John and Abigail Adams, John Quincy Adams, and George Mason

Liberty, Enslavement, Indigenous Identity, and the Limits of Reform

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Date _____ Class _____

Grades 6 through 12 Interdisciplinary Research Simulation Task

Essential Question

How should we evaluate opposition to enslavement when words, actions, and the protection of Indigenous identity do not always agree?

NJSLS Social Studies

6.3.8.CivicsPR.3 applies civic principles to human rights conflicts. Grades 9 through 12 use 6.1.12.HistoryUP.2.c to examine the denial of constitutional ideals and individual rights to different groups.

NJSLS English Language Arts

Grades 6 through 8 use RI.CR.6.1, RI.CR.7.1, RI.CR.8.1 and W.AW.6.1, W.AW.7.1, W.AW.8.1 for evidence and argument. Grades 9 through 10 use RI.CR.9–10.1 and W.AW.9–10.1. Grades 11 through 12 use RI.CR.11–12.1 and W.AW.11–12.1.

CCLS Literacy Connections

RH.6–8.1, RH.9–10.1, RH.11–12.1 support source analysis. WHST.6–8.1, WHST.9–10.1, WHST.11–12.1 support historical arguments.

Interdisciplinary and Amistad Alignment

History and civics examine African American and Indigenous freedom, agency, and unequal rights. Geography locates the evidence. Mathematics tests changes in records. Science literacy challenges racial pseudoscience.

Day 1 Abigail Adams Challenges a Contradiction

Do Now

Can a person demand freedom while denying it to someone else? Explain.

Source A Liberty Must Reach Beyond the Speaker

In a letter to John Adams dated September 22, 1774, Abigail Adams condemned slavery in Massachusetts. Colonists were protesting British authority while enslaved people were denied liberty within the colonies. Abigail argued that those held in bondage possessed the same right to freedom claimed by the colonists. Her criticism exposed a contradiction within the movement for colonial rights. [1]

Her letter of February 13, 1797 also described defending a Black youth named James when others objected to his attendance at a local school. This was a concrete challenge to racial exclusion. Neither episode, by itself, establishes a position on every Indigenous nation or every form of racial classification. We must identify the people and circumstances actually discussed. [2]

Brief Primary Source Excerpt

“I wish most sincerely there was not a Slave in the province.” Abigail Adams, September 22, 1774. [1]

Quick Write

Explain the contradiction Abigail identified. Connect her argument to her later defense of James. Cite Source A.