



Phillis Wheatley was born in the country of Senegal. In 1761 when she was eight years old she was kidnapped and brought to Boston on a slave ship. Once in America, she was sold at auction to John Wheatley, who bought her to be a servant for his wife, Suzanna. However, Suzanna recognized how intelligent Phillis was and taught her English, Literature, History, Latin and Greek. This was at a time when it was illegal to teach slaves to read or write.

At the age of 12, Phillis created her first poem. By 1773, she had published a book of poetry titled ***Poems On Various Subjects***. Phillis was the first African American slave to publish a poetry book and the third woman in America to do so. After the death of her masters and friends John & Suzanna Wheatley, Phillis (no longer a slave) married John Peters, a freed slave.

She continued to write, but never published again. The poem below, written soon after her tenure of slavery ended, expressed her thoughts on the subject of slavery.

**No more America in mournful strain
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain,
No longer shall thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
Has made, and which it meant t'enslave the land.
Should you, my lord, while you pursue my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was the soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe lov'd
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?**

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/About-Slavery>

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Questions 2 Ponder

The Iron Chain

Phyllis Wheatley wrote this poem:

*No more America in mournful strain
Of wrongs, and grievance unredress'd complain,
No longer shall thou dread the iron chain,
Which wanton Tyranny with lawless hand
Has made, and which it meant t'enslave the land.
Should you, my lord, while you pursue my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest,
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was the soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?*

Who no longer dreads the iron chain, according to the poem?

For What Does Phillis Wheatley Pray?

Phillis Wheatley, born in Senegal, became a slave in America.

A writer of poetry, during and after her captive years, she tells us what it was like to live under a "lawless hand." She rebukes a system which allowed children to be stolen from their parents.

In her poem, she is praying for something specific. What is it?

Media Stream



Phillis Wheatley

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