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# SECTION I

## First Wave of Anti-Slavery Activism (1783-1834)

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### Lesson 4 Pursuing Freedom

**Grade Level:** Elementary School

**Objectives:**

Students will

- Develop expert knowledge of the different paths enslaved people pursued in order to secure emancipation by participating in a jigsaw activity.
- Select a historical character and write a diary entry detailing his or her pursuit of freedom.

**Time:** One 50-minute class period

**Materials:**

- Worksheet 1: Expert Topic Sheet - Running Away
- Worksheet 2: Expert Topic Sheet - Manumission
- Worksheet 3: Expert Topic Sheet - Self-Purchase

**Background:**

As long as slavery existed, so did the desire to be free. During gradual emancipation (1799-1827), anti-slavery activities fell into three broad categories in Kings County: (1) the individual and community efforts of black people, both enslaved and indentured, to secure their own emancipation; (2) the work of an anti-slavery society called the New-York Manumission Society who used the court system on behalf of enslaved people or those held illegally; and (3) the campaign for legal and political equality by Brooklyn's free black community through grassroots community-building. The work of these activists was met with frequent opposition and hostility from Brooklyn's land-owners and farmers whose wealth was built on slavery.

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“May 17, 1815. This morning my negro was to come home. I am afraid he had run away and we can give no account for it.

May 19, 1815. My Negro Will ran away.

May 22, 1815. Went this morning to New York and published my Negro Will and John Wyckoff Negro Henry in the Papers – Spectator and Star reward 80 Dollars.”

—John Baxter, 1815. John and Garret S. Baxter journals. ARC.257. Brooklyn Historical Society.

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**Runaway.**

**R**AN away from the subscriber, an indentured colored boy named **DAVID SMITH**, between eleven and twelve years old. He is now lurking around Brooklyn. All persons are forbid harboring him, on penalty of the law. He is a great rogue, and I will freely give his indentures to any person who can govern him—his father has refused to accept them.

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Runaway advertisement for David Smith. *Long Island Star*. January 10, 1822. Brooklyn Historical Society.

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# LESSON PROCEDURES

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1. Using Think-Pair-Share, ask students to identify possible methods enslaved people used to become free prior to the passage of the 13th Amendment. Once pairs have shared with each other, elicit answers from the entire class and record them on the board.

2. Drawing from the information in the **Background**, briefly introduce to students the individual and collective efforts of enslaved people to secure their freedom.

3. Introduce the Jigsaw Activity by explaining that students will work in “home” and “expert” teams to discover more about how enslaved people captured their freedom during the era of gradual emancipation. Assign students to “home” teams of three students. Distribute the **Expert Topic Sheets**. Instruct each “home” team member to pick one of the three topics to research:

- Expert Topic Sheet - Running Away
- Expert Topic Sheet - Manumission
- Expert Topic Sheet - Self-Purchase

4. Have students move into their “expert” teams, joining other students who have the same expert topic. Assign each team one discussion leader to facilitate the discussion and make sure that everyone contributes to the conversation.

5. After “expert” teams have read about their topic and discussed the questions, ask them to think of a symbol that represents their assigned path to freedom. For example, the “Self-Purchase” expert team may draw a bag of money to represent the money that enslaved people often saved for several years in order to purchase their own freedom and the freedom of their family members.

6. Students return from their “expert” teams and take turns teaching their “home” team members their topic. Call on representatives from each expert team to draw their topic’s symbol on the board and explain why the team created that particular symbol.

7. Tell students that they will select one of the historical characters they learned about in the lesson (David Smith of Running Away, Caesar Foster of Manumission, and Titus of Self-Purchase) and write a letter to the editor of an abolitionist newspaper explaining their path to freedom and why they think slavery should be abolished.

## Linking Past and Present

- Have students research indirect references to slavery in the United States and New York constitutions.
- Ask students to calculate how many years passed between the year the Constitution became law (1787) and the year gradual emancipation was finalized in New York State (1827).
- How many years passed between the year the Constitution became law and the Emancipation Proclamation (1863)?
- How many years have passed between the passage of the 13th Amendment (1864) and today?
- How is the present affected by the history of slavery?