

Resistance to Enslavement

Unit 4, Lesson 6

Essential Question

How did enslaved people resist enslavement?

What conclusions are people who view these images likely to draw?

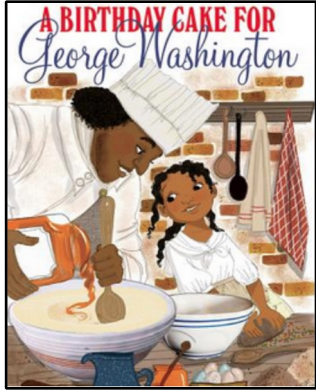


Image 1

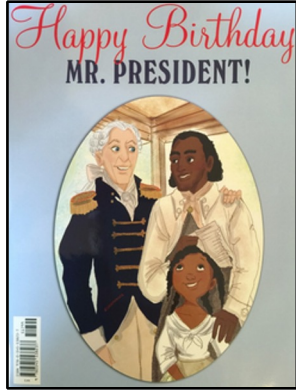


Image 2



Image 3



Image 4

What conclusions are people who view these images likely to draw?



Image 5



Image 6

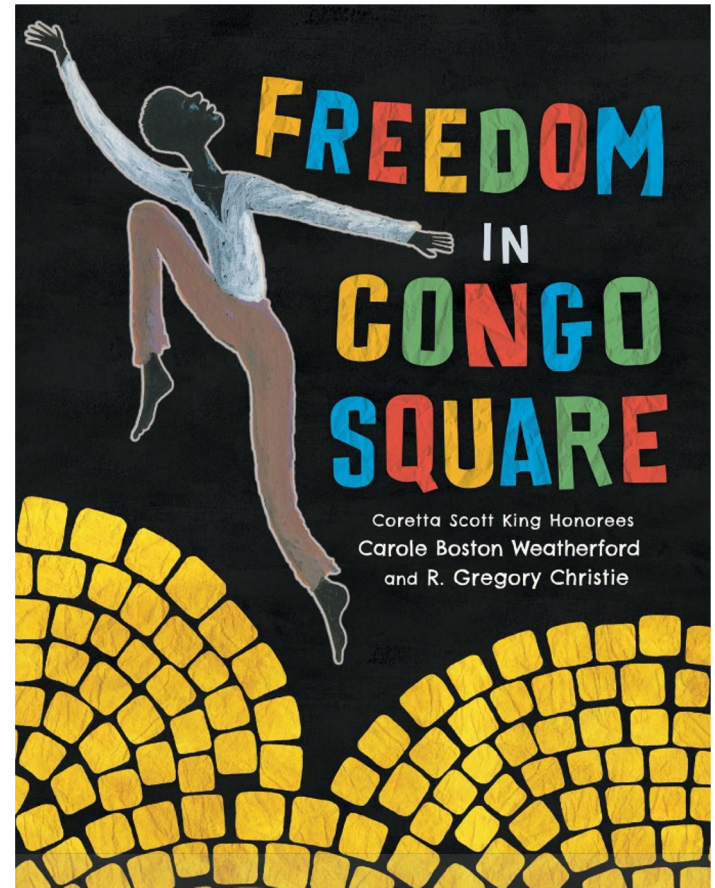


Image 7

Freedom In Congo Square

Day	Activities
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	
Sunday	

As you listen to the story *Freedom In Congo Square*, list the things that enslaved people did each day of the week.



How did enslaved people feel about enslavement?

Timeline

- 1619** First Africans arrive in the English colonies
- 1640** John Punch enslaved because he was “negro”
- 1858** Solomon Northrup wrote *Twelve Years a Slave*
- 1865** Slavery abolished (ended) in the United States
- 2011** Franklin and Higginbotham write *From Slavery to Freedom*

Source 1 [modified]

“Anyone who thinks that enslaved people have no idea of how badly they are treated is fooling themselves. They are wrong if they imagine that an enslaved person who has been whipped gets up from their knees with cuts and blood on their backs ready to forgive. A day will come when the enslaved peoples’ prayers will be heard. It will be a terrible day of revenge when the enslavers will cry out for mercy.”

Solomon Northrup, an enslaved man,

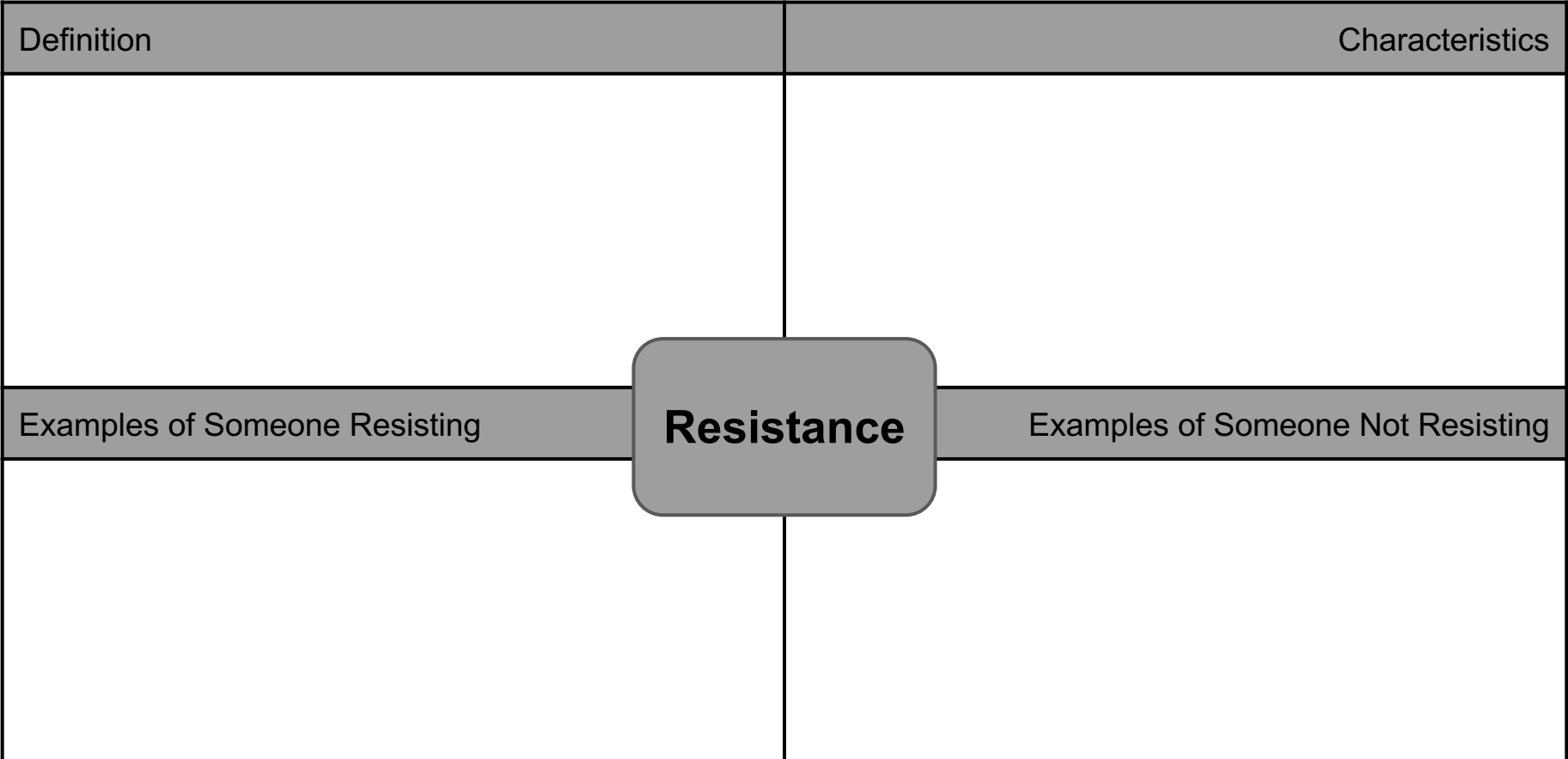
from his book *Twelve Years a Slave*, (1853), p. 129

Source 2

“the most far-fetched and inaccurate characterization of slaves is that they were satisfied, even happy with their lot.”

John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham

From their book *From Slavery to Freedom*, (2011), p. 153



Slave Rebellions During the Colonial Period

**Major American Rebellions by Enslaved People
1619 - 1787**

Year	Rebellion	Lasted	Number of Enslaved People who Participated	Number of Enslavers who Died	Outcome for those Who Rebelled
1712	New York City Rebellion	1 day	30-40	9	21 executed 6 killed themselves 6 pardoned
1739	Stono Rebellion, South Carolina	1 day	75-80	25	50 killed or executed (put to death)

Source: Franklin and Higgenbotham (2011). *From Slavery to Freedom*, p. 156.

Resistance to Enslavement

As you read Resource 6: Resistance to Enslavement, highlight or underline any forms of resistance carried out by enslaved people.

Resource 6: Resistance by Enslaved People

Was Resistance by Enslaved People Common?

Black historians John Hope Franklin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham explain that, just because American slaves did not participate in many large rebellions, this did not mean that they did not resist their unfair ways that they were treated. "Slaves," they have written, "carried out countless everyday acts of resistance." (Franklin and Higginbotham, 151)

Delaware historian Peter Kolchin agrees. Just because there were not any massive rebellions against enslavement does not mean that enslaved people accepted slavery. "In a wide variety of ways," Kolchin explains, "slaves expressed their dissatisfaction with the conditions they were forced to endure. Most common were acts that historians have labeled "silent sabotage" or "day to day resistance." Sabotage means to damage, destroy, or prevent something on purpose. These were not always big actions like rebellions, but they still irritated enslavers a lot and helped the enslaved person avoid violent punishment from their enslavers." (Kolchin, 157)

So, what were some of the common acts of silent sabotage? Enslaved people frequently...

- Refused to answer to their slave names
- Stole food [that they helped produce]
- Faked being sick so they would not have to work
- Pretended to be pregnant so they would not have to work
- Pretended not to understand orders they were given
- Worked slowly
- Broke tools
- Destroyed crops

Slavery was a brutal system, backed law, that gave all enslavers the power to be violent and cruel to the people they enslaved. All enslaved people were victims, trapped in a powerful, dehumanizing system that considered them the legal property of enslavers. If there was a possibility that they would be sold to a more violent enslaver or to a place where they did not want to go, enslaved people would act like they were weak, had bad attitudes, or no skills so other enslavers would not want to "buy" them. And, of course, they would do the opposite if they thought the buyer would be less harsh or lived in a place that they wanted to go (e.g., closer to family or friends; perhaps a place where it might be easy to escape to freedom).

How Did Silent Sabotage Affect Enslaved African People?

For enslaved African people, silent sabotage helped them feel like they had some control over their lives and gave them ways to fight against the brutality of the system of slavery. When silent sabotage went undetected, it led White people to believe that Africans were naturally lazy, unintelligent, sneaky, or thieving — when actually their actions were both very brave, intelligent, and justified. (Kolchin, 157)

What are some examples of resistance that were not "silent"?

There were also not-so-silent ways that enslaved people resisted slavery in which enslaved people struck back at the system violently.

In 1761, an article in a South Carolina newspaper reported that "Negroes have begun the hellish act of poisoning" their enslavers. Enslavers were constantly in fear of being poisoned. Some of them even had "official tasters" who would eat some of the food before the enslavers would to see if it was poisoned. (Franklin and Higginbotham, 155)

Sometimes enslaved people set fire to their masters' barns and homes but tried to make the fires look like accidents. Others got into fist fights with their masters.

Tragically, some enslaved people were so desperate to escape the violence inflicted upon them by their white enslavers and the system of slavery that they purposely injured themselves so that they could not work or be sold. Some enslaved people were so desperate that they took their own lives.

What Was the Most Common Form of Overt Resistance to Enslavement?

Overt resistance is the kind that is obvious to everyone. According to Franklin and Higginbotham, the "most common form of overt slave resistance was running away." (Franklin and Higginbotham, 154) Some enslaved people escaped forever, while others were recaptured in the act of seeking freedom. When they returned, they were punished by the white enslaver, in most cases violently, by their white oppressors frequently and in many ways.

Why Didn't All Enslaved People Rebel or Run Away?

People wonder why more did not join large rebellions like the Stono rebellion or run away. We need to keep in mind that these were very risky actions. Slavery in America was a racially based system that kept Black people and empowered White enslavers with the force of state and federal law. Enslaved people couldn't simply run away from this system.

Large rebellions failed and Black enslaved people received severe, violent punishment from White enslavers. For example, some enslaved people who were part of the New York City and Stono rebellions were executed.

If you look at a map, there were some places from which it might have been almost impossible to escape successfully because there was so much land and so many enslavers between where one was and where they might find freedom.

Think back and say, "I would have done it." But an important point that we must keep in mind is that things were VERY different back then and we never know what we might have lived at the time and had to face the circumstances. People resisted enslavement in ways that were different from them at the time in which they lived.

Debrief- Q1

The images from the warm-up suggest enslaved people were happy. What have you learned from this lesson to argue against this false suggestion?

Debrief- Q2

It was common for enslaved people to resist the unfair life that enslavement dealt them. What are some examples of the ways that enslaved people resisted, other than big rebellions?

Debrief- Q3

Why didn't more enslaved people participate in large rebellions and run away?