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HISTORY MAKING  
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# TEACHER'S GUIDE

*Film available at*

[historymakingproductions.com/sistersinfreedom](http://historymakingproductions.com/sistersinfreedom)

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# INTRODUCTION

## Synopsis of Film

*Sisters in Freedom* tells the extraordinary story of the black and white women who created America's first organized female political force and their daring battle to end slavery. The film opens with the escape of enslaved young woman Ona Judge from the home of President George Washington. The story continues in the 1830s—an era of rapid increase in slavery in the South. It also a time of tightening of both fugitive slave laws and the rules that govern women in the public sphere. Yet in Philadelphia, women like Lucretia Mott, Sarah Mapps Douglass, Harriet Forten Purvis and Angelina and Sarah Grimké lead an effort that inspires millions of Americans to petition Congress to end slavery, persisting despite a vicious backlash to the abolition movement. The women are mocked in emerging mass media, silenced in the halls of government, and threatened by violence that foreshadows the Civil War to come. As riots sweep U.S. cities, a mob attacks the abolitionists' grand new meeting hall in Philadelphia, determined to burn it down. Despite the mounting challenges, the sisters of the abolitionist movement continue to battle for an end slavery.

## Teacher's Guide

The *Sisters of Freedom* Teachers' Guide was created to provide

- Background for teaching about the abolitionist movement (biographies, time-line)
- Primary sources and activity ideas that complement the content of *Sisters in Freedom*
- Information on Document Based Lessons, a highly regarded pedagogical strategy
- Detailed plans and all materials needed for Document Based Lessons based on two excerpts of the film—
  - The Escape of Ona Judge
  - The Burning of Pennsylvania Hall
  - **NOTE:** Both excerpts are available at [historymakingproductions.com/classroom](http://historymakingproductions.com/classroom)

The publication of this guide was paid for with a generous grant from the *Pennsylvania Abolition Society* (for more information, see [paabolition.org](http://paabolition.org)).

# BIOGRAPHIES OF ABOLITIONISTS PORTRAYED IN *SISTERS IN FREEDOM*



**Grace Bustill Douglass**  
(1782-1842)

The owner of a successful millinery shop and wife of Robert Douglas, a barber and minister, Grace Bustill Douglass was a member of Philadelphia's black elite. Douglas gave financial support to fugitive slaves, started a school for black children, and, along with her daughter Sarah, was a founding member of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.



**Sarah Moore Grimke**  
(1792-1873)

After witnessing slavery firsthand at her home in South Carolina, Grimke fled to Philadelphia where she became a Quaker and anti-slavery activist. After her younger sister Angela followed her path North, the Grimke sisters became active in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and were the first women to become anti-slavery orators on the abolition circuit. Garnering harsh criticism for speaking up, they also became strong advocates for women's rights. In 1837, Grimke wrote a series of letters about women's rights that were printed in *The New England Spectator* and later published as *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*.



**Sarah Mapps Douglass**  
(1806-1882)

Born into a prominent free black family in Philadelphia, Douglas was an active abolitionist and among the founders of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. She was a teacher at a school she created and later at the Institute for Colored Youth. Douglas was also an advocate for women's education and health care, and a leader in the protection and support of former slaves in the years after the Civil War. Raised a Quaker, she criticized the racism of the sect and eventually left the Society of Friends.



**Lucretia Coffin Mott**  
(1793-1880)

The Quaker belief in the equality of all humankind had a profound influence on Lucretia Coffin, born into a Quaker family in Massachusetts. She attended and later taught at a Quaker boarding school in New York and married a fellow Quaker, James Mott. Although a small woman, she was a powerful speaker who devoted herself to anti-slavery and women's rights causes. As a founder and first president of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Mott hoped to serve as a delegate at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. Denied access due to her gender, Mott became a more passionate advocate for women's equality. She helped organize the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, an important early milestone of the women's suffrage movement.



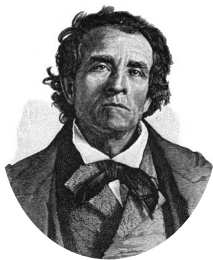
**Angelina Grimke Weld**  
(1805-1879)

Born into a slave-holding family in South Carolina, Angelina became a well-known abolitionist writer and orator. Along with her sister, Sarah, Weld moved to Philadelphia, joined the Society of Friends (Quakers), and became a pioneering female speaker on the abolition circuit. The sisters described the evils of slavery based on firsthand knowledge which made their message particularly powerful. As women in the public sphere, the sisters received harsh criticism spurring them to also advocate for women's rights. Angelina Grimke Weld became the first American woman to address a legislative body when she spoke against slavery at the Boston State House in 1838. She was also a member of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, a friend and confidante of Sarah Mapps Douglass, and the wife of fellow abolitionist, Theodore Weld.



**Harriet Forten Purvis**  
(1810-1875)

The daughter of wealthy sailmaker James Forten and his wife Charlotte, Harriet Forten Purvis was raised in a leading black abolitionist family. After marrying Robert Purvis, she joined her husband in helping fugitive slaves as part of the Underground Railroad and hosting prominent abolitionists in their well-appointed home. Along with her mother and sisters Margaretta and Sarah, Purvis was a founder of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Purvis was instrumental in organizing anti-slavery fairs in which items were sold to raise funds for abolitionist organizations. Purvis was a vocal advocate for women's suffrage and a participant in American Equal Rights Association.



**Theodore Weld**  
(1803-1895)

Originally from Connecticut, Weld became passionate about anti-slavery causes while a seminary student in Ohio. He helped to found the American Anti-Slavery Society, an organization for which he became an abolitionist orator and writer. After marrying Angelina Grimke, Weld worked with his wife and her sister, Sarah, to write *American Slavery As It Is*, an 1839 book that is believed to have been the inspiration for Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although he worked briefly in Washington, D.C. to help John Quincy Adams and others fight for repeal of the Gag Rule, much of his life after the late 1830s was spent away from public life. He became a dedicated teacher and school director in Belleville, New Jersey and later Hyde Park, Massachusetts.

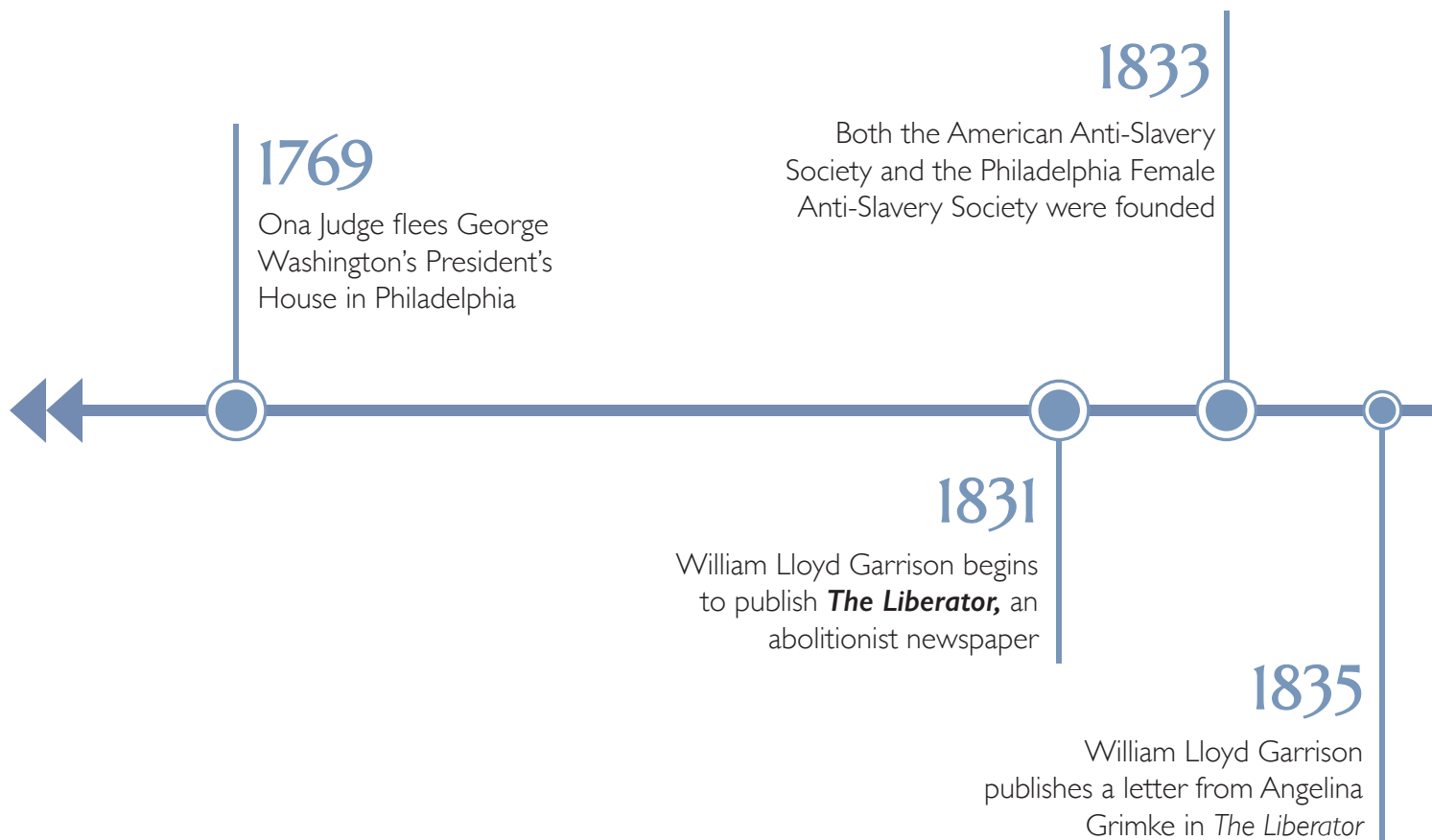


**Robert Purvis**  
(1810-1898)

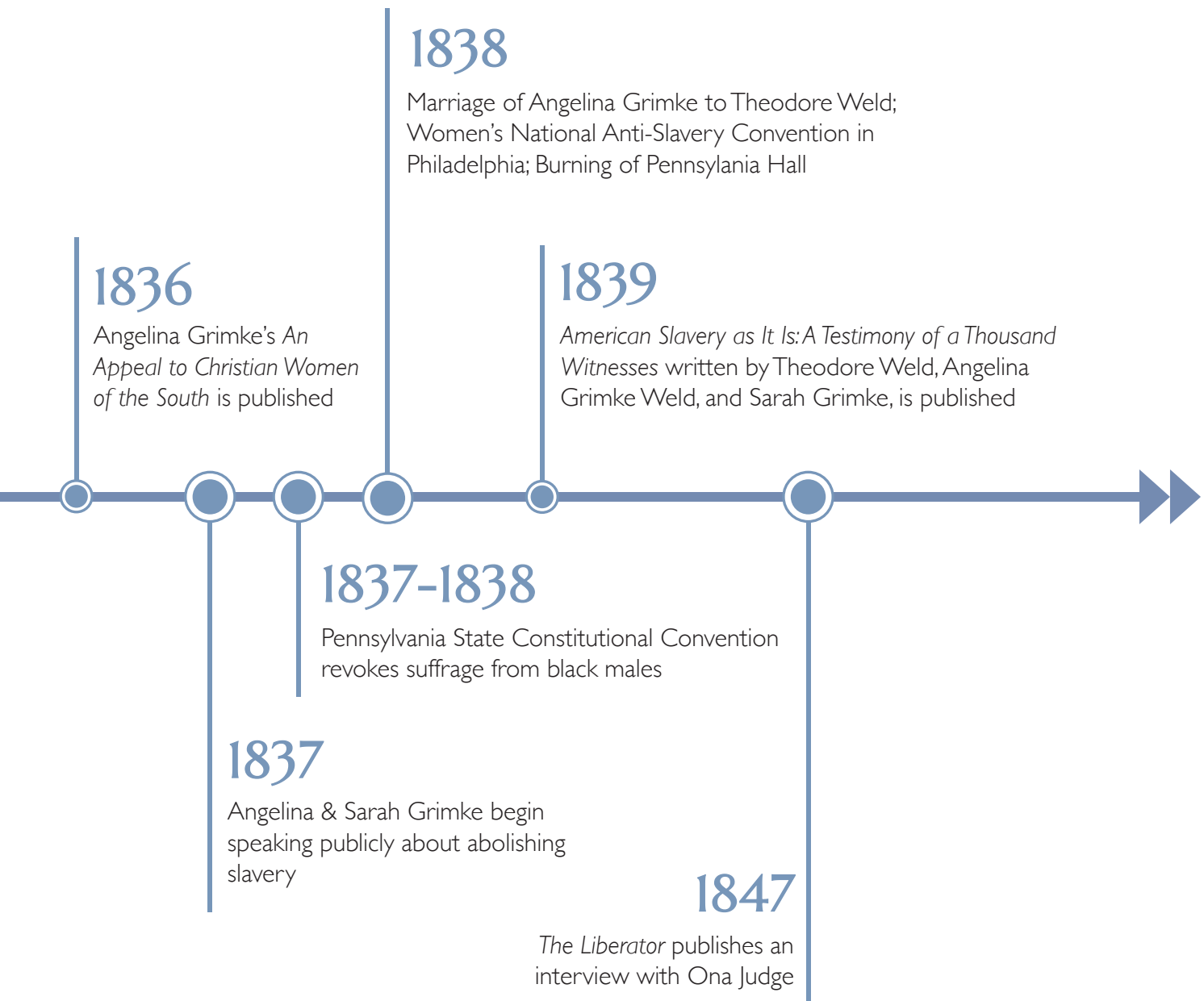
Though Robert's father was a white cotton broker and his mother was of mixed African and Jewish lineage, Purvis chose to identify as black in spite of his light complexion. When Purvis was nine, his family moved from South Carolina to Philadelphia where he attended the Clarkson School run by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. He married Harriet Forten, daughter of James Forten, among Philadelphia's wealthiest men. As a couple, they had the financial wherewithal to devote themselves to humanitarian causes including the Underground Railroad, abolition, women's equality, prison reform, and Native American rights. Purvis was a leader of numerous organizations including the Vigilant Association of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, and the Woman's Suffrage Society.

# TIME-LINE OF EVENTS AS DEPICTED IN *SISTERS IN FREEDOM*

The first written protest against slavery in America was penned in Philadelphia in 1688, and the struggle to abolish slavery continued in different forms in the city until passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865. Most of the events depicted in *Sisters in Freedom*, however, take place during a relatively brief and action-packed period of the ante-bellum era.







# IN HER OWN WORDS:

*Anti-Slavery Writings from Sisters in Freedom*

## **Speech to Female Literary Society (published in *The Liberator*)**

Sarah Mapps Douglass, 1832

My Friends—My Sisters:

How important is the occasion for which we have assembled ourselves together this evening, to hold a feast, to feed our never-dying minds, to excite each other to deeds of mercy, words of peace; to stir up in the bosom of each, gratitude to God for his increasing goodness, and feeling of deep sympathy for our brethren and sisters, who are in this land of Christian light and liberty held in bondage the most cruel and degrading—to make their cause our own!

...It is my wish that the reading and conversation should be altogether directed to the subject of slavery. The refreshment which may be offered to you for the body, will be of the most simple kind, that you may feel for those who have nothing to refresh body and mind.

- *Why do you think Douglas believed that black women's intellectual engagement in reading and literary discussions was an important part of fighting slavery?*

... One short year ago, how different were my feelings on the subject of slavery! It is true, the wail of the captive sometimes came to my ear in the midst of my happiness, and caused my heart to bleed for his wrongs; but, alas! the impression was as evanescent as the early cloud and morning dew. I had formed a little world of my own, and cared not to move beyond its precincts. But how was the scene changed when I beheld the oppressor lurking on the border of my own peaceful home! I saw his iron hand stretched forth to seize me as his prey, and the cause of the slave became my own. I started up, and with one mighty effort threw from me the lethargy which had covered me as a mantle for years; and determined, by the help of the Almighty, to use every exertion in my power to elevate the character of my wronged and neglected race. One year ago, I detested the slaveholder; now I can pity and pray for him. Has not this been your experience, my sisters? Have you not felt as I have felt upon this thrilling subject? My heart assures me some of you have....

- *Douglas gave this speech in 1832 during a period of backlash against both free and enslaved African Americans in the wake of the Nat Turner slave revolt in Virginia. What does Douglas say changed her feelings about slavery? Do you think that the events she describes are literal or might she be referring to other aspects of free black life during a particularly oppressive time?*

### *Excerpts from Pennsylvania Hall Speech*

Angelina Grimke Weld, 1838

To work as we should in this cause, we must know what Slavery is. Let me urge you then to buy the books which have been written on this subject and read them, and then lend them to your neighbors. Give your money no longer for things which pander to pride and lust, but aid in scattering “the living coals of truth” upon the naked heart of this nation, -- in circulating appeals to the sympathies of Christians in behalf of the outraged and suffering slave...

- *What specific steps does Grimke Weld encourage her audience to take? Why might she believe that taking such steps would help to bring about an end to slavery?*

Women of Philadelphia! Allow me as a Southern woman, with much attachment to the land of my birth, to entreat you to come up to this work. Especially let me urge you to petition. Men may settle this and other questions at the ballot-box, but you have no such right; it is only through petitions that you can reach the Legislature. It is therefore peculiarly your duty to petition. Do you say, “It does no good”? The South already turns pale at the number sent. They have read the reports of the proceedings of Congress, and there have seen that among other petitions were very many from the women of the North on the subject of slavery. This fact has called the attention of the South to the subject. How could we expect to have done more as yet? Men who hold the rod over slaves, rule in the councils of the nation: and they deny our right to petition and to remonstrate against abuses of our sex and of our kind. We have these rights, however, from our God. Only let us exercise them: and though often turned away unanswered, let us remember the influence of importunity upon the unjust judge, and act accordingly. The fact that the South look with jealousy upon our measures shows that they are effectual. There is, therefore, no cause for doubting or despair, but rather for rejoicing.

- *When Grimke Weld gave this speech, the Gag Rule was in effect, preventing anti-slavery petitions from being presented in the House of Representatives. Why might she have encouraged women to continue to circulate petitions?*

# ACTIVITY IDEAS

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## Other Female Freedom Fighters

Have students explore the fascinating biographies of other notable women who advocated for the end of slavery. Ask students to compare the female abolitionists they research to one or more of the individuals depicted in the film. This can be done in paragraph form, on chart paper, or using a Venn Diagram. Some suggested figures are:

- Catharine Beecher
- Mary Ann Shadd Cary
- Elizabeth Margaret Chandler
- Lydia Maria Child
- Ellen Craft

## The Anti-Slavery Alphabet

The *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* was produced by the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS) to be sold at an Anti-Slavery Fair, a fundraiser for abolitionist causes. Visitors to these fairs would pay an admission price and could purchase anti-slavery books, handicrafts made by PFASS members, and items made without slave labor. Although the book was published anonymously, it was written by Hannah and Mary Townsend, Quaker sisters who were members of the PFASS.

- Hand each student a stanza corresponding with a letter of the alphabet; circulate among students to make sure that they understand and can pronounce each word in their stanza. (With classes larger than 26 students, students can be assigned the opening lines and/or share a letter with a classmate.) Have students read their stanzas aloud in alphabetical order.
- Distribute copies of the entire alphabet. Ask students to review the stanzas. Which did they find most disturbing? Most surprising? Most paternalistic?
- Ask if they agree with the message in the opening lines that young people can be effective agents of social change. Can they think of examples in history or current life in which young people are in the lead as changemakers?
- Challenge students to create an “Alphabet” for a cause or issue that matters to them. This can be done individually with each student choosing their own topic or as a whole class with each student composing for a different letter of the alphabet. In the latter version of the activity, students will need to agree on the cause or issue. They can be assigned the letter for which they have read aloud from the Anti-Slavery alphabet.

# ANTI-SLAVERY ALPHABET

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"In the morning sow thy seed."

PHILADELPHIA:  
PRINTED FOR THE ANTI-SLAVERY FAIR  
-1847-



Merrihew & Thompson,

Printers, 7 Carter's alley

## TO OUR LITTLE READERS.

LISTEN, little children, all,  
Listen to our earnest call:  
You are very young, 'tis true,  
But there's much that you can do.  
Even you can plead with men  
That they buy not slaves again,  
And that those they have may be  
Quickly set at liberty.  
They may hearken what you say,  
Though from us they turn away.  
Sometimes, when from school you walk,  
You can with your playmates talk,  
Tell them of the slave child's fate,  
Motherless and desolate.  
And you can refuse to take  
Candy, sweetmeat, pie or cake,  
Saying "no"—unless 'tis free—  
"The slave shall not work for me."  
Thus, dear little children, each  
May some useful lesson teach;  
Thus each one may help to free  
This fair land from slavery.

A

**is an Abolitionist—**

A man who wants to free  
The wretched slave—and give to all  
An equal liberty.

B

**is a Brother with a skin**

Of somewhat darker hue,  
But in our Heavenly Father's sight,  
He is as dear as you.

C

**is the Cotton-field, to which**

This injured brother's driven,  
When, as the white-man's slave, he toils,  
From early morn till even.

D

**is the Driver, cold and stern,**

Who follows, whip in hand,  
To punish those who dare to rest,  
Or disobey command.

E

**is the Eagle, soaring high;**

An emblem of the free;  
But while we chain our brother man,  
Our type he cannot be.

F

**is the heart-sick Fugitive,**

The slave who runs away,  
And travels through the dreary night,  
But hides himself by day.

G

**is the Gong, whose rolling  
sound,**

Before the morning light,  
Calls up the little sleeping slave,  
To labor until night.

H

**is the Hound his master  
trained,**

An emblem of the free;  
But while we chain our brother man,  
Our type he cannot be.

I

**is the Infant, from the arms**

Of its fond mother torn,  
And, at a public auction, sold  
With horses, cows, and corn.

J

**is the Jail, upon whose floor**

That wretched mother lay,  
Until her cruel master came,  
And carried her away.

K

**is the Kidnapper, who stole**

That little child and mother—  
Shrieking, it clung around her, but  
He tore them from each other.

L

**is the Lash, that brutally**

He swung around its head,  
Threatening that “if it cried again,  
He’d whip it till ‘twas dead.”

M

**is the Merchant of the north,**

Who buys what slaves produce—  
So they are stolen, whipped and  
worked, for his, and for our use.

N

**is the Negro, rambling free**

In his far distant home,  
Delighting ‘neath the palm trees’  
shade and cocoa-nut to roam.

O

**is the Orange tree, that bloomed**

Beside his cabin door,  
When white men stole him from his  
home to see it never more.

P

**is the Parent, sorrowing,**

And weeping all alone—  
The child he loved to lean upon,  
His only son, is gone!

Q

**is the Quarter, where the slave**

On coarsest food is fed,  
And where, with toil and sorrow worn,  
he seeks his wretched bed.

R

**is the “Rice-swamp, dank and  
lone,”**

Where, weary, day by day,  
He labors till the fever wastes  
His strength and life away.

S

**is the Sugar, that the slave**

Is toiling hard to make,  
To put into your pie and tea,  
Your candy, and your cake.

T

**is the rank Tobacco plant,**

Raised by slave labor too:  
A poisonous and nasty thing,  
For gentlemen to chew.

U

**is for Upper Canada,**

Where the poor slave has found  
Rest after all his wanderings,  
For it is British ground!

V

**is the Vessel, in whose dark,**

Noisome, and stifling hold,  
Hundreds of Africans are packed,  
Brought o’er the seas, and sold.

W

**is the Whipping post,**

To which the slave is bound,  
While on his naked back, the lash  
Makes many a bleeding wound.

X

**is for Xerxes, famed of yore;**

A warrior stern was he  
He fought with swords; let truth and love  
Our only weapons be.

Y

**is for Youth—the time for all**

Bravely to war with sin;  
And think not it can ever be  
Too early to begin.

Z

**is a Zealous man, sincere,**

Faithful, and just, and true;  
An earnest pleader for the slave—  
Will you not be so too?

# READING AND WATCHING LIKE A HISTORIAN: USING DOCUMENTS TO TEACH *SISTERS IN FREEDOM*

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by Amy Cohen

After twenty years as a middle and high school social studies teacher, I left the classroom at the end of the 2013 school year to become the Director of Education for History Making Productions, a documentary film company based in Philadelphia. My job is to create educational materials to accompany our films and to let teachers know about both the films and materials.

The materials I have developed reflect four core understandings obtained during my two decades of teaching a variety of courses to diverse groups of students in several different public school settings.

- Primary sources are essential to the effective teaching of history.
- History is more vibrant and compelling when taught as an evolving interpretation of the past rather than as a set of static facts.
- Effective social studies education promotes the development of literacy, communication, and critical thinking skills.
- Most teachers are saddled with excessive workloads and can benefit greatly from having access to high quality, adaptable materials that follow a predictable sequence.

The materials that accompany our 14-part series, *Philadelphia: The Great Experiment*, exemplify how I have incorporated these understandings. For each 25-minute film, there are a set of activities to do **BEFORE** (introductory hooks to stimulate student interest, essential questions, vocabulary lists), **DURING** (watch-along note-taking sheets, suggested pause points) and **AFTER** watching the film (discussion questions, graphic organizers, primary source based lessons, quiz questions). When presenting these materials, I always emphasize that the various components are meant to be used on an à la carte basis in order to suit a range of curricular needs and student readiness levels. (NOTE: All films and classroom materials are available at [historyofphilly.com](http://historyofphilly.com).)

A year ago, I learned about another collection of social studies materials that also fits well with the core understandings identified above. The *Reading Like a Historian* curriculum was developed by the Stanford History Education Group beginning in 2006. A concise summary of the approach can be found on their website [sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons](http://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons):

*The Reading Like a Historian curriculum engages students in historical inquiry. Each lesson revolves around a central historical question and features a set of primary documents designed for groups of students with a range of reading skills. This curriculum teaches students how to investigate historical questions by employing reading strategies such as sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading. Instead of memorizing historical facts, students evaluate the trustworthiness of multiple perspectives on historical issues and learn to make historical claims backed by documentary evidence.*



Fortunately for Pennsylvania students and educators, the lead developer of the *Reading Like a Historian* curriculum, Dr. Abigail Reisman, has relocated from Stanford to the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Reisman is currently turning some of her attention and talent to working with the School District of Philadelphia and other local entities, including History Making Productions, to develop lessons centered on our local and regional history.

History Making Productions has recently released *Sisters in Freedom: The Daring Battle to End Slavery* which focuses on the courageous efforts of female abolitionists. Like the films in the *Philadelphia: The Great Experiment* series, *Sisters in Freedom* features compelling reenactments, expert interviews, rich primary sources, and state-of-the-art graphics and animation. Unlike those films, however, *Sisters in Freedom* is fifty minutes long.

Aware that I needed a different approach than my usual BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER menu and eager to explore the *Reading Like a Historian* method, I approached Dr. Reisman about collaborating. The social studies curriculum team at the School District of Philadelphia, already working with Dr. Reisman on other projects, also chose to support this work. Although I have developed a few **Document Based Lessons** (the building blocks of the *Reading Like a Historian* approach) for *Sisters in Freedom*, in this article I will explain just one. My hope is that by describing the key elements of a single lesson, the elegance and intelligence of the *Reading Like a Historian* method will be illustrated. (The full lesson plan, appropriate for either middle or high school, follows the article.)

Each **Document Based Lesson (DBL)** begins with a **Central Historical Question (CHQ)**. The CHQ needs to have more than one possible answer and the potential to yield insight into a historical event or era (Reisman, 2012). For this lesson, the CHQ is “Why was President George Washington unable to return Ona Judge to his family after she fled the President’s House in Philadelphia?”

The next key component of the DBL is **Establishing Background Knowledge (EBK)**. The purpose of this segment of the lesson is to equip students with the information they will need to analyze the primary sources that will be used to answer the CHQ. The EBK can take the form of an excerpt from a textbook, a brief PowerPoint presentation, or a short lecture. In this lesson, the opening five minutes of *Sisters in Freedom* and a time-line serve as the EBK section.

The film clip introduces Ona Judge, a 22-year-old enslaved woman who was Martha Washington’s personal attendant. Although born at Mt. Vernon, Judge had traveled to both New York and Philadelphia with the First Family. While enslaved in Philadelphia, Judge is exposed to a vibrant Free Black community and becomes aware that the Washingtons are violating the spirit, if not the letter, of Pennsylvania’s Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. Taking an enormous risk, Judge flees the President’s House and boards a New Hampshire bound ship (Armstrong, 2017). After viewing the film segment depicting Judge and her daring escape, students read through a timeline to clearly establish the chronology of relevant events. The teacher then explains that students will be reading through documents that help to bring to light the reasons that President George Washington, the most powerful person in the United States, was unable to capture a young, illiterate woman who fled his household.

Two aspects of the DBL model set it apart from other primary source based lessons. First, teachers are expected to model document analysis for their students, focusing on the key historical skills of **sourcing** (noting when, where, and by whom the document was created in an effort to assess its reliability),

**contextualization** (considering how the era in which the source was created influences its content), **corroboration** (determining points of agreement and disagreement between and among documents), and **close reading** (analyzing how language and evidence are used to convey information or support an argument) (Reisman, 2012). For this lesson, the teacher reads and reacts to a 1796 letter from President Washington to a New Hampshire customs agent. The teacher makes observations and explains relevant findings such as who wrote the letter and when it was written (sourcing) and known information about the letter's recipient and his home community (contextualization).

The other aspect of the DBL approach to primary sources is **Document Modification**. Primary sources are altered to make them more approachable and less time-consuming for students. Documents can be shortened (ideally a page or less in length), sections irrelevant to the CHQ can be excised, and challenging vocabulary words can either be defined or replaced. While this may be anathema to some educators and historians, as a teacher I frequently (albeit guiltily at the time) used to modify documents for classroom use. Even though I taught at an elite academic magnet school with some of the strongest students in the state of Pennsylvania, I made sure that primary sources were presented in manageable chunks. I did this as a way to scaffold my students' learning of how to analyze primary sources. This often led to just the type of modification that Reisman et al. endorse as necessary, particularly to engage struggling readers.

The heart of the DBL is reading primary sources and responding to **Guiding Questions**. Students working alone, in pairs, or small groups, read through the documents and answer about three to five questions that can be answered by reading the text and which will help them to reply to the CHQ. The questions emphasize the same historical skills that the teacher has modeled and/or they have practiced in previous DBL lessons. In addition to the 1796 letter penned by George Washington that the teacher has introduced, students read an article based on an interview done with Ona Judge many decades after she became a fugitive. This *Sisters in Freedom* lesson utilizes only two sources, however, many lessons in the *Reading Like a Historian* collection use more.

Once students have reviewed the documents and answered the Guiding Questions, the teacher leads a whole class discussion—beginning with the CHQ. Students are encouraged to share different points of view and to back up their responses with textual evidence. A collaborative approach between the teacher and among multiple students is required to answer the CHQ as fully as possible. Follow up discussion questions should also be subject to varied interpretations.

Although not an integral part of the DBL structure, the lesson that follows includes a writing prompt to be used as an exit ticket, homework assignment, or follow-up question to begin class on the following day.

Unfortunately for my students and me, I did not come upon the *Reading Like a Historian* approach until I was out of the classroom. I hope, though, that readers of this journal will find both the method described and the film that this lesson accompanies to be helpful in your practice.

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Reisman, A. (2012). The 'Document-Based Lesson': Bringing disciplinary into high school history classrooms with adolescent struggling readers. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 44(2), 233-264.

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# INQUIRY: THE ESCAPE OF ONA JUDGE

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## **Central Historical Question:**

Why was President George Washington unable to return Ona Judge to his family after she fled the President's House in Philadelphia?

## **Materials:**

- Copies of Timeline
- Copies of Documents A & B
- Copies of Guiding Questions

## **Plan of Instruction (based on 60-minute period)**

### **I. Introduction (3 min.):**

Ask students to quickly brainstorm where they have seen the image or heard the name George Washington. Encourage students to recognize that Washington's image is on the dollar bill and Mount Rushmore; although he died over 200 years ago, most of them can likely easily picture his face. There are numerous cities, states, roads, bridges, colleges, schools, etc. named for him.

Indicate that they will be learning about a young, enslaved woman who chose to leave President George Washington's household in Philadelphia.

### **II. Establish Background Knowledge (7 min.):**

Show clip of the first five minutes of *Sisters in Freedom: The Daring Battle to End Slavery*. This excerpt introduces Judge, her relation to the Washington family, the milieu of Philadelphia and two relevant laws—Pennsylvania's Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery and the federal Fugitive Slave Law signed by Washington himself. Clip is available at [historymakingproductions.com/classroom](http://historymakingproductions.com/classroom).

### **III. Transition (5 min.):**

Hand out timelines. Read through timelines and explain that today we're going to read through documents that help to bring to light the reasons that President George Washington, the most powerful person in the United States, was unable to capture a young, illiterate woman who fled his household.

### **IV. Presenting the Evidence (10 min.):**

Hand out Document A and have students watch you as you practice cognitive modeling of sourcing and contextualization.

- When we practice any historical thinking skill, we start by centering ourselves on the CHQ: Why was President George Washington unable to return Ona Judge to his family after she fled the President's House in Philadelphia? Ask for a few initial hypotheses to answer the CHQ.
- Now we will use sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration on two documents today to help us answer this question. I'm going to be looking for who wrote this, and what is the writer's perspective? When was it written, and where? Why was it written? Is it a reliable source? I'll underline anything I think is important as we read through the document.

- c. Let's look at Document A. We can see that this letter was written by President Washington about six months after Ona Judge fled his household. He indicates that he has already had someone try to persuade her to return willingly to his household.
- d. As Washington has been trying to get Judge back to his household, he often claims that she was treated well and had no reason to run away. I wonder, though, how Judge felt about her life as a slave to the first family.
- e. Now let's consider contextualization. The letter is written to Joseph Whipple, someone who voluntarily freed the enslaved people he owned. Although Whipple's job is dependent on Washington's favor, why might Washington be reluctant to demand that Whipple capture Judge and force her to return to the Washington family? Elicit a few responses.
- f. Now that we have considered the context, I'm wondering if a letter written to Whipple by Washington will be a reliable source for determining why President Washington was unable to return Ona Judge to his family.

**V. Students complete Guiding Questions for Document A (10 min.):**

Elicit a few student responses. Indicate that students will now read a document that presents a different explanation of Ona Judge's ability to avoid recapture.

**VI. Students complete Guiding Questions for Document B (10 min.):**

Elicit a few student responses.

**VII. Discussion Questions (10 min.):**

- a. Have we answered our Central Historical Question? Why was President George Washington unable to return Ona Judge to his family after she fled the President's House in Philadelphia?
- b. Which version of events, the one told in Document A or B, more closely matched your initial hypothesis? Did this surprise you?
- c. How might Ona Judge have been influenced by spending seven years in Philadelphia where she was regularly exposed to a vibrant free black community?
- d. Although President Washington had many more resources than Ona Judge, where might she have found the strength and determination to avoid his attempts at capturing her?
- e. George Washington was arguably the most powerful person in the country at the time of Judge's escape, yet he was unable to have her return to his family. Use the historical thinking skill of contextualization to explain this failure.
- f. Why might someone be willing to both break the law and defy the President of the United States? Who, other than Ona Judge, did both of these things in order to ensure her freedom?
- g. Return to the timeline. Why is it significant that George Washington asked for his nephew's help in finding Judge in August of 1799?
- h. Which historical thinking skill (sourcing, contextualization, or corroboration) was most helpful in answering the CHQ?
- i. Ask students to reflect about whether they ever stop to think about George Washington as an owner of enslaved people when they encounter his name and likeness.

**VIII. Wrap-up (5 min.):**

Either of the following prompts can be given as an exit ticket, a homework assignment, or a follow-up activity on the following day.

- a. Imagine that you are a New Hampshire resident who knows that Ona Judge has fled from President George Washington. She knocks on your door because she needs a place to hide. The rest of your family is afraid to take her in. How do you convince them that they should do so?
- b. At the outset of the lesson, you were asked to think about where you have seen images of heard of places named for President George Washington. In what ways might you think of the first president of the United States differently following this lesson? Do you think it is important to have a fuller understanding of such an important historical figure?

# TIMELINE:

**1780-** *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* is passed in Pennsylvania. According to this law, people born after its passage would be freed at the age of 28. Among the exceptions were enslaved people being held in Pennsylvania by non-residents of the staying for less than six months.

**1788-** Passage of *An Act to Explain and Amend Pennsylvania's Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*. This law is passed to close a loophole that had enabled long-term visitors to Pennsylvania to maintain ownership of enslaved people by sending them out of state when their residence approached six months.

**1790-** Ona Judge accompanies the Washington family when the national capital is moved from New York to Philadelphia

**1793-** President Washington signs the Fugitive Slave Act requiring authorities in free states to return escapees from slavery to their owners

**May 21, 1796-** Ona Judge runs away from the President's House in Philadelphia at age 22

**April-December, 1796-** George Washington repeatedly seeks assistance for the return of Ona Judge

**August, 1799-** George Washington writes to a nephew asking for assistance in recapturing Ona Judge

**December, 1799-** Death of George Washington

**1848-** Death of Ona Judge in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. She was never recaptured nor officially freed.

# DOCUMENT A:

## A Letter From George Washington to Joseph Whipple (Modified)

*Joseph Whipple, a politically connected businessman, was serving as customs collector in Portsmouth, New Hampshire—a state in which many people opposed slavery. He was responsible for overseeing ships arriving in the city's port, an important job for which he had been appointed by President Washington. Whipple had chosen to free the enslaved people he owned.*

Philadelphia  
28<sup>th</sup> November, 1796

Sir,

I regret that the attempt you made to restore the girl (Oney Judge as she called herself while with us, and who, without the least **provocation** fled from her Mistress) met with so little success.

I was afraid that if she had any previous notice of the intention to send her back, that she would try to avoid it; for whatever she may have asserted to the contrary, there is no doubt in this family, of her having been seduced and tempted off by a Frenchman who used to frequently introduce himself into the family; & has never been seen here, since the girl left. I have recently been told, through other channels, that she did go to Portsmouth with a Frenchman, who getting tired of her, as is presumed left her, and that she had **betaken herself to the Needle**—the use of which she well understood—for a livelihood.

I do not mean however, that such violent measures should be used as would excite a mob or riot which might be the case if she has supporters or even uneasy sensations in the minds of well-disposed Citizens. Rather than either of these should happen, I would **forego** her services.

We would rather have her sent to Virginia than brought to Philadelphia; as our stay here will be but short; and as it is not unlikely that she may, from the circumstance I have mentioned, be in a state of pregnancy. I should be glad to hear from you on this subject, and am Sir Your Obedient Humble Servant.

- George Washington

## **Vocabulary:**

**provocation-** action or speech meant to anger or annoy

**betaken herself to the Needle-** took up sewing

**forego-** do without

## **Guiding Questions for Document A:**

1. (Sourcing) How long after Ona Judge's escape was this written? How might President Washington be feeling about Judge's escape at this point?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. (Close reading) According to Washington, who was responsible for Judge's escape from the President's House? What evidence does he present to support this claim?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. (Contextualization) Why might Washington assume that using violent means to capture Judge might "excite a mob or riot"? Why would Washington want to avoid creating this kind of reaction?

## DOCUMENT B:

### “Washington’s Runaway Slave” (Modified)

*This article was printed in The Granite Freeman, a Concord, New Hampshire abolitionist newspaper on May 22, 1845. It is based on an interview of Judge conducted by the author, Reverend T. H. Adams.*

There is now living in the town of Greenland, N.H., a runaway slave of Gen. Washington. Her name at the time of her escape was ONA MARIA JUDGE. She is not able to give the year of her escape, but says that she came from Philadelphia just after the close of Washington’s second term of the Presidency, which must fix it somewhere in the [early?] part of the year 1797.

Being a waiting maid of Mrs. Washington, she was not exposed to any peculiar hardships. If asked why she did not remain in his service, she gives two reasons, first, that she wanted to be free; secondly that she understood that after the death of her master and mistress, she was to become the property of a grand-daughter of theirs, by name of Custis, and that she was determined never to be her slave.

Washington made two attempts to recover her. First, he sent a man by the name of Bassett to persuade her to return; but she resisted all the arguments he employed for this end. He told her they would set her free when she arrived at Mount Vernon, to which she replied, “I am free now and choose to remain so.”

Finding all attempts to seduce her to slavery again in this manner useless, Bassett was sent once more by Washington, with orders to bring her and her infant child by force. Bassett, being acquainted with Gov. [then Senator John] Langdon, then of Portsmouth, took up lodgings with him, and disclosed to him the object of his mission.

The good old Governor must have possessed something of the spirit of modern anti-slavery. He entertained Bassett very handsomely, and in the meantime sent word to Ona Judge, to leave town before twelve o’clock at night, which she did, found a place to hide, and escaped the clutches of the oppressor.

When asked if she is not sorry she left Washington, as she has labored so much harder since, than before, her reply is, “No, I am free, and have, I trust been made a child of God by the means.”



## **Guiding Questions for Document B:**

1. (Sourcing) Whose version of events is conveyed in this article? How long after Judge escaped the Washington household was the interview on which this article is based conducted?
  
2. (Close reading) What reasons does Judge give for escaping from the Washington household? What can be inferred about the Custis granddaughter?
  
3. (Corroboration) How does Judge's explanation of her reasons for fleeing differ from that of President Washington?
  
4. (Close reading; Contextualization) Who told Judge that someone had been sent to return her to President Washington?
  
5. Hypothesis: Ona Judge was able to leave town and quickly find a new hiding place. What might that indicate about the residents of New Hampshire at the time?

# INQUIRY: THE BURNING OF PENNSYLVANIA HALL

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## Central Historical Question:

Who was responsible for the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in 1838?

## Materials:

- Copies of Documents A-D
- Discussion Questions for Documents A-D
- Graphic Organizer

## Plan of Instruction (based on 60-minute period)

- I. Remind students that you paused the film at a crucial point in the history of abolition. (Or, without having viewed the beginning of the film, explain the following):  
*Groups like the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society were calling for immediate abolition, many white leaders were advocating for colonization, and other Americans both North and South were profiting from the labor of enslaved people and wanted slavery to continue.*
- II. Continue (or begin) film at 41:36 until 51:05. (Clip is available at [historymakingproductions.com/classroom](http://historymakingproductions.com/classroom).) As depicted in the film, members of the anti-abolitionist mob intentionally burned Pennsylvania Hall. What other groups or individuals may have played a role? Indicate that soon after the burning of Pennsylvania Hall, there was disagreement as to who should be blamed.
- III. Distribute Documents A-D along with Guiding Questions. Circulate as students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to answer the Guiding Questions. Review Guiding Questions as whole class as needed.
- IV. Distribute Graphic Organizer. Fill in the column for Document A as a whole class activity so that students understand the kind of information they should be recording on the graphic organizer.
- V. Have students work individually, in pairs, or as small groups to fill out graphic organizer with arguments against each of the three major groups that were blamed. They can summarize or use quotations from the documents. (See answer key.)
- VI. Conclude with a whole class discussion.
  - a. Has the Central Historical Question been answered?
  - b. What other primary sources might be helpful in answering the Central Historical Question?
  - c. If you were making a pie chart about the responsibility for the burning of Pennsylvania Hall, what percentage of blame would you give to the Managers & Abolitionists, to the Mob, and to the Mayor & Other City Officials?

- d. The members of the Police Committee place a great deal of blame on the Managers of Pennsylvania Hall and the people attending the anti-slavery conference.
- Can you think of other examples in history or in the current day in which the victims of a mob action have been accused of bringing it on themselves?
  - Do First Amendment protections extend to all views, no matter how out-of-step with broader social norms? Do the police always have the responsibility to protect people lawfully expressing such views?
- e. People in the North in general and in Philadelphia in particular tend to see their history as one of opposition to slavery. How does the Pennsylvania Hall experience change your perception of the North and/or Philadelphia?
- f. Although there is a historical marker at the site where Pennsylvania Hall briefly stood, most people have never heard of it, nor is it mentioned in most American History textbooks. Do you think it should be considered an important event in American History?

# DOCUMENT A

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## Text of posters hung in Philadelphia, May 15<sup>th</sup> 1838:

Whereas a convention for the avowed purpose of effecting the immediate abolition of slavery in the Union is now in session in this city, it behooves all citizens, who entertain a proper respect for the right of property, and the preservation of the Constitution of the United States, to interfere, *forcibly if they must*, and prevent the violation of these pledges, heretofore held sacred. We would therefore propose to all persons, so disposed, to assemble at the Pennsylvania Hall in 6<sup>th</sup> street, between Arch and Race, on to-morrow morning (Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> May) at 11 o'clock, and demand the Immediate dispersion of said convention.

Signed, Several Citizens

## Vocabulary:

**behoove**- to be the responsibility of

## Guiding Questions for Document A:

1. (Close reading) In what ways does the wording of the poster appeal to a reader's sense of patriotism? Why might the authors of the poster have assumed that such an approach would motivate people to assemble at Pennsylvania Hall?
2. (Close reading) The poster calls for people to show up at 11 am on a Wednesday morning. What kinds of people (age, gender, social class, etc.) might have been most available at the time of the week?
3. (Sourcing) Why do you think the poster is signed "several citizens"? Can we make any inferences into who might have written this, one of numerous handwritten posters found around the city?

## DOCUMENT B

### Excerpts from a Report on the Destruction of the Hall by the Managers of the Pennsylvania Hall Association, 1838 (Modified)

The Board of Managers of the Hall had deemed it their duty to communicate to the Mayor of the city, and the Sheriff of the county, information of the preceding evening's outrage and the arrangement for the coming afternoon and evening meetings as well of those expected on the subsequent days of the week; and to call on these officers for that protection which their official obligations required them to render.

As the day rolled on, the indications of approaching violence became more and more alarming—the crowd grew more dense and more excited; busy agents of mischief were passing from group to group, circulating falsehoods and calumnies against the abolitionists, and inflaming passions to leaven it yet more thoroughly with a spirit of reckless desperation, while so far as we could discern, little or nothing was done by those whose official duty was the preservation of the peace, to avert the coming storm. On the contrary we have strong reasons for believing that the course of the Mayor had a tendency to encourage violence and invite aggression upon the rights of a portion of his constituents.

A few minutes before the appointed hours of the evening meeting, several persons went to the Hall for the purpose of attending it, but found the door closed and locked. It was soon ascertained that the Mayor had requested of the Board of Managers the keys of the building, promising if they were given into his possession, that he would take upon himself the responsibility of protecting the building, which otherwise he said he could not do, and the Managers had complied with his request. Of course the idea of holding the intended meeting was abandoned. But the mob did not abandon *their* design.

The Mayor, according to his morning promise, appeared in front of the building, and made them a speech—in which he expressed the hope that nothing of a disorderly nature would be done, stated that the house had been given up to him for the night, and that there would be no meeting, that he *relied on them as his police*, and trusted they would abide by the laws and keep order; and then concluded by wishing them good evening. The mob responded with “three cheers for the Mayor,” and he withdrew, leaving them neither dispersed nor pacified.

It is understood that the Mayor subsequently returned, but it was then too late for an efficient exertion of his authority.

## **Vocabulary:**

**calumny**- a false and derogatory statement

**leaven**- expand

**ascertain**- discover

## **Guiding Questions for Document B:**

1. (Contextualization) In 1838, most Philadelphia residents were either supportive of or indifferent to the institution of slavery. Why do you think the managers' report emphasizes that misinformation ("falsehoods and calumnies") was spread among the assembled crowd?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. (Close reading) Consider the words that the managers chose to italicize in their description of Mayor Swift's speech. Why do you think they saw these word choices as particularly significant?

# DOCUMENT B

## Excerpts from the Report of the Police Committee, 1838 (Modified)

The Committee deem it unavoidable to dwell for a moment upon the causes which produced among *a certain portion* of our community that deep excitement, which, *doomed to destruction* a large and costly edifice recently erected in our city. The Committee owes it to the causes of truth, to declare that this excitement *was occasioned* by the determination of the *owners* of that building and of their friends, to persevere in openly promulgating and advocating in it *doctrines repulsive to the moral sense* of a large majority of our community and to persist in this course against the advice of friends, heedless of the dangers they were encountering, *reckless of its consequences to the peace and order of our city*. Of their strict legal and constitutional right to do so, there can be no question. Neither can there be any doubt of the duty of city authorities, so far as it is in their power to do it, to extend protection to all, and to secure, as far as possible, the rights and the property of all citizens against invasion from any quarter.

But how far it was prudent or judicious, or even morally right—how far they could anticipate any result different from that which has occurred—are questions upon which public opinion is divided. However much it may be a subject of regret to this Committee, it can be no matter of surprise to them, that the mass of the community could ill brook the erection of an edifice in this city, for the *encouragement of practices believed* by many to be *subversive to the established orders of society*, and viewed by some as repugnant to that separation which it has pleased the great Author of nature to establish among the various races of man.

Had the founders of the building been satisfied with a *less public* dedication of their Hall, it is probable that the general good sense of our community, and the all-pervading influence of the law, would have availed to secure the building against the attack of its lawless aggressors. Extending as they did, a call in *public papers, most widely*; inviting from distant states men whose names have been conspicuous before the community as active agitators; and embracing in their invitations all persons, *without distinction of color*, they unfortunately produced in the public mind a high state of excitement. And when on the arrival of these strangers in Philadelphia and during their sojourn here, our streets presented the unusual union of black and white walking arm in, *it is a matter of no great surprise*, that any individuals should have so far forgotten arm what was due to the character of the city, and the supremacy of the law, as publicly to give vent to that indignation *which ought never to have been felt*.

## Vocabulary:

**edifice-** building

**promulgate-** spread

**judicious-** wise

**conspicuous-** well-known, visible

### Guiding Questions for Document C:

1. (Contextualization) When Mayor Swift learned that there would be an investigation into the role of city officials in the burning of Pennsylvania Hall, he readily agreed such an inquiry. What can we assume about the individuals appointed to the “Police Committee” that issued this report?
2. (Close reading) What is the meaning of the following phrase: “*that separation which it has pleased the great Author of nature to establish among the various races of man*”?



## DOCUMENT D

### Excerpts from “Men & Things,” a recounting of the burning of PA. Hall, *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, January 11, 1898 (Modified)

The second day passed without disturbance, although there was great indignation at the sight of black men and women entering the hall along with white companions. On the third day Lucretia Mott, together with Angelina Grimke, the South Carolina Quakeress, who had freed her slaves and had married Theodore D. Weld only a night or two before, appeared at the meeting of the women, which was held separately from that of the men, because of the prejudice against their participation with them in public affairs. Windows were broken by the hoodlums on the outside, stones were thrown at the hall and the women menaced with insults.

John Swift was then Mayor of Philadelphia. He had displayed his physical courage on more than one occasion in facing mobs and handling ruffians. But he was not in sympathy with the agitators in Pennsylvania Hall. The next day they called upon him for protection, and he advised them to give up the idea of holding a night meeting. He assured them that if they would proceed with it the building and their lives would certainly be in danger. As night came on, Sixth Street and Cherry Street and parts of Race and Arch Streets were filled with a howling mob. It was said that there were twelve thousand men swearing, yelling and demanding the application of the torch.

The Mayor, to whom the keys of the hall had been surrendered by the Abolitionists when they saw that it would be useless to hold the meeting, came forward to try his powers of persuasion. Swift was disposed to blame them for causing the trouble, having told Daniel Neall, the president of the managers, that “it is public opinion that makes mobs, and ninety-nine out of a hundred I talk with are against you.” The mob cheered him when he requested them to go home; but they knew that he was powerless with his handful of police.

As soon as he turned his back the lights in the street lamps were extinguished. A battering ram was brought into action against the main doorway; the gas pipes in the hall were broken. It is said that Swift came back with his police, but it was too late; there were few citizens who volunteered to help them, and they were soon forced to retire. Flames shot up almost simultaneously from all parts of the hall; the fireman were not permitted to turn their hose upon it, and long before midnight not even the walls of the new “temple of freedom” stood amidst its ashes.

### Guiding Questions for Document D:

1. (Contextualization) What significant events in American History took place between 1838 and 1898? How might the sixty-year gap between the burning of Pennsylvania Hall and the publication of this article have influenced the perspective of the author?
2. (Close reading) What words are used to describe the people gathered outside of Pennsylvania Hall in the first three paragraphs of the document? What do these words reveal about the perspective of the author? Why do you think the author uses the word “citizens” in the final paragraph?

## FOR FURTHER READING

Biddle, Daniel and Murray Dubin. *Tasting Freedom: Octavius Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

Dunbar, Erica A. *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

Dunbar, Erica A. *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave Ona Judge*, New York: Atria Books, 2017.

Faulkner, Carol. *Lucretia Mott's Heresy: Abolition and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.

Nash, Gary. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720-1840*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Women's Rights Emerges within the Anti-Slavery Movement 1830-1870: A Brief History with Documents*, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

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## Franklin's Spark: 1720-1765

- The enslavement and escape of "Samson", owned by Governor James Logan
- The work of eccentric abolitionist Benjamin Lay
- Runaway ads in colonial newspapers (including Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette)

## Fever: 1793

- The revolt of enslaved people in Haiti and evacuation to Philadelphia
- Role of Richard Allen and the African American community in serving as nurses; subsequent accusations of theft and price gouging

## Disorder: 1820-1854

- Abolition and anti-abolition in the border city (burning of Pennsylvania Hall)

## **An Equal Chance: 1855-1871**

- Founding of the Pennsylvania Railroad
- William Still, the Underground Railroad, and the Vigilant Committee
- Life and death of civil rights activist, scholar, community organizer O.V. Catto

## **World Stage: 1872-1899**

- The career and activism of Caroline Le Count

## **Awakening: 1900-1920**

- The Great Migration to Philadelphia
- The childhood and education of Marian Anderson

## **Promise for a Better City: 1944-1964**

- The 1944 PTC strike protesting the appointment of black trolley operators
- Efforts to create more job opportunities for African Americans (e.g. protest marches, selective patronage) and emergence of civil rights leaders Cecil B. Moore and Reverend Leon Sullivan
- The 1964 Columbia Avenue Riot

## **The Fight: 1965-1978**

- Joe Frazier's boxing career
- "The Sound of Philadelphia" as developed by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff
- Conflict between Mayor Rizzo and the African American community

## **Breakthrough: 1978-1994**

- The election of Wilson Goode, the first African American mayor
- The MOVE bombing and fire

## **Webisodes:**

- *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom*
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