



## **Flight to Freedom Learning Resource** **Readers Theater©**

**Fort Mose Historical Society:**  
**African American Community of Freedom**  
[connect@FortMose.org](mailto:connect@FortMose.org)  
<https://fortmose.org/>

**Fort Mose Historic State Park**  
<https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fort-mose-historic-state-park>

**Fort Mose: Selected Awards & Honors**  
U.S. National Historic Landmark  
Site of Memory, UNESCO Slave Route Project  
Site: National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom  
Site: Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor



## Fort Mose Historical Society: African American Community of Freedom

### Flight to Freedom Learning Resource: Readers Theater©

**Note:** This educational resource is designed to accompany the popular **Flight to Freedom Encounter** that takes place annually at Fort Mose Historic State Park. Flight to Freedom re-creates the perilous journey of Freedom Seekers as they escape from enslavement on British plantations and flee southward, pursuing citizenship in Spanish Florida.

Fort Mose Historical Society offers use of these materials free-of-charge. The materials may be downloaded and reproduced for educational use. Editing is prohibited.

For more information on the **Flight to Freedom Encounter**, or to register youth groups for the unique on-site experience, please visit [FortMose.org](http://FortMose.org). For information or feedback on these educational resources, please contact [Connect@FortMose.org](mailto:Connect@FortMose.org).

Thank you for sharing the history of Fort Mose!

### FL Learning Standards

- **SS.4.A.3.5** Identify the significance of Fort Mose as the first free African community in the United States.
- **S5.4.A.3.In.e** Identify that African slaves escaped to Fort Mose to live in freedom
- **S5.4.A.3.Su.e:** Recognize that African slaves went to Fort Mose to be free.
- **S5.4.A.3.Pa.e:** Recognize an aspect of freedom.
- **SS.4.A.3.3** Identify the significance of St. Augustine as the oldest permanent European settlement in the United States.
- **LAFS.4.SL.1.2** Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- **SS.6.G.2** Understand physical and cultural characteristics of places.
- **SS.4.G.1.4** Interpret political and physical maps using map elements (title, compass rose, cardinal directions, intermediate directions, symbols, legend, scale, longitude, latitude).

- **SS.8.A.2.7** Describe the contributions of key groups (Africans, Native Americans, women, and children) to the society and culture of colonial America.
- **SP.PK12.VI.1.2** Apply listening and auditory skills, such as discriminating sounds and associating concepts, actions, and ideas with expressive language.

## **The Fort Mose Story**

- ◆ **First free legally sanctioned Black community in what became the United States of America**
- ◆ **Destination of the original Underground Railroad, running south**

Welcome to Fort Mose Historic State Park, a National Historic Landmark, and to the unique Flight to Freedom encounter!

As you travel the Freedom Trail with your students, you will be transported to a time nearly three hundred years ago when courageous freedom seekers risked everything to live at Fort Mose, the first legally sanctioned free Black community in what is now the United States.

Africans who were taken from their homes sought to reclaim their freedom. Those born into enslavement sought relief from the hereditary system of bondage. When word spread that free life might be possible in Spanish Florida, the Flight to Freedom began.

Enslaved men, women and children within the British colonies of the Carolinas and Georgia began the perilous journey southward. They were aided by indigenous Yamassee people along the way.

Upon safe arrival in St. Augustine, the freedom seekers were asked to pledge allegiance to the Spanish crown and accept the Catholic religion. Able-bodied men were required to complete a term of service in the militia.

The Spanish colonial government established *Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose*, or Fort Mose, in 1738. Located on St. Augustine's northern border, Fort Mose became the first legally sanctioned free Black community in what was to become the United States. It was an important military outpost where free Fort Mose militia defended all of St. Augustine from attack. The free women of Fort Mose provided vital community support.

Today, Fort Mose is preserved as a Florida State Park, open 365 days per year for visitation by the public. It's designated a National Historic Landmark and a Site of Memory of the UNESCO Slave Route Project. Fort Mose is also honored as a site on

the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom and as southernmost site on the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor.

At its core, the Fort Mose story is one of tremendous human agency, perseverance, ingenuity, courage and accomplishment. As such, it stands in sharp contrast to the standard narrative of subjugation and oppression. Fort Mose citizens made significant contributions to colonial Spanish society. These freedom seekers had claimed their liberty, and secured the blessing of freedom for their offspring.

This is not to say Mose's founders and their offspring did not suffer. They did, enduring hardships, illness, hunger and constant danger. Many fought and died protecting Saint Augustine. These facts highlight the sacrifices people are willing to make to be free and can lead to rich and meaningful conversations with students.

Ultimately, the story of Fort Mose is one of hope, endurance, and triumph. Therefore, Fort Mose's story appeals to all who yearn for a broader, more inclusive and accurate depiction of colonial history that led to our country's founding.

We thank you for introducing your students to Fort Mose and the story of its courageous citizens, as defined in Florida Social Studies Standards.

For a more complete history of Fort Mose, please visit the Fort Mose Historical Society's website, and please forward questions to: [Connect@FortMose.org](mailto:Connect@FortMose.org).

Fort Mose Historical Society: African American Community of Freedom

## **Introduction: Flight to Freedom Readers Theater©**

### **What is Readers Theater?**

Readers Theater is an integrated collaborative learning approach that involves students in reading, listening and performing. In our activity below, we invite students to read excerpts from the official script used by our Flight to Freedom reenactors. Students can assume roles of major characters associated with formation of our nation's original Underground Railroad, running south.

This activity requires no sets, costumes, props or memorized lines. Each performer's goal is to read his or her script effectively, allowing the audience to visualize the action through creative use of voice and facial expressions.

## Materials

- Printed copies of the Readers Theater Script. (Suggestions for the visually impaired: 20-24 point font and braille copies.)
- Suggested props: Dried corn and beans, gourd canteen and bowl, flint and steel fire starter, tricorne hat, compass/sundial.
- Suggested images: Fort Mose artifacts. <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu/100years/fort-mose-artifacts/>

## Vocabulary

**Enslaved** - A person forced into the control of another, in violation of human rights

**Foe** - Enemy

**Fort Mose (Moh-say')** – First legally sanctioned free African community in what became the United States.

**Freedom** - Not being imprisoned or enslaved

**Freedom seeker** - An enslaved person who seeks a life of freedom

**Perilous** - Dangerous

**Yamasee (ya mah' see)** - Native peoples who lived in the coastal region of present-day northern Georgia, and later in northeastern Florida.

**Underground Railroad** - A secret network and routes, co-created by people of various backgrounds, and used by enslaved people to escape to freedom. Today, Fort Mose is listed as a site on the US National Parks Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

## Instruction: Flight to Freedom Readers Theater©

### Suggested Pre-reading Activities

1. Share the story of Fort Mose with students (see above).
2. Share the props and images listed above with students. Describe the use of these items by Freedom Seekers, Spanish soldiers and citizens, and Native peoples.
3. Explore the map of the St. Augustine estuary and Fort Mose. (The map can be found in the Resources section, at the end of this document.) Ask:
  - Why might Fort Mose have been built on its location?

- Why do you think the Spanish settled in St. Augustine?
- What is an estuary, and what might be the advantages of residing near one?

4. Provide students with building blocks. Instruct them to build a fort that they imagine might help Fort Mose militia defend the Spanish colony of St. Augustine. Then, encourage students to build shelter for men, women and children who were residents of the Fort Mose community. Let students use their imaginations as they consider sources of water, food, income, and protection.

## **Readers Theater Script Flight to Freedom, 1738**

### **Instructions**

Today, we are stepping back into history. The year is 1738, 38 years before our country was formed.

We are going to join courageous freedom seekers who have escaped from enslavement on a British plantation. They are making a perilous journey south to the Spanish colony of St. Augustine, in land they called 'La Florida'.

(Pass out scripts; assign roles)

**Date:** 1738

**Setting:** Coastal region of South Georgia and North Florida

### **Characters**

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Narrator 4

Narrator 5

Freedom Seeker 1

Freedom Seeker 2

Yamassee Chief

Trapper

Friar

Boatsman

Scout

Franciso Menendez

Women, Men and Children of Fort Mose

### **Scenes**

Scene 1: On the Freedom Trail

Scene 2: Freedom at Fort Mose

## Scene 1: On the Freedom Trail

### Narrator 1

Hundreds of years ago, Africans risked their lives to escape from enslavement on British plantations. They heard, through word-of-mouth, that they might find freedom in Spanish Saint Augustine.

As we take our first step, we'll enter the year 1738 — that's <insert correct number> years ago! (Example: That's **284** years ago)! We walk on land that borders the marsh. It's kind of soggy. We're traveling at night, so we're not sure what dangers might be out there!

Shhh.... If we're very quiet, we may learn the secrets of our country's first Underground Railroad!

### Freedom Seeker 1

Quiet! Don't make a noise...You must keep my whereabouts a secret!

I'm <insert Betsy or Ben>. Our family was enslaved on a rice plantation in the Carolina colony. We worked from sunup to sundown, and life was very hard!

Then, we heard about a town called St. Augustine, way down South in Spanish Florida. They said there's a community there, called Fort Mose, where Africans live free!

We knew the journey to Fort Mose would be long, hard and dangerous. But we had to give it a try!

So, we escaped in the middle of the night with nothing more than the clothes on our backs. The indigenous Yamassee people have helped us. They have been very kind, but they, too, fear for their lives!

Please don't give us up! We've come so far, and we're so close to Saint Augustine now!

### Freedom Seeker 2

(Speaks to Freedom Seeker 1): Come now, let's get some rest. We've walked all night. Here are some thick bushes where we can hide!

### Narrator 2

Along the way, many freedom seekers received help from Native peoples. That's how the first Underground Railroad was formed! Why did Yamassee people help the freedom seekers? Let's find out!

**Yamassee Chief**

My people are the Yamassee, 'The Fierce'! (Whoop whoop! [War cry])

Once we called the British friends. Now we make war with them. They do not speak truth. They capture and enslave us. This has made all Yamassee angry, and we fight!

Now we hear we can be protected by the Spanish in Saint Augustine, so my people will go there. As we travel south, we've met many who need our help. We have much in common with the enslaved Africans who have been treated so cruelly. And so we must help them. This is the right thing for all the people!

**Trapper**

(Snarls) Are you friend, or foe? Maybe you can give me an assist!

I make my living by trapping animals. I sell their skins and meat. Now, the British are giving me more money to catch slaves who have escaped from their colonies.

Have you seen any runaway slaves? I can pay you good money for information on where to find them! Have you seen any on the trail? I have silver jingling in my pocket for you. Tell me quick!

(Silence). Nothing? Aw, off with you then. You're no use to me. Scat!

**Narrator 3**

Wait! Did you hear a twig snap? I wonder who is nearby! Could it be friend, or foe?

**Friar**

Good day to you, travelers. You must be on your way to Fort Mose. Don't worry, it's not far now.

I am a Franciscan friar who teaches the Catholic religion. South of here, at Fort Mose, free African people are building a church and a home for their priest.

You know that these Mose citizens were not always free. Most of them came from British colonies up north, where they were enslaved. Our Governor has made free life possible for these poor people. We will protect them, if they convert to our religion and serve the Spanish crown.

This is good plan, because the African people have brought talent that can benefit us! They are skilled in farming, carpentry, fishing and many crafts!

Here comes the boatsman now. He'll take you to your destination. Travel safely, my friends! And may God be with you.

**Boatsman**

Hey! Are you on your way to Fort Mose?

My boat is old and small, but it is safe. I know these waterways well, and I know how to avoid British scouts and spies.

Remember — we must be quiet. We don't want to be caught!

Come with me. We'll cross the Saint Johns river by boat, then navigate our way through the marsh to reach Fort Mose. There, you'll be safe!

**Scout**

Who goes there? I am the guard on duty to protect entry into Fort Mose. Tell me the Saint of the day so I will know if you are friend or foe.

**Boatsman**

Santa Teresa is saint of the day! Now please let us enter Fort Mose.

**Scene 2: A Life of Freedom at Fort Mose****Scout**

Ah, you come in search of freedom as I did many years ago. Welcome to Fort Mose! I will take you to meet our leader, Captain Francisco Menendez.

**Narrator 4**

Ah, I can see the relief on your faces. You've made it safely to Fort Mose!

You're about to meet Captain Francisco Menendez, from the Mandingo tribe of West Africa.

Captain Menendez was captured by enslavers when he was just a boy. He was taken from his home, transported to the colonies and forced to work on British plantations. But then, he made his flight to freedom. And here at Fort Mose, he claimed his freedom.

Because of his skills and contributions, Francisco Menendez was appointed captain of the Fort Mose Militia and leader of the Fort Mose community!

## **Franciso Menendez**

Greetings, friends! My name is Franciso Menendez, and I welcome you to Fort Mose! Please enjoy your visit — we are so glad you have joined us! In this community, you'll find people from many backgrounds. Most of our citizens are of African descent, from many different West African tribes. You'll find Native peoples here as well, and Spanish men and women. We share our labor and our talents, for the good of all.

As you can see, Fort Mose sits on the northern border of Spanish St. Augustine. Our brave men serve as guardians of the city and its surroundings. Soon, you'll see our militia at drill. Once the drill has ended, the men will also provide services as blacksmiths, carpenters, fishermen and boatmen.

You'll also meet many of the courageous women of Mose. They, too, share their skills and of food cultivation, gathering and preparation, herbal medicine, weaving and sewing, childcare and home care.

And you will find young people here, too. We are all grateful for a life of freedom!

## **Narrator 5**

And this ends our story. **The Flight to Freedom** required tremendous courage, ingenuity and perseverance. Freedom seekers navigated dangerous swamps, wild animals, and ruthless slave catchers. But those who made it to Fort Mose gained something very precious. They claimed their freedom!

## **Assessment**

- What words would you use to describe the freedom seekers?
- Who helped the Freedom Seekers on their way to Fort Mose?
- What did you learn from reading this script?

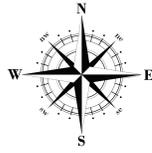
## **Next Steps**

Visit Fort Mose Historic State Park in St. Augustine, FL. Explore the on-site museum, where you will learn much more about the Fort Mose community.

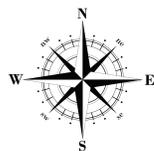
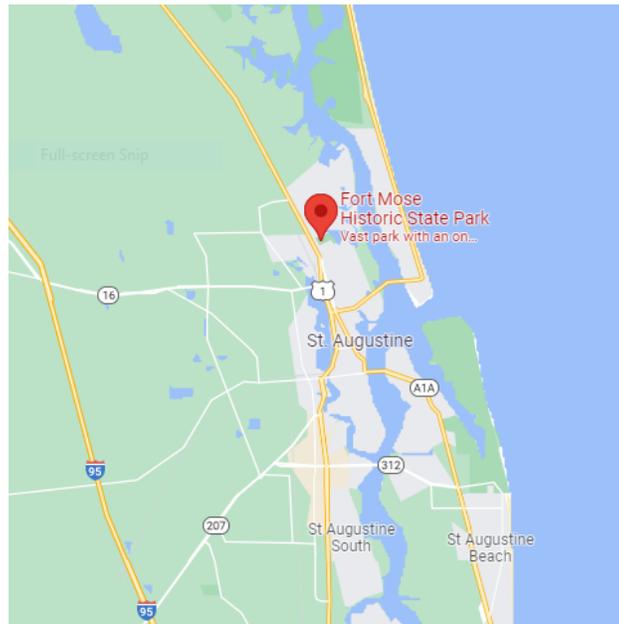
Soon, you will also be able to experience the Flight to Freedom Encounter 365 days per year, through the use of interpretive panels. For more information visit: <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails/fort-mose-historic-state-park>.

Visit the Castillo des San Marcos National Monument in downtown St. Augustine to learn more of the city's colonial history. For more information visit: <https://www.nps.gov/casa/index.htm>.

## Resources



### Map of Fort Mose and St. Augustine, Florida



### Routes on the Flight to Freedom Trail

