Paths Toward Freedom

How the antislavery movement grew in northern states

SS24.US1.4a "Describe the growth of an anti-slavery movement in northern states through the founding of the first abolitionist societies, passage of gradual emancipation laws, court cases, and actions of individuals."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one action taken by a society, circle one action taken by an individual or group of petitioners, and number the law and court cases that changed slavery. Use your marks to trace the different ways the movement grew.

More Than One Path

1. In 1775, reformers in Philadelphia formed what became the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, one of the first organized antislavery groups in North America. Members helped people challenge illegal enslavement and urged lawmakers to change the law. Black Americans also led demands for freedom. In 1777, Prince Hall and other Black men petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to end slavery. They argued that liberty should apply to them, too. An isolated protest could be ignored, but petitions and organized aid kept the issue before officials. The movement grew as people worked together, even when they disagreed about how fast slavery should end.

2. Lawmakers responded in different ways. Pennsylvania's 1780 gradual abolition law did not free people already enslaved there. It said children born to enslaved mothers after the law would become free at age 28, after years of required service. New York passed a gradual emancipation law in 1799. These measures set a legal path toward ending slavery, but they left many people in bondage for years. For a family, a promise of future freedom was not the same as freedom now. Antislavery organizers could point to these laws as gains while continuing to demand wider change.

3. Courts offered another path. In Massachusetts, Elizabeth Freeman, an enslaved woman, sued for her freedom and won in 1781. She argued that slavery conflicted with the state's 1780 constitution, which declared that all men were born free and equal. In 1783, rulings in cases involving Quock Walker reinforced that interpretation and effectively ended slavery in Massachusetts. Unlike Pennsylvania, Massachusetts did not use a gradual abolition law to reach that result. Petitions, societies, laws, and lawsuits did not work in the same way, but each pressed public officials to confront slavery. Northern states moved toward freedom at different speeds.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Pennsylvania Abolition Society help turn opposition to slavery into an organized movement?

2. How did Pennsylvania's 1780 law advance emancipation while also limiting it?

3. How did Elizabeth Freeman's lawsuit and the Quock Walker cases create a different path from Pennsylvania's law?

4. How did Prince Hall and the other petitioners contribute to the movement, even though their petition did not itself end slavery?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five- or six-sentence museum label explaining how at least three methods in the passage worked together to grow the antislavery movement in northern states. Connect the methods rather than just listing them, and include one limit of the progress.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.4a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one action taken by a society, circle one action taken by an individual or group of petitioners, and number the law and court cases that changed slavery. Use your marks to trace the different ways the movement grew. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Pennsylvania Abolition Society help turn opposition to slavery into an organized movement?	**Its members helped people challenge illegal enslavement and urged lawmakers to change the law.**
2	How did Pennsylvania's 1780 law advance emancipation while also limiting it?	**It promised freedom at age 28 to children born to enslaved mothers after the law, but it did not free people already enslaved and required years of service.**
3	How did Elizabeth Freeman's lawsuit and the Quock Walker cases create a different path from Pennsylvania's law?	**The Massachusetts cases used the state constitution's statement about equality to challenge slavery. Their rulings effectively ended slavery there, rather than freeing people gradually under a new law.**
4	How did Prince Hall and the other petitioners contribute to the movement, even though their petition did not itself end slavery?	**They brought Black Americans' demand for freedom before Massachusetts lawmakers and argued that liberty should apply to them.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The antislavery movement grew when people pressed for freedom in public and in government. Prince Hall and other Black petitioners brought their demands to lawmakers, while the Pennsylvania Abolition Society helped people challenge illegal enslavement and pushed for legal change. Gradual emancipation laws showed that lawmakers could act, but Pennsylvania's law left people already enslaved in bondage. Elizabeth Freeman took a different route by using Massachusetts's constitution to win her freedom in court. Later rulings involving Quock Walker helped end slavery in that state. Together, these efforts made slavery harder to defend, although progress came slowly and unevenly.

Accept explanations that accurately connect distinct methods, such as petitioning, organized aid, legislation, and lawsuits. Students should identify a limit supported by the passage, such as delayed freedom under gradual emancipation.