

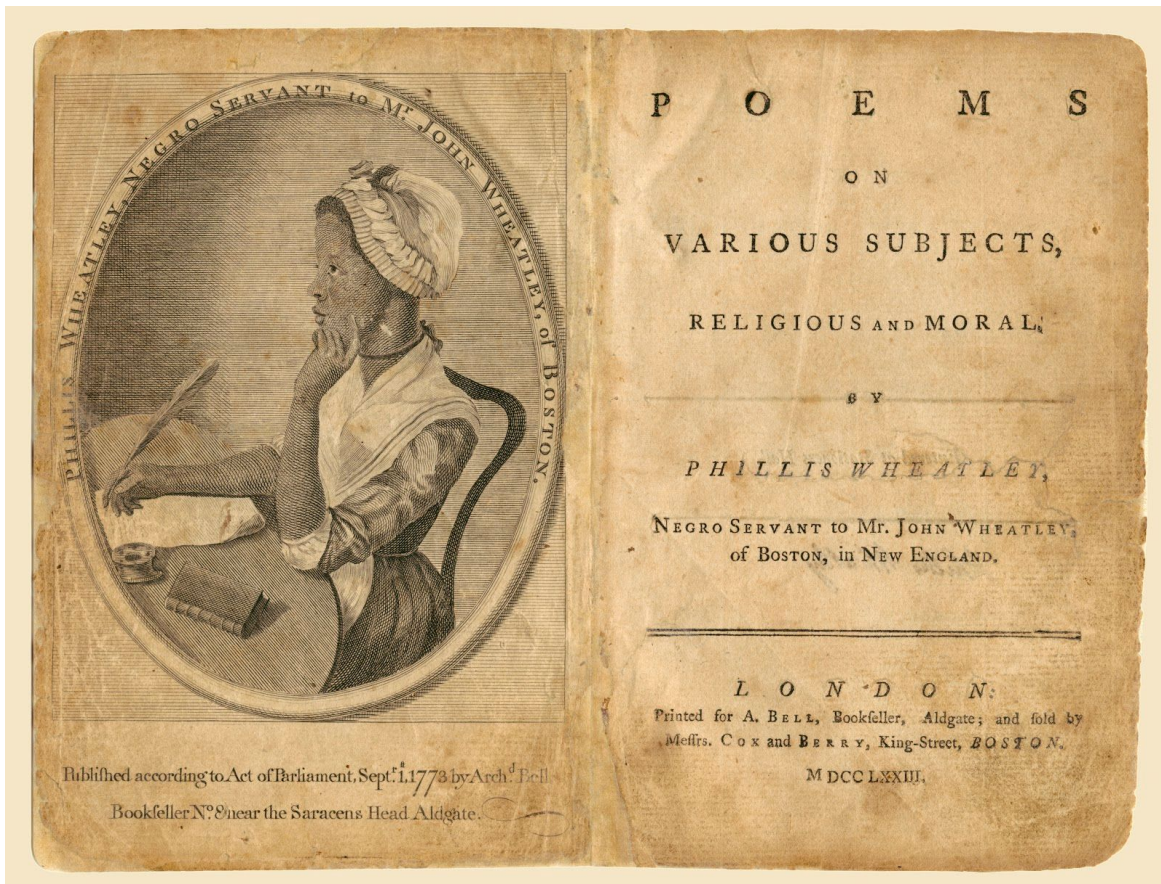
THE ROSENBAACH

Phillis Wheatley, Lesson One

Level: Grades 3-6

Today I wanted to tell you about the first black poet in America to publish a book. Her name was Phillis Wheatley. She was kidnapped from her home in Senegal and sold as a slave to a family in Boston in 1761 when she was just seven years old. When she arrived in America, she was taught to read and write by her owners. Phillis began writing poetry when she was twelve and one of her poems was published in a newspaper when she was eighteen. She wanted to publish a whole book of her poems but people didn't believe she could write because she was enslaved. She had to answer questions about her poetry in front of a group of men to prove that she was the one who wrote them. But then she couldn't find someone in America who would pay for her book to be published. Finally Phillis found a woman in England who would pay for the book to be made. She was twenty-one years old when it was published.

This is what the first page of her book of poetry looked like when it was published in 1773. The artist who made the drawing was a man named Scipio Moorhead. Like Phillis, he was enslaved in Boston.



Here are some other images of Phillis which artists have made.



by Meredith Bergmann



by Elizabeth Catlett



by Claudine G. Mansour

Phillis faced many, many challenges in her life. Which image does the best job of telling a story about those challenges?

Let's pretend we're choosing one of these images of Phillis for the front of a new version of her book of poetry. Which one do you think is most appropriate for the first page of her book? Why?