Paths to Freedom

Examine how Black Americans helped change the Civil War.

8.C.12.2.C "Examine the contributions of free and enslaved persons, such as the 54th Massachusetts Regiment."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two actions taken by free or formerly enslaved people, and circle two actions taken by people while still enslaved. Write the same number beside each marked action and one result it produced.

More Than One Way to Fight

1. In 1863, the Union army formed the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, one of the first Black regiments raised in the North. Its soldiers included men born free and men who had escaped slavery. At Fort Wagner in South Carolina, they charged a heavily defended Confederate fort. They could not capture it, and many were killed or wounded. Still, their courage challenged claims that Black men would not fight well. Reports of the assault helped bring more Black volunteers into the Union army, expanding its strength.

2. Enslaved people also shaped the war, even when they could not enlist. Some secretly passed Union troops information about roads, rivers, or Confederate forces, risking punishment if discovered. Others escaped plantations and reached Union camps. Their departure weakened the Confederacy's supply of forced labor, while some escapees worked for the Union or later joined its army. These actions were choices made under danger, unlike the labor enslavers forced them to perform. The same person could help the Union first while enslaved and again after reaching freedom.

3. Harriet Tubman shows how knowledge gained under slavery could become a weapon against it. Born enslaved, she escaped years before the war. In June 1863, she helped guide a Union raid along South Carolina's Combahee River. Scouts and local people supplied information about the area. Union forces destroyed Confederate supplies, and more than 700 enslaved people escaped during the raid. Tubman's work was not battlefield fighting like the 54th's charge, but both efforts weakened the Confederacy and pushed the struggle toward freedom.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the 54th Massachusetts help the Union even though it did not capture Fort Wagner?

2. Explain two ways enslaved people could weaken the Confederacy, one while still enslaved and one by escaping.

3. How was Tubman's contribution at the Combahee River different from the 54th's contribution at Fort Wagner?

4. Why does the passage distinguish enslaved people's chosen actions from the labor enslavers forced them to perform?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 60 to 85 word museum label explaining how people with different experiences of freedom helped weaken the Confederacy. Include at least two specific details from the passage, and distinguish a chosen action from labor forced by enslavers.

ANSWER KEY

Paths to Freedom

GRADE 8 · 8.C.12.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two actions taken by free or formerly enslaved people, and circle two actions taken by people while still enslaved. Write the same number beside each marked action and one result it produced. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the 54th Massachusetts help the Union even though it did not capture Fort Wagner?	**Its courage challenged doubts about Black soldiers, and reports of the assault helped recruit more Black volunteers.**
2	Explain two ways enslaved people could weaken the Confederacy, one while still enslaved and one by escaping.	**While enslaved, some secretly gave Union troops information. By escaping, people reduced the Confederacy's supply of forced labor.**
3	How was Tubman's contribution at the Combahee River different from the 54th's contribution at Fort Wagner?	**Tubman helped guide a raid using knowledge of the area, while the 54th fought in a charge against a defended fort.**
4	Why does the passage distinguish enslaved people's chosen actions from the labor enslavers forced them to perform?	**Passing information and escaping were dangerous choices that helped the Union. Labor forced by enslavers was not a choice to help the Union.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Black Americans shaped the war in more than one way. At Fort Wagner, soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts fought despite heavy losses, and reports of their courage drew more Black volunteers. Enslaved people could secretly share information with Union troops or escape, reducing the Confederacy's forced workforce. Harriet Tubman helped guide the Combahee River raid, during which more than 700 people escaped. Forced labor for enslavers was not a choice to help the Union; resistance to that system was.

Accept other passage-supported actions and effects, including escapees working for the Union or joining its army. In the museum label, look for a clear distinction between chosen resistance and forced labor.