

The Massachusetts Constitution

1780 | Grade 4 · Explain with evidence

Words to know

constitution — a set of basic rules for a government

rights — freedoms and protections people are entitled to

government — the system that makes and carries out public decisions

Look closely



Massachusetts State House

Read the story

Massachusetts adopted a constitution, a plan for government. John Adams was its main author. The document described rights and branches of government. It remains in use with amendments. Rights were not equally enjoyed by everyone.

It is widely described as the oldest written constitution still functioning in the world. Read that claim with attention to written form and continuing use. Its equality language became important in freedom cases.

Think, talk, and show evidence

1. State the main idea. Support it with two details from the reading.
2. Explain a change or challenge described in the text. Which words support your answer?
3. Use one vocabulary word in a new sentence about this event.
4. What can the image and caption help explain? What can they not tell you?

Follow-up reading: Elizabeth Freeman wins freedom

1781

An enslaved woman known as Bett went to court with a man named Brom. They challenged their enslavement and won. Bett later used the name Elizabeth Freeman. Her action helped challenge slavery in Massachusetts.

Brom and Bett v. Ashley used legal arguments connected to the new constitution's equality principles. Freeman's victory was a specific case, not a single law instantly ending every form of slavery.

Compare the two readings. Explain one similarity or difference using a detail from each. Their order does not prove that one caused the other.

Teacher guide & source trail

Original classroom adaptation. Suggested reading levels are instructional choices, not standardized readability certifications. Use professional judgment and learner feedback.

ELA practice: RI.4.1: refer to details; RI.4.2: main idea and summary; RI.4.3: explain events; RI.4.7: interpret visual information; W.4.2 and SL.4.1: explain and discuss.

These tasks support selected skills in the [Massachusetts 2017 ELA framework](#); they do not establish mastery of an entire standard.

Answer guidance

Factual anchor: Massachusetts adopted a constitution, a plan for government. John Adams was its main author. The document described rights and branches of government. It remains in use with amendments. Rights were not equally enjoyed by everyone. It is widely described as the oldest written constitution still functioning in the world. Read that claim with attention to written form and continuing use. Its equality language became important in freedom cases.

Accept accurate main ideas and explanations supported by the text. Vocabulary meanings are in the opening word bank. For picture questions, use the caption and credit below; distinguish what is visible from what is inferred. For comparison, accept a specific connection supported by both readings. Do not require personal accounts of trauma.

Continue the inquiry

[Research source for this event ↗](#)

[Research source for follow-up ↗](#)

[Event page, accessible HTML reading, and vocabulary game ↗](#)

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[Image source and rights record ↗](#)

The PDF contains selectable English text and embedded fonts. For adjustable text and browser reading tools, use the event's [HTML page](#). External sources may need adult guidance.