



Post-Visit Prompts & Strategies for Discussion & Reflection on NC Freedom Park



"I realized for the first time in my life how we were connected. That this is not an African American experience. It's a North Carolinian experience. It is our history."

- Jacki Shelton Green (NC Poet Laureate speaking about NC Freedom Park)

Overview

Incorporating meaningful discussion and reflection after a visit to [North Carolina Freedom Park](#) transforms the experience from a one-time outing into a valuable, memorable and connected learning opportunity that extends far beyond the time spent on-site. The following **discussion prompts** and **strategies** are designed to help students think critically about their visit to NC Freedom Park; make connections; process their feelings; develop a deeper understanding of the people, history and themes represented in the Park; and enhance their curiosity to learn more.

Teachers can choose from the various prompts provided, combining and editing as they see fit. Prompts can be used in whole class discussion, in some of the discussion formats/activities provided later in this resource, or as written reflections. (If students completed [Freedom Park Field Notes](#), referring to their journal during discussion can also be helpful.)

Culminating Discussion & Reflection Prompts

The Beacon of Freedom

North Carolina Freedom Park's stated interpretation of "The Beacon of Freedom" is that it "is a 45-foot abstract metal art structure depicting a giant flame. The flame characterizes the spirit of African Americans who for generations struggled, and continue to struggle, to be free and to be treated as equal members of society, with the same rights, resources, and opportunities. Within the African American community, the desire to be free burns eternal. This feeling and the hope of one day enjoying the same rights and being treated equal to others is expressed through the Beacon of Freedom." However, students should be allowed to interpret the sculpture in alternative ways, as long as they provide evidence to back up their own interpretations.

- What first came to mind when you saw the "Beacon of Freedom?" What emotions or feelings does the Beacon evoke in you?
- What artistic techniques were used to create the Beacon? (Consider the shape, materials, colors, and textures used.) Why do you think these particular decisions were made by the designers and how do these techniques contribute to the overall impact of the artwork?
- What do you think the Beacon represents or symbolizes? What do you think the artist was trying to convey through this sculpture?
- How does the "Beacon of Freedom" interact with its surroundings? Do you think there is anything significant about its specific location within NC Freedom Park? How does the environment surrounding the Beacon effect your interpretation of it?
- How might the artist's background or experiences have influenced the creation of this sculpture?
- How might your personal background and experiences shape your interpretation and understanding of the sculpture?
- Does the sculpture invite any specific actions or reactions? Can you interact with the sculpture in any way (touching, moving around it, etc.)? How does the sculpture's interactivity or lack thereof affect your experience of it?
- What specific cultural or social issues do you think the Beacon addresses?

- Are there any other public sculptures or artworks you know of that are similar or different from this one? Explain.
- How does this sculpture compare to traditional indoor artworks in terms of its impact and accessibility?
- What particular quotes within NC Freedom Park do you feel most directly connect with the “Beacon of Freedom” and why? (e.g., "My father passed the torch to me which I have never go out". Lyda Moore Merrick; “There is another peculiarity about the people of North Carolina....There seems to be more of the unquenchable fire of freedom in the eyes of these people than in those of any other people we have visited.” Robert Hamilton)
- How does this sculpture contribute to the cultural and aesthetic identity of the area? How does the “Beacon of Freedom” contribute to the identity or narrative of North Carolina?
- What is the “Beacon of Freedom’s” message or purpose for the public? What is its message for young people in particular?

The Arbor

The Arbor reflects a tradition of the African American experience in North Carolina. During slavery, enslaved people would meet in secret "bush arbors" (also called "hush arbors" or "brush arbors") - wooded, secluded areas where they could gather for fellowship, support, and worship outside of the gaze of enslavers. The arbor was a place to cultivate community & faith, & gain strength from each other as they resisted and survived the inhumane conditions of slavery.

Some arbors were constructed with branches, sticks, & other natural elements to form a basic, natural structure. Secret meetings & religious gatherings often took place in the evenings, after laboring long hours or when enslavers were traveling. Enslaved people prayed and sang spirituals for hope, including “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Go Down Moses,” “Wade in the Water,” & “Steal Away.” The spirituals often related to escape, freedom, or God coming to carry them home.

After the end of slavery, the arbor meetings evolved into revivals, meeting places, and even post-Civil War schools for multi-generational students of newly freed people. These gatherings were the foundation of the southern Black church. In fact, many Black churches were built on the very places where bush arbor meetings were held.

Studying the history of brush arbors is an important exploration of the ways enslaved individuals found moments of community, cultural expression, and resilience despite the hardships they faced.

- What are bush arbors, and how were they used by enslaved individuals? Why were these spaces secret?
- In what ways were bush arbors significant in the lives of enslaved people?
- How did bush arbors serve as spaces for cultural expression and the preservation of traditions among enslaved individuals? What practices might have taken place in these spaces? (Make sure students consider cultural practices, singing, dancing, storytelling/oral traditions, worshiping, education, meetings discussing important business, uplift, etc.)
- How did bush arbors foster a sense of community and connection among enslaved individuals?
- How did the use of bush arbors contribute to the passing down of cultural knowledge from one generation of enslaved individuals to the next? What role did these spaces play in maintaining cultural identity within the African diaspora?
- Despite their oppressive circumstances, how did the creation and use of bush arbors showcase the resilience and agency of enslaved individuals? What does the existence of these spaces reveal about the ways enslaved people asserted control over their own lives?
- Why do you think singing spirituals was such a common practice in brush arbors? In what ways were spirituals impactful?

- How might the use of bush arbors have changed over time, considering factors like emancipation, societal shifts, and changes in the African American experience?
- How do historians learn about the existence and significance of bush arbors, considering that they might not be extensively documented in written records? How might oral traditions and community stories contribute to our understanding of these spaces?
- How can the study of bush arbors contribute to a more holistic understanding of the history of slavery and its ongoing impact?
- Describe the features of the arbor area in NC Freedom Park. What is significant about its location and design elements?
- Why do you think the designers of NC Freedom Park chose to include a space symbolic of a bush arbor?
- What kind of activities do you think should take place in this area of NC Freedom Park and why?

The “Voices of Freedom”

- NC Freedom Park’s creators chose to feature words instead of statues or traditional art. Why do you think this decision was made?
- Consider the specific people and quotes represented in NC Freedom Park. What do you imagine the process was like to decide whose voices to feature in the Park? Why do you think these particular Voices are commemorated?
- Who represented in the “Voices of Freedom” did you find most interesting, inspiring, etc. and why? Who, in your opinion, made the largest or most lasting impact? What evidence makes you think this?
- Despite the adversity they faced, how do each of these “Voices” showcase the contributions, influence, resilience, and agency of African Americans throughout North Carolina history?
- All of the “Voices of Freedom” faced risks for the work they did. What were some of those risks and why do you think they carried forward despite such risks?
- If you were able to make a recommendation to the NC Freedom Park board for additional “Voices of Freedom” to add to the Park, who would you argue should be added and why?
- How do the “Voices of Freedom” inform your understanding of the concept of freedom throughout North Carolina history?
- How can the study of the African American’s represented in NC Freedom Park, and their contributions to the ongoing struggle for freedom, contribute to a more holistic understanding of our shared history, and history’s ongoing impact today?

Overall Park Design & Message

- What were your first reactions when walking through NC Freedom Park? What emotions or feelings did the Park evoke in you and why?
- What did you notice about the Park’s overall design in terms of shape, layout, materials, colors, and textures used? What strategies did the creators use to try and engage the visitor? What was emphasized and what techniques were used to do so? How do all of these techniques contribute to the overall impact of NC Freedom Park?
- How do you think you are meant to interact with NC Freedom Park? (Does it encourage, for instance, touching, moving around it, etc.)? How does the Park’s design for interactivity (or lack thereof) affect your experience of it? How do you think you are meant to feel while visiting? Does the Park invite any specific actions or reactions? What evidence makes you feel this way?
- If you were given the chance to meet with the design and construction team, are there any recommendations you would make for revisions or additions to the Park’s physical features? Explain.

- What is significant about NC Freedom Park’s specific location? How does it interact with its surroundings? How does its location in the State’s Capitol Area impact your interpretation of the Park?
- What themes did you identify throughout the Park?
- Who do you think is the primary audience for North Carolina Freedom Park and what makes you think this?
- What overall message is Freedom Park conveying? What do you think the creators wanted you to “take away?”
- What specific cultural or social issues does NC Freedom Park address?
- What does North Carolina Freedom Park say about the experiences of freedom in our state?
- How might your personal background and experiences shape your understanding of North Carolina Freedom Park?
- Have you ever visited any other public park or space that is similar to this one? Explain.
- How does NC Freedom Park compare to other public spaces in terms of its impact and accessibility?
- How does NC Freedom Park contribute to the cultural and aesthetic identity and narrative of North Carolina?
- What did the Park’s creators do well with in terms of the Park’s mission, design, and content? Is there anything that could be improved? If so, explain what and how. Is there anything you would do differently at the Park to specifically engage young people? Explain.
- Monuments, memorials, parks, etc. that feature people or events from our past can raise complex questions about the history we choose to remember. When public art, monuments, memorials, etc. cannot tell the whole story, what part of the story, or whose story, should be told? How should these decisions be made?
- It took over 20 years for NC Freedom Park to go from conception to execution. What do you think it took on the part of the project leaders to make this happen? Why do you think it was so important to them? Why do you think they specifically view this as an important site for students around the state to visit?
- Why do you think the site is titled “North Carolina Freedom Park?” If you were going to rename it, what would you recommend it be called and why?

Personal Reflections

- What did you find most memorable about North Carolina Freedom Park and why? What was your favorite component or quote within the Park and why?
- What or who did you learn about that is entirely new to you?
- Freedom Park was conceived of in the early 2000s and was finally constructed 20 years later, in 2023. How do you think the Park should change in 20 more years?
- Why is it important for people to visit NC Freedom Park? Who is most important to have visit the Park and why?
- After visiting NC Freedom Park, and learning about the struggles and contributions of African Americans throughout North Carolina history, what is most significant about this Park’s creation, location, and mission?
- What does freedom now mean to you?
- Considering everything you have learned regarding the ongoing struggle for freedom. What did it take to get to where we are today as a society? What work is there to still be done? What is your role in ensuring freedom for all people today and in the future?

- Who do you need to tell about your trip to NC Freedom Park, and who do you need to bring back to visit the Park with you, and why?

Discussion Strategies

These strategies are a few samples of ways to engage students in conversation and reflection (using the above questions or your own), outside of the traditional teacher-facilitated whole class discussion.

- **Classroom Mingle:** Choose a set of open-ended questions related to Freedom Park (from those provided or questions of your own) and write them onto index cards or cut them apart into strips (with one question per card/strip.) Provide a question to each student (there should be enough questions so that each person has a different question) and ask all students to stand up and find a partner. In their partners, Student A asks Student B their question. After answering, Student B asks Student A their question. Next, they exchange strips of paper, and each one finds another member of the class for a new partner. The process is repeated. Teachers can monitor the time for each interaction. After a set amount of time, students can be signaled (e.g., via music) to move around the classroom and have a new partner when the music stops.
- **Walk, Talk, Freeze:** Pose a discussion question about Freedom park to students and tell them how long they will have to discuss with a partner. Students will pair up and walk around (the room, the hall, outside, etc.) with their partner for the allotted time. During this time, they are discussing their response and preparing to summarize their thoughts in one minute or less with the rest of the class. When time is up, ask students to freeze where they are. Quickly go around the room to hear each pair's response. This process can be repeated as many times as desired.
- **Small Group Discussions w/ Prompt Cards:** While whole classroom discussions can be fruitful and ensure everyone is part of the same experience, it is often difficult to ensure that all students have a chance to verbalize their thinking. Incorporating small-group discussion is a low-stakes way of ensuring that all students can actively engage. Teachers can break students up into groups of 3-5 and provide each with discussion prompt cards. Teachers may also want to have students select specific roles to perform, such as Facilitator, Recorder, Reporter, etc. As students discuss, teachers should rotate around the room to ensure groups are on-task and following pre-determined expectations for quality, respectful discussion.
- **Talk w/ Your Hands:** Break students into groups and provide each group a large piece of paper and markers. Pose a discussion questions and have groups brainstorm their thoughts, ideas, and questions on the paper without discussing aloud. After a set time, groups can then discuss out loud while still adding to their paper. All groups can also be instructed to rotate to review and build upon other group's responses.
- **Socratic Seminars:** Organize a structured discussion in which students engage in open-ended questions related to the field trip. This encourages deeper thinking and allows students to explore various viewpoints. <https://www.paideia.org/our-approach/paideia-seminar>
- **Silent Discussion:** Give each student a piece of paper to write their thoughts on a topic or question. Pass the papers around the group, allowing each student to read the previous contributions and add their own. This method promotes thoughtful reflection and minimizes the pressure of speaking aloud.
- **Visual Reflections:** Pose an open-ended question to students and have them respond by creating a visual representation (drawings, diagrams, collages, or some other artistic means.) This allows students to express their thoughts creatively and can be particularly effective for students who may struggle with writing. The artistic renderings can be placed around the room, and the class can be split in half for a gallery walk, where half of the students stay with their piece to discuss answer any questions as the other half of the students rotate through. The class can then switch so that the remaining students stand beside and discuss their reflections in the same format.
- **Guest Speaker:** Invite a guest speaker who is an expert in the subject of the field trip to share insights, answer questions, and facilitate a discussion about the experience.

Share Your Visit and/or Classroom Work With Us!

As part of our ongoing commitment to NC Freedom Park as a site of educational excellence, we extend a warm invitation to educators around the state to share your experiences with us. Let us know how you have introduced students to NC Freedom Park, how you have utilized the materials provided, or how you have developed your own – whether related to an on-site visit, or back in the classroom. Whether you and your students visited NC Freedom Park, incorporated our materials, created your own engaging activities inspired by your visit and/or understanding of NC Freedom Park, or have unique insights or classroom celebrations to share, **we would love to hear from you and possibly feature you/your students on our website!**

We welcome photos, videos, student work samples, and descriptions of the activities you implemented either on-site at NC Freedom Park or back in your classroom. Highlight/summarize any creative projects or discussions, or send in your own reflections or student reflections. Brag on yourself and/or your students and share your creativity with us!

Have something to share? Or, want to discuss ideas or questions about being featured? Contact Christie Norris at cnorris@unc.edu. *(Educators whose experiences/reflections are deemed suitable for publication may be eligible for a monetary stipend!)*

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