

Quock Walker and the constitution

1783 | Grade 2 · Read & notice

Words to know

court — a place or group that decides legal cases

equality — having equal rights or standing

change — become different

Look closely



Elizabeth Freeman, who brought a different freedom suit in 1781. This is not a portrait of Quock Walker.

Read the story

Quock Walker sought freedom through the courts. His cases helped challenge slavery. In 1783, Chief Justice William Cushing explained that slavery conflicted with the state constitution. People used the language of rights to demand change.

Think, talk, and show evidence

1. What happened in this reading? Tell one fact.
2. Who or what is this reading mostly about?
3. Choose a word from the word bank. Explain it in your own words.
4. Look at the picture and its caption. What does it help you notice? Is it from the time of the event?

Follow-up reading: Shays' Rebellion

1786–1787

Many farmers struggled with debt and taxes. Some blocked courts and joined an armed uprising. Daniel Shays became one of its leaders. The conflict showed deep disagreement about government, fairness, and money.

How are the two readings alike or different? Tell a partner one connection. Which event came first?

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.2.1: ask and answer questions; RI.2.2: identify a main topic; RI.2.7: use images and words; W.2.2 and SL.2.1: 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: Quock Walker sought freedom through the courts. His cases helped challenge slavery. In 1783, Chief Justice William Cushing explained that slavery conflicted with the state constitution. People used the language of rights to demand change. Walker litigation and Freeman’s case were separate. Together with resistance and changing practice, these decisions undermined slavery in Massachusetts. Emancipation did not eliminate racism or ensure equal opportunity.

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.