

Law Across Borders

Tracing effects of the Fugitive Slave Act.

8.7.C “analyze the impact of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 on slavery, free Blacks, and abolitionists;”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one sentence in each paragraph that shows an impact of the law, then write S, F, or A beside it for slavery, free Black people, or abolitionists.

A Law That Reached North

- ① In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act as part of a compromise over slavery’s expansion. The law required federal officials and many citizens to help capture people who had escaped slavery. Accused fugitives could not testify in their own hearings, and commissioners received a larger fee for returning a person to slavery than for releasing one. The act made the federal government more involved in protecting slaveholders’ claims, even in free states across the nation.
- ② For free Black people, the law created danger far beyond the South. Slave catchers sometimes seized free people and claimed they were fugitives. Because the hearing rules offered few protections, free Black families carried proof of freedom, avoided travel, or moved to Canada. Northern communities that had once seemed safer now felt threatened. The act showed that freedom in a free state could still be insecure when federal law favored the claims of slaveholders over theirs.
- ③ The law also changed the work of abolitionists, people who sought to end slavery. Some organized vigilance committees that warned Black residents, raised legal funds, and helped fugitives reach safety. Others protested arrests, wrote antislavery newspapers, and criticized officials who enforced the law. Resistance sometimes brought fines or jail penalties, because assisting an escape violated the act. By forcing Northerners to witness slavery’s reach, the law increased conflict over slavery and strengthened antislavery activism in the North.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What change in federal involvement did the Fugitive Slave Act create, and how did that change support slavery?

2 Use two details from the passage to explain why free Black people were vulnerable under the law.

3 How did abolitionists respond to the law, and why could their response bring punishment?

4 Why did the Fugitive Slave Act increase conflict over slavery in the North? Use evidence from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a five-sentence newspaper editorial from the perspective of a Northern resident in 1851. Explain one impact on slavery, one impact on free Black people, one impact on abolitionists, and why you think the law increased conflict.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline one sentence in each paragraph that shows an impact of the law, then write S, F, or A beside it for slavery, free Black people, or abolitionists. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What change in federal involvement did the Fugitive Slave Act create, and how did that change support slavery?	The act made the federal government more involved in protecting slaveholders' claims, even in free states. This strengthened the enforcement and reach of slavery.
2	Use two details from the passage to explain why free Black people were vulnerable under the law.	Slave catchers sometimes seized free people and claimed they were fugitives. Hearing rules offered few protections, so families carried proof of freedom, avoided travel, or moved to Canada.
3	How did abolitionists respond to the law, and why could their response bring punishment?	Abolitionists formed vigilance committees, raised legal funds, helped fugitives, protested arrests, and wrote antislavery newspapers. Helping an escape violated the act and could bring fines or jail penalties.
4	Why did the Fugitive Slave Act increase conflict over slavery in the North? Use evidence from the passage.	The law forced Northerners to witness slavery's reach into free states and threatened free Black communities. It also caused protests and resistance, increasing disagreement over slavery and the law.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Fugitive Slave Act has extended slaveholders' power into free states by making federal officials enforce their claims. Free Black neighbors now fear being seized and carry papers to prove their freedom. Abolitionists are organizing committees, legal aid, and protests, even though they risk punishment. This law forces Northern communities to see that slavery can reach into their streets. It will deepen the conflict because people disagree over whether they must support such a law.

Accept equivalent explanations that accurately connect the law to strengthened slaveholder power, danger for free Black people, and increased abolitionist action. For the editorial, look for all three impacts and a supported explanation of increased conflict.