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Frederick Douglass and his Slave Narrative

Guiding Questions

- 1) How successful is Frederick Douglass in convincing the reader that slavery is an evil for the slave, the slaveholder, and society at large?**
- 2) Does Frederick Douglass's narrative convince you that he was once in fact a slave?**

Learning objectives

Students will be able to place the narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass in historical context

Students will be able to identify Frederick Douglass's purpose in writing the narrative.

Students will be able to describe 3 distinct different types of slavery in the American South.

Students will be able to explain the crucial role education plays in the life of Frederick Douglass.

Students will be able to describe the effects of slavery on slaves, slaveholders and antebellum American society.

Students will identify the role played by the city of Lynn in the life of Frederick Douglass.

Background

Frederick Douglass was the leading abolitionist of his day and a remarkable man. An escaped slave he survived a horrendous childhood and young adulthood to become one of the shining stars of American history. Frederick Douglass went on to become a famous orator; an adviser to President Lincoln, an advocate for women's rights, the US Minister to Haiti, and a leader for freedom loving people across the globe. His example is especially useful for educators because one of the keys to his success was his determination to be educated despite the incredible obstacles placed in his

way. Douglass believed and his life illustrates that education is key to self-improvement as well as liberty itself.

Douglass's book a Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave Written by Himself is a powerful indictment of the American slavery system as well as American democracy and Christianity. Douglass explains in great detail the hypocrisy of a nation whose founding document the Declaration of Independence states "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights among these are life liberty and the pursuit of happiness". Similarly Douglas describes overseers and slave-owners who go to church on Sunday but are incredibly cruel to their slaves the other 6 days of the week. In fact ironically Douglas finds these overseers and slave-owners to be the cruelest. Douglas wrote this book to combat the public perception that he could never have been a slave because he was so eloquent. By reading this book and analyzing its contents in its historical context students become familiar with a primary document that describes the reality of what was America in the early to mid 1800s.

While Frederick Douglass was enslaved, his mind was never captured. From reading this book students can learn that education and self-improvement is the American method for overcoming adversity. Perhaps it takes the example of a man who was denied an education to encourage today's students to take full advantage of the educational opportunities so freely offered to them today.

Preparation activities

Reintroduce students to the concept of primary sources.

Discuss the literary concepts of narrative and irony

Have students define the words slavery, abolition, abolitionist and chattel.

Review a timeline of the life of Frederick Douglass and lead a discussion in class as to why writing this book was necessary for Douglass.

Lesson activities

Students are to keep a response journal in which they will examine and react to each chapter with the assistance of leading questions. Students will also choose at least two notable quotes from each chapter and explain why they find the quote to be important to them personally. Responses will be graded by a "depth chart" found in the assessment section of this unit plan. It is suggested that the instructor begin by reading the preface by William Lloyd Garrison with the class and answer the leading questions as a class to demonstrate what is required for the rest of the book.

Preface

- 1) Identify the man who wrote the preface and describe his relationship with Frederick Douglass.
- 2) In your own words describe why Garrison believed his meeting with Douglass was so "fortunate".
- 3) What two contrasting roles does Douglass hold according to Garrison?
- 4) In what ways did Garrison believe that Douglass could help the abolitionist movement in the North and the South?
- 5) What does Garrison have to say about the African race?
- 6) What is Garrison's purpose in contrasting American slavery would be enslavement of an American sailor in Africa?
- 7) In what ways does Garrison describe slavery as unchristian?
- 8) This preface was written on May 1, 1845. Put into historical context, what does Garrison mean by "no compromise with slavery? No union with slaveholders!"?

Chapter 1

- 1) Why is Douglass not sure when he was born?
- 2) Why does Douglass believe that a slaveholder who has fathered a slave child is likely to be tougher on the child?
- 3) Why does Douglass rarely see his mother?
- 4) What is the role of the overseer?
- 5) What is the relationship between slaveholder and overseer?
- 6) What was Douglass's purpose in telling the story of Lloyd's Ned?

Chapter 2:

- 1) Why was it difficult to find copies of slave songs?
- 2) What was the relationship between Colonel Lloyd and Frederick's master?
- 3) Explain the pecking order among slaves.
- 4) Why did slaves fear being sold to slave traders no matter how bad the circumstances?
- 5) Frederick Douglass claims that "slaves sing out of sorrow rather than joy", how does he explain this?

Chapter 3

- 1) How did Colonel Lloyd stop the boys from stealing his fruit?
- 2) Why was being in charge of Colonel Lloyd's horses one of the worst jobs in the plantation?
- 3) What was ironic about Colonel Lloyd's treatment of his horses?
- 4) What was the result for the slave who told Colonel Lloyd the truth about his master?

Chapter 4

- 1) What attribute did Mr. Hopkins lack that caused Colonel Lloyd to let them go according to Douglass?
- 2) Describe slave justice under overseer Austin Gore.
- 3) Was Mr. Gore's shooting of Demby murder?
- 4) What did Mr. Gore give as his reason for shooting Demby? What was a result of this shooting?
- 5) What other examples does Douglass give in this chapter of murders committed against slaves by whites?

Chapter 5

- 1) What were conditions like for slave children on the Colonel Lloyd plantation?
- 2) Why was Douglass so eager to leave the plantation for Baltimore?
- 3) Why does Frederick Douglass look upon his move to Baltimore as "the first plain manifestation of the kind that Providence has ever since attended me"?
- 4) What was Douglass' first impression of his new mistress Sophie Auld?

Chapter 6

- 1) How did Douglass explain Sophie Auld's kindness and what soon caused her to lose that kindness?
- 2) What reason did Mr. Auld give for insisting Mrs. Auld stop teaching Frederick Douglass?
- 3) What does Douglass consider to be the main tool on "the pathway from slavery to freedom"?
- 4) How is life different for a city slave as opposed to a plantation slave?
- 5) What was Frederick Douglass's purpose in telling the story of Henrietta and Mary?

Chapter 7

- 1) Why did Mrs. Auld strengthen supervision of Frederick?
- 2) How did Frederick Douglass continue his education despite Mrs. Auld's opposition?
- 3) What did Frederick Douglass learn from the book The Columbian Orator? (Note, this book was also very important and intellectual development of Abraham Lincoln.)
- 4) What irony does Douglass find in the statement "it is almost an unpardonable offense to teach slaves to read in this Christian country"?
- 5) How did Douglas first come to hear about "abolition"?
- 6) What did the Irishman suggest Douglass do? Why doesn't he trust them?
- 7) How did Douglas learn to write?

Chapter 8

- 1) Why did Douglass have to return to the plantation?
- 2) How was the value of the “property” determined?
- 3) Why was the division of the property between Master Andrew and Mistress Lucretia so terrifying to the slaves?
- 4) What truths about slavery does Douglass illustrate with the story of his grandmother?
- 5) How does Frederick Douglass compare slaves and livestock?
- 6) Why did Douglass have to leave Baltimore at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 9

- 1) What characteristics of Master Thomas Auld did Douglass find so detestable?
- 2) Why did the slaves not call Master Thomas Auld “master” on a consistent basis?
- 3) What effect did Mr. Thomas Auld’s conversion to “Christianity” have on him?
- 4) Why was Master Thomas Auld so cruel to “Henry”?
- 5) Why did Douglass let Master Thomas’s horse’s runaway?
- 6) What was the contract between Master Thomas and Edward Covey?
- 7) For what purpose did Master Thomas send Douglass to Covey?

Chapter 10

- 1) Why are slaves so fearful of Mr. Covey? What tactics does he use?
- 2) Why does Mr. Covey buy a slave to use as a “breeder”?
- 3) What tactics did Mr. Covey use to succeed in breaking Douglass?
- 4) How does Frederick succeed in becoming a man again?
- 5) Why does Frederick runaway to Master Auld’s? Who convinces him to return to Mr. Covey?
- 6) How does Douglass win the fight with Covey and why doesn't Mr. Covey report him?
- 7) Why does Douglass cite the battle with Covey as “the turning point in my career as a slave”?
- 8) How are even the holidays corrupted by slavery in Douglass's mind?
- 9) Why do you think that Douglass includes the stories about the two religious slaveholders in his narrative?
- 10) For what purpose to Douglass hold Sabbath schools?
- 11) What are the reasons Douglass gives for slaves not trying to escape?
- 12) How did the slaves plan to run away?
- 13) What was the purpose of the “protections” written by Douglass and how did the protections almost caused their deaths?
- 14) What happens to each of the slaves who attempted to run away?
- 15) When Douglass returns to Baltimore what does he do?
- 16) Why does Douglass again decide to fight back when attacked?

- 17) What does Master Hugh attempt to do for Douglass and what is the result?
- 18) What does Douglass have to do with the wages he earns every week?

Chapter 11

- 1) Why does Douglass keep the details of his escape secret?
- 2) What is the mistake Douglass believes abolitionists are making in their advertisement of the “underground railroad”?
- 3) What affect did Douglas's Master have on Douglass by giving him a small portion of his wages periodically?
- 4) What does Douglass mean by the phrase “hiring my time” and why does Master Hugh allow it?
- 5) What were the costs and benefits of this arrangement with Master Hugh for Frederick Douglass?
- 6) Why did master Hugh end this arrangement?
- 7) How did Douglass retaliate?
- 8) What steps did Douglass take in planning his escape?
- 9) Why did Douglass see in every white man an enemy?
- 10) Why was Douglass so uncomfortable in New York City as a fugitive slave?
- 11) Where did Frederick Douglass choose to go after New York? Who assisted him in getting there?
- 12) How does Frederick Douglass end up with the last name “Douglass”?
- 13) How did the wharves of New Bedford differ from those in Baltimore?
- 14) What does Douglass discover about prejudice in New Bedford?
- 15) How does Douglass first become known to the “anti-slavery world”?

Appendix

- 1) Why did Frederick Douglass write the appendix?
- 2) How does Douglass contrast the “pure, peaceable and impartial Christianity of Christ” with the “hypocritical Christianity of this land”?
- 3) How does Douglas criticize the Christian church of the North?
- 4) Why does Douglas include the poem entitled Parody in his narrative?
- 5) Where and on what date is the book finished?

Assessment

Depth chart

- 1) Explaining-Students will explain why the characters do what they do given the historical context.
- 2) Describing-Students will restate portions of the text in an accurate fashion including the quotations chosen.
- 3) Identifying-Students will identify important events in the life of Frederick Douglass and their meaning.

- 4) Examining-Students will examine the text for bias in purpose, why did Frederick Douglass Place this poem in the narrative at this juncture? What was Douglas's purpose and including this story in this place?
- 5) Connecting-Students will connect Frederick Douglass's narrative to their own experiences. For example how do students feel when they were made to do something for which they would not be compensated?
- 6) Judging-Students will make judgments about the text. For example is Frederick Douglass trying to persuade or is he being completely honest? How is this narrative of the Frederick Douglass still valuable today?

Extension activities

- 1) Students could make a timeline of the life of Frederick Douglass.
- 2) Students can make a museum exhibit representing the life of Frederick Douglass to be viewed by other students as well as the public at large.
- 3) Frederick Douglass believes that no one can be enslaved if they have ability to read, write and think. Students could write an essay or give an oral presentation on whether they believe this is true.
- 4) Students can research the history of slavery. In what other cultures has slavery existed? Where does it exist today? What happened to those cultures where it did exist?