

EXPRESSIONS OF FREEDOM



VIRGINIA AMERICAN REVOLUTION 250 COMMISSION

2024

VA250.ORG

**VIRGINIA'S HISTORY
IS AMERICA'S STORY**

FOREWORD

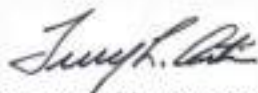
As Virginia prepares to commemorate the 250th anniversary of American independence in 2026, VA250 is committed to highlighting the enduring legacy of freedom and its deep ties to Virginia's history. In this spirit, the "Expressions of Freedom" contest was designed to foster education, engagement, and inspiration in line with VA250's core goals.

In anticipation of its 2024 Fourth of July celebration at the Virginia State Capitol, the Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with VA250, invited high school students in the Tidewater region to explore the profound question: "What does freedom mean?" Inspired by the ideals enshrined in the Declaration of Independence – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The resulting "Expressions of Freedom" were a vibrant collection of creativity. Within these pages, you'll find a selection of these exceptional student works. Each piece reflects a deeply personal understanding of freedom, showcasing its evolving nature in our "out of many, one" nation. These expressions serve as a testament to the power of education and engagement to shape a brighter future grounded in the ideals of liberty.

This pilot program represents the exciting first chapter of the "Expressions of Freedom" initiative. Looking forward, VA250 plans to expand the contest across the Commonwealth, welcoming students from all grade levels to add their voices to the conversation. In addition, Virginia students will have the opportunity to participate in the national America 250 contest – "America's Field Trip," with the chance to win a visit to iconic landmarks.

We invite you to delve into these "Expressions of Freedom" and be inspired by the thoughtful reflections of Virginia's young minds. Visit VA250.org for a broader view of this dynamic program and to learn how you can be a part of our ongoing exploration of freedom's meaning, past, present, and future.



The Honorable Terry Austin
Chair, VA250 Commission



The Honorable Mamie E. Locke
Vice Chair, VA250 Commission

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FREEDOM

What does freedom mean?
The question everyone has asked
Freedom means to act how you want
Unlike how it was in the past

Freedom means to voice your mind
To have the ability to always seek and find
Freedom means to spread your wings
Seize the opportunity that America brings

My parents found their freedom here
My father in the naval sphere
He came to the land of the free
And met my mother where he proposed on one knee

My mother came from the same place
The Philippines, a not-so-free space
She worked as a nurse
Made money and with freedom, bought herself a nice purse

Freedom has allowed
My parents to be proud
Freedom has allowed
My parents to be loud

For me, myself, and I
Freedom has allowed me to lie
Freedom has allowed me to say whatever I want
And choose whatever to eat, such as a croissant

Freedom has let my family of five
Be alive and thrive
Freedom allowed us to choose our way
To wake up blessed and happy every single day

Freedom has more than one meaning
For me, it's to do whatever I want
For my parents it's to be successful
But at the end of the day, we all stay nonchalant

Although we have these freedoms, we all stay humble
In order to prevent our lives from a crumble
We cherish freedom and we hold it so dear
It is a word that has its own meaning and not just a word that we hear.

WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN TO YOU?

"What is the meaning of life?" "What does it mean to be happy?" "What does freedom mean to you?" While the questions listed are questions that everyone wishes to have answered such as myself I see that these questions are ones to be seen with **no absolute truth.**

So, when we are asking the question "What does freedom mean to me?" I find it difficult to be able to say what it is, but, I can say what it is not.

Freedom is a term that can be seen repetitively; Whether it be in American History, European History, African History it is all a part of history and part of the future at the same time. **Freedom is not oppression.**

Freedom is a fundamental concept when it comes to planning the future. While one can say that the only way to get ahead is by learning from mistakes and not repeating the past, to make sure that everyone is free & be able to express themselves. We as humans fail to live up to the own expectations that we set for ourselves. **Freedom is not a trend.**

I once was at home, in the comfort of my own bed scrolling mindlessly through TikTok when I came across a video with a black screen, and the sound being a reporter asking "If you had one wish what would you wish for?"

The Video continued to show clips of American children answering the question. "To be rich" "A million dollars" "Billions and Billions of dollars" "Get a Lamborghini." Now I had not thought much about the answers that the children provided the video then moved on to a reporter in Gaza asking the Palestinian children the same exact question. "I wish the road wasn't blocked anymore" "I wish to eat sugar" "I wish for bread" "I wish to attend school" "I wish my brother would come back to life." **Freedom is not something that you should take for granted.**

This is when I came to another conclusion which is the idea that freedom is purely subjective.

I then realized that my interpretation of freedom and the environment that I was surrounded by such as going to school, seeing my friends, spending time with my brother were all interpretations of freedom in the eyes of someone who was the freedom that others do not get the opportunity of having.

But the question still remains. "What is freedom?"

Freedom is something that history has fought for. Freedom is something that people today still stand for. Freedom is something that lays out the foundation of what our future will look like later.

The United States of America is the country where we are supposed to be the land of the free. Where American citizens such as children, teenagers, adults, elderly. Show that freedom is something that you do not have to be in that supposed situation to fight for, but to be able to speak up for those that do not have the voice.

Freedom today is being able to realize that you can have an impact on the freedom of others. Whether it be political pressure, social media, boycotting, protesting, it's about knowing that you have an impact on freedom.

Freedom today is being able to express my thoughts on social media and using my voice.

I was finally able to come to the conclusion that no matter where, who, or what the situations are, you can speak up and fight for freedom.

Because it was then that I learned that **Freedom** is a principle that is limitless. Freedom is the idea that you can choose right from wrong. That you do not judge. That you know that you can have an impact. That you know what it is you're fighting for.

Freedom is passionate, expressive, and it sympathizes with anyone.



William Johnson Hodges was an antislavery activist and African American political leader during the early 1800s in Tidewater, Virginia. Initially, my goal for this project was to depict William's escape from jail after he was wrongfully convicted based on his "sufficient handwriting." However, I soon realized this drawing represented more than just a jailbreak. It encapsulates William's essence and lifelong dedication as a reformer, empowered by his freedom, having been born a free African American in Tidewater, Virginia.

Unlike many of his contemporaries who were enslaved, William was unshackled and able to advocate for the rights and freedoms of his fellow African Americans. His advocacy began early when he joined an Abolition Society with his brother, Willis Augustus Hodges; they were the only members of color. In 1847, the brothers co-founded a weekly anti-slavery newspaper, the Ram's Horn. During the Civil War, William returned to Virginia to work in the education department, focusing on the economic advancement of poor African Americans.

William's commitment to social reform and political activism was further demonstrated when he became the founding president of the Colored Political Association of Kings County in 1854. In October 1855, he attended the National Convention of African Americans in Philadelphia. After the Civil War, he permanently settled near Norfolk and, in February 1865, became the founding president of the Colored Monitor Union Club. This organization rallied African Americans in hopes that some of them would vote in a May election.

William Johnson Hodges' use of his freedom to advocate for others highlights his remarkable dedication to anti-slavery and abolition. Through the process of creating this art piece, this project not only acknowledges William's contributions to the past but also those of the African American Community and his ancestors.

WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN?

ELSIE
LAFAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL

Freedom is everything. Without it, life as we know it ceases to exist. Freedom is an ever-present value that surrounds all life on Earth and is the foundation of civilized society. It is the driving force behind humanity's actions and has followed us through the ages, fostering change.

In pre-colonial times, it was freedom that caused Native Americans to develop such complex societies. To them, freedom meant the ability to keep their lands, religion, way of life. And when this was threatened by European settlers, conflict between the two groups formed.

This trend continued into colonial times. Colonists were content to stay under the English monarch when they felt they had freedom, but when that was threatened, The American Revolution was born. Colonists fought for freedom; to protect what they had and win more.

You see, freedom is the driving force of society. It causes change because we as humans believe freedom is worth fighting for. It is because of this that we as Americans believe that freedom is the highest virtue of our country, and we are willing to sacrifice to retain it. Freedom is everything because freedom is what causes us to do what we do.

In the new age that we live in now, freedom continues to be threatened. But the challenging of ideas, and the free speech, protests, and petitions that come from it are just proof that freedom is still working. Because freedom is everything.

Cuffeytown is an area of Chesapeake, Virginia in the Long Ridge/Hickory area that was formed by free Black people in the 1700s. In the time preceding the Civil War and during the Civil War, 13 courageous soldiers from this area, named Walter Smith, William Cuffey, Bluet Cuffey, Emerson Cuffey, Lemuel Cuffey, Wilson Cuffey, William Cuffey, Levi Sevils, Cornelius Smith, James W. Smith, Samuel Smith, John Whitehurst, and Thomas Van fought for the Union Army in the United States Colored Troops, among thousands of brave men. The Cuffeytown 13 were a group of 13 Civil War U.S.C.T. soldiers from current-day Chesapeake. These soldiers fought in the 5th, 10th, and 36th regiments of the U.S.C.T., and represent the idea of freedom in Virginia.

Cuffeytown was a very unique community in Southeastern Virginia. It was one of the oldest free Black communities in Virginia. Many people who lived there were farmers and shipbuilders. The people who lived there were very well-educated and resilient. The church was the focal point for the community of Cuffeytown, where they built a church called Gabriel Chapel A.M.E. Zion Church. It was built in 1866, and it served as a community gathering place. This church is still standing in good condition today.

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861. It quickly became clear that the war would be a long and bloody one after the Battle of Bull Run in Manassas Junction, Virginia, where there were nearly 5,000 casualties. During the first two years of the war, African Americans were not able to fight in the war. However, on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was passed. It declared that "all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free." This was revolutionary for America, as it allowed slaves in the Confederate states to be free. However, Black people were still not able to fight in the Civil War.

On May 22, 1863, the War Department of the United States issued General Order 143. This authorized the creation of the United States Colored Troops. Along with the Second Confiscation and Militia Act of 1862, which allowed armies to organize militias of Black or White people. Black people were finally allowed to fight for their freedom. The 1st Regiment of the U.S.C.T. was organized in May and June 1863. By the end of the war, African-Americans accounted for about 10% of the Union army. The U.S.C.T. had 135 infantry regiments, 6 regiments of cavalry, 1 light artillery regiment, and 13 regiments of heavy artillery. Approximately 179,000 African American soldiers fought in the United States Colored Troops, and around 37,000 African American soldiers died in the Civil War. The U.S.C.T. was a significant first step towards civil rights.

Black men were now able to fight in the Civil War, however, they were not treated the same as their White counterparts. They were paid much less and treated very differently than the White soldiers. Frederick Douglass was very unhappy with this, especially because he had two sons who were fighting in the U.S.C.T. and he was recruiting for them. On August 10, 1863, Douglass visited the White House to talk with Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln listened to him; however, he did not grant U.S.C.T. soldiers equal pay until June 1864.

From 1865 to 1866, after the end of the Civil War, several members of the Cuffeytown 13 were stationed in Texas, particularly the soldiers from the 10th and the 36th U.S.C.T. Regiments. While in Texas, these soldiers were given the title "buffalo soldiers," because Native Americans living there likened their dark, curly hair to that of a buffalo, and they fought fiercely like buffaloes. After they were discharged from serving in Texas, many of them moved back to Cuffeytown.

The 13th Amendment was passed by Congress on January 31, 1865, and ratified on December 6, 1865. This was a revolutionary amendment, as it made slavery illegal for good. It stated that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." This amendment, along with the 14th and 15th Amendments, made up the Civil War Amendments, which expanded the rights of African Americans. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, the 14th Amendment expressed that citizens would receive "equal protection under the law," and the 15th Amendment granted Black men the right to vote.

After these monumental amendments, Cuffeytown was greatly affected. During Reconstruction, African Americans in Cuffeytown and throughout Hampton Roads were being elected to office. Technically, Black men had the right to vote under the 15th Amendment, however, African Americans were still restricted from voting due to the grandfather clause, poll taxes, and literacy tests.

In summary, the members of the Cuffeytown 13 and all of the United States Colored Troops were fearless men who fought for their freedom or the freedom of their peers. The Civil War was one of the bloodiest wars in American history, with around 620,000 deaths and around 1.5 million casualties. The Civil War played a vital role in shaping the nation and its fight for equality, and the Cuffeytown 13 represented freedom in Virginia. The Cuffeytown 13 is an underrepresented point in Virginia's history, and these soldiers deserve wider recognition and understanding.



And while the other birds fly
I'm stuck here
While I suppose I can't complain
It's not quite where I want to be
The others say I've got it made
Food and drink without lifting a feather
But I long for more
The thrill of catching a worm in the misty morning
The joy of finishing a nest after hours of tribulation
I shout day and night for the freedom I seek
And yet I go unanswered
Sitting with my life decided
Without my input
And while the other birds fly
I'm stuck here...

In June 2021, right before the incessant school week of SOL exams, I found myself on a quest for a book to read once the tests were over, as technology was strictly prohibited within the testing centers. My search led me down an unexpected path. It began when I stumbled upon a YouTube review of a book by an ancient philosopher, Epictetus. The video hinted at heartfelt wisdom within his "Discourses and Selected Writings." Intrigued, I scoured the web for a source to acquire this age-old wisdom, ultimately leading me to a Barnes and Noble in Hampton. Little did I know that this journey to acquire a seemingly ancient text would not only quench my thirst for knowledge but also dramatically alter my perspective on life and the inner workings of the human mind. Within the pages of Epictetus' "On Freedom," I uncovered a radical concept of liberty that transcended anything I could ever imagine, transforming my understanding of freedom. This discourse not only taught me to discern what lies within my control from what doesn't but also provided practical guidance to attain true inner freedom, paving the way for an intense change in my life's story.

I have always been a passionate entrepreneur, constantly seeking success in all ventures of my life. However, this relentless pursuit of success most often led to moments of increasing turmoil. Rage, envy, dispute, jealousy, hatred, and selfish intent flooded my mind. These recurring themes, casting a shadow over relationships and overall personal well being. As far back as I can remember, it started with having to be a team player within school assignments. Butting heads with classmates as I pitch ideas, fists clenched beneath the table, whitening with anger, as my idea gets cast away. The room was getting hot, as if we entered a sauna. My heartbeat; thundering in my ears. Envy, a raging hurricane in my mind, as the ideas of others gathered more attention and admiration. Comparison grew heavier and heavier in my mind, like a boat consumed under the waves of a roaring ocean. Peace of mind, shattered like a broken window. Disputes arose amongst the table, arguments began, as if others stepped into this sauna as well. Friendships were strained, relationships crumbled, and I found myself isolated, a prisoner of my own emotional instability.

As I began to read Epictetus' Discourses and Selected Writings the words were leaping from the pages. This ancient text offered me a contrasting perspective on control and freedom. As I read deeper, and deeper, it was as if the text was written for me. Speaking a language I've never heard yet could clearly understand. The discourse presented an incredible belief that true freedom resided within my ability to navigate the stormy seas of my emotions. Inspired by the work of Epictetus, I embarked on a quest to conquer such emotional storms. Observing my thoughts and emotions without judgment. A practice that allowed me to distance myself from such emotional pull. Now when group assignments arose, I was able to react with calm and well thought out responses. Dispute dissolved into discussions with a sense of civility instead of dominance. Jealousy and hatred withered away, as empathy grew with colleagues and competitors. Once broken relationships, turned into cooperative alliances. I began to experience joy in helping others succeed.

This new beginning, sparked by Epictetus, bore witness to remarkable changes within my life. Group assignments became platforms of collaboration, instead of battlegrounds of anger. Motivation and admiration overtook envy, allowing me to relax easier. Constructive dialogue, of which was once destructive disputes, flourished among the table. This once seen battlefield, now a canvas for creation and innovation. I was led to realize that On Freedom was not just a discourse, through a roadmap to navigate the landscape of collaboration with grace and resilience.

My journey from a life consumed by emotional turbulence was now marked by inner freedom. A tale of transformation inspired by the wise writings of Epictetus. A journey on a narrow path of self-discovery, where fits of rage, envy, disputes, jealousy, hatred, and selfish intentions evolved, and blossomed into understanding, collaboration, and personal growth. I have learned that the mastery of my emotions was not solemnly a path of personal freedom, though the key to unlocking an untapped, true potential of who I can be. My journey enlightened my mind to allow me to live free; to live as I wish, not being coerced, impeded, or compelled, never experiencing what I would rather avoid.



Freedom is like a kite soaring high in the sky, representing the essence of boundless potential and unrestrained movement. It embodies the ability to rise above constraints, to dance with the wind of opportunity, and to explore new heights without limitations. The kite's vibrant colors signify the diverse paths and choices available to us, each one a unique expression of our individuality and aspirations. Anchored by the thread of our decisions and responsibilities, freedom is not about severing ties with reality but about finding balance. It is the harmony between the exhilaration of flying high and the wisdom of staying connected to our core values and truths. Each loop and dive of the kite illustrates the dynamic nature of freedom, where every movement is a testament to our capacity to navigate life's challenges and embrace its possibilities. In essence, freedom is the exhilarating journey of soaring through life, guided by our inner compass, and grounded by our sense of purpose and responsibility.



If I was never meant to speak
Then the lord would not have given me words to say
I would have learned to bite my cheek
And choose to throw my rights away

If I was never meant to preach
Then my father would have never taught me to pray
There would be no reason for me to teach,
I'd have to throw my religion away

If I was never meant to vote
Then I wouldn't be born in a democracy
The Founding Fathers would never have wrote
That we have the right to meritocracy

Freedom to preach
Freedom to elect
Freedom of speech
Freedom to affect

But what happened to real freedom,
Not the stuffy values written centuries ago
Where is the right to support Islam
And not face prosecution from the status quo

Is there truly freedom to elect,
To vote in senseless popular elections
When the electoral college shows no respect
And chooses their own suggestions

How can there be a freedom to say
Whatever we deem fit
When the government pushes our thoughts away
And practices censorship

And even in our own body
We face the restriction of our rights
How can we be free to lobby
When the courts overturn all our tries

They say we're created equal
And yet I constantly feel the pressure
Of the pay gaps between people
And the minorities' lack of pleasure

It is a shame that there is so much pain
And that addicts are left to struggle
With their addictions while tied down by chains
Our rehabilitation efforts are constantly a fumble

We may have beaten the British back in 1783
But today they surpass us in many ways
Like giving healthcare for free
While the U.S forces people to count their days

The United States is still the land of the free
And home of the brave
But we can't just all agree
We have to take action before we meet our grave

Freedom cannot be found in the Constitution
It has to start with our youth
There is no room for substitution
And we have the capacity to choose

I see dying freedom in our country
And yet I am not afraid to stay
Because I know the fix does not have to be bloody
We can solve it all in a civilized way

God bless the U.S.A,
We promise we'll mend our ways, God forgive the U.S.A
We promise we won't be a disgrace.

Freedom ...

In the heart of the morning, under the vast sky's dome,
Freedom whispers, a soft, persistent hum.
It's the breath of the earth, the depth of the sea,
A dance of the spirit, wild and free.

It's the right to dream, to speak, to choose,
The strength to win, the grace to lose.
It's the quiet pride in a day's hard work,
The courage to stand, where shadows lurk.

Why is it important, you ask? It's the soul's pure light,
The fire that guides through the darkest night.
In freedom lies the power to create,
To live with love, and reject all hate.

A bird uncaged, soaring high,
Freedom is the endless blue of the sky.
It's the foundation of peace, the voice of the heart,
A world united, a fresh start.



Freedom is being you with no fear.
Is what the morse code in my painting reads. The hands in my painting represent people from different races, classes, religions, sexualities, genders, and more coming together and being friends. America makes room for everyone to be themselves and we need to continue embodying that in our 250th year. Our differences are what make us so special.

WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN TO ME?

Freedom is a concept deeply ingrained in the human spirit, embodying the essence of choice and volition. It represents the ability to choose according to one's desires, unaffected by external constraints and obligations. To me freedom is the presence of autonomy, the liberty to pursue my own path unencumbered by the shackles of necessity.

However, I often find myself grappling with a contradiction between obligation and desire; whether it's attending school in the morning, working on weekends, or fulfilling monthly military drills. These obligations restrict my freedom to act as I wish. Yet, amidst these mandates, I encounter a mental barrier- a metaphorical brake activated within my mind. The impending obligations trigger a cascade of thoughts and emotions, disrupting my inner peace.

True freedom emerges from choice and volition. When I have the opportunity to act based on my own desires, I feel liberated from the constraints of obligation. Freedom is not about the action itself but rather the manner in which it is undertaken. Every action carries the potential for both good and evil, with the exercise of free will imbuing it with moral significance. Whether an action arises from necessity or choice ultimately determines its ethical implications. In essence, freedom to me is the culmination of choice and volition- the liberation of the human spirit from external constraints. It enables individuals to navigate life's complexities with autonomy and agency, unfettered by the chains of necessity. As we embrace the power of choice, we open the door to endless possibilities and human potential.

To fully grasp the significance of freedom, it's essential to consider its impact on various aspects of life. In personal relationships, freedom allows individuals to express themselves authentically, fostering mutual respect and understanding. It enables individuals to pursue their passions and aspirations without fear of judgment or societal expectations. In the realm of politics and governance, freedom serves as the cornerstone of democracy, ensuring that citizens have the right to participate in decision-making processes and hold their leaders accountable. Moreover, freedom plays a crucial role in fostering innovation and progress. When individuals are free to explore new ideas and challenge existing norms, they unleash the creative potential that drives societal advancement. It encourages diversity of thought and fosters a culture of innovation leading to breakthroughs in science, technology, and the arts.

At its core, freedom is not merely a concept but a fundamental human right that must be protected and preserved. It requires constant vigilance and dedication to uphold the principles of liberty and justice for all. As we strive to create a more inclusive and equitable society, it is essential to recognize the inherent dignity and worth of every individual and ensure that their freedoms are respected and upheld.

In conclusion, freedom is a multifaceted concept that encompasses choice, autonomy, and the pursuit of one's desires. It empowers individuals to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to the betterment of society. By embracing the principles of freedom and advocating for its universal application, we can create a world where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and fulfill their potential.

WHAT DOES FREEDOM MEAN?

In the shadows of the night, where silence reigns,
A woman's voice, unheard, quietly strains.
In the echoes of her footsteps, on streets unknown,
Her struggles, her dreams, often overthrown.

What does freedom mean, in a world so unjust?
Where women's rights are tarnished, ground to dust.
It's the right to speak, to choose, to thrive,
Without fear or restraint, to feel alive.

Freedom is the absence of chains that bind,
The power to shape one's destiny, unconfined.
It's the right to walk with head held high,
In a world where equality should never die.

Yet, in the face of adversity, women rise,
With courage and strength, they claim their prize.
They fight for justice, for rights long denied,
Their voices, like thunder, cannot be denied.

Freedom is the dawn breaking through the night,
A beacon of hope, a guiding light.
It's the promise of a better tomorrow,
Where women's dreams are free to follow.

So let us stand together, hand in hand,
And strive to build a world where all can stand.
Where women are valued, respected, esteemed,
And the true meaning of freedom is redeemed.



At its most fundamental level, freedom is the ability to choose and do whatever you want. You have the freedom to experience or create experiences however you would like. Freedom has inspired the most creative writers, philosophers, and politicians. Freedom is what everyone deserves, but not what everyone gets. The power or right to speak, act, or think as one wants without restraint. Freedom for most is granted and as it should be, but for others living in darker parts of the world or in darker parts of even the bright places, freedom is not given and is stripped if you are not seen as "worthy" of it.

On a personal level, freedom is the ability to make choices regarding one's own life. This is where freedom intertwines with responsibility. You have the freedom to make good decisions and to think out plans instead of acting irrationally, but some abuse this freedom and make poor decisions which end up having big consequences leading to one's freedom being taken away. When kids get their license, they are given a huge amount of freedom, but with mistakes and a continuous chain of poor decisions they can get their license taken away or worse end up in an accident, which could lead to death. Personal freedom allows individuals to pursue their dreams and to express their thoughts and emotions. Musicians write and produce their music because they have the freedom to write and express themselves.

On a political level, our rights and freedoms are protected through the constitution and bill of rights. Political freedom protects an individual's ability to vote, speak freely, and assemble. When politicians speak out about their beliefs, they have the right and freedom to do so because it is freedom of speech. When individuals protest, they are free to do so because they have the freedom to protest something they think is wrong or unfair. Martin Luther King protested the freedom for African Americans because they were getting treated unfairly and didn't have the freedom to live like humans. This was in the 60s and because of him and him using his freedom of speech, he accomplished so much and moved the movement for equality in the best direction.

Freedom is something everyone should be guaranteed but unfortunately the world is not as kind as we would hope it would be. People used to be enslaved and were stripped of any freedom they had. Slavery was huge in America , and it was so inhumane that freedom was taken away causing slaves to feel less than human. People now are still not free. Women in eastern Asia are not allowed to talk with a man and must dress and act a certain way. They don't have the freedom to live how they want to live.

Freedom is the ability to succeed in life and pursue your dreams no matter the circumstances that you are dealt. Freedom has enabled anybody to practice whatever religion they believe in without being chastised by their neighbor. This freedom is granted to every American citizen and it is why millions of people want to immigrate to this beautiful country each year. Fortunately, my dad was able to experience this freedom when he immigrated to Norfolk, Virginia in the United States of America with my Lola, Lolo, and aunt from the Philippines as a teenager. Although the Philippines is a gorgeous country with kind and caring people there was no clear path to success for my family, hence the reason they moved. My Dad attended Lake Taylor High School for his senior year in high school. From there he attended Old Dominion University for four years in which he graduated with a civil engineering degree. Afterward, my Dad would work for various small companies where he could get experience and learn from others in the field. Eventually, he settled at a company called Hentz Engineering in Virginia Beach, Virginia where he was able to work his way up to the vice president position. This success story did not come overnight but rather took immense sacrifice from both my Lalo and Lola as they planned to move to a new country that had a different language, economy, and culture.

Since I was young, my Dad has stressed the importance of pursuing a secondary education to earn a degree, staying disciplined to achieve a goal, and working hard to achieve my dreams. America is set up in such a way that has allowed my Dad and so many other parents to create a better life for their family when they move here because of the free public education and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972. I will forever be grateful for the drive that my Lola and Lola had in the 1980s to move my family to America where the possibilities for success are endless. A place where the only limitation upon success is set in your own mind.

What is freedom?

Is it being out in the open, breathing in air?

Does it feel like the drops of sun dripping down, surrounding me with essence?

The feeling of light swallowing me whole? From my toes to my crown.

Is it independence from hooks and locked doors?

Is it simply autonomy, the type that upholds?

Is it a feeling, a fondness, a fable, a function?

A fated story for all mankind? Favor from God, a favor from man?

A passing reawakening fashion?

Is it a facetious front to hide behind? A fabricated shield to haste behind?

Is it a famed fleeting feeling? Is it even felt at all?

What is freedom?

What is that freedom our forefathers fought so fervently for?

What is that freedom our country stands firmly planted on?

What is that freedom that calls my name?

What is that freedom that my father fled here for?

What is that freedom?

Is it the waving of a flag in 1776?

Is it the streams of our melting nation running into one mix?

Is it the caw of the eagle with wings spread high?

Is it the raising of our nation with one single cry?

Is it the outcome of Yorktown?

Or the dethroning of the crown?

Is freedom just a dream?

One universal unknown?

A hive mind of struggle?

The need to better, to be better, a common spirit sweeping the nation?

Is freedom untenable? Is it tangible?

Can I grasp it? Grapple like Jacob?

Is it a present brought from God himself?

Is it man-made for the purpose of wealth?

I heard Freedom before.
I've heard it's call.
I know it's embrace
Freedom born in Virginia, raised from the ash and soot
Freedom birthed into reality with a pen's fickle hook.
Freedom of the Old Dominion.
Freedom lacking of a name

Freedom?
It calls to me.
It beckons.
As it called to my father and my father's father.
To my mother and my mother's mother.
They wear it well, like purple robes
penance, preparation, pining

Freedom, which way must I turn?
Freedom, how can I reach what I yearn?
Freedom?
Have I heard your call?
Freedom must be everything but absolutely nothing at all.

Freedom is choice
For hundreds and hundreds of years
My ancestors were made to feel as if they didn't have a voice
Just based on the colors of their skin
When attempting to speak up
They were just put down again and again
But they never stayed down
And continued on the long fight
For their god-given rights

Freedom is choice
They tell us women are meant to stay home
I began to believe them because these days
It's almost horrifying to go out alone
But brave women overcame those fears
They put themselves out on the line for backlash
Just to kick the suffrage movement into gear
To ensure that future generations of women
Had the ability to pave their own way

Freedom is choice
Financial prowess defines our country
They claim money is essential for the American Dream
A house with a loving family and a white picket fence
But with the worsening economic situation
The future looks much like an American Nightmare
And whether or not you can provide for yourself and your family
May determine your family's legacy

Freedom is choice
The choice to speak up or stay quiet
To choose the road less traveled
Or to become a pioneer
There is no shame in either
But all should know
What freedom consists of
Is the choice to use your voice

Freedom is a profound and multifaceted concept that has been a cornerstone of human aspiration throughout history. Freedom is a beacon of hope, inspiring people to fight for their own rights. It is an essential human aspiration that is fundamental for personal growth. It is a universal longing that transcends cultures, generations, and borders. Freedom extends beyond political independence to encompass social, economic, and cultural freedom. The struggle for freedom has made up the history of humans, ranging from the ancient times to modern times, continuing to be a motivator for social change and progress. At its core, freedom means the ability to live life on one's terms, unencumbered by oppressive restrictions or constraints.

Social freedom incorporates the ability to form and maintain relationships, associating with others and participating in activities of the community without fearing discrimination or hate. Economic freedom includes the right to work, to own property, and to pursue economic options without restriction or exploitation. When discussing cultural freedom, it includes the ability to express oneself, to preserve cultural heritage, and to participate in the cultural life of one's community.

Freedom encompasses the liberty to think, believe, and express oneself without fear of persecution or retribution. It involves the power to make choices, pursue opportunities, and forge one's own path in life. The absence of freedom is a state of captivity, where individuals are denied the autonomy to shape their own destinies. It is also not only an individual concept, but a collective one as well. In a community or society, freedom is dependent on the individual members. As individuals are free to express themselves, associate with others around them, and be involved in the political process, then the entire community will benefit from a plethora of different views and ideas. Collective freedom will foster creativity, innovation, and progress. Throughout history, freedom has been a beacon of hope for marginalized communities, inspiring struggles for emancipation, civil rights, and social justice. From the abolition of slavery to the feminist movement, freedom has been the rallying cry for those seeking equality and dignity. The pursuit of freedom has also driven innovation, creativity, and progress, as individuals have been empowered to explore new ideas, challenge the status quo, and push the boundaries of human achievement.

In America, freedom is deeply ingrained in the nation's founding principles and values.

The Declaration of Independence boldly declares that all men are created equal, endowed with certain unalienable rights, including Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. This creed has inspired generations of Americans to fight for freedom, both at home and abroad, and has made the United States a beacon of hope for those seeking refuge and opportunity. Yet, freedom is not a static concept, it is a dynamic and ongoing struggle. It requires constant vigilance, courage, and sacrifice to protect and expand its boundaries. To have freedom means to have accountability, self-awareness, and a commitment to respecting the rights and freedoms of others. Freedom is not a fixed state but a constant struggle, which requires consistent caution and activism to protect and expand boundaries. As society evolves, new challenges and threats to freedom emerge, demanding innovative solutions and collective action. All in all, freedom is a precious universal human right, essential for human flourishing and progress. It is a multifaceted concept that encompasses political, social, and economic liberty, and is deeply ingrained in America's founding values and principles. As we celebrate America's achievements and possibilities for the future, we must also acknowledge the ongoing struggles and challenges to freedom and continue to strive for a world where all individuals can live life on their own terms, with dignity and respect.

VA250

In anticipation of its 2024 Fourth of July celebration at the Virginia State Capitol, the Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with VA250, invited high school students in the Tidewater region to explore the profound question: "What does freedom mean?" Inspired by the ideals enshrined in the Declaration of Independence - life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness - students were empowered to express their unique perspectives through essays, artwork, videos, or audio submissions.

We invite you to delve into these "Expressions of Freedom" and be inspired by the thoughtful reflections of Virginia's young minds.