

Quock Walker and the constitution

1783 | Grade 4 · Explain with evidence

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.

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.

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: 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.

Protesters feared losing farms and facing debt imprisonment. The rebellion influenced national debates about the Articles of Confederation. Explain both people's grievances and the consequences of armed resistance.

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: 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.