
MISSION 1: “For Crown or Colony?”
Part 4: From Bad to Worse (March 5, 1770)
Discussion Activity: What Are Rights? What is Freedom?

A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR:

Students, especially middle school age students, think and talk about justice and fairness often. It’s during early adolescence that children begin to question authority, to challenge rules, and to work on their own needs for privacy and independence. It’s for that reason that it’s particularly appropriate for students of this age to be studying conflict and revolution: studying the history will help them to understand themselves and using their own experiences and feelings will help them to understand the history. The materials provided here will encourage students to go beyond declarations and pronouncements and to begin to think deeply about rights and freedom.

The answers to many of the discussion questions below depend on the beliefs, attitudes and values of the students who answer them. Your role isn’t to push children toward one response or another, but rather to encourage them to explore the reasons they believe what they do, to use evidence, to question assumptions, and to think flexibly.

There are a number of ways to use these questions, but first and foremost, don’t try to use them all. The first question alone could be the basis for an entire discussion. Think about your class and decide where you believe they are in their thinking about rights and freedom. Choose one or more of these questions depending on the amount of time you have and the needs of your group.

Then, decide on how you will organize the activity. It might be that you divide the class into table groups. Then, you might decide to give everyone the same few questions to work on, or you might give different tables different questions, or some combination of that. After working together, students should share their thinking by posting their responses on a chart, or one or two people from each group might report to the rest orally.

If each student, or each group, gets a copy of the UN Declaration handout photocopied onto cardstock, they might cut the statements up into a set of cards. That would enable them to organize and reorganize them to answer questions. Or, each student could be given a single card (their choice or yours) and try to represent the right graphically, with pictures they make themselves or collage using relevant or related photographs. You might prompt them with a question like, “What does being hungry look like?” or “What does having the right to privacy look like?”

Students working on #6 could easily pick out the one or two they feel is most or least important to them. They could arrange the whole packet in order of importance.

Since rights are abstractions, the more you can do to make the discussion and activities concrete, the better. Again, be very mindful of the needs of your students.

What Are Rights? What is Freedom?

About sixty years ago, the United Nations adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. You might know that the ideas about freedom in our *Declaration of Independence* were not new, but rather they were adapted from other thinkers and from other documents. You probably also know that just because the Declaration was written and signed, it didn't automatically mean that everyone enjoyed the rights to which Thomas Jefferson referred. Likewise, most of the ideas in *this* document are centuries old. Still, not everyone in the world enjoys them.

Here are some of the main ideas from the Universal Declaration. You can find the original text at <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>.

1. Everyone is entitled to rights and freedoms, regardless of who they are or what their circumstances are.	2. Everyone has the right to live, to have liberty, and to feel safe and secure.
3. The authority, or power, the government has comes from the people it serves. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. The government is elected by the people.	4. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
5. No one shall be arrested, detained or exiled unless there is reason to believe they have done something wrong. Everyone is entitled to a fair trial.	6. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his/her own, and to return to his/her country.
7. Everyone has the right to privacy, and that privacy should not be invaded unless there is a good reason to do so.	8. People have the right to marry and have a family. People may marry whomever they want to marry, provided both consent to it.
9. Everyone has the right to own property. No one's property can be taken away without good reason.	10. Everyone has the right to think what he/she wants to, and to believe what he/she wants to. A person can practice any religion he/she wants to.

11. A person has the right to express his/her opinion in speech, print or other media.	12. People may meet together freely to exchange opinions, and give and get information through any of the media.
13. All people have the right to work, and the conditions of that work must be decent. People also have the right to rest from that work.	14. People have the right to an education.
15. When you exercise your rights and freedom, you must do so with a respect for the rights and freedoms of others.	16. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited.

What Are Rights? What is Freedom? Questions

1. Based on your own ideas, what you've learned this year so far, and the reading attached here, what are rights? What is freedom?
2. What do rights have to do with freedom?
3. Where do rights come from? From God? From nature? From governments? From laws? Why do you think that?
4. How does your idea of freedom and rights fit with the idea of having to follow rules, as we do in games, at school, at home, with respect to laws, etc. (Examples: Are you *free* if you have to wait your turn on the movie line instead of cutting right to the front? If you have to pay for things in a store? If you have to come to school on time? If you are free, why can't you hit someone on the head with a stick?)
5. Do *you* feel like you have rights? Do *you* feel free? Why or why not?
6. Look at the list of rights. If you could only have three, which would you choose? In what order? Now add more, one by one, in order of importance. What reasons can you give for your choices? As an alternative, begin with all the rights. Then decide which one you would give up if you had to give up three. What would go next?
7. A right that may sound natural to you is, "All people have the right to think and say what they want." Another is, "All people have the right to live." Here is one that isn't on the list: "All people have the right to a BMW." How do we decide what is a right and what isn't?
8. Read through the list of rights on the other page again. Which rights did the Patriots seem to already have? Which did they feel they did not have?
9. The UN Declaration is clear that no one can be held in slavery. Answer this: Do your parents own *you*? Explain why you believe you or why not?
10. You know that enslaved Africans in the colonies had no rights, no freedom. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that freedom (he called it "liberty") was an "inalienable right" (one that was given to people by God and can't be taken away). Yet he himself owned slaves as did many of the other signers. How can you explain this? Assume he wasn't insane and that he did understand what he was doing.

11. Nat is an indentured servant who has few rights. He is lucky because Mr. Edes, while a stern master, isn't a cruel one. Still, until his indenture is up, he has little freedom of movement and in general, he must do what Mr. Edes tells him to. Solomon is a freedman, and he can go where he wants and do what he wants, but because many black people in the North are enslaved, Solomon must carry identification papers to demonstrate to the authorities that he is free. And there is always a chance someone will kidnap him and sell him back into slavery. Phillis is enslaved, but her masters, Mr. and Mrs. Wheatley, have educated her, they treat her well, and she has time to worship, to write poetry and even to travel.

- Of these three people, who is the most free? Who is the least? Why do you think so?
- If you had to be one of these three people, who would you choose to be? Why?
- If you had been an enslaved African in early 1770s Boston, and you became aware that people were talking about liberty and freedom, what might you have said or done?