Choices at the Port

Compare work, freedom, and traditions in colonial Virginia

5.C.2.6 "Compare the experiences of both free and enslaved persons in the British colonies, including resistance efforts by enslaved peoples and attempts to preserve aspects of African culture."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about free people's choices and circle two details about limits placed on enslaved people. Write 1 beside a resistance effort and 2 beside a way people kept an African tradition alive.

Life Near a Virginia Port

1. Imagine a busy Virginia port in the 1700s, when Virginia was a British colony. Free workers might load ships for pay and choose another job if one did not suit them. Some free Black people also worked for wages, although unfair laws limited their rights. Enslaved people loaded cargo too, but enslavers claimed their labor and kept its earnings. They could not simply leave a job they were forced to do.

2. A free worker could walk home after unloading a ship. An enslaved worker needed an enslaver's permission to travel and could be sold away from family. To resist, some enslaved people slowed their work or ran away, despite the danger of punishment. Free workers could complain about a job or seek different work, but enslaved workers faced force when they tried to change their lives.

3. Both free and enslaved people of African descent carried traditions with roots in Africa. They might pass down stories, sing songs, or prepare foods shaped by African ways. Enslaved people often had to find time for these practices after forced work or during rare breaks. Free Black people had more control over their time, though unfair laws still limited their freedom. Keeping traditions helped families and neighbors share a sense of belonging.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How was a free worker's pay for loading ships different from what happened to an enslaved worker's earnings?

2. How did a free worker's ability to leave the port differ from an enslaved worker's ability to travel?

3. If workers wanted to change their work, what could a free worker do? What might an enslaved worker do to resist?

4. How could both free and enslaved people of African descent keep traditions alive? What made this harder for enslaved people?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence scene about a free worker and an enslaved worker near the port. Show a difference in their choices and include a believable moment when someone resists or keeps a tradition alive.

ANSWER KEY

Choices at the Port

GRADE 5 · 5.C.2.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about free people's choices and circle two details about limits placed on enslaved people. Write 1 beside a resistance effort and 2 beside a way people kept an African tradition alive. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How was a free worker's pay for loading ships different from what happened to an enslaved worker's earnings?	**A free worker could earn pay. An enslaver claimed the enslaved worker's labor and kept its earnings.**
2	How did a free worker's ability to leave the port differ from an enslaved worker's ability to travel?	**A free worker could walk home after work. An enslaved worker needed an enslaver's permission to travel.**
3	If workers wanted to change their work, what could a free worker do? What might an enslaved worker do to resist?	**A free worker could complain or seek another job. An enslaved worker might slow their work or run away, despite the risk of punishment.**
4	How could both free and enslaved people of African descent keep traditions alive? What made this harder for enslaved people?	**Both could share stories or songs or prepare foods shaped by African ways. Enslaved people had to find time after forced work or during rare breaks.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

At the port, Mara, a free Black worker, decided to seek a different job the next day. Beside her, Kofi was forced to load crates and could not choose to leave. During a break, Kofi shared a family story with his sister. Mara listened and added a story her grandmother had taught her.

Accept other comparisons and traditions supported by the passage. In the scene, look for a clear difference in choice and a believable act of resistance or cultural preservation.