

WHEATLEY PETERS PROJECT

HOME

RESOURCES

ACTIVITIES

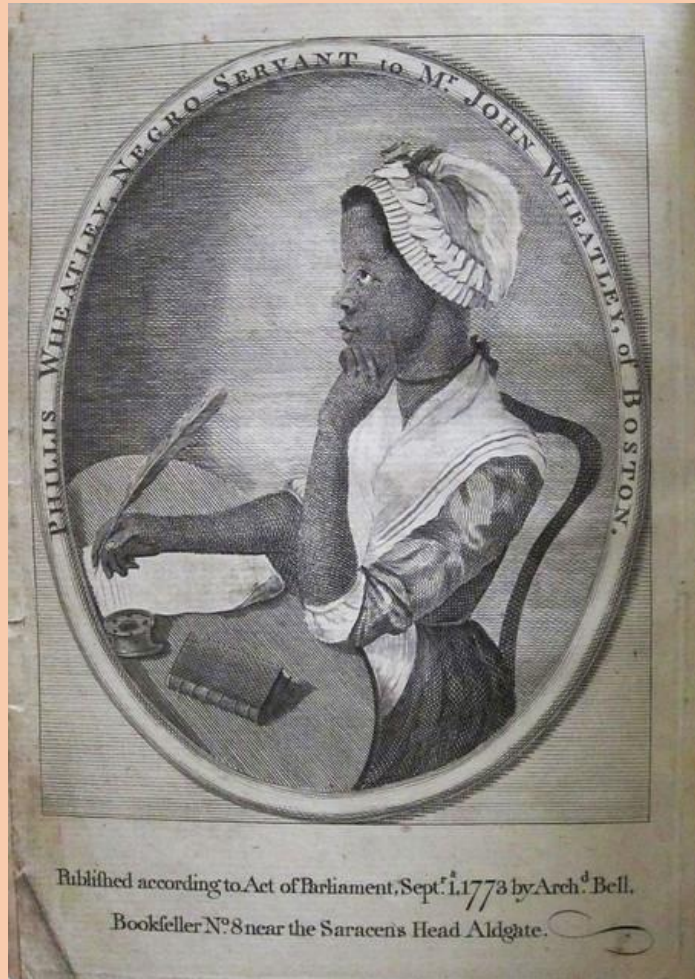
MORE..

The Genius of Phillis Wheatley Peters



Who is Phillis Wheatley Peters?

Image Courtesy New York Public library



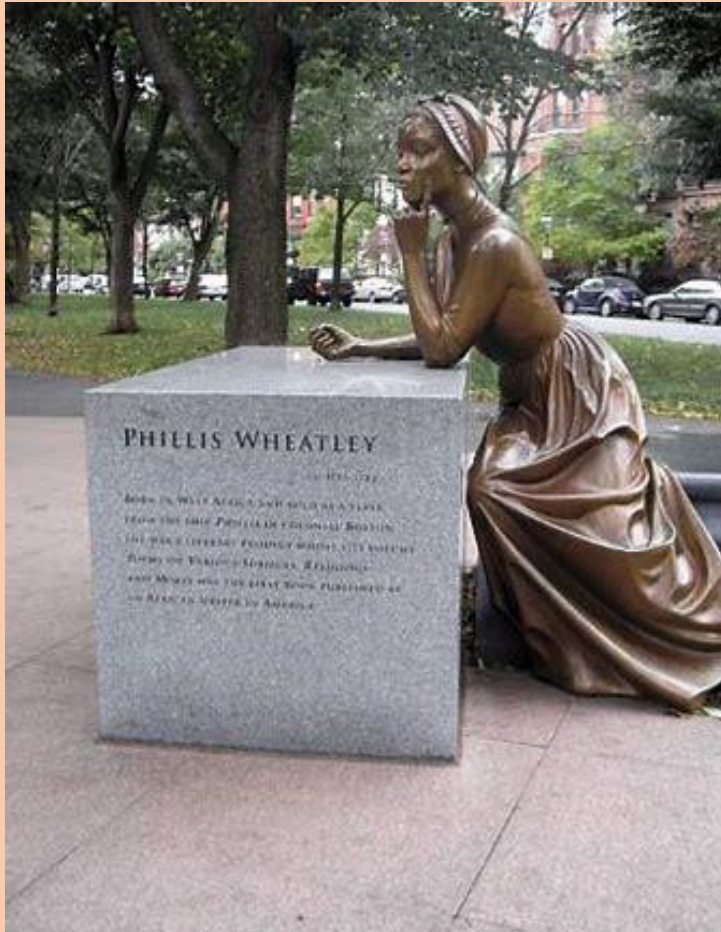
- *Brilliant writer, first African American woman to become author of a book of poetry (or, for that matter, any book)*
- *Poems book published in 1773 (when she was only 19 or 20 years old), with her work read during her lifetime across the transatlantic world*

African Heritage

- *Kidnapped (around the age of 7) from the West Coast of Africa*
- *Survived the Middle Passage*
- *Arrived in Boston in 1761*




Who is Phillis Wheatley Peters? Boston Connections



One of 3 statues at Boston Women's Memorial

- *Purchased by John Wheatley as a “gift” for his wife Susanna*
- *(Re)named “Phillis,” which was the name of the ship that brought her from Africa*
- *Taught reading and writing in the Wheatley home and quickly emerged as a talented poet writing for local audiences*

Writing Ties to Boston



An ELEGIAC
P O E M,
On the DEATH of that celebrated Divine, and eminent Servant of JESUS CHRIST, the late Reverend, and pious
GEORGE WHITEFIELD,
Chaplain to the Right Honourable the Countess of HENTINGDON, &c. &c.

Who made his Exit from this transitory State, to dwell in the celestial Realms of Bliss, on LORD'S-Day, 29th of September, 1770, when he was seiz'd with a Fit of the Ailms, at NEWBURY-PORT, near BOSTON, in NEW-ENGLAND. In which is a Consolatory Address to His truly noble Benefactress the worthy and pious Lady HENTINGDON, ---and the Orphan-Children in GEORGIA; who, with many Thousands, are left, by the Death of this great Man, to lament the Loss of a Father, Friend, and Benefactor.

By PHILLIS, a Servant Girl of 17 Years of Age, belonging to Mr. J. WHEATLEY, of BOSTON: ---And has been but 9 Years in this Country from Africa.

HAIL, happy Saint on thy immortal throne !
To thee complaints of grievance are unknown ;
We hear no more the music of thy tongue,
Thy wonted auditories cease to throng,
Thy lessons in unequal'd accents flow'd ;
While emulation in each bosom glow'd ;
Thou didst, in strains of eloquence refin'd,
Inflame the soul, and captivate the mind.
Unhappy we, the setting Sun deplore !
Which once was splendid, but it shines no more ;
He leaves this earth for Heaven's unmeasur'd height ;
And worlds unknown, receive him from our sight ;
There WHITEFIELD wings, with rapid course his way,
And falls to Zion, through vast seas of day.


When his AMERICANS were burden'd fore,
When streets were crimson'd with their galleys' gore !
Unrival'd friendship in his breast now strove :
The fruit thereof was charity and love
Towards *America* --- couldst thou do more
Than leave thy native home, the *British* shore,
To cross the great Atlantic's wat'ry road,
To see *America's* distress'd abode ?
Thy prayers, great Saint, and thy incessant cries,
Have pierc'd the bosom of thy native skies !
Thou moon hast seen, and ye bright stars of light
Have witness'd been of his requests by night !
He pray'd that grace in every heart might dwell :
He long'd to see *America* excell ;
He chang'd its youth to let the grace divine
Arise, and in their future actions shine ;
He offer'd THAT he did himself receive,

A greater gift not GOD himself can give :
He urg'd the need of HIM to every one ;
It was no less than GOD's co-equal SON !
Take HIM ye wretched for your only good ;
Take HIM ye starving souls to be your food,
Ye thirsty, come to this life giving stream :
Ye Preachers, take him for your joyful theme :
Take HIM, " my dear AMERICANS," he said,
Be your complaints in his kind bosom laid ;
Take HIM ye *Africans*, he longs for you ;
Impartial SAVIOUR, is his title due ;
If you will chuse to walk in grace's road,
You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to GOD.

Great COUNTESS ! we *Americans* reverse
Thy name, and thus condole thy grief sincere :
We mourn with thee, that *ROMA* obscurely plac'd,
In which thy Chaplain undisturb'd doth rest,
New-England sure, doth feel the ORPHAN's smart ;
Reveals the true sensations of his heart :
Since this fair Sun, withdraws his golden rays,
No more to brighten these distress'd days !
His lonely *Tavernack*, sees no more
A WHITEFIELD landing on the *British* shore :
Then let us view him in yon azure skies :
Let every mind with this lov'd object rise.
No more can he exert his lab'ring breath,
Sic'd by the cruel messenger of death,
What can his dear *AMERICA* return ?
But drop a tear upon his happy urn,
Thou tomb, shalt safe retain thy sacred trust,
Till life divine re-animate his dust.

Sold by EZEKIEL RUSSELL, in Queen-Street, and JOHN BOYER, in Marlboro-Street.

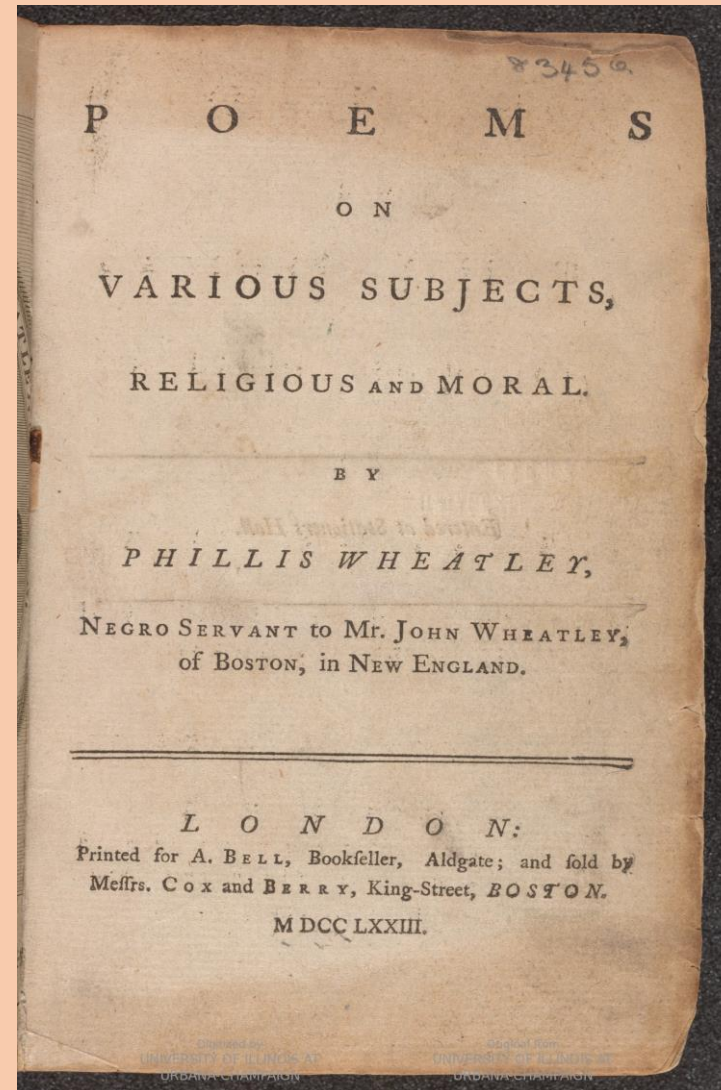
A *George Livermore.*
P O E M,
By PHILLIS, a *Negro* Girl, in
BOSTON.



ON THE DEATH OF THE REVEREND
GEORGE WHITEFIELD,

First publications took the form of pamphlets and “broadsides,” often presenting elegies in honor of a distinguished person or a family friend’s relative who had died— Including very young children

Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral: Frontispiece portrait from a first edition of Phillis Wheatley's *Poems*



The following is a Copy of a LETTER sent by the Author's Master to the Publisher.

PHILLIS was brought from *Africa* to *America*, in the Year 1761, between Seven and Eight Years of Age. Without any Assistance from School Education, and by only what she was taught in the Family, she, in sixteen Months Time from her Arrival, attained the English Language, to which she was an utter Stranger before, to such a Degree, as to read any, the most difficult Parts of the Sacred Writings, to the great Astonishment of all who heard her.

As to her WRITING, her own Curiosity led her to it; and this she learnt in so short a Time, that in the Year 1765, she wrote a Letter to the Rev. Mr. COCOM, the *Indian* Minister, while in *England*.

She has a great Inclination to learn the Latin Tongue, and has made some Progress in it. This Relation is given by her Master who bought her, and with whom she now lives.

JOHN WHEATLEY.

Boston, Nov. 14, 1772.

To the P U B L I C K.

AS it has been repeatedly suggested to the Publisher, by Persons, who have seen the Manuscript, that Numbers would be ready to suspect they were not really the Writings of PHILLIS, he has procured the following Attestation, from the most respectable Characters in *Boston*, that none might have the least Ground for disputing their *original*.

WE whose Names are under-written, do assure the World, that the POEMS specified in the following Page, * were (as we verily believe) written by PHILLIS, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from *Africa*, and has ever since been, and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best Judges, and is thought qualified to write them.

His Excellency THOMAS HUTCHINSON, *Governor*,

The Hon. ANDREW OLIVER, *Lieutenant-Governor*.

<i>The Hon.</i> Thomas Hubbard,	<i>The Rev.</i> Charles Chauncy, <i>D.D.</i>
<i>The Hon.</i> John Erving,	<i>The Rev.</i> Mather Byles, <i>D. D.</i>
<i>The Hon.</i> James Pitts,	<i>The Rev.</i> Ed. Pemberton, <i>D.D.</i>
<i>The Hon.</i> Harrison Gray,	<i>The Rev.</i> Andrew Elliot, <i>D.D.</i>
<i>The Hon.</i> James Bowdoin,	<i>The Rev.</i> Samuel Cooper, <i>D.D.</i>
John Hancock, <i>Esq;</i>	<i>The Rev.</i> Mr. Samuel Mather,
Joseph Green, <i>Esq;</i>	<i>The Rev.</i> Mr. John Moorhead,
Richard Carey, <i>Esq;</i>	Mr. John Wheatley, <i>her Master</i> .

N. B. The original Attestation, signed by the above Gentlemen, may be seen by applying to *Archibald Bell*, Bookseller, No. 8, *Aldgate-Street*.

* The Words "*following Page*," allude to the Contents of the Manuscript Copy, which are wrote at the Back of the above Attestation.

Influential white male leaders of Boston (including John Hancock) wrote testimonials to affirm her authorship (due to the belief that no young Black girl could have written the poems.) But she still had to travel to London to get her book published, as no US printer would take on the project.



Publication sponsor: Countess of Huntingdon

D E D I C A T I O N .

To the Right Honourable the

COUNTESS OF HUNTINGDON,

THE FOLLOWING

P O E M S

Are most respectfully

Inscribed,

By her much obliged,

Very humble,

And devoted Servant;

Phillis Wheatley.

*Boston, June 12,
1773.*

Who is Phillis Wheatley Peters? Social Connections, continued



- *Had a large circle of friends, such as her regular correspondent (also a Black woman) Obour Tanner*
- *Set free in 1773 soon after arriving back in Boston*
- *Married John Peters, a free Black man, not long after deaths of Susanna (first) and then John Wheatley*
- *Continued to write after marriage*

LIBERTY AND PEACE,

A

P O E M.

By PHILLIS ^{Wheatley} PETERS.

B O S T O N :

PRINTED BY WARDEN AND RUSSELL,
AT THEIR OFFICE IN MARLBOROUGH-STREET,
M,DCC,LXXXIV.

LIBERTY AND PEACE



LIBERTY and PEACE.

O! Freedom comes. Th' prescient Muse fore-
told,
All' Eyes th' accomplish'd Prophecy behold:
Her Port describ'd, "*She moves divinely fair,
"Olive and Laurel bind her golden Hair."*
She, the bright Progeny of Heaven, descends,
And every Grace her sovereign Step attends;
For now kind Heaven, indulgent to our Prayer,
In smiling *Peace* resolves the Din of *War*.
Fix'd in *Columbia* her illustrious Line,
And bids in thee her future Councils shine.
To every Realm her Portals open'd wide,
Receives from each the full commercial Tide.
Each Art and Science now with rising Charms,
Th' expanding Heart with Emulation warms.

Who is Phillis Wheatley Peters? Social Connections, continued



- *Unable to secure adequate subscriptions for a second book of poetry*
- *Worked as a scrubwoman to help support her family*
- *Had three children, none surviving*
- *Died 1784 (age of 31)*

Phillis Wheatley's Many Legacies



- Became a recurring figure in anti-slavery publications in the early decades of the nineteenth century
- Celebrated in international publications such as this French democracy magazine's imagined version of how she might have looked later in life
- Revered as a role model for Black women and girls, across succeeding decades, as seen in Black women's clubs and schools named in her honor

Today: A major figure in presentations of Boston/US history



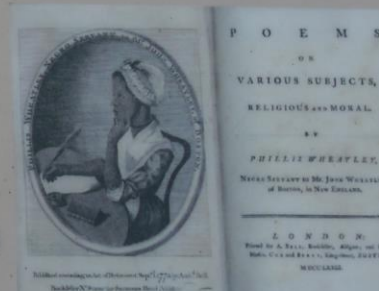
Granary's gravestones chronicle thousands of individual lives. **Sarah (Savage) Wells (d. 1730)** was the daughter of merchant Ephraim Savage and wife of tailor Joshua Wells. After her husband's death she maintained the property purchased from her father and chose not to remarry.

The Gutteridge-Ezekial Lewis-Abigail Gay tomb holds the remains of **Mary (Buttolph) Thaxter Gutteridge (1665-1732)**, keeper of Boston's Gutteridge Coffee House, her children, their spouses, and at least 20 others. Having outlived two husbands Mrs. Gutteridge chose to keep her second husband's business rather than remarry. The first wife of merchant **Ezekiel Lewis, Jane Clark (1722-ca. 1755)**, was painted by **John Smibert** in 1732.

One of Boston's most famous Africans was Phillis (Wheatley) Peters (ca. 1753-1784), the poetess. Wheatley was named after the slave ship, *Phillis*, that brought her to Boston. She was taught to read and write by her owners and she became an internationally recognized poet. Freed at the time of her master's death, she bore and lost two children before dying with her third in 1784. The man who bought her at a Boston slave auction, **John Wheatley (d.1778)** is buried in Granary. The location of Phillis Wheatley's burial is unknown.

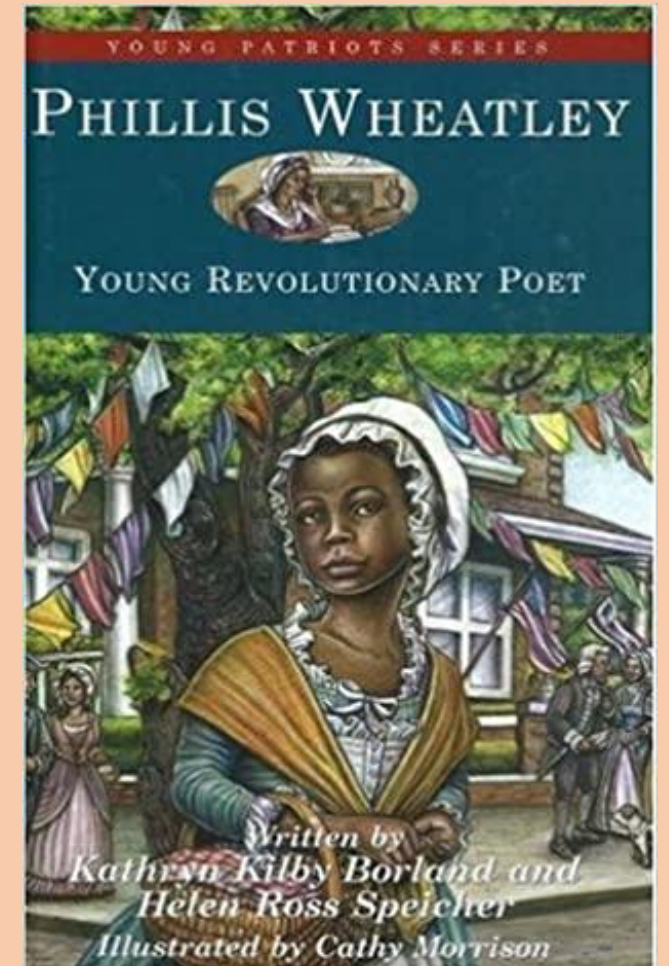
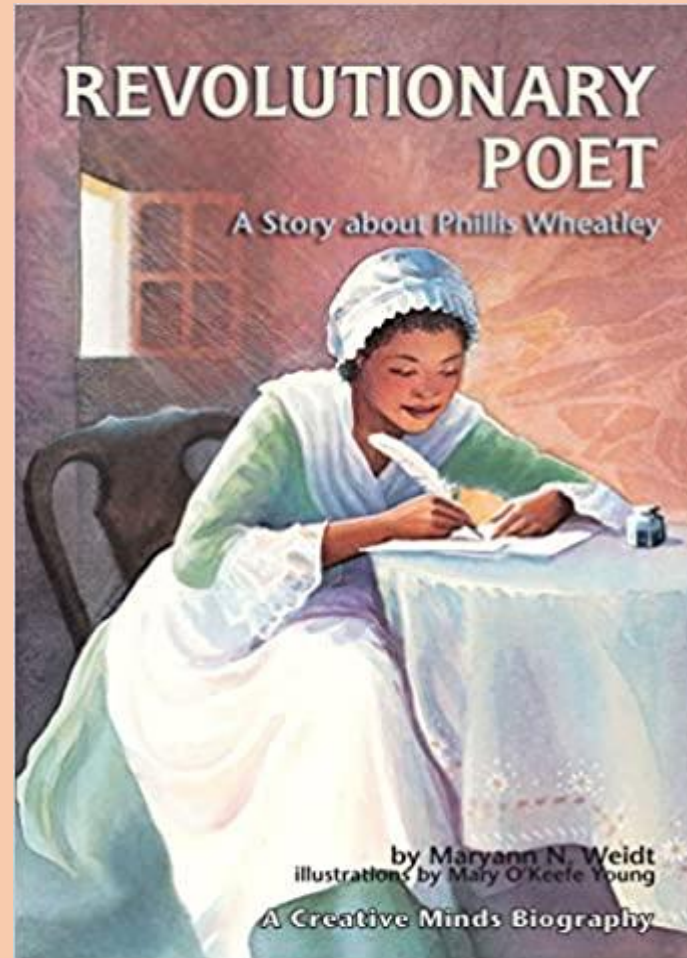
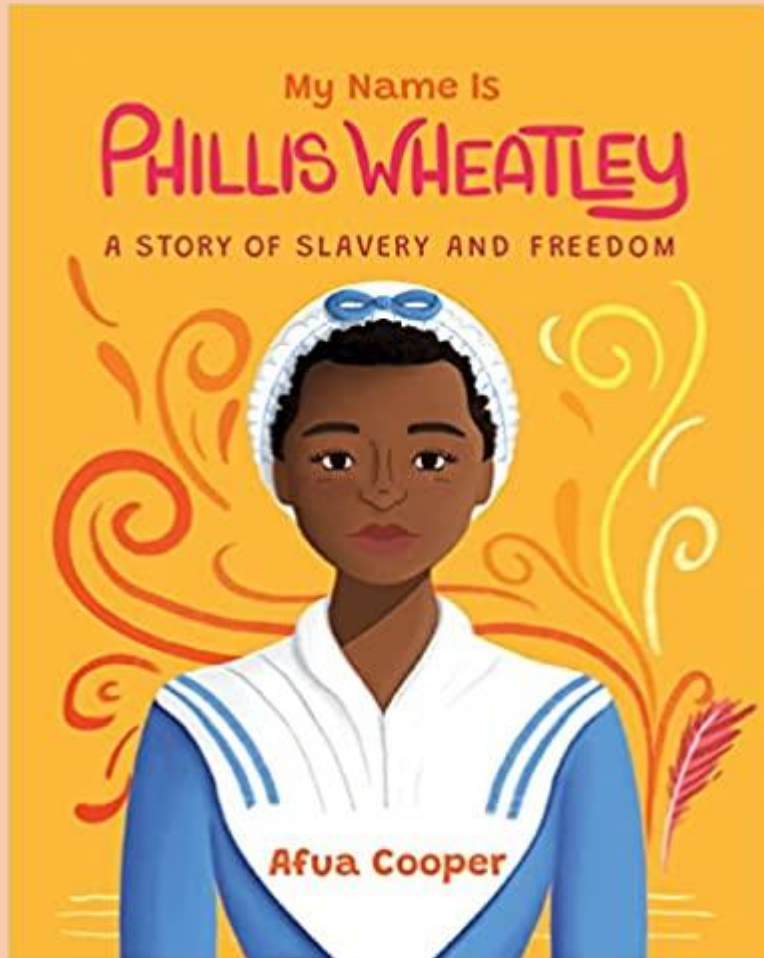


Jane Clark (later Mrs. Ezekial Lewis) (1722-ca. 1755). Oil on canvas by John Smibert (1688-1751), 1732. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.



Phillis Wheatley. "Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral." London 1773. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Today: Uplifting Stories Told about PWP in an ever-growing array of children's literature



Black women poets inspired by PWP

