

# Anthony Burns: Fugitive Slave, 1854

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*A classroom play by Team HOPE*

*Cast List*

Anthony Burns (BURNS).....Fugitive Slave from Virginia

Charles Stevens (STEVE).....Resident of Boston

William Lloyd Garrison (GARR).....anchor of “The History News Report”

Margaret Fuller (R1).....reporter for “The History News Report”

Nellie Bly (R2) .....reporter for “The History News Report”

Ernie Pyle (R3).....reporter for “The History News Report”

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## TEACHER NOTES

**SETTING:** A contemporary classroom. It is advised to set up the anchor in the front of the room facing the class, in front of some sort of background with “The History New Report.” You may choose to set up the different reporters conducting the interviews around the classroom and have the historical figures come to them. This way it gives the appearance of different locations. A name plate in front of each cast member is highly recommended. A 5x8 index card folded in half works great for this purpose.

**COSTUMES:** Although not necessary, any period costumes for the historical figures are a great addition. Even a simple hat or wig is excellent.

**MASKS:** Masks are an easy addition that will add to the drama and make the entire event more fun for the students. First, go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and click on “image search.” Type in the historical figure’s name and find an image of the person. Copy and paste the picture in a Word document. You may need to crop and then enlarge the photo so you get a picture large enough to be used as a mask. Portraits obviously work best for this use. Print out the picture and paste it onto a cardboard backing. You can tape a plastic spoon or popsicle stick to be used as a handle. You may decide to make masks for the student correspondents as well, using pictures of television news personalities for the masks.

*Note: If there is a historical person you cannot find a picture for, don’t despair! Almost any random “period” person’s picture (as long as it not someone easily recognizable) would work as a mask.*

**ROLES:** Encourage students to act out the roles with as much energy as possible. Do not be too terribly concerned that the sex of the historical figure matching with the sex of the student.

The teacher may decide to take a part in the play, role-modeling one of the historical figures. It is recommended that five copies of the scripts are specifically set aside for each character in the play. For each character, *highlight all their lines* in order to facilitate a faster pace of dialogue. All other students should receive an unmarked copy of the play to read as the play is performed.

**ANCHOR AND REPORTERS:** In order to facilitate the historical discussions that exist in the plays, actual famous journalist names have been used in the plays. Teachers should point out that these journalists come from different times in American history and do not necessarily reflect the period they report on. It is as if they can travel in time to deliver “The History News Report.” A teacher may also decide to substitute the names given in the script for student names if desired. A brief description of the journalists is as follows:

- **Elijah Lovejoy** (1802-1837) A minister and journalist for the *St. Louis Observer* and later editor of the abolitionist newspaper the *Alton Observer* of Alton, Illinois. In 1837, pro-slavery forces attacked his warehouse in order to destroy his printing press and he was murdered on the scene.
- **Margaret Fuller** (1810-1850) An early woman rights activist, Margaret was the first female journalist to work on the staff of a major American newspaper, *The New York Tribune*. She was a widely read literary critic who was also sent on overseas assignments to Europe.
- **Nellie Bly** (1864-1922) After a writing a fiery rebuttal to a sexist column in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, Nellie was hired by a very impressed editor at the newspaper. She went on to become a famous investigative journalist on the plight of working women, and gained further fame for having faked insanity in order to investigate the treatment of the mentally ill.
- **Ernie Pyle** (1900-1945) An American journalist who was a roving correspondent for Scripps Howard newspaper chain. His articles were read in over 200 newspapers. He is most famous for having been a war correspondent during World War II. He led the charge for Congress to give soldiers “battle pay” while in combat. He died under heavy fire from a Japanese machine gun nest in the Pacific on April 18, 1945.

**DISCUSSION:** Use the accompanying worksheet to facilitate discussion before and after the play. Students who are not directly involved in the play can attempt to write preliminary answers as the play is performed. The audience should be told that they will be the primarily responsible for the discussion questions at the end of the lesson.

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*NOTE: All responses by historical figures reflect actual events and beliefs as closely as possible.*

## CAST ABBREVIATIONS

Anthony Burns .....BURNS  
Charles Stevens.....STEVE  
William Lloyd Garrison .....GARR  
Elijah Lovejoy .....ANCH  
Margaret Fuller..... R1  
Nellie Bly.....R2  
Ernie Pyle.....R3

**ANCH** Welcome to the History News Report, I am your anchor Elijah Lovejoy. We are covering a story that has enflamed the North against the evils of slavery and the new fugitive slave law that was passed along with the Compromise of 1850. Of course, I am talking about the story of slave Anthony Burns. HNR News correspondents are going to give us live interviews with key players and eyewitnesses from recent events. First, let's go to HNR News reporter Ernie Pyle who is standing by with none other than Anthony Burns himself. Ernie?

**R3** Thanks Elijah. I'm here in Alexandria, Virginia with Anthony Burns, who was just recently returned to his owner Charles Suttle after federal troops enforced the 1850 fugitive slave law and captured Anthony in Boston, Massachusetts. Anthony, first, I'm sorry for your return to slavery.

**BURNS** I am too. I still hope to be someday free. I know certain groups are raising money to buy my freedom. I can only hope.

**R3** We do too. Can you tell our audience how it was that you ended up in Boston?

**BURNS** Well, I was given much freedom and privileges by my owner Mr. Suttle. I could hire myself out to different shops and I even helps four other slaves do the same. As long as I paid Suttle a fee, then I had freedom to come and go as I pleased. In this time I even became a preacher at a church and learned to read and write.

**R3** It was at this time you started thinking about freedom?

**BURNS** Yes. I was working in Richmond, I befriended a sailor who helped me stowaway on a ship. Four weeks later, I walked the streets of Boston as a free man...so I thought.

**R3** What did you do when you arrived?

**BURNS** I found a job. I worked hard and kept to myself. I was free for three months.

- R3** But soon your master was after you?
- BURNS** I was stupid. I sent a letter to my brother, also a slave of Mr. Suttle, and even though I sent the letter by way of Canada, it found its way into Mr. Suttle's hands. I was picked off the streets on May 24 after being accused of robbing a silversmith. It was just a ruse to get me not to run. Mr. Suttle showed up looking for me with days.
- R3** The local population in Boston was not happy with your capture were they?
- BURNS** No. The next night after my arrest, I could hear loud banging on the door. Evidently, a local group of free colored people were using a beam as a battering ram. Eventually, they broke the door down, I heard a shot and some screams, but the guards quickly beat back the crowd.
- R3** You were soon sent home?
- BURNS** On July 2, 1854 I was convicted of being a fugitive slave and on that same day I was paraded through the streets of Boston to the wharf where a federal ship awaited to take me back here to Alexandria, Virginia.
- R3** Thank you for your time Mr. Burns and I pray the next time we meet you will once again be free. Back to you in the studio Elijah!
- ANCH** What a heart wrenching story Ernie! (*pause*) We now will be going to Boston where HNR correspondent Nellie Bly is standing by with an eyewitness to Mr. Burn's recapture. Nellie?
- R2** Yes, Elijah, I'm here with Charles Stevens, a resident of Boston who was an eyewitness on July 2 when Anthony Burns was led through the streets of Boston in chains. Can you tell us what you saw, Mr. Stevens?
- STEVE** Well, at about eleven o'clock, the troops filed out at the corner of Court and State streets. Each man had been supplied with eleven rounds of powder and ball, and, before moving, they proceeded to load in the presence of the assembled spectators. Then, without music, they marched down through the above-named streets, dropping off detachments at the several side streets, until the whole were posted.
- R2** How many men in total?
- STEVE** By the time some local men were paid to help in this dastardly deed, their strength numbered around three hundred. They even had a brass cannon to complete the force and it was loaded and turned to face the mass of people gathering on Court street.
- R2** How many people were assembled do you think?

**STEVE** Approximately 50,000 people came to protest the taking of Mr. Burns back into bondage. They witnessed the armed power of the government of the United States arrayed against the people of Massachusetts.

**R2** Where was Burns?

**STEVE** Still in the courthouse. Several of the guards actually tried to cheer him up by telling them that money was being raised to purchase his freedom and that four hundred dollars had already been raised. He ignored such attempts to make the situation easier.

**R2** It was after this you saw Burns come out of the courthouse?

**STEVE** Yes, he was led by a detachment of United States artillery, then a platoon of Marines. Burns was placed in the middle of another two platoons of Marines along with the over one hundred local hired guards.

**R2** Was Burns in chains?

**STEVE** No, he insisted he would go without a fight if not shackled. He felt it was such a disgrace to have to wear such instruments. In the end, he got his way and was able to keep his pride. He was forced however to lock arms with two guards.

**R2** How did the procession proceed?

**STEVE** On the sidewalks in Court and State streets, every available spot was occupied; all the passages, windows, and balconies, from basement to attic, overflowed with gazers, while the roofs of the buildings were black with human beings. From a window opposite the Old State House, was suspended a black coffin, upon which was the legend, The Funeral of Liberty.

**R2** Was there any sound? Music? Or shouting at the procession?

**STEVE** No music enlivened its march; the dull tramp of the soldiers on the rocky pavements, and the groans and hisses of the bystanders, were the only sounds... the procession moved on and reached the wharf...

**R2** What was the scene at the wharf?

**STEVE** At the end of the wharf lay a small steamer which had been chartered by the United States Government. On board this vessel Burns was conducted, and immediately withdrawn from the sight of the gazing thousands into the cabin below. At twenty minutes past three o'clock, the steamer left the wharf and went down the harbor.

**R2** Thank you Mr. Stevens. Back to you in the studio Elijah.

**ANCH** Thank you Nellie. Margaret Fuller is also in Boston and is standing by with William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. Margaret?

**R1** Elijah, Mr. Garrison has just finished a public demonstration aimed at the recapture of Anthony Burns. Mr. Garrison, what exactly have you done?

**GARR** (*very angry*) I have just burned a copy of the Fugitive Slave Law that led to this outrage! But that is not all! No! I have burned with it a copy of the unjust Burns court decision, and the Constitution of the United States itself! Slavery cannot stand!

**R1** You burned even the Constitution?

**GARR** That is right! That document has protected slavery ever since this country's conception and it must be torn to shreds so we can start anew!

**R1** Do you intend to do anything else beyond symbolic burning of documents?

**GARR** Without question! An Anti-Slave Hunting League has been formed here in Massachusetts. We will not let them take from us a free man ever again! This case has done nothing more than enflamed anti-slave sentiment throughout the North!

**R1** What about Mr. Burns?

**GARR** The abolitionist community is already in the process of raising the required \$1,200 to buy his freedom! And we will do it! Anthony Burns will be a free man once again! (*Garrison turns and walks away*)

**R1** (*taken aback by Garrison's sudden departure*) Well, back to you Elijah.

**ANCH** Thanks Margaret. That concludes this edition of History News Report. For Ernie Pyle, Nellie Bly, and Margaret Fuller, this is Elijah Lovejoy.

*Afterward: The abolitionist community in Boston did raise \$1,200 and tried to buy Anthony Burns freedom from Charles Suttle. He refused to sell Anthony to anyone attempting to free him. Eventually, Anthony was sold to a slave owner in North Carolina who was willing to sell Burns for \$1,300. Now free, Burns moved back to Boston where his biography was written. Burns would later move to Canada to preach in a Baptist Church until his early death at the age of 28 in 1862.*

"Return of a Fugitive Slave, 1854", EyeWitness to History, [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com) (2005).

"Anthony Burns Captured, 1854," Africans in America. [www.pbs.com](http://www.pbs.com)