

**ACTIVITY**

# Supporting Question 3: Using Ideals to Assert Rights

## Overview

### About This Activity

Students explore Supporting Question 3 through a series of activities that help them consider the perspectives of those denied rights during the founding era. They analyze primary sources written by a group of Black abolitionists from Massachusetts and Judith Sargent Murray, and advocate for white women’s rights. They conclude with a Formative Task that asks them to create a Found Poem using primary sources.

<b>Supporting Question</b>	How did groups excluded from power at the time of the founding use the language of the founding ideals to assert their own rights?
<b>Formative Task</b>	Students will create a found poem using primary sources to illustrate the nation’s founding ideals as expressed by individuals excluded from certain rights and freedoms during the founding era.
<b>Featured Sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading: Petition for Freedom to the Massachusetts Legislature, 1777</li> <li>• Reading: “On the Equality of the Sexes” by Judith Sargent Murray, 1790</li> <li>• Reading: Quote from Rosemary Bray</li> <li>• Handout: Creating a Found Poem</li> </ul>

## Procedure

### Day 1

#### Activity 1: Reflect on the “Ownership” of a Nation’s Laws and Ideals

Project and read aloud the following quote from scholar Ben Railton:

“[Our nation’s] laws and ideals can feel at times like they are above us . . . like we are servants of them in some way, or that they are larger than the individuals in a nation or in a community. . . . [But] in fact we are the owners of these laws and ideals; they belong to us, and we can and should figure out how to make them serve our lives and our needs and our

## Supporting Question 3 | We the People Inquiry

communities rather than the other way around.”<sup>1</sup>

Then break the class into small groups of three to five students to discuss the questions below in the [Think, Pair, Share](#) strategy format.

- Why does Railton think it is important for individuals to “own” their nation’s laws and ideals?
- How might taking ownership of these laws and ideals strengthen a democracy?
- What do you think about this quote? What questions does it raise for you?

Debrief by asking volunteers to verbally share their responses.

### Activity 2: Explore Additional Perspectives through Primary Resources

Explain to students that in class so far, they’ve explored some of the ideals associated with the American Revolution and the founding of the United States. In class today, they’ll be deepening their understanding of the founding, this time from the perspective of those who were denied their rights and excluded from political participation at the time.

Tell students that in the next activity, they will be examining two primary sources from the founding era: an antislavery petition from a group of African Americans in Massachusetts (1777) and an influential essay from a white female writer and intellectual (1790). The sources were written by individuals belonging to groups that were denied equality and freedom in 1776 and in the centuries since. But, as the sources illustrate, these individuals nevertheless had their own powerful visions of what those ideals looked like and what the collective future of the United States should be.

Ask students to explore the primary sources using the [jigsaw](#) strategy. This strategy asks students to become “experts” on a specific document and then share their knowledge with another group of their peers.

Divide the class into pairs and give each pair a specific source (**Petition for Freedom to the Massachusetts Legislature, 1777**, or **“On the Equality of the Sexes” by Judith Sargent Murray, 1790**). Have each pair first read the text silently to themselves and record their annotations (thoughts, questions, and epiphanies) in the margins. When they are finished, ask each pair to read the text aloud together and discuss and answer the reflection questions in the gray boxes at the end of each section. Next, each pair should follow the instructions for sharing their thoughts, questions, and epiphanies under the section of titled “TQE Time!” Finally, students will discuss the connection questions with a partner. Be sure that students know they will eventually be summarizing their source for another group of students who have not read that source, and they will be sharing their answers to the connection questions.

## Day 2

### Activity 1: Share in “Teaching” Groups

Give students time to finish all the steps above with their partner. Once students have finished, divide the class into new “teaching” groups of three students. The members of each “teaching”

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<sup>1</sup> [Ben Railton on the Freeman and Walker Cases](#), FacingHistory.org, accessed August 20, 2020.

### Supporting Question 3 | We the People Inquiry

group should have each read a different source in their pairs, so that both sources are represented.

Instruct each student to summarize their source for the new “teaching” group and to share their answers to the connection questions (1–3). After each student has shared, ask each “teaching” group to make a list of the different connections to the Declaration of Independence that came up in their discussion.

Reconvene as a class and have students share their lists. You might record their responses as a class list on the board or on chart paper. Then ask the class to discuss the following questions:

- How do these sources embody the nation’s founding ideals?
- How do they depart from, extend, or complicate those ideals?

#### Activity 2: Reflect on a Quote from Rosemary Bray

Rosemary Bray. Distribute and read aloud the **Quote from Rosemary Bray** source. After reading, transition into a class discussion using the following prompts. (Alternatively, you might assign one question for students to discuss in the same small groups from the previous activity and then ask them to share their question and summarize their thinking with the class.)

1. What tension does Bray identify in founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence? What does she mean when she says, “You can’t let that powerful an idea into the world without consequences”?
2. How do the ideas in this paragraph connect to the primary sources you examined in your Jigsaw groups?

#### Formative Task

##### Create a Found Poem

To answer the supporting question, “How did groups excluded from power at the time of the founding use the language of the founding ideals to assert their own rights?” have students select one of the primary sources from these activities to create a [found poem](#). Students can use the source they read in their expert groups, or they can select one they learned about in their teaching groups. If they choose the second option, be sure they understand that they will need to read the source carefully before turning it into a found poem. To create their found poem, ask students to follow the instructions in the **Creating a Found Poem** handout.

Students can read their poems aloud to the class. Alternatively, students can read the poems silently. First, have students pass their poems to the left once. Have students read the poem they’ve received, write a comment (students should sign their name to their comment), and then pass the poem to the left again for another comment. Depending on how much time you have, you might allow for three or four passes, or you might have time for students to comment on all of the poems created by their classmates.