

Mumbet's Declaration of Independence:
Perspectives on Slavery and Freedom in Colonial New England

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Grades: 4 and 5

Lesson Topic:

While the colonists were fighting the American Revolutionary War to break free of the tyranny of British rule, Mumbet sued the colony of Massachusetts for her freedom from slavery. Inspired by the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights which stated "All men are born free and equal," Mumbet with the support of her lawyer was awarded her liberty. These lessons will examine the life and character traits of Mumbet, the family who enslaved her, and the lawyer who argued her case with an emphasis on the variety of perspectives found on the institution of slavery and the growing ideas of liberty in colonial New England.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to identify and utilize primary and secondary sources.
- Students will be able to cite evidence from the texts to support an analysis of both sources.
- Students will be able to determine character traits, occupations, and perspectives on slavery/freedom in colonial New England

Resources:

Background Information:

<https://kidsbiographer.com/2014/06/23/meet-the-biographer-gretchen-woelfle/>

(Interview with the author about writing *Mumbet's Declaration of Independence*)

<http://www.thetrustees.org/what-we-care-about/history-culture/elizabeth-freeman-fighting-for-freedom.html>

(Slideshow about the life of Elizabeth Freeman)

<http://www.massmoments.org/moment.cfm?mid=244>

(Summary of Mumbet's quest for freedom)

Map of Berkshire County, Massachusetts, specifically Sheffield and Stockbridge

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/student-run-lesson>

(Junk it - Keep it strategy)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IX_qV9jRKDo

(How to Write a Tweet)

Picture Book:

Woelfe, Gretchen. *Mumbet's Declaration of Independence*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 2014.

Primary Sources:

<http://www.mass.gov/anf/docs/lib/body-of-liberties-1641.pdf>

(Massachusetts Slave Law page 53, #91)
<http://mumbet.com/index.php/77-mumbet-articles/mumbet/71-mumbetsgrave>
(Mumbet's gravestone)
<http://mumbet.com/index.php/mumbet/74-mumbetportrait>
(Mumbet's portrait)
http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/bill_of_rightss6.html
(Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, Article 1)

Graphic Organizer and Activities (see attached documents):

Character Traits Graphic Organizer
Tweet It Up Activity
Political Cartoon Activity

Supporting Resources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MggVIU0a51U>
(YouTube video definition of Twitter/tweet)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sch4cgecTWA>
(YouTube Jimmy Fallon: Sesame Street Hashtags: #WhenIWasAKid)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qev7ADFIROs&index=17&list=PLykHzf464sU99HVFTMNPjLWLqPSJAzEDN>
(YouTube Jimmy Fallon: Hashtags: #HalloweenFail)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkMlwKWfadY&t=1248s>
(YouTube video: *Liberty Kids 139: Born Free and Equal*)
<https://mass.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/fyr12.socst.us.1950pres.mumbet/mumbet/#.WXIb-ogrLIU>
(Video segment of PBS series: *Finding Your Roots*)
<http://historicalfirsts.org/website/the-women-their-stories/mum-bett/>
(Website of Tammy Denease, an historical re-enactor who portrays Mumbet)
<http://www.mass.gov/courts/court-info/sjc/edu-res-center/abolition/abolition-4-gen.html>
(Official website of the Massachusetts Court System)

Adams, Catherine & Pleck, Elizabeth H. *Love of Freedom: Black Women in Colonial and Revolutionary New England*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Laiz, Jana & Barnes, Ann-Elizabeth. "A Free Woman On God's Earth" *The True Story of Elizabeth "Mumbet" Freeman The Slave Who Won Her Freedom*. Great Barrington, MA: Crow Flies Press, 2009.

Woelfle, Gretchen. *Answering the Cry for Freedom: Stories of African Americans and the American Revolution*. Calkins Creek, 2016.

Time: Three 45-minute lessons

Procedure:

Day One - Interactive Read Aloud Materials: Picture Book

- 1) Have students think about what they value (what is important to you) - family, friends, pets, possessions, school, home, hobbies, free time, sports, etc.
- 2) Have students imagine never having any of these freedoms and inform them that this is the situation that the woman named Mumbet experienced.
- 3) Let students know that we will be reading a story during the American Revolutionary era when ideas about freedom were frequently debated.
- 4) Introduce the main characters (Mumbet, Colonel Ashley, Mrs. Ashley, and Mr. Sedgwick) and tell students that as we read, they will be thinking about who they are (their traits), the role they play (occupations), and their perspectives on freedom and slavery
- 5) Read the text and at the teacher's discretion, stop for discussion
- 6) At the end, have students reflect on the reading (through turn and talks, whole group discussion, and/or stop and jots)
 - a) Is this a primary or secondary source?
 - b) What are the different perspectives you noticed in this book on slavery/freedom?

Day Two - Small Group Chart Work (Identifying traits using a graphic organizer and citing text evidence) Materials: graphic organizers for each student; cited text passages

- 1) Divide students into small groups to receive typed texts based on **one** of the four characters (Mumbet, Colonel Ashley, Mrs. Ashley, Mr. Sedgwick) - each group will become an "expert" on one character
- 2) Have students complete the chart on **their** character and use evidence from the text
- 3) Share as a class so others can fill in the rest of the chart
 - a) Students can agree or disagree
 - b) Students can revise character traits words or evidence to make them stronger
- 4) Have a group discussion about how their thinking has changed or remained the same. Do they have any burning questions?

Day 3 - Primary Source Investigation - The purpose of this investigation is to allow students to develop an understanding of the perceptions that colonists had about slavery and freedom in New England during the 1700's

(caveat - students should be familiar with reading primary sources)

- 1) Review with students what they have learned about the book's characters

- 2) Inform students that today, they will be taking a look at primary sources that connect to the story to understand the perspectives of these characters (on freedom/slavery)
- 3) Groups rotate around to read and discuss one of the four given primary resources and jot down the main ideas from the source (Consider using the “Junk It and Keep It” group strategy; consider enlarging the primary sources so students can chart notes underneath it (<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/student-run-lesson>))
- 4) The classroom teacher then discusses the main idea under each primary resource chart and facilitates discussion on which perspective the primary resource supports (slavery vs. antislavery - which characters in the book display these ideologies?)
- 5) Discuss: What are the perspectives that we notice? (keep it general - enslaved person, slave master, anti-slavery ally) How has your view changed since the start of the lesson?

Assessments/Extensions (see additional attachments):

- Create a political cartoon based on one of three points of views found in Mumbet’s story (enslaved person, slave master/mistress, anti-slavery ally)
- Create a tweet (140 characters or less) describing one of these perspectives

“Any time, any time while I was a slave, if one minute's freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it—just to stand one minute on God's airth [sic] a free woman I would.” — Elizabeth Freeman