

Anthony Burns is returned to slavery

1854 | Grade 4 · Explain with evidence

Words to know

law — a rule made through government

resist — act against a force, rule, or demand

freedom — the ability to live and act without unjust control

Look closely



Modern topic illustration created for Massachusetts History Explorers. It is not a historical artifact.

Read the story

Anthony Burns had escaped slavery and reached Boston. He was arrested under the Fugitive Slave Act. People protested, but officials sent him back to slavery. Supporters later helped purchase his freedom.

The case exposed conflict between federal enforcement and antislavery resistance. Protests did not overturn the federal law. Burns's own life and agency matter beyond the political symbol made of his case.

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: The Sixth Massachusetts answers the call

1861

The Sixth Massachusetts militia responded quickly when the Civil War began. Its soldiers traveled toward Washington. In Baltimore, conflict with a crowd led to deaths. Massachusetts became deeply involved in the war.

The regiment was among the earliest organized units answering Lincoln's call. Precise first claims require context. Military service affected families, communities, and people whose rights were still unequal.

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: Anthony Burns had escaped slavery and reached Boston. He was arrested under the Fugitive Slave Act. People protested, but officials sent him back to slavery. Supporters later helped purchase his freedom. The case exposed conflict between federal enforcement and antislavery resistance. Protests did not overturn the federal law. Burns's own life and agency matter beyond the political symbol made of his case.

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 ↗](#)

Image: Original site illustration.

[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.