

# OFFICE OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE INITIATIVES

May 2020



**1619 PROJECT – NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE, August 2019**

**READING, WRITING, AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS ACTIVITIES**

*7<sup>th</sup> Grade*

***ARTICLE: EVE L. EWING ON PHILLIS WHEATLEY***

**AUTHOR: EVE L. EWING**

**Standard:**

- Social Studies Practice – Grade 7 – A2: Identify, select, and evaluate evidence about events from diverse sources (including written documents, works of art, photographs, charts and graphs, artifacts, oral traditions, and other primary and secondary sources).

## **PRE-READING ACTIVITY**

### **VOCABULARY**

*Define the following terms.*

- abolitionists
- barbarian
- cherub
- enlightened
- enslaved
- metamorphosis
- publish
- uncultivated
- warily

## DURING-READING ACTIVITY

*Respond to the following prompts.*

**Gist Statement – 2-3 sentences that summarizes the text:**

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**3 key words from the poem:**

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**2 quotes that struck me:**

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**1 personal connection I can make with the poem:**

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## POST-READING ACTIVITY #1

*The 1619 Project* uses a mix of historical research, personal reflection, analysis, and creative writing to challenge dominant narratives about U.S. history. For this activity, imagine you are creating a quote museum, where significant quotes will be displayed in visually appealing ways.

- **Identify 2 quotes** from the poem that challenge and/or inspire you.
- **Interpret the meaning** of each quote in 1-2 sentences.
- Consider how you want to present each quote **visually**; you can design a typeface, create visual art that interprets the quote, or choose a photograph that illustrates what you want readers to consider when they see the quote.
- Use the provided space on the next two pages to complete this activity.

*Source: Pulitzer Center*

**Quote #1:**

**Interpretation of the quote:**

**Visual**

**Quote #2:**

**Interpretation of the quote:**

**Visual**

## POST-READING ACTIVITY #2

Read the following poem by Phillis Wheatley.

### On Being Brought from Africa to America.

'Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land,  
Taught my benighted soul to understand  
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:  
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.  
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
"Their colour is a diabolic die."  
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,  
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

In a **1-2 paragraph short response**, choose **2** questions to respond to:

- What emotions do you feel?
- What personal experiences and/or memories do you connect this poem to?
- How does this poem connect to issues of race today?

## POST-READING ACTIVITY #3

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

*Choose one of the following to complete:*

- Draw an **editorial cartoon** or **illustration** that captures key themes from this poem.
- Write a **poem** about a social justice issue that impacts your community today.

● *Late 1773*: A publishing house in London releases “Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral,” by Phillis Wheatley, a 20-year-old enslaved woman in Boston, making her the first African-American to publish a book of poetry.

Pretend I wrote this at your grave.  
Pretend the grave is marked. Pretend we know where it is.  
Copp’s Hill, say. I have been there and you might be.  
Foremother, your name is the boat that brought you.  
Pretend I see it in the stone, with a gruesome cherub.  
Children come with thin paper and charcoal to touch you.  
Pretend it drizzles and a man in an ugly plastic poncho  
circles the Mathers, all but sniffing the air warily.  
We don’t need to pretend for this part.  
There is a plaque in the grass for Increase, and Cotton.  
And Samuel, dead at 78, final son, who was there  
on the day when they came looking for proof.  
Eighteen of them watched you and they signed to say:  
*the Poems specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe)  
written by Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since,  
brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa*  
and the abolitionists cheered at the blow to Kant  
*the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling  
and the enlightened ones bellowed at the strike against Hume  
no ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences*

Pretend I was there with you, Phillis, when you asked in a letter to no one:  
How many iambs to be a real human girl?  
Which turn of phrase evidences a righteous heart?  
If I know of Ovid may I keep my children?

Pretend that on your grave there is a date  
and it is so long before my heroes came along to call you a coon  
for the praises you sang of your captors  
who took you on discount because they assumed you would die  
that it never ever hurt your feelings.  
Or pretend you did not love America.  
Phillis, I would like to think that after you were released unto the world,  
when they jailed your husband for his debts  
and you lay in the maid’s quarters at night,  
a free and poor woman with your last living boy,  
that you thought of the Metamorphoses,  
making the sign of Arachne in the tangle of your fingers.  
And here, after all, lay the proof:  
The man in the plastic runs a thumb over stone. The gray is slick and tough.  
*Phillis Wheatley: thirty-one. Had misery enough.*

By Eve L. Ewing