Whose Liberty?

Two women writers test the Revolution's promises.

8.C.2.2.D "Describe how the promise of political equality impacted the views of women, by examining the writings of Mercy Otis Warren and Phillis Wheatley."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence showing how Warren responded to the promise of rights and one showing how Wheatley responded. Circle words that show a limit on equality each writer faced.

A Promise Put to the Test

1 During the American Revolution, leaders argued that people should not live under rulers who denied their rights. Yet the new republic did not grant women equal political power, and slavery continued. Two writers tested the reach of the Revolution's promises. Mercy Otis Warren, a white woman from Massachusetts, wrote about government and public events. Phillis Wheatley, an enslaved Black poet from Africa, wrote about liberty while living in Boston. Their words show how women could use the language of rights, even when those rights did not apply equally to them.

2 In 1788, Warren published *Observations on the New Constitution* under the name "A Columbian Patriot." She warned that the proposed Constitution lacked clear protections for individual rights and could give too much power to federal leaders. In 1805, she published a history of the Revolution, entering a public debate usually led by men. Warren's writings put a woman's judgment beside men's on questions of freedom and government. She did not demand voting rights for women in these works, but she acted as if women could judge a nation's promises.

3 In her poem "To the Right Honourable William, Earl of Dartmouth," Wheatley praises the hope of freedom from British rule. She then explains why liberty matters to her: she was taken from Africa as a child, away from her parents, and enslaved. She asks whether she could wish for anyone else to suffer such "tyrannic sway." By linking her own experience to the colonists' struggle, Wheatley exposes a painful gap: people demanding freedom from Britain still held others in slavery. Her poem insists that their promise of liberty should reach farther.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Warren use her writing to take part in debates about the rights the new government should protect?

2. What limit on political equality makes Warren's work as a writer significant?

3. How did Wheatley use her own experience to question the colonists' calls for liberty?

4. How did the two writers reveal different gaps between the Revolution's promises and people's lives?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a museum displays these writings beside the Declaration of Independence. Write a five- or six-sentence exhibit label that judges whether the promise of equality was fully met, uses one detail from each writer's work, and explains how their different experiences shaped their views.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Liberty?

GRADE 8 · 8.C.2.2.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence showing how Warren responded to the promise of rights and one showing how Wheatley responded. Circle words that show a limit on equality each writer faced. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Warren use her writing to take part in debates about the rights the new government should protect?	**She warned that the proposed Constitution needed clearer protections for individual rights and later wrote a history of the Revolution, adding her judgment to public debates.**
2	What limit on political equality makes Warren's work as a writer significant?	**Women lacked equal political power, and men usually led public debate. Warren published her views on government despite those limits.**
3	How did Wheatley use her own experience to question the colonists' calls for liberty?	**She described being taken from Africa and separated from her parents, then asked why anyone else should suffer such oppression.**
4	How did the two writers reveal different gaps between the Revolution's promises and people's lives?	**Warren entered debates usually led by men, although women lacked equal political power. Wheatley pointed to slavery while colonists demanded freedom for themselves.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Revolution's promise of equality was not fully met. Warren warned that the proposed Constitution needed clearer protections for individual rights. By publishing her views, she also entered a political debate usually led by men, even though women lacked equal political power. Wheatley wrote about being taken from Africa and separated from her parents, then questioned why anyone should suffer such oppression. Warren pressed for rights in government, while Wheatley used her experience of enslavement to show how far the colonists' promise of liberty still had to reach.

Accept answers that connect each writer's work to a limit on revolutionary equality. Do not credit claims that Warren demanded women's voting rights in these works or that Wheatley's poem says all enslaved people were freed.