

II

CESAR TARRANT, FROM SLAVE TO SAILOR

By Nat Amoateng

1771

1772

1773

1774

1775

1776

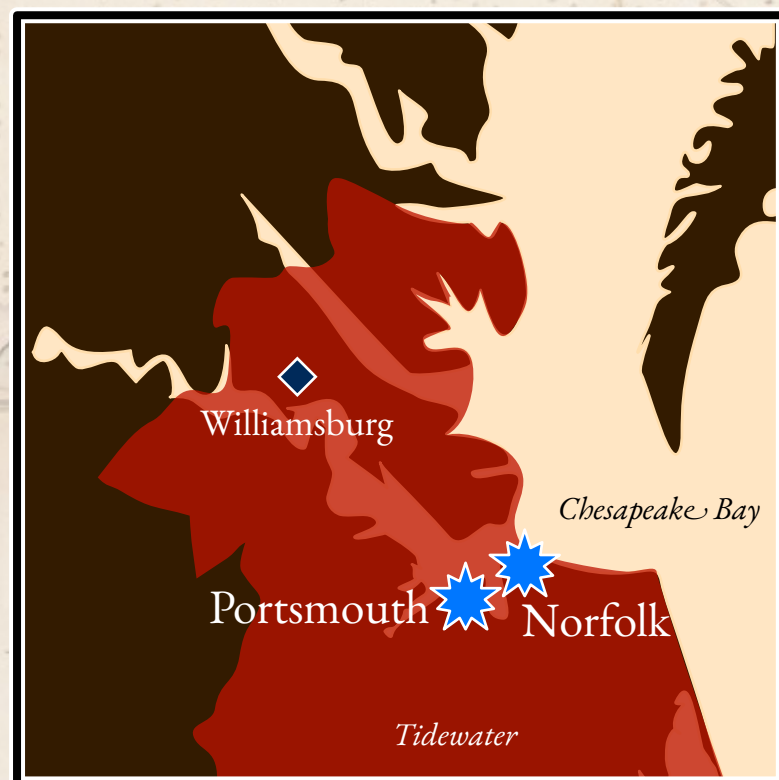
1777

1778

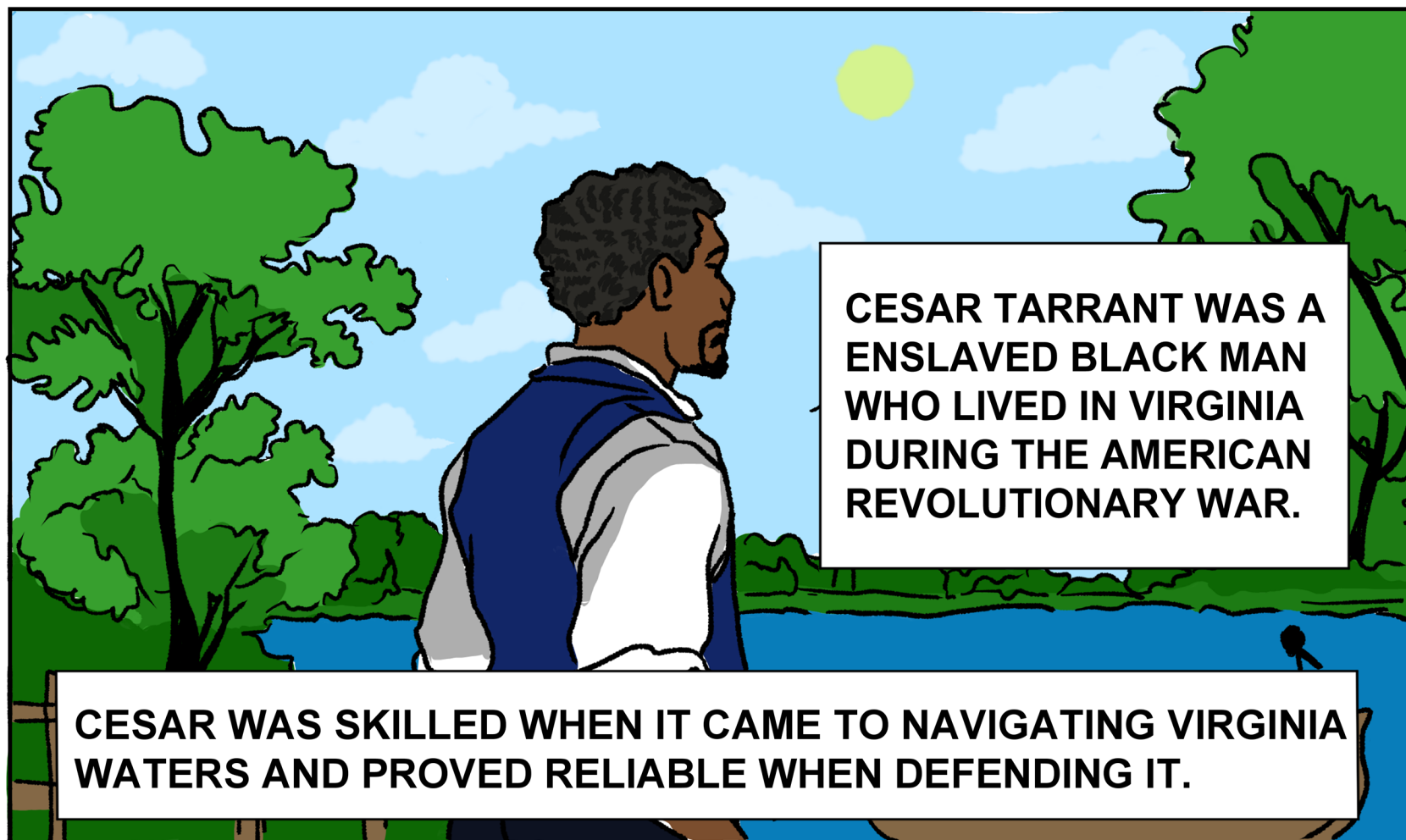
Lord Dunmore becomes Royal Governor of Virginia

The First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia

The Battles of Lexington and Concord

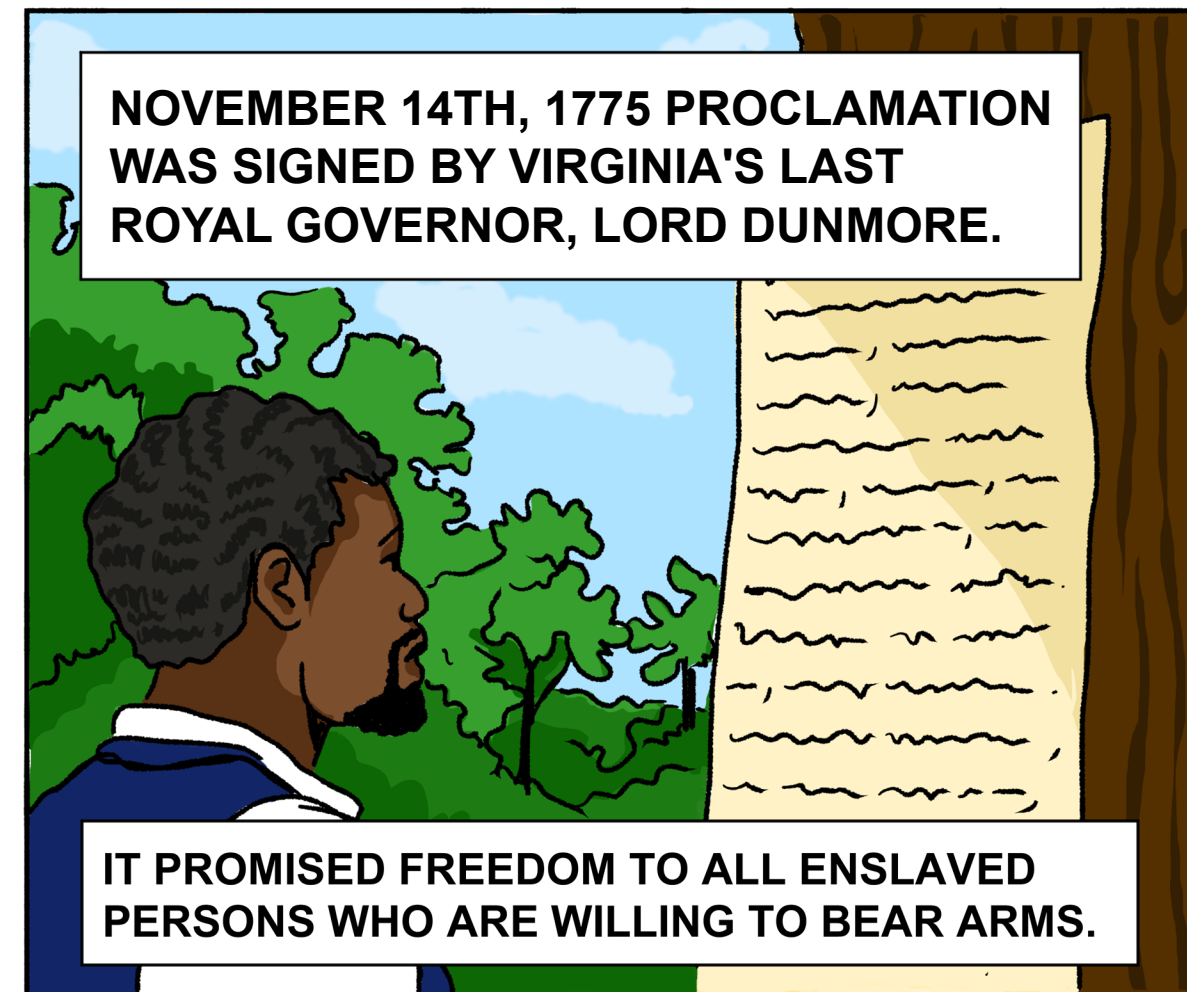


The enslaved man Cesar Tarrant joins Virginia's navy and in 1778 steers a Patriot ship in battle with a British ship. After the war, Tarrant must wage another war: the fight to free himself, his wife and his children from enslavement. Will Virginia's General Assembly honor his service?



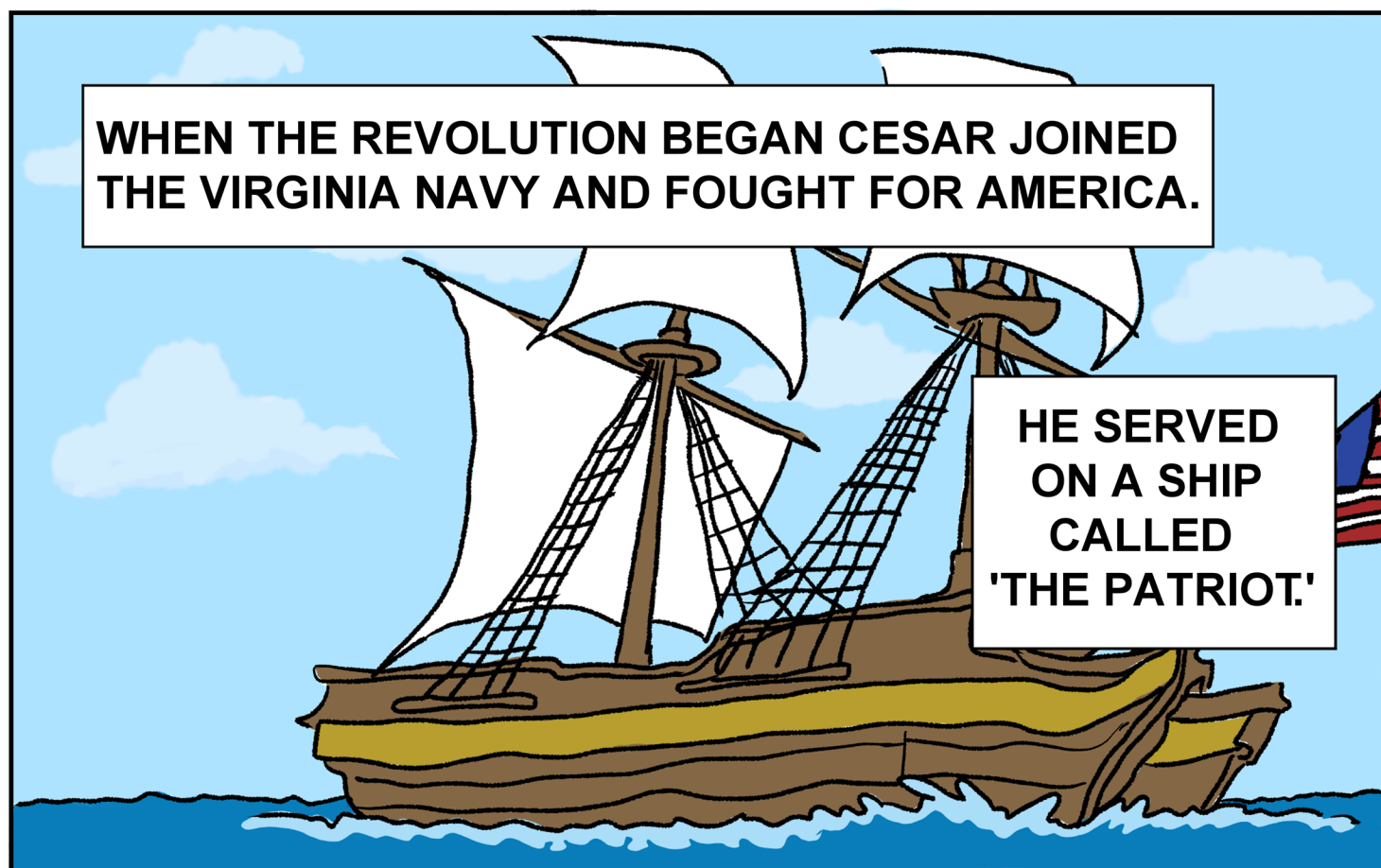
CESAR TARRANT WAS A ENSLAVED BLACK MAN WHO LIVED IN VIRGINIA DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR.

CESAR WAS SKILLED WHEN IT CAME TO NAVIGATING VIRGINIA WATERS AND PROVED RELIABLE WHEN DEFENDING IT.



NOVEMBER 14TH, 1775 PROCLAMATION WAS SIGNED BY VIRGINIA'S LAST ROYAL GOVERNOR, LORD DUNMORE.

IT PROMISED FREEDOM TO ALL ENSLAVED PERSONS WHO ARE WILLING TO BEAR ARMS.



WHEN THE REVOLUTION BEGAN CESAR JOINED THE VIRGINIA NAVY AND FOUGHT FOR AMERICA.

HE SERVED ON A SHIP CALLED 'THE PATRIOT.'



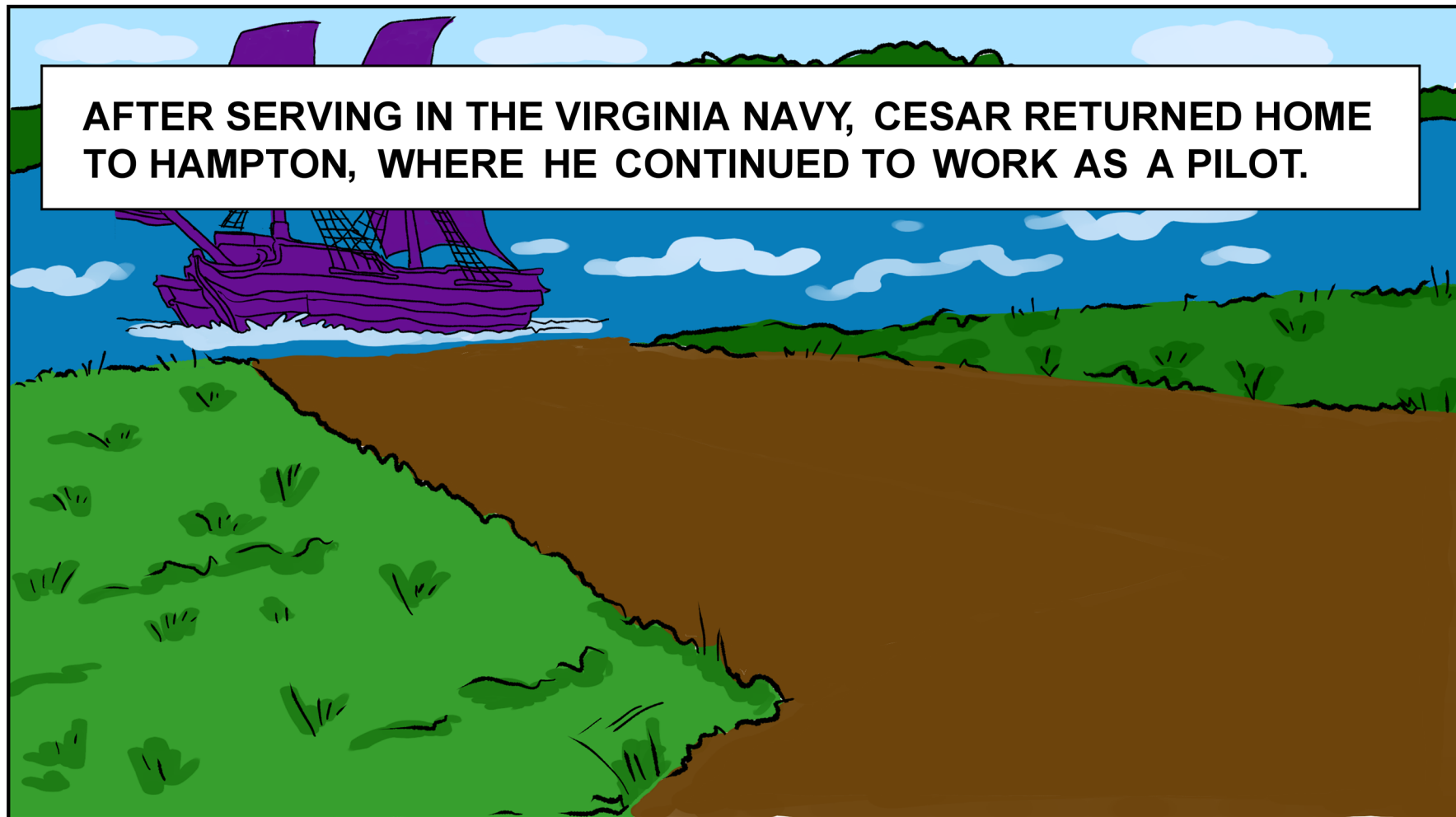
DURING A 1778 BATTLE WITH BRITISH FORCES, CESAR NAVIGATED TREACHEROUS LOCAL WATERS AT THE VIRGINIA CAPES.

CESAR OUTMANEUVERED AND RAMMED
'THE LOWE,' A BRITISH VESSEL.

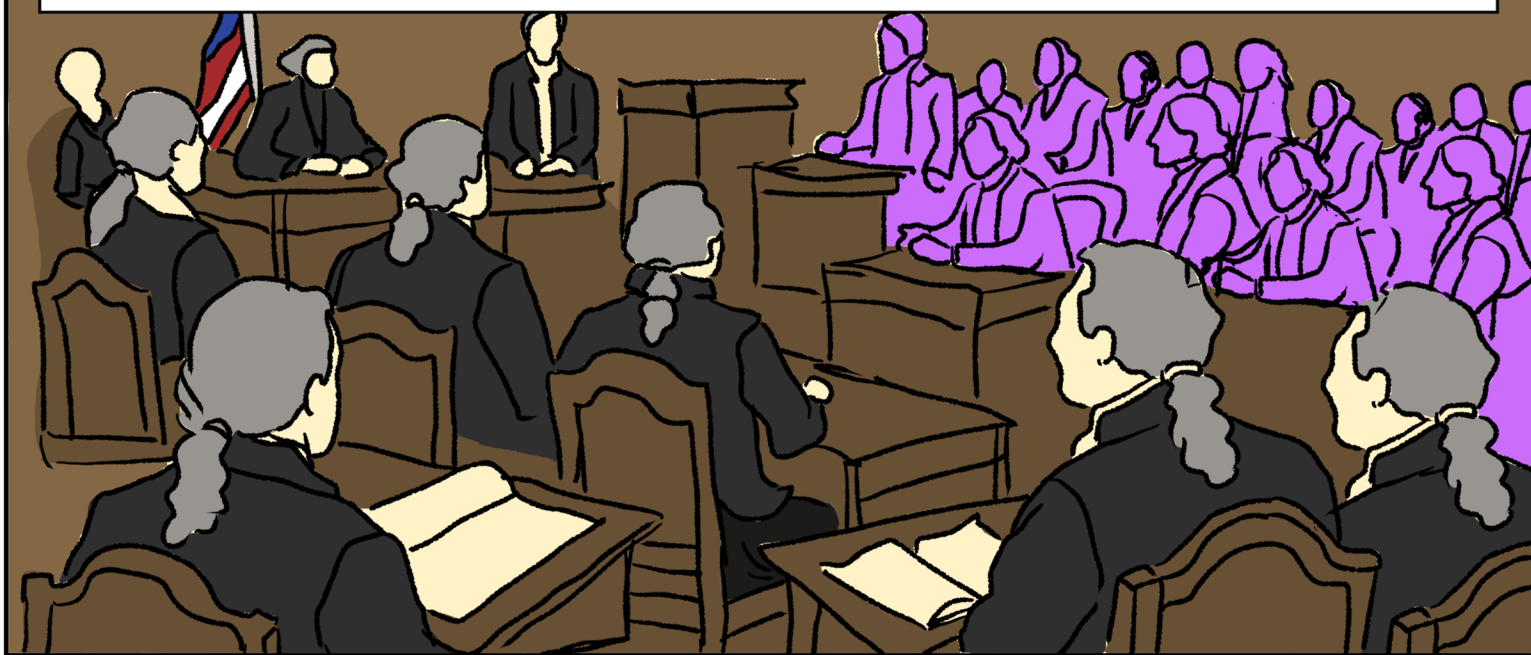


HE WAS PRAISED FOR HIS SKILL
AND BRAVERY WHILE UNDER FIRE.

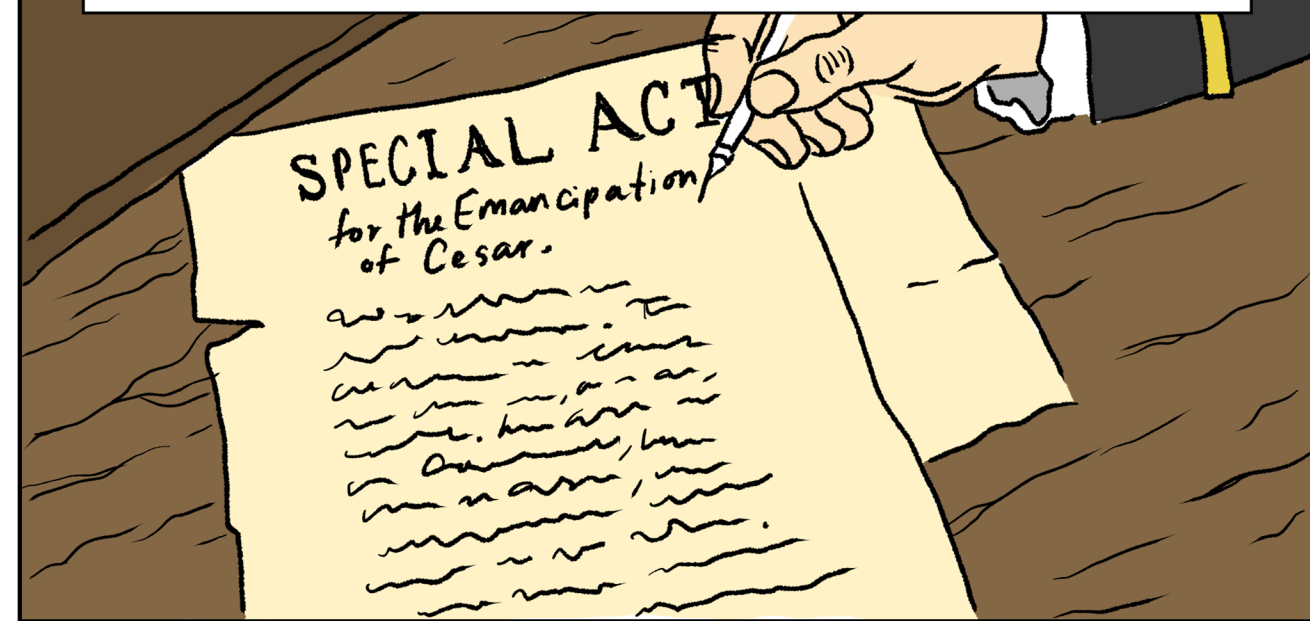
AFTER SERVING IN THE VIRGINIA NAVY, CESAR RETURNED HOME
TO HAMPTON, WHERE HE CONTINUED TO WORK AS A PILOT.



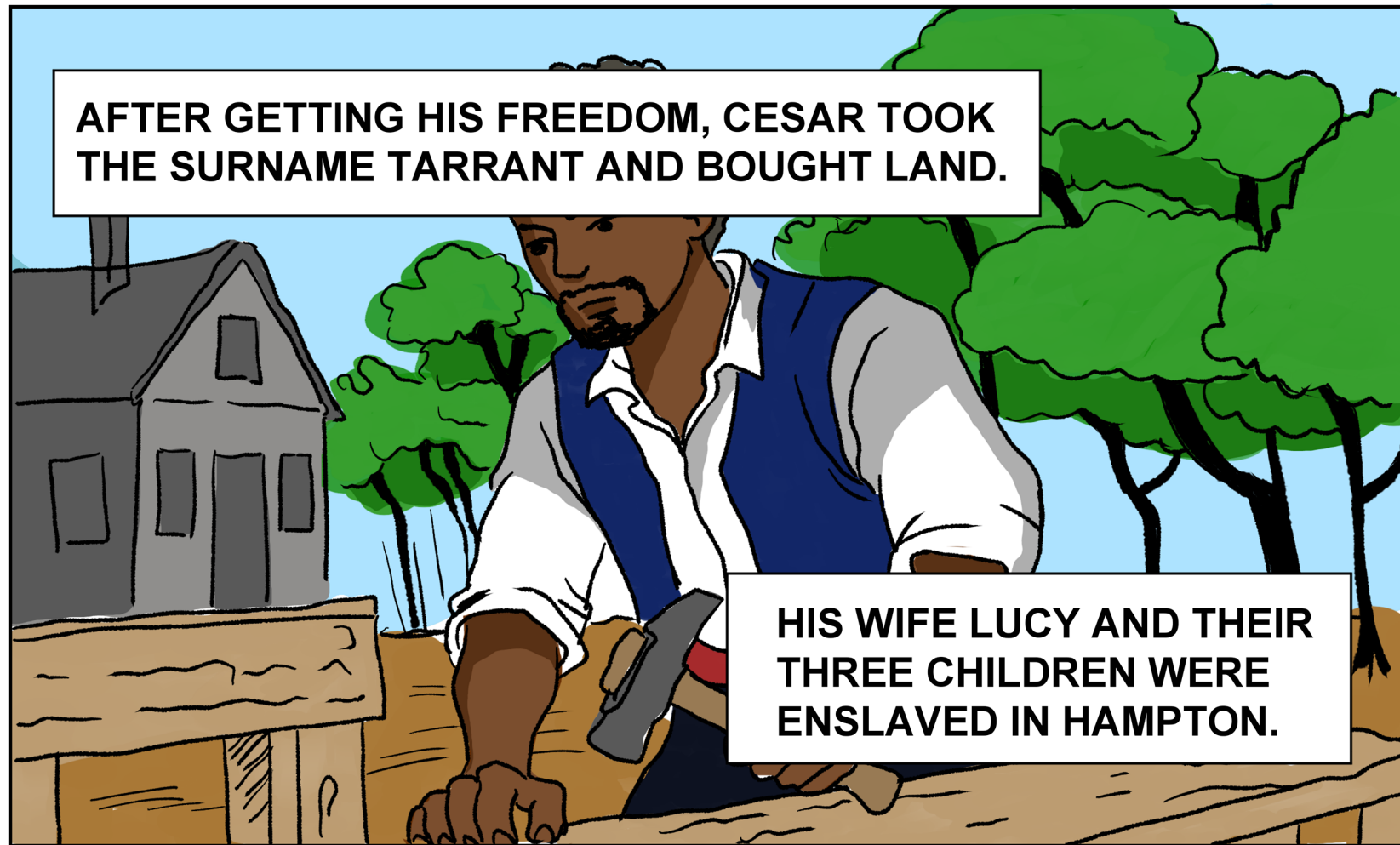
OCTOBER 20TH, 1783: THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
PASSED THE LAW EMANCIPATING ENSLAVED PERSONS
WHO SERVED DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.



THE VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY FINALLY
RECOGNIZED CESAR'S CONTRIBUTION AND
SERVICE AND PASSED A SPECIAL ACT IN 1789
TO PURCHASE AND GRANT HIM HIS FREEDOM.

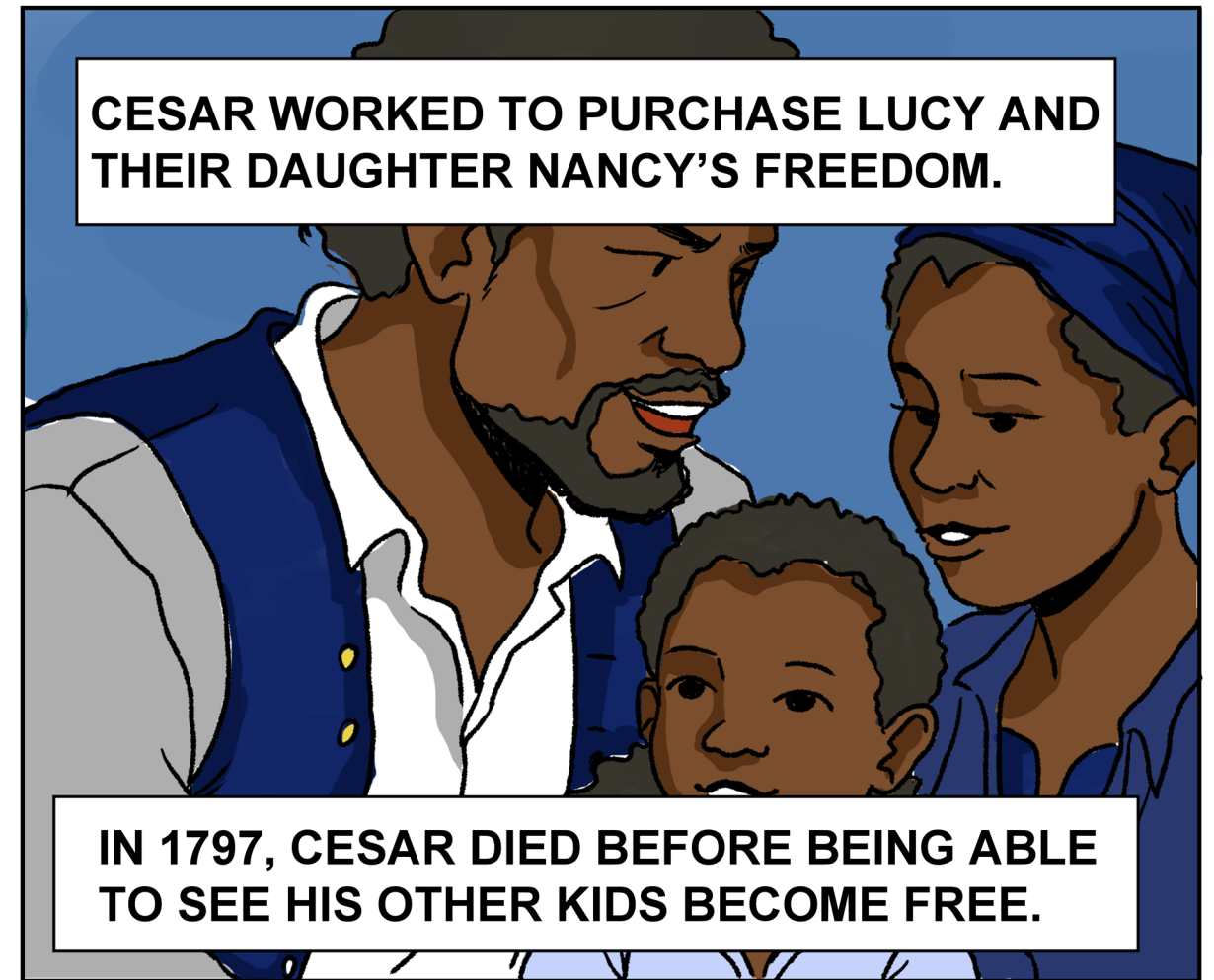


AFTER GETTING HIS FREEDOM, CESAR TOOK THE SURNAME TARRANT AND BOUGHT LAND.



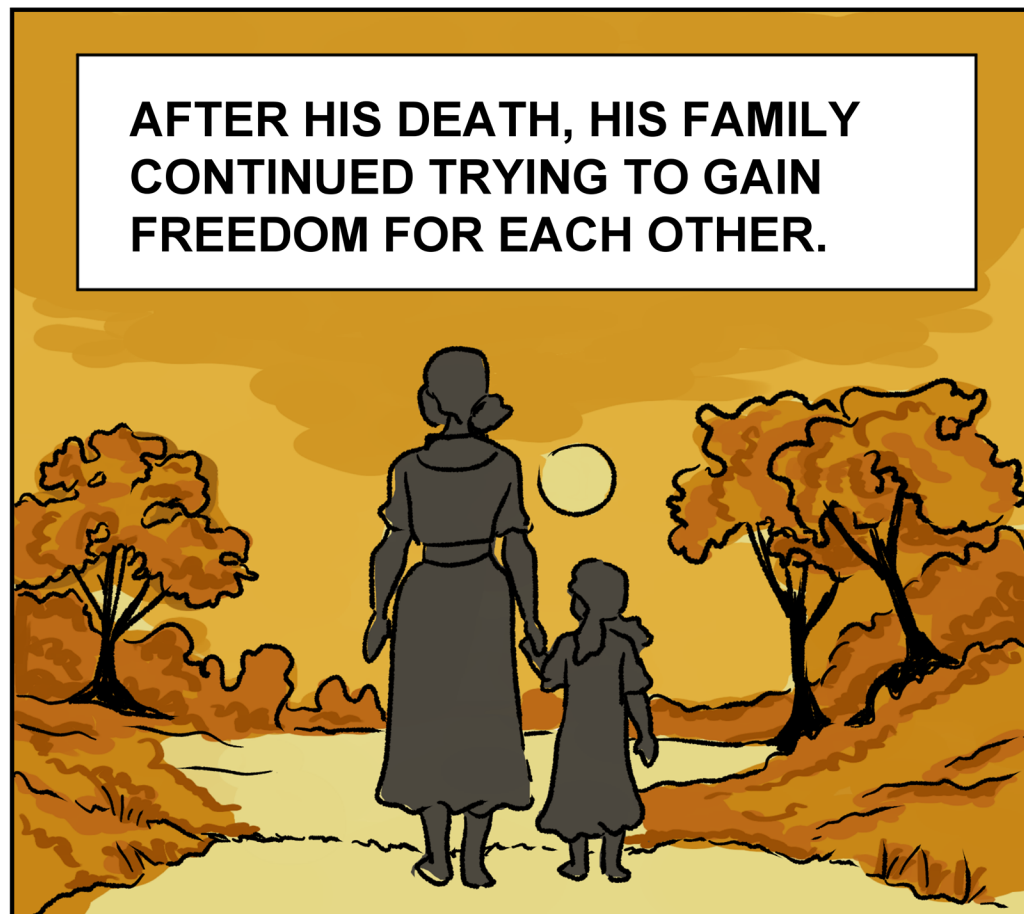
HIS WIFE LUCY AND THEIR THREE CHILDREN WERE ENSLAVED IN HAMPTON.

CESAR WORKED TO PURCHASE LUCY AND THEIR DAUGHTER NANCY'S FREEDOM.

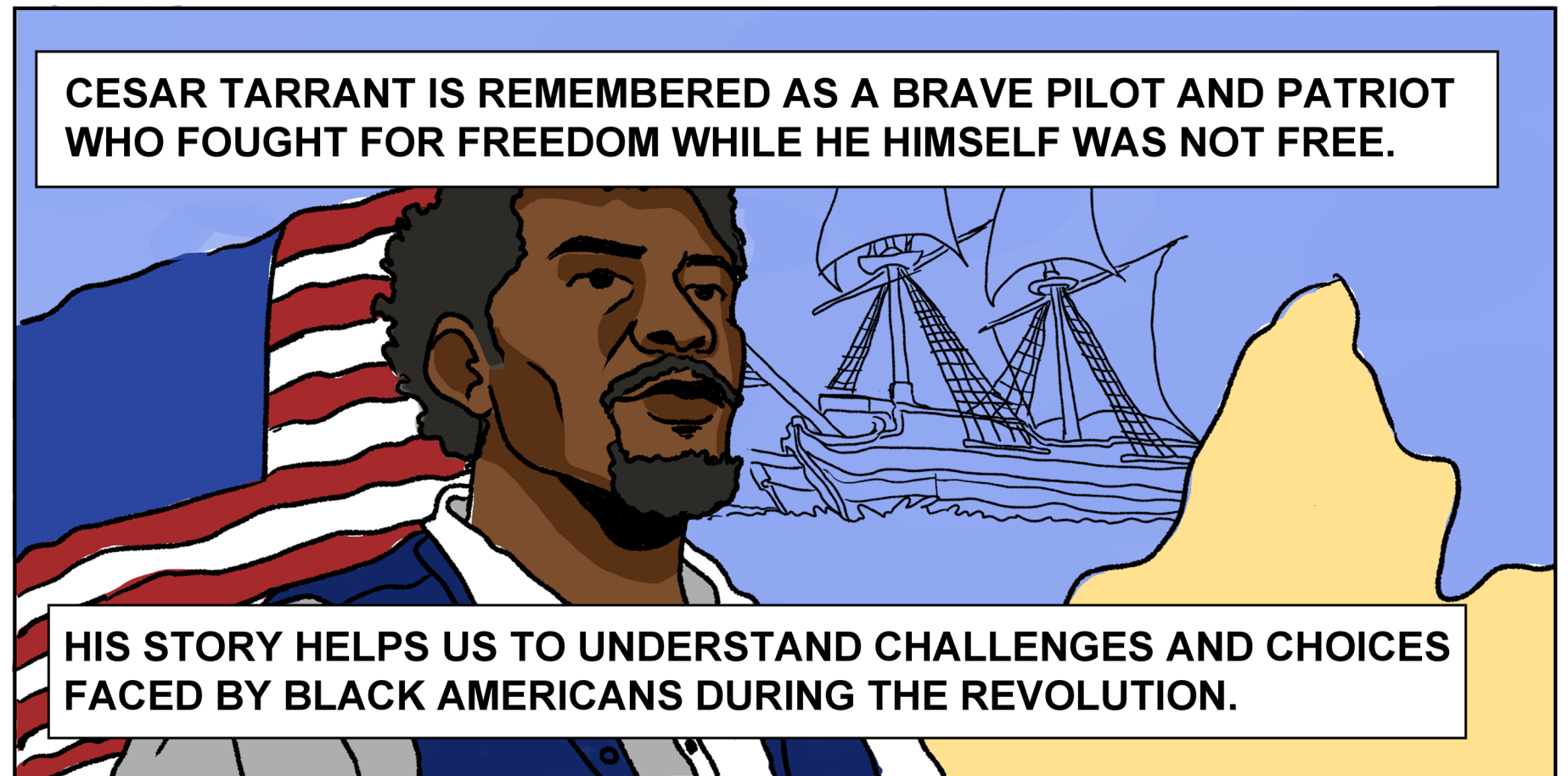


IN 1797, CESAR DIED BEFORE BEING ABLE TO SEE HIS OTHER KIDS BECOME FREE.

AFTER HIS DEATH, HIS FAMILY CONTINUED TRYING TO GAIN FREEDOM FOR EACH OTHER.



CESAR TARRANT IS REMEMBERED AS A BRAVE PILOT AND PATRIOT WHO FOUGHT FOR FREEDOM WHILE HE HIMSELF WAS NOT FREE.



HIS STORY HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND CHALLENGES AND CHOICES FACED BY BLACK AMERICANS DURING THE REVOLUTION.

Questions to Consider

1. What was the most important point of this chapter?
2. Tarrant was from Hampton. Where is that in relation to your home?
3. What was significant about Tarrant's service?
4. Where would Virginia's Navy have operated?
5. What would have been the risk of serving in the Navy then?

Learn More

-  “One enslaved sailor won his freedom after fighting in the war for independence,”
by Randy Walker, Cardinal News