



Frederick Douglass

abolitionist ∞ orator ∞ author ∞ American

1818-1895

Overview: Organized by grade band, educators are encouraged to use the following biographical information, discussions, questions and activities to engage students in meaningful learning opportunities focusing on the significance of Frederick Douglass' birthday on February 14th. Frederick Douglass is known for his efforts to advance civil rights and equality throughout the 19th century, and still holds a lasting legacy that should be celebrated and honored today. His messages, character strengths and notable achievements are recognized by FAIR as epitomizing the pro-human movement. (Note: biographical information presented in slide format linked here: [Celebrating the Life of Frederick Douglass](#))

K-2 Lesson Ideas

Biographical information	Questions/Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Born into slavery in or around 1818 in Talbot County, Maryland <p>Douglass later wrote of his unknown birthdate: “A want of information concerning my own birthdate was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• His full name at birth was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey• Escaped slavery successfully in 1838, ended up in New York. Married Anna Murray, a free black woman from Baltimore he met from living with the Auld family. They had 5 children. <p>He changed his name to Frederick Douglass to avoid recapture, and although he did not know the exact date, he chose to celebrate his birthday on February 14th, recalling that his mother referred to him as her “Little Valentine”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do you think Douglass did not know his birthday?• How would that have made you feel? How do you like to celebrate your birthday?• Why did he choose February 14th as his birthday?• If Douglass was born in 1818, how old would he be today?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frederick and Anna moved to New Bedford, MA where they were introduced to the abolitionist movement. By 1843, he was touring the U.S. to spread his anti-slavery messages. ● Published first of three autobiographies called “<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>” ● Traveled to Ireland and Great Britain where he was impressed with the freedom he received compared to treatment in the U.S. During this trip he gave his famous “London Reception Speech”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is a narrative? What stories would you tell in your own narrative?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Back in the U.S., he began publishing his own abolitionist newspaper the <i>North Star</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Included women’s rights in the newspaper. Later changed the name to <i>Frederick Douglass’ Paper</i> in 1851, and published until 1860, right before the start of the Civil War. ● In 1852, he delivered a speech called “What to a slave is the 4th of July?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost” <p>“What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham”</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In your own words, write what the 4th of July means to you, and infer what Douglass would feel about the holiday if he were alive today.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation ended the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What African American and women’s

<p>practice of slavery during the Civil War era. Douglass was disappointed that President Lincoln did not use this as an opportunity to grant formerly enslaved people the right to vote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They later reconciled and Douglass spoke at the dedication of the Emancipation Memorial in Washington DC in 1876. ● Following the war, Douglass held many governmental positions, while maintaining his advocacy efforts for African American and women’s rights. ● In 1877, Douglass met with Thomas Auld, the cruel man who once “owned” him, as Auld lay sick and dying. <p>○ In his final autobiography, Douglass recounts Auld saying during this meeting regarding Douglass’ escape from enslavement, “Had I been in your place I should have done as you did.” Douglass replied, “I did not run away from you, but from slavery.”</p>	<p>rights do you think Douglass was advocating for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What message can we learn from Douglass meeting with his former owner, showing respect for someone who committed such an injustice towards him?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Douglass became US Marshall of Washington D.C. in 1877 ● Douglass’ wife Anna died in 1882, and in 1884 he remarried Helen Pitts, a white activist. ● In 1888, he became the first African American to receive a vote for President of the United States. Ultimately, Benjamin Harrison won the party nomination. <p>● Douglass died in 1895 of a heart attack, after meeting with the National Council of Women, a women’s rights group. He was 77 years old.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write an obituary for Douglass using some of his greatest accomplishments and the legacy of his spoken and written words.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “There is no end of stories about Mr. Douglass.”- <i>Times</i> obituary. <p>Frederick Douglass for Kids</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is something you learned about Douglass? ● What is the connection between Douglass’ birthday and Valentine’s Day? ● Write a Happy Birthday & Happy Valentine’s Day letter to Frederick Douglass, explaining why his legacy has made an impact as well as what

we can still learn from his work.

3-5 Lesson Ideas

Biographical information	Questions/Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Born into slavery in or around 1818 in Talbot County, Maryland <p>Douglass later wrote of his unknown birthdate: “A want of information concerning my own birthdate was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● His full name at birth was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey● Escaped slavery successfully in 1838, ended up in New York. Married Anna Murray, a free black woman from Baltimore he met from living with the Auld family. They had 5 children. <p>He changed his name to Frederick Douglass to avoid recapture, and although he did not know the exact date, he chose to celebrate his birthday on February 14th, recalling that his mother referred to him as her “Little Valentine”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Why do you think Douglass did not know his birthday?● What do you think were some of the implications of Frederick Douglass not knowing his exact birthday? How would that make you feel?● Why is Douglass’ unknown birthday significant to the time period?● If Douglass was born in 1818, how old would he be today?● Create a timeline to show the remarkable moments of Douglass’ life from today’s slides.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Frederick and Anna moved to New Bedford, MA where they were introduced to the abolitionist movement. By 1843, he was touring the U.S. to spread his anti-slavery messages.● Published first of three autobiographies called “<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>”● Traveled to Ireland and Great Britain where he was impressed with the freedom he received compared to treatment in the U.S. During this trip he gave his famous “London Reception Speech”. <p>“What is to be thought of a nation boasting of its liberty, boasting of its humanity, boasting of its Christianity, boasting of its love of justice and purity, and yet having within its own borders three millions of persons denied by law the right of marriage?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● How does Douglass spread a message of fairness in his “London Reception Speech”?● What is a narrative? What stories would you tell in your own narrative?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Back in the U.S., he began publishing his own abolitionist newspaper the <i>North Star</i>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Included women’s rights in the newspaper. Later changed the name to <i>Frederick Douglass’ Paper</i> in 1851, and published until 1860, right before the start of the Civil War. ● In 1852, he delivered a speech called “What to a slave is the 4th of July?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost” ○ “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What principles in the Declaration of Independence is Douglass referring to? How can one demonstrate standing by those principles? ● How does Douglass criticize the way that America has betrayed its own founding due to slavery? ● Why was Douglass passionately dedicated to a country that did not protect his rights? ● In your own words, write what the 4th of July means to you, and infer what Douglass would feel about the holiday if he were alive today.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation ended the practice of slavery during the Civil War era. Douglass was disappointed that President Lincoln did not use this as an opportunity to grant formerly enslaved people the right to vote. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They later reconciled and Douglass spoke at the dedication of the Emancipation Memorial in Washington DC in 1876. ● Following the war, Douglass held many governmental positions, while maintaining his advocacy efforts for African American and women’s rights. ● In 1877, Douglass met with Thomas Auld, the cruel man who once “owned” him, as Auld lay sick and dying. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What African American and women’s rights do you think Douglass was advocating for? ● What message can we learn from Douglass meeting with his former owner, showing respect for someone who committed such an injustice towards him?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In his final autobiography, Douglass recounts Auld saying during this meeting regarding Douglass’ escape from enslavement, “Had I been in your place I should have done as you did.” Douglass replied, “I did not run away from you, but from slavery.” 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Douglass became US Marshall of Washington D.C. in 1877 ● Douglass’ wife Anna died in 1882, and in 1884 he remarried Helen Pitts, a white activist. ● In 1888, he became the first African American to receive a vote for President of the United States. Ultimately, Benjamin Harrison won the party nomination. ● Douglass died in 1895 of a heart attack, after meeting with the National Council of Women, a women’s rights group. He was 77 years old. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Write an obituary for Douglass using some of his greatest accomplishments and the legacy of his spoken and written words.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “There is no end of stories about Mr. Douglass.”- <i>Times</i> obituary. ● Douglass’ work serves as inspiration for those seeking equality and a just society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Douglass’ birthday was a date no one thought to record, yet he is remembered as one of the most significant and respected figures from the 19th century, with a detailed death description in the national news. ● What is something you learned about Douglass? ● Write a letter to Douglass explaining what you have learned from him about the strengths of humanity, fairness and understanding.
<p>Biography of Frederick Douglass for Kids: American Civil Rights History for Children - FreeSchool</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the connection between Douglass’ presumed birthday and Valentine's Day? ● What are some ways we can show our appreciation for Douglass and his contributions everyday, but on February 14th specifically? ● Douglass is an exemplary American

	<p>for his commitment to the founding principles of equality and justice for all. Find specific examples from the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution that connect to the messages and advocacy efforts of Frederick Douglass.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write a Happy Birthday & Happy Valentine’s Day letter to Frederick Douglass, explaining why his legacy has made an impact as well as what we can still learn from his work.
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6-8 Lesson Ideas

Orienting Discussion: Frederick Douglass is a particularly interesting thinker and author because it is possible to assemble dozens of lines from his texts which imply that he is a bitter critic of America, or to assemble dozens of other lines which imply that he is an uncritical supporter of the American founding. How are students of American history to understand the thoughts of someone who seems to contradict himself so much?

Biographical information	Questions/Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born into slavery in or around 1818 in Talbot County, Maryland <p>Douglass later wrote of his unknown birthdate: “A want of information concerning my own birthdate was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His full name at birth was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey • Escaped slavery successfully in 1838, ended up in New York. Married Anna Murray, a free black woman from Baltimore he met from living with the Auld family. They had 5 children. <p>He changed his name to Frederick Douglass to avoid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is Frederick Douglass’ unknown birthday significant to the time period? • How does the fact that Frederick Douglass had been enslaved affect his credibility both as a critic of America and as one of America’s greatest supporters?

<p>recapture, and although he did not know the exact date, he chose to celebrate his birthday on February 14th, recalling that his mother referred to him as her “Little Valentine”.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frederick and Anna moved to New Bedford, MA where they were introduced to the abolitionist movement. By 1843, he was touring the U.S. to spread his anti-slavery messages. ● Published first of three autobiographies called “<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i>” ● Traveled to Ireland and Great Britain where he was impressed with the freedom he received compared to treatment in the U.S. During this trip he gave his famous “London Reception Speech.” <p>“What is to be thought of a nation boasting of its liberty, boasting of its humanity, boasting of its Christianity, boasting of its love of justice and purity, and yet having within its own borders three millions of persons denied by law the right of marriage?”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In the passage quoted that begins “What is to be thought . . .”, what is the effect of pointing out the contradictions between America’s founding principles and its practices in the form of a question rather than a statement?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Back in the U.S., he began publishing his own abolitionist newspaper the <i>North Star</i>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Included women’s rights in the newspaper. Later changed the name to <i>Frederick Douglass’ Paper</i> in 1851, and published until 1860, right before the start of the Civil War. <p>In 1852, he delivered a speech called “What to a slave is the 4th of July?” Read the following passages from Douglass’s famous speech :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) In your own words, explain what you think Frederick Douglass means in the first passage? 2) In your own words, explain what you think Frederick Douglass means in the second passage? 3) What are the “principles contained” in the Declaration of Independence that Douglass respects so much? 4) In the second passage, Douglass intensely criticizes America. How does his criticism of America relate to America’s enactment of the principles contained in the Declaration? 5) Many historians claim that to fully appreciate Frederick Douglass as a patriotic American, students must “understand his contradictions.” What contradictions do you find in these two

occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.”

- “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour...”

passages about Frederick Douglass’s relation to America?

- 6) We might ask if Douglass’s respect and criticism are really contradictory. Write a paragraph on how Douglass’s passionate criticisms might themselves be expressions of respect for the country he loves.
- 7) Discuss these questions as a class.

- In 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation ended the practice of slavery during the Civil War era. Douglass was disappointed that President Lincoln did not use this as an opportunity to grant formerly enslaved people the right to vote.
 - They later reconciled and Douglass spoke at the dedication of the Emancipation Memorial in Washington DC in 1876.
- Following the war, Douglass held many governmental positions, while maintaining his advocacy efforts for African American and women’s rights.
- In 1877, Douglass met with Thomas Auld, the cruel man who once “owned” him, as Auld lay sick and dying.
 - In his final autobiography, Douglass recounts Auld saying during this meeting regarding Douglass’ escape from

- What character strengths does Douglass show when he reconciles with Lincoln, even though he often found that Lincoln did not go far enough in the cause of safeguarding the freedom of Black Americans?
- Douglass is sometimes criticized for accepting jobs in the American government while he criticized that same government. Is that a fair criticism?
- What does it say about Douglass that he visited the man on his deathbed who had enslaved Douglass earlier in his life?

<p>enslavement, “Had I been in your place I should have done as you did.” Douglass replied, “I did not run away from you, but from slavery.”</p>	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “There is no end of stories about Mr. Douglass.”- <i>Times</i> obituary. ● Douglass’ work serves as inspiration for those seeking equality and a just society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What about Douglass’s life most inspires you in your life?

9-12 Lesson Ideas

Orienting Discussion:

Frederick Douglass is a particularly interesting thinker and author because it is possible to assemble dozens of lines from his texts which imply that he is a bitter critic of America, or to assemble dozens of other lines which imply that he is an uncritical supporter of the American founding. How are students of American history to understand the thoughts of someone who seems to contradict himself so much?

The poet John Keats once said that the greatest strength of the mind was the ability to hold two competing ideas in one’s head at the same time. He called this ability “negative capability.” Our minds aren’t usually comfortable with such conflict within them, and we need strength to **not** jump to a conclusion. Some thoughts are true but are true within limits. If we understand these limits, ideas that seem contradictory can exist together as both true within their limits.

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<p>Back in the U.S., he began publishing his own abolitionist newspaper the <i>North Star</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Included women’s rights in the newspaper. Later changed the name to <i>Frederick Douglass’ Paper</i> in 1851, and published until 1860, right before the start of the Civil War. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Based upon your study, complete each sentence with an appropriate qualifier of the limit of the statement’s truth. Be prepared to defend why you qualified each statement in the way you did. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The American Declaration of Independence and Constitution provide the most noble

In 1852, he delivered a speech called “What to a slave is the 4th of July?”

As a class, watch or read or watch part or all of Frederick Douglass’s speech “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”

["What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July"](#)

As you consider the speech, keep an eye out for statements that show great positive respect for America and for those that show intense criticism of America. If you do not have time to read or watch the speech, consider the quotations below from the speech.

“Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. They were great men too — great enough to give fame to a great age. It does not often happen to a nation to raise, at one time, such a number of truly great men. The point from which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable; and yet I cannot contemplate their great deeds with less than admiration. They were statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory....”

“I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.”

“What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour...”

vision of government yet produced, though

- The Fourth of July is a fitting celebration of a country and people of great bravery and vision, though

- I understand why many people would mock America for its hypocrisy and repeated betrayal of its fundamental principles, though

- The Fourth of July is for many Americans a day of lament for broken promises and betrayed values, though

- 2) Discuss the following questions in small groups and then together as a whole class.
- What difference does it make that Douglass gave this speech in 1852, as opposed to 2022?
 - What progress since 1852 has America made in recognizing and protecting the essential human rights of Black people that Douglass would have been proud of?
 - What work remains to be done in 2022 America to fully recognize and protect the essential human rights of Black people that Douglass would rally for?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation ended the practice of slavery during the Civil War era. Douglass was disappointed that President Lincoln did not use this as an opportunity to grant formerly enslaved people the right to vote. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They later reconciled and Douglass spoke at the dedication of the Emancipation Memorial in Washington DC in 1876. ● Following the war, Douglass held many governmental positions, while maintaining his advocacy efforts for African American and women’s rights. ● In 1877, Douglass met with Thomas Auld, the cruel man who once “owned” him, as Auld lay sick and dying. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In his final autobiography, Douglass recounts Auld saying during this meeting regarding Douglass’ escape from enslavement, “Had I been in your place I should have done as you did.” Douglass replied, “I did not run away from you, but from slavery.” 	<p>In your own words, write a paragraph on how one can both respect something passionately and be highly critical of it at the same time. Discuss as a class.</p> <p>In your own words, write a paragraph on how criticism can be an act of high respect and a call for significant change at the same time. Discuss as a class.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What character strengths does Douglass show when he reconciles with Lincoln, even though he often found that Lincoln did not go far enough in the cause of safeguarding the freedom of Black Americans? ● Douglass is sometimes criticized for accepting jobs in the American government while he criticized that same government. Is that a fair criticism? ● What does it say about Douglass that he visited the man on his deathbed who had enslaved Douglass earlier in his life?
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- “There is no end of stories about Mr. Douglass.”- *Times* obituary.
- Douglass’ work serves as inspiration for those seeking equality and a just society.

- What about Douglass’s life most inspires you in your life?