Lives and Limits

Read how enslaved people lived, resisted, and faced legal restrictions.

8.C.10.2 "Analyze experiences of enslaved persons, including common conditions of life under slavery, acts of resistance to slavery, such as Nat Turner's Rebellion, and legal restrictions, such as Slave Codes."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline two details about daily conditions, circle two legal restrictions, and number three different acts of resistance. Use your marks to trace how people challenged slavery despite its limits.

Life and Resistance in Virginia

1. Before sunrise on a Virginia tobacco farm, enslaved people might already be carrying water or preparing tools. Many worked long hours in fields, while others cooked, cared for children, or practiced skilled trades. Enslavers controlled their labor and could sell family members away from one another. Food, clothing, and shelter varied by place, but enslaved people could not choose where to live or whom to work for. Even under these pressures, they built families and communities, passed on knowledge, and sought moments of rest.

2. State laws called Slave Codes helped enforce slavery. In Virginia, enslaved people needed written permission to travel away from a plantation, and laws restricted their gatherings. Such rules made it harder to visit family, share news, or organize against enslavement. Enslavers and officials used punishment to enforce these limits. Resistance took different forms: some people slowed their work, some escaped, and some secretly learned to read despite restrictions in many places. These choices carried serious risks, but each challenged an enslaver's claim to control another person's time, movement, or mind.

3. In 1831, Nat Turner, an enslaved preacher in Virginia, led an uprising against slavery. Turner and other rebels killed about 55 white people before armed groups stopped the revolt. Afterward, Turner was captured and executed, and many Black people, including people who had not joined the rebellion, were killed. Virginia then tightened laws that restricted Black gatherings and education. The uprising shows one form of organized resistance, while the harsh response shows how officials used violence and law to defend slavery. Daily acts of resistance also continued, though they were less visible.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did two conditions of daily life limit enslaved people's control over their lives?

2. Choose two legal restrictions from the passage. How could each make it harder for enslaved people to connect with others or resist?

3. Compare slowing work with Nat Turner's uprising. How did each challenge slavery, and how did their scale differ?

4. What does Virginia's response to Turner's uprising suggest about the purpose of its new restrictions?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label about enslaved people's lives and choices in Virginia. Include one detail about daily conditions, one legal restriction, and one act of resistance, then explain how the restriction or condition relates to that act.

ANSWER KEY

Lives and Limits

GRADE 8 · 8.C.10.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

As you read, underline two details about daily conditions, circle two legal restrictions, and number three different acts of resistance. Use your marks to trace how people challenged slavery despite its limits. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did two conditions of daily life limit enslaved people's control over their lives?	**Enslavers controlled their labor, so they could not choose whom to work for. Enslavers could also sell family members apart.**
2	Choose two legal restrictions from the passage. How could each make it harder for enslaved people to connect with others or resist?	**Written permission to travel made visiting family or escaping harder. Restrictions on gatherings made sharing news or organizing harder.**
3	Compare slowing work with Nat Turner's uprising. How did each challenge slavery, and how did their scale differ?	**Slowing work challenged an enslaver's control over a person's time. Turner's uprising was an organized, armed challenge involving a group of rebels.**
4	What does Virginia's response to Turner's uprising suggest about the purpose of its new restrictions?	**By tightening restrictions on Black gatherings and education after the uprising, Virginia sought to prevent people from sharing knowledge or organizing further resistance.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Enslavers could sell family members away from one another, making family life uncertain. In Virginia, enslaved people needed written permission to travel away from a plantation. Some resisted by escaping. Escaping defied the control over movement that the permission rule was meant to enforce.

Accept other passage-supported conditions, restrictions, and acts of resistance. For the museum label, look for four sentences and a clear explanation connecting at least two of the required details.