

Topic: New York State Freedom Train

Issue: Summer 2026

NYS Social Studies Framework: (Note - the documents on the Freedom Train meet these standards).

4.4 GOVERNMENT: There are different levels of government within the United States and New York State. The purpose of government is to protect the rights of citizens and to promote the common good. The government of New York State establishes rights, freedoms, and responsibilities for its citizens.

4.5 IN SEARCH OF FREEDOM AND A CALL FOR CHANGE: Different groups of people did not have equal rights and freedoms. People worked to bring about change.

4.6 WESTWARD MOVEMENT AND INDUSTRIALIZATION: New York State played an important role in the growth of the United States. During the 1800s, people traveled west looking for opportunities. Economic activities in New York State are varied and have changed over time, with improvements in transportation and technology.

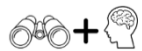
7.5 THE CONSTITUTION IN PRACTICE: The United States Constitution serves as the foundation of the United States government and outlines the rights of citizens. The Constitution is considered a living document that can respond to political and social changes. The New York State Constitution also has been changed over time.

7.7 REFORM MOVEMENTS: Social, political, and economic inequalities sparked various reform movements and resistance efforts. Influenced by the Second Great Awakening, New York State played a key role in major reform efforts.

Notes about icons:



This icon is paired with observation questions to help students remember that to observe is to just look at what is in the document.



This icon is paired with inference questions to help students remember that to infer is to use what they observed paired with their own background knowledge to draw a conclusion.



This icon is paired with questions that require thinking about the worldview of those involved. This is to remind students to put on their “Worldview Glasses” and see things from the point of view of the people involved.



This icon is paired with questions that ask students to synthesize information from more than one source.

Big Ideas in this Issue: In response to the US Freedom Train, New York State’s librarian created a display of documents that illustrated New York’s role in securing and protecting freedoms. This display traveled throughout the state on a train. The three cars each had a theme, and cases within the cars were dedicated to different topics within the theme. School children throughout New York visited the train.

Activities in This Issue:

Page 3 – “Take a Closer Look” - Students will learn about the theme of the three cars of the New York State Freedom Train using an historic newspaper article. Students will find the text that gives the theme for each car and record that. Then they will go back through the text using the color coded key to tag different information in the text.

Page 4 – “Learning Activity” - Students will look at an excerpt from one of the documents on the train. The document is minutes from the New York Colonial Council from 20th November 1734. The minutes record the arrest of John Peter Zenger for seductions libel. Students will read this, then they will read the excerpt from the First Amendment that pertains to Freedom of the Press. They will answer questions about the difference between the ideas about printing criticism of the government in 1734, to 1791. There is a longer version of this with more writing room in the Online Extras.

Online Only Materials:

Materials from the New York State Freedom Train have been digitized and added to Consider the Source NY. You will find them here: <https://considerthesourcenyc.org/new-york-state-freedom-train>

In the materials you will find a copy of Archie’s Note Catcher to use with any of the documents you might want to examine more closely with your students.

Learning Activity Online Extras:

- John Peter Zenger Longer Version. This is a two-page version of the Learning Activity that has more room to record answers and some additional text and questions.
- Newspaper Quest - students will take notes on three different newspaper articles about the New York State Freedom Train on an Archie Note Catcher, then use the information to create a project to teacher others about the NYS Freedom Train.

Online Lesson Plan: “All Aboard the New York State Freedom Train”

This inquiry-based social studies lesson engages students in analyzing primary sources from New York State’s Freedom Train to explore the essential question: *What is freedom?* Students work collaboratively using a jigsaw model, first in expert groups to investigate one document, then in home groups to share findings and build collective understanding.

The lesson centers on four historical documents that highlight different perspectives on rights and freedoms (e.g., antidiscrimination in education, abolition of Indigenous enslavement, constitutional voting rights, and colonial freedoms). Through structured roles (Archivist, Evidence Expert, Questioner, etc.), students practice sourcing, questioning, evidence analysis, and drawing conclusions.

The lesson culminates in a discussion and written response, where students define freedom using evidence from the sources, reinforcing both civic understanding and literacy skills.