

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: A Teaching Unit
(Designed for 8th Grade Social Studies Students)

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Abstract

This unit was designed to help students gain a deeper understanding of slavery as seen in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. This unit can be used in conjunction with lessons on slavery or a unit on the causes of the Civil War. The lessons are designed to meet the needs of eighth grade students and should be used as students read *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

Unit Goals/Objectives

1. Students will be able to describe the early life of Frederick Douglass as described in the *Narrative*.
2. Students will be able to describe the life of blacks under the system of slavery.
3. Students will conduct research into the life of Frederick Douglass and his escape from slavery.
4. Students will be able to write an "additional" chapter to the *Narrative* detailing Douglass' escape from slavery.

Key/Essential Questions

1. How does Frederick Douglass describe his early life in the *Narrative*?
2. What insights do we gain from the *Narrative* into the life of a typical slave?
3. How did Frederick Douglass escape from slavery?

Note to Teacher

This unit is designed to strengthen student understanding of slavery in the United States. This unit is not designed to introduce these topics, but rather to reinforce them once they have already been taught. Therefore, in order for students to more fully comprehend this unit, they should have a basic understanding of:

- A. slavery
- B. abolitionism
- C. the life of Frederick Douglass

(Note: Please be aware that this book contains some inappropriate language.)

Massachusetts Curriculum Standard

USI.31 Describe the formation of the abolitionist movement, the roles of various abolitionists, and the response of southerners and northerners to abolitionism.

- A. Frederick Douglass
- B. William Lloyd Garrison
- C. Sojourner Truth
- D. Harriet Tubman
- E. Theodore Weld

Background Information

Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey was born in Maryland circa 1817. He was the son of a female slave and an unidentified white man (rumored to have been Frederick's owner).

Frederick was separated from his mother at an early age and was raised by his maternal grandmother. He spent the first 21 years of his life as a slave. He worked as a field hand, house slave, and at times was hired to work in the shipyards in Baltimore, Maryland as a calker.

In 1838, Frederick escaped to New York. Anna, the girl he would soon marry, joined him there. Together, Frederick and Anna settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts where he was able to obtain work in the shipyards. It was also in New Bedford where Frederick took the name "Frederick Douglass".

On August 11, 1841, Douglass attended an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts. Douglass was urged to speak. This meeting marked the beginning of Frederick Douglass' career as an abolitionist and anti-slavery speaker. He soon became a world famous orator on behalf of the abolitionist cause.

Because Douglass was such an excellent speaker, he was accused of having never been a slave. In order to respond to these false accusations, Douglass wrote his autobiography. It was entitled *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and was published in 1845. Following the publication of his autobiography, Douglass feared arrest and re-enslavement. He chose to travel to Britain where he remained for two years lecturing about slavery.

While in Britain, Douglass earned enough money to purchase his freedom. He settled with his family in Rochester, New York where he began an abolitionist newspaper called *The North Star*. Douglass would publish this newspaper for 17 years. Douglass was also very supportive of the women's suffrage movement. In 1848, he attended the Seneca Falls

Convention, the first convention for women's rights which was held in Seneca Falls, New York. Douglass would later become close friends with women's rights leader and fellow Rochester resident, Susan B. Anthony.

During the Civil War, Douglass successfully urged President Lincoln to allow blacks to serve in the Union army. He helped organize two black regiments. In the years following the Civil War, Douglass held a number of federal positions. The last of these was from 1889-1891 when Douglass served as the United States minister to Haiti.

In 1884, Douglass, then a widower, remarried. His new wife, Helen Pitts was white. Douglass was criticized for marrying a white woman, but pointed out that his first wife had been the color of his mother while his second wife was the color of his father.

Douglass passed away on February 20, 1895 in Washington, DC after a day spent at a women's rights convention. He was buried in Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester, New York several yards away from his friend and fellow activist, Susan B. Anthony.

Lesson One: Frederick Douglass Biographical Sketch

(Note to Teacher: This lesson is meant to be an introduction to Douglass' *Narrative*. It should be completed before students begin reading the book.)

Objectives:

1. Students will complete research in order to write a five paragraph biographical sketch of Frederick Douglass.
2. Students will analyze information from four sources in order to write the biographical sketch.
3. Students will create an outline in order to better organize their research.
4. Students will write a five paragraph biography describing the life of Frederick Douglass.

Materials Needed:

1. Lesson One: Frederick Douglass Biographical Sketch Sheet
2. Sources/Research Data Sheets
3. Frederick Douglass Biography Outline Sheet
4. white lined paper

Time Allotment: The time allotment is to be determined by the teacher.

Procedure:

1. Give each student a copy of the Frederick Douglass Biographical Sketch Sheet.
2. Review the directions on this sheet orally with the class.
3. Give each student the two Sources/Research Data Sheets. Remind students that one of their sources cannot be from the internet.
4. Give students an appropriate due date for their Sources/Research Data Sheets.
5. Once students have completed the Sources/Research Data Sheets, give them each a copy of the Frederick Douglass Biography Outline Sheet. Please note that students may need to have you review the process of outlining for them. Give students an appropriate timeframe in which they are to complete their outline.
6. Once their outlines are due, students should write their rough draft. The teacher will assign the due date for the rough drafts.
7. Once the rough drafts are completed, they are to be peer-edited in class.
8. Students will write their final copy once their rough draft is peer edited. The final copy can be typed or written on white lined paper. The teacher will determine the due date for this assignment.
9. Students will pass in their completed work. It will be stapled in this order: Final Copy, Outline, Sources/Research Data Sheets, and rough draft.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Frederick Douglass Biographical Sketch

Directions: As an introduction to *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, you will write a five paragraph biographical sketch of Frederick Douglass. You will need to find four sources (one of which must be a non-internet source) in order to write the biographical sketch.

Your biography will cover the following topics:

1. Early life as a slave
2. Douglass' escape to freedom
3. Douglass as an abolitionist
4. Douglass' actions during the Civil War
5. Douglass' life and career following the Civil War

In order to successfully complete this assignment, you will need to do the following:

- A. Complete the Sources/Research Data Sheets
- B. Complete the Frederick Douglass Autobiographical Outline
- C. Complete the rough draft which will be peer-edited.
- D. Write the final copy of your five paragraph biographical sketch.
Your final copy can be typed or neatly written on white lined paper.

*Please note that all of the four above components will be passed in with your final copy.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Sources/Research Data Sheet

Directions: Write your source information on the lines provided in bibliographical format. Write your research information in the "Data" section below each source. You may use complete sentences or bulleted information.

Source 1: _____

Data:

Source 2: _____

Data:

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Sources/Research Data Sheet

(Pg. 2)

Source 3: _____

Data:

Source 4: _____

Data:

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Frederick Douglass Biography Outline

Directions: Complete the outline below using your research. Follow the format as shown.

I. Early life as a slave

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

II. Douglass' escape to freedom

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

III. Douglass as an abolitionist

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

IV. Douglass' actions during the Civil War

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

V. Douglass' life and career following the Civil War

A.

1.

2.

B.

1.

2.

Lesson Two: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Objectives:

1. Students will read and understand *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
2. Students will demonstrate their comprehension of the book by answering questions for each chapter.

Materials Needed:

1. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass
2. Who Was Who? activity sheet
3. Chapter Review Questions sheets

Time Allotment: The time allotment is to be determined by the teacher. The chapter reviews and the Who was Who activity sheet are to be completed as the students read Douglass' *Narrative*.

Procedure:

1. Each student will be given a copy of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass. The teacher will assign the class to read specific chapters. The reading can be done independently at home or orally in class.
2. As students read each chapter, they will complete the review questions for that chapter. The teacher can decide if student answers can be brief or in full sentences.
3. Also, as students read, they will complete the "Who Was Who?" activity sheet. This activity sheet is designed to provide students with an identification for the different personalities introduced in the book.
4. Teacher will review the answers to all review questions in class on the day each set of chapter review questions are due.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Who Was Who?

Directions: As you read the story, identify each of the following people. This will help you in maintaining your understanding of who was who and how they were related, etc.

1. Captain Anthony -

2. Mr. Plummer -

3. Harriet Bailey -

4. Colonel Edward Lloyd -

5. Andrew Anthony -

6. Richard Anthony -

7. Lucretia Anthony Auld -

8. Captain Thomas Auld -

9. Mr. Severe -

10. Mr. Hopkins -

11. Austin Gore -

12. Hugh Auld -

13. Sophia Auld -

14. Thomas Auld -

15. Edward Covey -

16. Willliam Freeland -

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter One Review Questions

1. Why did Douglass not know exactly how old he was?
2. Who were Douglass' parents?
3. How did Douglass' mother risk her safety for him?
4. Where did Douglass live? With whom?
5. Who was Captain Anthony?
6. Who was Mr. Plummer? How does Douglass describe him?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter Two Review Questions

1. Who was Colonel Edward Lloyd?
2. What crops were grown on Lloyd's plantation?
3. What did slaves receive for their monthly food allowance?
4. What did slaves receive for their yearly clothing?
5. What is the job of an overseer?
6. How was Lloyd's plantation similar to a "country village"?
7. How were the songs (spirituals) sung by slaves "testimony against slavery"?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter Three Review Questions

1. Why do slaves say they are contented when asked?

2. Why did slaves consider it bad to be a poor man's slave?

Chapter Four Review Questions

1. Why was Mr. Austin Gore the most dreaded overseer?

2. What happened to Demby?

3. Why do you think it was not a crime for a white person to kill a black person in Talbot Co., MD?

Chapter Five Review Questions

1. What were Douglass' chores before he was old enough for field work?

2. What did Douglass suffer from the most?

3. Why were Douglass' family members not really connected with each other?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter Six Review Questions

1. Why did Thomas Auld not want his wife to teach Douglass to read?

2. According to Douglass, how were slaves in the city treated differently than the slaves in the country?

Chapter Seven Review Questions

1. How did owning a slave change the personality of Sophia Auld?

2. How did Douglass learn to read?

3. What impact did reading *The Columbian Orator* have on Douglass?

4. How was learning to read a "curse" for Douglass?

5. How did Douglass learn to write?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter Eight Review Questions

1. What is a valuation? Why did Douglass have to take part in a valuation?
2. What impact did the valuation have on Douglass?
3. Why did Douglass not want Mr. Andrew Auld to be his owner?
4. Who became Douglass' owner?
5. How does Douglass describe the treatment of his grandmother?
6. Why did Douglass have to leave Baltimore?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter Nine Review Questions

1. How does Douglass describe Thomas Auld?
2. What was Douglass' life like with Thomas Auld?
3. What was a Sabbath school?
4. What was the community's reaction to the Sabbath school?
5. Why was Douglass sent to live with Edward Covey?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter Ten Review Questions

1. Why was Edward Covey nicknamed the "snake"?
2. How did Covey succeed in "breaking" Douglass?
3. Why did Douglass finally go to his master? What was his master's reaction?
4. Why did Douglass and Covey get into a physical fight? What was the result?
5. According to Douglass, how were the holidays used to keep "down the spirit of insurrection" (rebellion) amongst the slaves?
6. Why did Douglass consider William Freeland his "best master"?

7. What did Douglass mean by saying that he "should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me"?

8. Why did Douglass run a Sabbath school?

9. Why did Douglass' attempt to run away fail?

10. How did Douglass have 75 masters when he worked as a calker in the shipyard?

11. Why did Douglass get into a fight at the shipyard?

12. According to Douglass, why was it important for "contented" slaves to be "thoughtless"?

13. What happened to Douglass' salary?

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Chapter Eleven Review Questions

1. Why did Douglass not describe all the details of his escape to New York?
2. Why was Douglass critical of the conductors of the Underground Railroad?
3. What arrangement did Douglass make in order to hire out his own time? Why did it end?
4. Why did Douglass leave New York and settle in New Bedford, Massachusetts?
5. Who was Anna?
6. Why was Douglass' name listed as Frederick Johnson on the marriage certificate?
7. What was Douglass' name at birth?
8. How did Douglass get the last name "Douglass"?
9. How was Douglass now his own "master"?
10. How did August 11, 1841 change Frederick Douglass' life?

Lesson Three: Treatment of Slaves as Seen in the *Narrative*

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to explain the life of a slave as described by Frederick Douglass.
2. Students will be able to explain how slavery impacted the white slave-owning population.

Materials Needed:

1. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass
2. Slavery Web activity sheet
3. Large sheet of paper or poster board

Time Allotment: The time allotment is to be determined by the teacher.

Procedure:

1. Each student will be given a copy of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass.
2. Each student will be given a copy of the Slavery Web activity sheet.
3. As students read each chapter, they will continue to add more detail to the web diagram on the Slavery Web activity sheet.
4. The Slavery Web activity sheets will be due on a teacher assigned date.
5. When the Slavery Web activity sheets are complete, students will collaborate in groups of three or four to combine their information into one large web. They will use the large sheet of paper or poster board for their web.
6. When the groups are complete, a spokesperson from each group will present their web to the class.

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Slavery Web

Directions: Create a web diagram in the space below that explains how blacks were treated under the system of slavery. You should get this information as you read the *Narrative*.

Lesson Four: Escape to Freedom

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to put themselves in the place of a slave who is contemplating an escape from slavery.
2. Students will use prior knowledge from class and Douglass' *Narrative* in order to complete this exercise.

Materials Needed:

1. Escape to Freedom activity sheet

Time Allotment: The time allotment is to be determined by the teacher.

Procedure:

1. Each student will have read *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass.
2. Each student will be given a copy of the Escape to Freedom activity sheet. This sheet can be given as an in-class assignment or for homework. The teacher can choose to have the class work on this assignment in groups as well.
3. Once complete, review the Escape to Freedom activity sheet with the class.
4. Students will then write a one page letter as an escaped slave. The letter will be addressed to William Lloyd Garrison, publisher of *The Liberator*. The student will detail the slave's life in slavery, escape, and new life as a free person. These letters can be started in class and finished for homework. Students can share their letters with the class when complete or perhaps post them on a bulletin board.

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Escape to Freedom

Imagine that you are a slave living on a cotton plantation in North Carolina. You spend your days working in the fields tending to your master's cotton plants. You work from sun-up to sun-down every day. Your spouse and three children work alongside you. Across the vast fields you can see your parents as they plant and harvest cotton.

After a day spent in the fields, you and your family return to your small cabin where you prepare supper. Shortly after eating, you and your family go to sleep on the dirt floor of the cabin knowing that you will all soon be returning to the fields once the sun rises. However, as you lie on the floor, you dream of escaping to freedom. Over the course of many nights, you devise a plan to leave slave life behind and to be a free person!

Answer the following questions:

1. What do you think awaits you once you reach freedom?

2. What is your destination?

3. What will you bring with you on your escape?

4. Who will you bring with you on your escape?

5. Who will you leave behind on the plantation? Why?

6. How will you manage to escape?

7. What are the dangers you will face on your journey to freedom?

8. What could happen to you if your escape is not successful?

9. If you do reach a free state, describe how you will feel.

10. If you do reach a free state, how will build a new life for yourself?

Final Assessment: Research and Writing Assignment **Frederick Douglass Escapes to Freedom**

Objectives:

1. Students will conduct research in order to describe Frederick Douglass' escape to freedom.
2. Students will write an "additional" chapter to Douglass' *Narrative* detailing his escape from slavery.

Materials Needed:

1. Frederick Douglass' Escape to Freedom Research Sheet
2. Frederick Douglass' Escape to Freedom: The "Missing Chapter" Sheet

Time Allotment: The time allotment is to be determined by the teacher.

Procedure:

1. Give each student a copy of the Frederick Douglass' Escape to Freedom Research Sheet.
2. Explain to students that they will be researching how Douglass escaped from slavery in 1838.
3. Let students know how many sources they will need for this research. Determine a due date for the research.
4. Once the research sheet is due, check and review this assignment with the class.
5. Give each student a copy of Frederick Douglass' Escape to Freedom: The "Missing Chapter" Sheet.
6. Explain to students that they will be writing an additional chapter to Douglass' *Narrative* detailing his escape to New York. This sheet is for students to brainstorm ideas based on their research. This can be done in class or for homework.
7. Students will write a rough draft for their chapter. It should be two typed pages. Teacher will determine the due date for the rough drafts.
8. Once completed, the rough drafts will be peer-edited in class.
9. Assign students a due date for their final papers. These will constitute the final assessment for the unit.

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

Frederick Douglass' Escape to Freedom Research Sheet

In the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass does not give any details about his escape to freedom. He feared that by doing so, he would be giving slave catchers further information and therefore be limiting the opportunities for other slaves to escape to freedom.

Directions: Do research to find out how Douglass escaped to freedom in 1838. Write the information in the box below.

Source(s): _____

Annotated Bibliography

Douglass, Frederick. *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. USA: Dover Publications, Inc., 2003. Douglass goes into deeper detail about his life as a slave, his escape to freedom, and his life as an abolitionist.

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage, My Freedom*. CreateSpace, USA: 2010. In this book, Douglass give basically a more detailed account his *Narrative*.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Dover Publications, Inc., 1995 (1845). This is an excellent autobiography in which Douglass details his life as a slave and his early life as a free man.

McFeely, William S. *Frederick Douglass*. USA: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991. This is a very readable book about Douglass' life.