Slavery and the Founding
Worked Example

Virginia Governor's Council reply to the petition of Matthew Ashby, November 27, 1769
How to annotate a primary source

1. Refer to the guiding questions and “I can” statements.
2. Preview the essential vocabulary.
3. Closely read the title.
4. Don’t skip the introduction.
5. Closely read the text.
6. Summarize what you learned from the source.

Virginia Governor’s Council reply to the petition of Matthew Ashby, November 27, 1769
Refer to the guiding question and “I can” statements

How did enslaved and free Blacks resist the injustice of slavery during the colonial era?

• I can articulate how slavery was at odds with the principle of justice.
• I can explain how enslaved men and women resisted the institution of slavery.
• I can create an argument supported by evidence from primary sources.
• I can succinctly summarize the main ideas of historic texts.

This source will help me answer this guiding question.

When I am done with this source, I should be able to do these four things.
### Essential Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Petition</td>
<td>A formal written request, typically to a government or government official.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indentured servants</td>
<td>Men and women who signed a contract or were indentured to work for a certain number of years in return for transportation to the American colonies and food, clothing, and shelter once they arrived. After completion of their contract, they were given their freedom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Codify</td>
<td>To officially compile into written law that must be followed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulatto</td>
<td>A person of mixed African and European descent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One hundred and fifty pounds</td>
<td>The pound was a unit of British money. One pound equaled 20 shillings or 240 pence. £150 was a very large sum of money for 1769 and is roughly equivalent to $36,000 in 2022. <a href="#">Click here</a> to find out how much this would equal in today’s currency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manumit</td>
<td>To release legally from slavery.</td>
</tr>
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Virginia Governor’s Council reply to the petition of Matthew Ashby, November 27, 1769

This date predates the American Revolution, so this comes from the colonial period.

I know this will deal with the colony of Virginia.

This is one of the essential vocabulary terms. I know this is an official request made to a court.

I expect to see a formal response from the Virginia governor to some sort of request made by a man named Matthew Ashby during the colonial period.
Don’t skip the introduction.

**Building Context**

In 1619, when the first Africans were sold in the colony of Virginia, they were slaves who were unfree and worked alongside white *indentured servants*. Some of the slaves, however, were freed. Slavery became *codified* or written into law over the next few decades. By 1662, the colony of Virginia passed a hereditary slave law declaring the child of an enslaved mother, regardless of the status of the father, would inherit the enslaved status of his/her mother. This law (and others over the next 40 years) created a hereditary, race-based system of coerced or forced labor in the colony: black skin color became equated with enslavement and inferiority. Matthew Ashby was born to a white mother, an indentured servant named Mary Ashby, and an unknown man of African descent. As a *mulatto* child born to a white mother, Matthew Ashby was required by law to serve as an indentured servant until the age of thirty-one. His mother was also required to pay a fine of 15 pounds to the parish church. After being indentured for 30 years, Matthew Ashby worked in Williamsburg, Virginia, as a free man.

I know that the petitioner, Matthew Ashby, was a free man of mixed-race that officially petitioned the Virginia Governor.
On the Petition of Matthew Ashby, a free Mulatto setting forth that he had two Children by his present wife Ann Ashby, while she was a Slave to Samuel Spurr; that he brought her and the two Children of the said Spurr for one hundred and fifty pounds, that he now has two children alive by her John and Mary, that she has been a faithful and diligent Wife ever since marriage, and praying that he may be permitted to set her and his Children free; the Board being satisfied therein, were of opinion, that the said Ann, John and Mary were deserving of their freedom, and it was order'd that the said Matthew Ashby have leave to manumit and set them free.

Matthew Ashby purchased his wife and children from their slaveholder for a large sum of money and is now requesting that they be freed.

Matthew Ashby had a wife named Ann, and two children, John and Mary. Ann was enslaved, therefore her children were enslaved by Virginia law.

Matthew Ashby’s race and status as a free man is officially noted.
1. In colonial Virginia, slavery was hereditary and tied to race. This was codified or written into law over time.
2. Manumission was possible but required petitioning the colonial government.
3. Free and enslaved Blacks not only interacted with each other, but established meaningful community and connection with each other (e.g., Matthew and Ann Ashby married and had a family).
4. Matthew Ashby paid a large sum of money for his family, showing his commitment to their freedom and that he was financially successful in his own right.