

# Lesson 7: A Key to Freedom

Unit 5  
Grade 4

Today we are going to learn about someone who had a sense of *agency*, acted on that sense, and improved her life in ways that we cannot imagine.

This person can be a model for all of us.

# Resource 1: Determining Meaning from Context

Hector was having a bad day. He woke up late because the electricity went out in his home and his alarm did not go off, missed breakfast, got to school late, and left his homework at home. But Hector's teacher had taught him about agency, and he remembered what she said. He went up to his teacher and explained what happened. His teacher gave Hector a snack and told Hector he could bring his homework in the next day.

Turn and discuss with a partner: Based on this little story, can you figure out what agency is?

# **Agency**

Agency refers to the belief or feeling that a person or people have of control over their lives, actions, and their consequences.

## Reflect

Think of a time when you faced a challenge or problem, and rather than feeling powerless and doing nothing, you exhibited agency.



# Elizabeth Key

You are going to read about a pretty remarkable story about someone who believed she had agency and, as a result, her life became incredibly better.



As you read, think about this question:

What was Elizabeth's "Key to Freedom?"

#### Resource 2: A Key to Freedom

Elizabeth Key was born in 1630 to an enslaved African woman in the colony of Virginia. Her father was a white farmer named Thomas Key. Thomas Key was already married when he had a baby with Elizabeth's mother (her name is not known).

Normally, Elizabeth would have automatically become enslaved because her mother was African. But because her father Thomas Key was baptized into the Church of England, Elizabeth became an "indentured servant."

Thomas Key transferred Elizabeth over to a man named Thomas Mottram. Mottram had several indentured servants working for him, including William Grinstead who was a free white man. Elizabeth and William began a relationship and had a son named John.



Thomas Mottram died in 1655. His relatives took advantage of Thomas's death. They determined that Elizabeth and her son John were slaves, not indentured servants.

In the meantime, William Grinstead's indenture ended and he was now a freeman. Grinstead became a lawyer. William and Elizabeth took the Mottram family to court to sue for their freedom.

William and Elizabeth had three things in their favor when they took the Mottram's to court.

First, Elizabeth's father was English. English law stated that, if the White father was free, his children were free.

Second, Elizabeth was only supposed to be an indentured servant for 10 years. Elizabeth had already served as an indenture 10 years MORE that she was legally supposed to serve.

Lastly, Elizabeth had been baptized a Christian and practiced her religion. Most Christians believed that Christians could not be enslaved.

Guess what! Elizabeth and William won their case! Elizabeth and her son John became free. On July 21, 1656 Elizabeth became the first African woman in the colonies to sue for her freedom and win.

Elizabeth and William later married and had another son. William died in 1660 but Elizabeth and her sons lived the rest of their lives as free people.

What can we learn from Elizabeth Key? It is important to have a sense of agency. If she believed she had no control over her life she might have remained enslaved.

Source: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tidih/elizabeth-key-wins-freedom/>





# Develop Your Sense of Agency

Describe a challenge or problem that you are facing and develop a plan for agency by developing a plan to overcome the challenge or problem.

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Demonstrate Agency

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Describe a challenge or problem that you are facing. Prove to everyone that you have agency! Develop a plan to overcome the challenge or problem (and “just do it”).

Your Problem or Challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

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Your Agency Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

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1. How did enslaved people respond to their mistreatment?
2. How does the story of Elizabeth Key highlight the benefits of treating one another well and cooperating?

