



EXPLORING THE POWER OF CULTURAL RELEVANCE IN A QPA COMMON TASK EXAMPLE

*Codman Academy is a small charter high school of 150 students in Boston, Massachusetts. 96% of its students are African American or Latino; 22% speak a first language other than English; and 69% are low-income. In the 10th-grade humanities course *Power, Equality, and Freedom in America*, all students are expected to identify, visit, research, and conduct oral histories on a “people’s history site” that highlights the accomplishments of those people not traditionally emphasized in U.S. history. Each student is expected to write a position paper on why their site should receive greater publicity in Boston. The curriculum in which this performance assessment is embedded is an example of curriculum that is culturally relevant. Culturally relevant curriculum “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). As students at Codman explore the history of the Freedom Trail, they are inspired to see the roles of people of color and the working class through a new lens. The task is powerful for students, as it places American history in the context of the students’ hometown through the power of fieldwork and having an authentic audience.*

CODMAN ACADEMY POSITION PAPER TASK SUMMARY

- **Topic:** After finishing a field study of Boston’s traditional historical sites, you will argue that the landmarks can better represent the “people’s history” by recognizing traditional histories while also focusing on the experiences and contributions of groups like African Americans, Native Americans, women, and poor people.
- **Genre:** Argument writing: The goal of your paper is to provide compelling evidence for the reader that your argument is correct. The essay must be research based and include evidence from fieldwork on Boston’s Freedom Trail.
- **Evidence sources:**
 - o Text: *A Young People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn.
 - o Articles discussed in class relating to American history.
 - o Personal records: Students visit historical sites on Boston’s Freedom Trail and record their observations through writing, photos, and video.
- **Audience:** The National Park Service and visitors to Boston’s Freedom Trail.
- **Time frame:** Fieldwork: two to three weeks; writing: two to three weeks.

THE BOSTON FREEDOM TRAIL POSITION PAPER TENTH-GRADE STUDENT WORK SAMPLE

“People walk along the Freedom Trail and admire the beautiful statues and history, but they overlook a huge part of Boston’s past and present: the working class. More people’s history based on the working class citizens of the 1700s should be publicized in the Boston Common, where riots against raised bread prices, the Stamp Act, and tea tax took place. The working class people’s action and dedication were influential in these riots, proving that they have earned more recognition than the current representation on the Boston Common. The Park Service should include landmarks that show how working class citizens fought for their rights and bravely demonstrated to improve the quality of their lives, building Boston into the city it is today.”