

Lesson Title: Slavery's Destructive Force

By: Linda Dursteler and Vivian Easton, Teacher Consultants, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question: By studying the narratives written in the words of the slaves themselves, will students gain an understanding of the destructive force of slavery?

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Analyze and understand the slave narrative as historical and literary primary documents.
- Explore the arguments of Jacobs and Douglass that slavery is not only dehumanizing to the slave but to the slave-owner.

Context: A high school class studying slavery in America and reading the slave narratives by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.

Materials:

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, edited and with introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah, New York: Modern Library, 2000.
- Selected passages from the text.

Time Span: One day plus follow-up as needed.

Procedures:

1. Prior to class, distribute to the students copies of the attached passages from the slave narratives. Students are to read and annotate before class discussion.
2. Conduct guided discussion of the passages, by dividing students into small groups of four or five. Instruct students to work together on their responses to the following questions. Each group should appoint one person to write down the responses to the questions.
 - In the 19th century America was known for its cult of domesticity and sentimentality—the belief that women were the moral standard bearers in American society. What does Passage B say about the influence of slavery when Mrs. Auld behaves as she does? And in Passage C, how was the mistress changed by the dehumanizing effect of slavery?
 - In Passage B, how do the underlined words help Douglass prove his point that slavery hurts the slave owner as well as the slave?
 - In Passage D, why wouldn't the white carpenters who witnessed the attack help Douglass or testify in his behalf?
 - Which words or phrases from the passages serve as strong images? What effect do they have on the reader?
 - In Passage H, Jacobs states that slavery is a “curse” to the whites as well as the blacks. How does the word choice used in these passages help Douglass and Jacobs prove their point that slavery hurts the slave owner?
 - Based on these passages, how was slavery dehumanizing to the slave and the master? Why do you think that people other than slaves are dehumanized?

- Not even the “Free” states escaped the destructive force of slavery. How did slavery impact the North?
3. Ask each group to share their responses with the class. Take time as a class to debrief about what the students have discovered during their reading and group discussions.
 4. Culminating writing activity. Have students respond to the passages and the group discussions in Step Two in a one- to two-page paper on the dehumanizing effects of slavery on all those involved.

Extensions: Students can research other slave narratives and historical accounts and find examples of the dehumanizing effects of slavery on the slaves, the slave traders, the slave owners, and others who dealt with slavery. They will write a two-page paper on their research findings.

Rationale: The dehumanizing effects of slavery affected the slaves, slave owners, those directly involved in slavery, and all others in the United States as long as slavery was institutionalized by laws and customs.

Resources:

- Blight, David W., editor. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself, with Related Documents*. Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2003.
- Fleischner, Jennifer, editor. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself, with Related Documents*. Boston: Bedford St. Martin’s, 2010.
- From the National Humanities Center, a lesson plan “From Courage to Freedom: Slavery’s Dehumanizing Effects”:
http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=596
- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, edited and with introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah, New York: Modern Library, 2000.
- Excerpts from Douglass:

Passage A from Chapter I:

“He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an old aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped the longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember anything. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it.”

Passage B from Chapter VI

Douglass describes Mrs. Auld at first as "Her face was made of heavenly smiles, and her voice of tranquil music." He then notes the change in her by writing: "But, alas! This kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon."

Passage C from Chapter VII

"My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practice [sic] her husband's precepts. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself. She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other."

Passage D from Chapter X

"In a few weeks after I went to Baltimore, Master Hugh hired me to Mr. William Gardner, an extensive ship-builder, on Fell's Point. I was put there to learn how to calk... In entering the shipyard, my orders from Mr. Gardner were, to do whatever the carpenters commanded me to do. This was placing me at the beck and call of about seventy-five men. I was to regard all these as masters. Their word was to be my law... This was my school for eight months; and I might have remained there longer, but for a most horrid fight I had The facts in the case were these: Until a very little while after I went there, white and black ship-carpenters worked side by side, and no one seemed to see any impropriety in it. All hands seemed to be very well satisfied. Many of the black carpenters were freemen. Things seemed to be going on very well. All at once, the white carpenters knocked off, and said they would not work with free colored workmen. Their reason for this, as alleged, was, that if free colored carpenters were encouraged, they would soon take the trade into their own hands, and poor white men would be thrown out of employment. They therefore felt called upon at once to put a stop to it.... My fellow-apprentices very soon began to feel it degrading to them to work with me.... They, however, at length combined, and came upon me, armed with sticks, stones, and heavy handspikes. One came in front with a half brick. There was one at each side of me, and one

behind me. While I was attending to those in front, and on either side, the one behind ran up with the handspike, and struck me a heavy blow upon the head. It stunned me. I fell, and with this they all ran upon me, and fell to beating me with their fists. I let them lay on for a while, gathering strength. In an instant, I gave a sudden surge, and rose to my hands and knees. Just as I did that, one of their number gave me, with his heavy boot, a powerful kick in the left eye. My eyeball seemed to have burst. When they saw my eye closed, and badly swollen, they left me. With this I seized the handspike, and for a time pursued them. But here the carpenters interfered, and I thought I might as well give it up. It was impossible to stand my hand against so many. All this took place in sight of not less than fifty white ship-carpenters, and not one interposed a friendly word; but some cried, "Kill the damned nigger! Kill him! kill him! He struck a white person." I found my only chance for life was in flight. I succeeded in getting away without an additional blow, and barely so; for to strike a white man is death by Lynch law,--and that was the law in Mr. Gardner's ship-yard; nor is there much of any other out of Mr. Gardner's ship-yard.

I went directly home... Master Hugh was very much enraged. He gave expression to his feelings by pouring out curses upon the heads of those who did the deed. As soon as I got a little the better of my bruises, he took me with him to Esquire Watson's, on Bond Street, to see what could be done about the matter. Mr. Watson inquired who saw the assault committed. Master Hugh told him it was done in Mr. Gardner's ship-yard at midday, where there were a large company of men at work. "As to that," he said, "the deed was done, and there was no question as to who did it." His answer was, he could do nothing in the case, unless some white man would come forward and testify. He could issue no warrant on my word... Of course, it was impossible to get any white man to volunteer his testimony in my behalf, and against the white young men. Even those who may have sympathized with me were not prepared to do this. It required a degree of courage unknown to them to do so; for just at that time, the slightest manifestation of humanity toward a colored person was denounced as abolitionism, and that name subjected its bearer to frightful liabilities. The watch-words of the bloody-minded in that region, and in those days, were, 'Damn the abolitionists!' and 'Damn the niggers!' There was nothing done, and probably nothing would have been done if I had been killed. Such was, and such remains, the state of things in the Christian city of Baltimore."

- Excerpts from Jacobs: (Harriet Jacobs uses the name of Linda Brent in the narrative.)

Passage E from Chapter II: The New Master and Mistress

"I met my grandmother, who said, "Come with me, Linda;" and from her tone I knew that something sad had happened. She led me apart from the people, and then said, "My child, your father is dead." Dead! How could I believe it? He had died so suddenly I had not even heard that he was sick. I went home with my grandmother. My heart rebelled against God, who had taken from me mother, father, mistress, and friend. The good grandmother tried to comfort me. "Who knows the ways of God?" said she. "Perhaps they have been kindly taken from the evil days to come" ... I returned to my master's. I thought I should be allowed to go to my father's house the next morning; but I was ordered to go for flowers, that my mistress's house might be decorated for an evening party. I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into festoons, while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me. What cared my owners for that? He was merely a piece of property. Moreover, they thought he had spoiled his children, by teaching them to feel that they were human beings."

Passage F from Chapter IV The Slave Who Dared to Feel Like a Man

“When my grandmother returned home and found her youngest child [Benjamin] had fled, great was her sorrow; but, with characteristic piety, she said, "God's will be done." Each morning, she inquired if any news had been heard from her boy. Yes, news *was* heard. The master was rejoicing over a letter, announcing the capture of his human chattel.

That day seems but as yesterday, so well do I remember it. I saw him led through the streets in chains, to jail. His face was ghastly pale, yet full of determination. He had begged one of the sailors to go to his mother's house and ask her not to meet him. He said the sight of her distress would take from him all self-control. She yearned to see him, and she went; but she screened herself in the crowd, that it might be as her child had said.

We were not allowed to visit him; but we had known the jailer for years, and he was a kind-hearted man. At midnight he opened the jail door for my grandmother and myself to enter, in disguise. When we entered the cell not a sound broke the stillness. ‘Benjamin, Benjamin!’ whispered my grandmother. No answer. ‘Benjamin!’ she again faltered. There was a jingle of chains. The moon had just risen, and cast an uncertain light through the bars of the window. We knelt down and took Benjamin's cold hands in ours. We did not speak. Sobs were heard, and Benjamin's lips were unsealed; for his mother was weeping on his neck. How vividly does memory bring back that sad night! Mother and son talked together. He had asked her pardon for the suffering he had caused her. She said she had nothing to forgive; she could not blame his desire for freedom. He told her that when he was captured, he broke away, and was about casting himself into the river, when thoughts of *her* came over him, and he desisted. She asked if he did not also think of God. I fancied I saw his face grow fierce in the moonlight. He answered, ‘No, I did not think of him. When a man is hunted like a wild beast he forgets there is a God, a heaven. He forgets everything in his struggle to get beyond the reach of the bloodhounds.’”

Passage G from Chapter IX Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders

“There was a planter in the country, not far from us, whom I will call Mr. Litch. He was an ill-bred, uneducated man, but very wealthy. He had six hundred slaves, many of whom he did not know by sight. His extensive plantation was managed by well-paid overseers. There was a jail and a whipping post on his grounds; and whatever cruelties were perpetrated there, they passed without comment. He was so effectually screened by his great wealth that he was called to no account for his crimes, not even for murder....

Murder was so common on his plantation that he feared to be alone after nightfall. He might have believed in ghosts.

His brother, if not equal in wealth, was at least equal in cruelty. His bloodhounds were well trained. Their pen was spacious, and a terror to the slaves. They were let loose on a runaway, and, if they tracked him, they literally tore the flesh from his bones. When this slaveholder died, his shrieks and groans were so frightful that they appalled his own friends. His last words were, ‘I am going to hell; bury my money with me.’...Cruelty is contagious in uncivilized communities.’”

Passage H from Chapter IX Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders

“You may believe what I say; for I write only that whereof I know. I was twenty-one years in that cage of obscene birds. I can testify, from my own experience and observation, that slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks. It makes the white fathers cruel and

sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation.

Yet few slaveholders seem to be aware of the widespread moral ruin occasioned by this wicked system. Their talk is of blighted cotton crops—not of the blight on their children's souls.”

Passage I from Chapter XXXI Incidents in Philadelphia

“When Mr. Durham handed us our tickets, he said, ‘I am afraid you will have a disagreeable ride, but I could not procure tickets for the first class cars.’

Supposing I had not given him money enough, I offered more. ‘O, no,’ said he, ‘they could not be had for any money. They don't allow colored people to go in the first-class cars.’

This was the first chill to my enthusiasm about the Free States. Colored people were allowed to ride in a filthy box, behind white people, at the south, but there they were not required to pay for the privilege. It made me sad to find how the north aped the customs of slavery.”

Lesson Title: African American Spirituals as Literature

By: Linda Dursteler and Vivian Easton, Teacher Consultants, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question: By reading a passage from a slave narrative concerning songs sung by slaves, will students be able to appreciate the literary tradition of the African American spirituals?

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Appreciate the power of the spirituals as a literary tradition.
- Understand the dehumanizing effects of slavery on both the slaves and the slave owners.

Context: A high school class reading *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*.

Materials:

- Excerpt from Chapter II of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. The challenge is to devise guided questions appropriate for the class using the texts.
- Lyrics of 2 spirituals: "Wade in the Water" and "Follow the Drinking Gourd."

Time Span: One day plus follow up as needed.

Procedures:

1. Prior to class, distribute copies of the passage to the students to read and annotate before class discussion.
2. Conduct guided discussion of the passage, using the following questions:
 - Why does Douglass believe that hearing the slaves "sing most exultingly" of going to the Great House Farm "would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do"?
 - Why is Douglass convinced that hearing the songs sung by slaves reveals "the soul-killing effects of slavery," even though the songs contain expressions of "the highest joy" as well as "the deepest sadness"?
 - Why is Douglass able to understand "the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs" only after he is no longer a slave himself?
 - Why do these songs, and not the events he recounts, give Douglass his "first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery"?
3. Culminating writing activity: In a one- to two-page paper students respond to the discussion of the questions in Step Two.

Extensions: Students can research other materials related to songs and spirituals popular during slavery.

Rationale: Slave songs and spirituals continue to influence American music. Their words also constitute a significant American literary tradition.

African-American spirituals constitute one of the largest surviving bodies of American folksong and are probably the best known. They are principally associated with the African-American churches of the Deep South. Mid-19th-century reports indicate that the tunes were sung in unison and abounded in ‘slides from one note to another, and turns and cadences not in articulated notes’. There is disagreement as to whether there are significant African elements in the songs and whether they were the innovation of black slaves or adaptations of white sources. African-American spirituals were first brought to an international audience from 1871 by the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

The African-American spiritual, characterized by syncopation, polyrhythmic structure, and the pentatonic scale of five whole tones, is, above all, a deeply emotional song. The words are most often related to biblical passages, but the predominant effect is of patient, profound melancholy. The spiritual is directly related to the sorrow songs that were the source material of the blues and jazz; a number of more joyous spirituals influenced the content of gospel songs.

(<http://www.answers.com/topic/spiritual>)

Note: In studying slavery and slave narratives, students may encounter images, language, descriptions, and opinions that they find offensive or unsettling. Teachers should be mindful of student backgrounds and be sensitive to these issues.

Resources:

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, edited and introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah, New York: The Modern Library, 2000.
- Coulson, Joseph, Lavine, Mike, and Hattleman, Steve. *Readers Guide to Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Great Books Foundation: Chicago, 2004.
- From the Authentic History Center are a number of audio files of spirituals: <http://www.authentichistory.com/1600-1859/spirituals/index.html>.
- The National Endowment for the Humanities has lesson plans about Spirituals at EDSITEment: http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=318.
- From the University of Denver is *The Spirituals Project* by Arthur C. Jones © 2004. No portion of this material may be reproduced by any means without written permission. <http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/History/>.
- The first major collection of *Negro Spirituals* was by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Thomas Wentworth (1823-1911). It is available online from the University of Virginia: <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/HigSpir.html>.
- From Chapter II, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*:

“The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow-slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along,

consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out--if not in the word, in the sound;--and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. They would then sing most exultingly the following words:--

"I am going away to the Great House Farm!

O, yea! O, yea! O!"

This they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do.

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul,--and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness, as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion."

- African American Spirituals – “Wade in the Water” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd”

Wade in the Water

(Chorus)

Wade in the water.
Wade in the water, children.
Wade in the water.
God's gonna trouble the water.

Well, who are these children all dressed in red?
God's a-gonna trouble the water
Must be the children that Moses led
God's a-gonna trouble the water.

Chorus

Who's that young girl dressed in white
Wade in the Water
Must be the Children of Israelites
God's gonna trouble the Water.

Chorus

Jordan's water is chilly and cold.
God's gonna trouble the water.
It chills the body, but not the soul.
God's gonna trouble the water.

Chorus

If you get there before I do.
God's gonna trouble the water.
Tell all of my friends I'm coming too.
God's gonna trouble the water.

Chorus

To try and de-code this song now is difficult. First, we don't know what the code is but it must have been quite sophisticated if it was to fool the "Massa" and the bounty hunters. The second problem is that there is no guarantee that these are indeed the original lyrics. Slave songs were passed on by word of mouth, not written down. There may well have been several other variants before we arrived at the gospel version we see here. Nonetheless, there are still enough references for us to say it was originally about escape. The very title of 'Wade in the Water' is advice to the runaways on how to avoid being tracked by bloodhounds. The reference to 'Jordan' could well be the Promised Land, in this case Canada where slavery did not exist. 'It chills my body, but not my soul' is reference to the physical discomforts that the journey will take, but at the same time is trying to bolster the spirits. 'Now if you should get there before I do' and 'Tell my friends that I'm a comin' too' are much more obvious allusions to a journey. (<http://www.localdial.com/users/jsyedu133/Soulreview/Understandingpages/coded.htm>)



Follow the Drinking Gourd is a reference to ‘the big dipper’ a constellation very close to the North Star itself. The North Star can be very difficult to recognize, but ‘The Big Dipper’ is easily identifiable, looking like a massive drinking gourd, and a clear indication of a northerly direction. The series of routes and safe houses, which were often run by Quakers, was known as “The Underground Railway.” By 1861 there were about 500 abolitionists, helping slaves find this invisible network of pathways, safe houses and signals.

A full interpretation of the song was posted in the *Detroit News*, February 25, 1997.

When the sun comes up and the first quail calls, follow the
drinking gourd.

For the old man is a-waiting to carry you to freedom,

If you follow the drinking gourd.

With the beginning of winter on Dec. 21, the sun starts climbing higher in the sky each day. And in winter, the call of migratory quail echoes across southern fields. So the song advised slaves to escape in winter and head north toward the Big Dipper -- code name, drinking gourd. A guide will be waiting at the end of the line.

The riverbank makes a very good road.
The dead trees show you the way,
Left foot, peg foot, travelling on
Follow the drinking gourd.

This verse directs fugitives to the Tombigbee River, where special markings on fallen trees will show they're on the correct northerly course. Travelling under cover of darkness, slaves could find their way along a river even on nights too overcast for the Big Dipper's stars to shine through. The Tombigbee River, which empties into Alabama's Mobile Bay on the Gulf of Mexico, originates in northeast Mississippi

The river ends between two hills.
Follow the drinking gourd.
There's another river on the other side,
Follow the drinking gourd.

When the Tombigbee ends, the runaways who had memorized the song knew to walk north over a hill until they came to another river, the Tennessee, then to go north on it as well.

Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the drinking gourd.
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom,
If you follow the drinking gourd.

The song ends by instructing slaves that at the end of the Tennessee River they must cross over to the north side of the big Ohio River, where someone from the Underground Railroad would ensure their passage to the first of a string of safe houses reaching all the way to Canada.
(<http://www.localdial.com/users/jsyedu133/Soulreview/Understandingpages/coded.htm>)

Lesson Title: Analysis of Argument: “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”

By: Linda Dursteler and Vivian Easton, Teacher Consultants, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question: Can students appreciate rhetorical strategies through a close analysis of an excerpt from one of Douglass’ most famous speeches?

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand rhetorical devices used in the passage, *i.e.*, appeals, syntax, diction, tone, imagery.
- Recognize the power of the contradiction between the model of governance proposed in the *Declaration of Independence* and the institution of slavery in America.

Context: A high school class reading *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* or studying rhetorical techniques. Could also be a class in social studies working on issues of American governance.

Materials: Excerpt from Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” speech delivered in Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852.

Time Span: One day plus follow-up as needed.

Procedures:

1. Prior to class, distribute copies of the passage to the students to read and annotate before class discussion.
2. Conduct guided discussion of the passage, using the following questions:
 - How does Douglass use rhetorical questions to underline the contradiction of liberty as espoused in the *Declaration of Independence* and the legal practice of slavery?
 - Examine Douglass’ use of the personal pronouns “I” and “you”. When does he use each one and to what effect?
 - What is the tone of the excerpt? Report the words, phrases, and sentences which create that tone?
3. Culminating **writing** activity: In a one- to two-page paper, students respond to the discussion of the questions in Step Two.

Extensions:

- Students could explore further the ideals declared by the Second Continental Congress in 1776 by considering the petitions by slaves prior to that year as they used the argument of inalienable rights and Christian brotherhood to ask for an end to laws allowing slavery in Massachusetts.
- Students could explore the issues of racism in America after the 13th Amendment to the Constitution ending slavery was ratified in 1865. Douglass’ 1875 speech, anticipating the centennial of 1876 which continues his concerns about the struggles to realize America’s ideals, might be used in this regard.

Rationale: Frederick Douglass was a powerful abolitionist speaker. Through studying his speeches and writings, students will become aware of his use of rhetorical strategies to raise questions about American ideals of consent of the governed, democracy, and protection of inalienable rights. These are questions with which we continue to struggle.

Note: In studying slavery and slave narratives, students may encounter images, language, descriptions, and opinions that they find offensive or unsettling. Teachers should be mindful of student backgrounds and be sensitive to these issues

Resources:

- The Declaration of Independence is available online:
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/declare.asp
- Fordham University Online has a book review of *Frederick Douglass and the Fourth of July* by James Colaiaco:
http://www.fordham.edu/campus_resources/enewsroom/fordham_magazine/book_review_s/frederick_douglass_a_23868.asp
- From *All Business* is a textual analysis of the speech:
<http://www.allbusiness.com/specialty-businesses/1015310-1.html>
- The National Park Service maintains a virtual museum about Frederick Douglass:
<http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/douglass/>
- *The Frederick Douglass Project* at the University of Rochester has a number of resources including lesson plans and documents:
<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?page=2494>.
- The 1774 slaves' petition to Gage, the governor of Massachusetts colony, is available online: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1774slavesappeal.html>. It is advisable to read the petition aloud since it is not written in standard English.
- The Library of Congress has a number of resources about Douglass, including a digitized version of his 1875 speech "The Color Question":
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/douglass/>
 - Historian David Blight, as part of Yale University Open Classroom, discusses Douglass' 1875 speech:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWnPCrQ_oNQ&feature=Playlist&p=5DD220D6A1282057&playnext=1&index=23

In 1845, Douglass published his autobiography, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: an American Slave*. With the revelation that he was an escaped slave, Douglass became fearful of possible re-enslavement and fled to Great Britain and stayed there for two years, giving lectures in support of the antislavery movement in America. With the assistance of English Quakers, Douglass raised enough money to buy his own freedom and in 1847 he returned to America as a free man.

He settled in Rochester, New York, where he published *The North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper. He directed the local underground railroad which smuggled escaped slaves into Canada and also worked to end racial segregation in Rochester's public schools.

In 1852, the leading citizens of Rochester asked Douglass to give a speech as part of their Fourth of July celebrations. Douglass accepted their invitation.

In his speech Douglass delivered a scathing attack on the hypocrisy of a nation celebrating freedom and independence with speeches, parades and platitudes, while, within its borders, nearly four million humans were being kept as slaves.

- Excerpt from “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” by Frederick Douglass

Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, "may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. My subject, then fellow-citizens, is AMERICAN SLAVERY. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave's point of view. Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America! "I will not equivocate; I will not excuse;" I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgment is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just.

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? that he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look to-day, in the presence of Americans, dividing, and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? speaking of it relatively, and positively, negatively, and affirmatively. To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding. There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong for him.

What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them

with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to bum their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is wrong? No! I will not. I have better employments for my time and strength than such arguments would imply.

What, then, remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? There is blasphemy in the thought. That which is inhuman, cannot be divine! Who can reason on such a proposition? They that can, may; I cannot. The time for such argument is past.

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.

(The entire speech is available from the History Teaching Center:
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=162>)

Lesson Title: Slavery: Two Slave Narratives, and the Arguments For and Against Slavery

By: Linda Dursteler and Vivian Easton, Teacher Consultants, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question: By studying the narratives written by former slaves, will students gain an understanding of the destructive impact of slavery on everyone involved?

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Acknowledge and explain the reasons given for and against the morality and legitimacy of slavery under the U.S. Constitution.
- Understand the importance of slave narratives in revealing the realities of slavery.
- Articulate an economic argument in favor of slavery and an opposing argument on behalf of free labor.

Context: A high school class studying the economic and social roots of slavery and the slave narratives as in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Materials:

- Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*.
- Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*.
- *Africans in America*: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html>
- The attached passages from Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, William Lloyd Garrison, and Senator James Henry Hammond

Time Span: One day plus follow up as needed.

Procedures:

1. Prior to class, distribute to the students copies of the attached passages from the slave narratives and the passages of the proponents and opponents of slavery. Students are to read (as a class or independently) and annotate before class discussion.
2. Conduct guided discussion of the passages, by dividing students into small groups of four or five and instruct them to work together on their answers to the following questions. Each group should appoint one person to write down the responses to the questions.
3. Ask groups to share their responses with the class.
 - Why are the slave narratives, stories told in the slaves own words, important to the debate on slavery?
 - What does William Lloyd Garrison find objectionable in slavery?
 - According to Sen. Hammond, what makes societies civilized and why did he think this justified the enslavement of black people in America?
 - What does Sen. Hammond mean by "the very mud-sill of society and of political government"? (Note: The teacher should define "mud-sill" for the students. It is the bottom sill or wooden beam in a foundation, which typically rests on the ground.)

- Why does Sen. Hammond believe southern slaves have a better life than northern "slaves"?
 - Why did people oppose slavery and defend slavery so strongly? How did slavery contribute to a widening breach between the North and South.
4. Culminating **writing** activity: A) Have students respond to the group discussions in Step Two in a one- to two-page paper and/or B) prepare a debate for or against slavery acknowledging the effects of slavery on the country and its peoples.

Extensions: Students can research other slave narratives and proponent and opponent views on slavery and write a two page paper on their findings.

Rationale: Slavery was considered by many in the South and some in the North as an economic necessity, but abolitionists and former slaves railed against the inhumanity of slavery.

Resources:

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself.* New York: The Modern Library, 2000.
- Blight, David W., editor. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself.* Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2003.
- Fleischner, Jennifer, editor. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself, with Related Documents.* Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2010.
- PBS maintains a site in support of the film series *Africans in America*. The site includes lesson plans, primary documents, photos, etc.: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html>. There are materials on: Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, George Fitzhugh's "The Universal Law of Slavery," James Henry Hammond's "The Mudsill Theory," race-based legislation in the North.
- Margaret D. Zulick, at Wake Forest University, has posted "Hardening of Proslavery Arguments from 1786 to 1837" with links to primary documents: <http://www.wfu.edu/~zulick/340/slaverynotes.html>.
- From the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is a major digital collection of primary resources: *Documenting the American South*. Materials on Douglass and slavery are available. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>.
- From NEH's *Edsitement* is a lesson plan, "The Growing Crisis of Sectionalism in Antebellum America: A House Dividing," which includes links to several resources: http://edsitement.neh.gov/printable_lesson_plan.asp?id=659.
- From the Virginia Center for Digital History, Alderman Library, is the site *Valley of the Shadow* which includes lesson plans on "White Southerners Defense of Slavery": <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/teaching/vclassroom/vclasscontents.html>
- Lucia Knoles, at Assumption College, has a site *Contextualizing Frederick Douglass* which includes resources on the American conversation about race: <http://www1.assumption.edu/users/lknoles/douglasscontexts.html>

- Excerpts from Douglass, *Narrative*

From Chapter X: (Douglass would turn 15 in February 1833.)

“I had left Master Thomas’s house, and went to live with Mr. Covey, on the 1st of January, 1833. I was now, for the first time in my life, a field hand. In my new employment, I found myself even more awkward than a country boy appeared to be in a large city. I had been at my new home but one week before Mr. Covey gave me a very severe whipping, cutting my back, causing the blood to run, and raising ridges on my flesh as large as my little finger... I lived with Mr. Covey one year. During the first six months, of that year, scarce a week passed without his whipping me. I was seldom free from a sore back. My awkwardness was almost always his excuse for whipping me. We were worked fully up to the point of endurance. Long before day we were up, our horses fed, and by the first approach of day we were off to the field with our hoes and ploughing teams. Mr. Covey gave us enough to eat, but scarce time to eat it. We were often less than five minutes taking our meals. We were often in the field from the first approach of day till its last lingering ray had left us; and at saving-fodder time, midnight often caught us in the field binding blades...

If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow, too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work, was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!”

- Excerpt from Jacobs, *Incidents*

From Chapter XV. (Jacobs is approximately 21 at time of this event.)

“My children grew finely; and Dr. Flint [her master] would often say to me, with an exulting smile, “These brats will bring me a handsome sum of money one of these days.”

I thought to myself that, God being my helper, they should never pass into his hands. It seemed to me I would rather see them killed than have them given up to his power. The money for the freedom of myself and my children could be obtained; but I derived no advantage from that circumstance. Dr. Flint loved money, but he loved power more. After much discussion, my friends resolved on making another trial. There was a slaveholder about to leave for Texas, and he was commissioned to buy me. He was to begin with nine hundred dollars, and go up to twelve. My master refused his offers. “Sir,” said he, “she don’t belong to me. She is my daughter’s property, and I have no right to sell her. I mistrust that you come from her paramour. If so, you may tell him that he cannot buy her for any money; neither can he buy her children.”

The doctor came to see me the next day, and my heart beat quicker as he entered. I never had seen the old man tread with so majestic a step. He seated himself and looked at me with withering scorn. My children had learned to be afraid of him. The little one would shut her eyes and hide her face on my shoulder whenever she saw him; and Benny, who was now nearly five

years old, often inquired, "What makes that bad man come here so many times? Does he want to hurt us?" I would clasp the dear boy in my arms, trusting that he would be free before he was old enough to solve the problem. And now, as the doctor sat there so grim and silent, the child left his play and came and nestled up by me. At last my tormentor spoke. "So you are left in disgust, are you?" said he. "It is no more than I expected. You remember I told you years ago that you would be treated so. So he is tired of you? Ha! ha! ha! The virtuous madam don't like to hear about it, does she? Ha! ha! ha!" There was a sting in his calling me virtuous madam. I no longer had the power of answering him as I had formerly done. He continued: "So it seems you are trying to get up another intrigue. Your new paramour came to me, and offered to buy you; but you may be assured you will not succeed. You are mine; and you shall be mine for life. There lives no human being that can take you out of slavery. I would have done it; but you rejected my kind offer."

I told him I did not wish to get up any intrigue; that I had never seen the man who offered to buy me.

"Do you tell me I lie?" exclaimed he, dragging me from my chair. "Will you say again that you never saw that man?"

I answered, "I do say so."

He clinched my arm with a volley of oaths. Ben began to scream, I told him to go to his grandmother.

"Don't you stir a step, you wretch!" said he. The child drew nearer to me, and put his arms round me, as if he wanted to protect me. This was too much for my enraged master. He caught him up and hurled him across the room. I thought he was dead, and rushed towards him to take him up.

"Not yet!" exclaimed the doctor. "Let him lie there till he comes to."

"Let me go! Let me go!" I screamed, "or I will raise the whole house." I struggled and got away; but he clinched me again. Somebody opened the door, and he released me. I picked up my insensible child, and when I turned my tormentor was gone. Anxiously I bent over the little form, so pale and still; and when the brown eyes at last opened, I don't know whether I was very happy.

All the doctor's former persecutions were renewed. He came morning, noon, and night. No jealous lover ever watched a rival more closely than he watched me and the unknown slaveholder, with whom he accused me of wishing to get up an intrigue. When my grandmother was out of the way he searched every room to find him.

He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny."

- Excerpt from William Lloyd Garrison, "On the Constitution and the Union" (December 29, 1832)

"There is much declamation about the sacredness of the compact which was formed between the free and slave states, on the adoption of the Constitution. A sacred compact, forsooth! We pronounce it the most bloody and heaven-daring arrangement ever made by men for the continuance and protection of a system of the most atrocious villany [*sic*] ever exhibited on earth. Yes—we recognize the compact, but with feelings of shame and indignation; and it will be held in everlasting infamy by the friends of justice and humanity throughout the world. It was

a compact formed at the sacrifice of the bodies and souls of millions of our race, for the sake of achieving a political object—an unblushing and monstrous coalition to do evil that good might come. Such a compact was, in the nature of things and according to the law of God, null and void from the beginning. No body of men ever had the right to guarantee the holding of human beings in bondage. Who or what were the framers of our government, that they should dare confirm and authorise such high-handed villany—such a flagrant robbery of the inalienable rights of man—such a glaring violation of all the precepts and injunctions of the gospel—such a savage war upon a sixth part of our whole population? —They were men, like ourselves—as fallible, as sinful, as weak, as ourselves. By the infamous bargain which they made between themselves, they virtually dethroned the Most High God, and trampled beneath their feet their own solemn and heaven-attested Declaration, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights — among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They had no lawful power to bind themselves, or their posterity, for one hour—for one moment — by such an unholy alliance. It was not valid then—it is not valid now. Still they persisted in maintaining it — and still do their successors, the people of Massachusetts, of New-England, and of the twelve free States, persist in maintaining it. A sacred compact! a sacred compact! What, then, is wicked and ignominious?

This, then, is the relation in which we of New-England stand to the holders of slaves at the south, and this is virtually our language toward them—“Go on, most worthy associates, from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, from generation to generation, plundering two millions of human beings of their liberty and the fruits of their toil—driving them into the fields like cattle—starving and lacerating their bodies—selling the husband from his wife, the wife from her husband, and children from their parents—spilling their blood—withholding the bible from their hands and all knowledge from their minds—and kidnapping annually sixty thousand infants, the offspring of pollution and shame! Go on, in these practices—we do not wish nor mean to interfere, for the rescue of your victims, even by expostulation or warning—we like your company too well to offend you by denouncing your conduct—’although we know that by every principle of law which does not utterly disgrace us by assimilating us to pirates, that they have as good and as true a right to the equal protection of the law as we have; and although we ourselves stand prepared to die, rather than submit even to a fragment of the intolerable load of oppression to which we are subjecting them—yet, never mind—let that be—they have grown old in suffering and we iniquity—and we have nothing to do now but to speak *peace, peace*, to one another in our sins. We are too wicked ever to love them as God commands us to do—we are so resolute in our wickedness as not even to desire to do so—and we are so proud in our iniquity that we will hate and revile whoever disturbs us in it. We want, like the devils of old, to be let alone in our sin. We are unalterably determined, and neither God nor man shall move us from this resolution, that our colored fellow subjects never shall be free or happy in their native land.’ Go on, from bad to worse—add link to link to the chains upon the bodies of your victims—add constantly to the intolerable burdens under which they groan—and if, goaded to desperation by your cruelties; they should rise to assert their rights and redress their wrongs, fear nothing—we are pledged, by a sacred compact, to shoot them like dogs and rescue you from their vengeance! Go on—we never will forsake you, for ’there is honor among thieves’—our swords are ready to leap from their scabbards, and our muskets to pour forth deadly volleys, as soon as you are in danger. We pledge you our physical strength, by the sacredness of the national compact—a compact by which we have enabled you already to plunder, persecute and destroy two millions of slaves, who now lie

beneath the sod; and by which we now give you the same piratical license to prey upon a much larger number of victims and all their posterity. Go on—and by this sacred instrument, the Constitution of the United States, *dripping as it is with human blood*, we solemnly pledge you our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor, that we will stand by you to the last.”

People of New-England, and of the free States! is it true that slavery is no concern of yours? Have you no right even to protest against it, or to seek its removal? Are you not the main pillars of its support? How long do you mean to be answerable to God and the world, for spilling the blood of the poor innocents? Be not afraid to look the monster SLAVERY boldly in the face. He is your implacable foe—the vampyre who is sucking your life-blood—the ravager of a large portion of your country, and the enemy of God and man. Never hope to be a united, or happy, or prosperous people while he exists. He has an appetite like the grave—a spirit as malignant as that of the bottomless pit—and an influence as dreadful as the corruption of death. Awake to your danger! the struggle is a mighty one—it cannot be avoided—it should not be, if it could.

It is said that if you agitate this question, you will divide the Union. Believe it not; but should disunion follow, the fault will not be yours. You must perform your duty, faithfully, fearlessly and promptly, and leave the consequences to God: that duty clearly is, to cease from giving countenance and protection to southern kidnappers. Let them separate, if they can muster courage enough—and the liberation of their slaves is certain. Be assured that slavery will very speedily destroy this Union, *if it be let alone*; but even if the Union can be preserved by treading upon the necks, spilling the blood, and destroying the souls of millions of your race, we say it is not worth a price like this, and that it is in the highest degree criminal for you to continue the present compact. Let the pillars thereof fall—let the superstructure crumble into dust—if it must be upheld by robbery and oppression.”

- Excerpt from "The 'Mudsill' Theory," by Senator James Henry Hammond, Speech to the U.S. Senate, March 4, 1858:

“In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life. That is, a class requiring but a low order of intellect and but little skill. Its requisites are vigor, docility, fidelity. Such a class you must have, or you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement. It constitutes the very mud-sill of society and of political government; and you might as well attempt to build a house in the air, as to build either the one or the other, except on this mud-sill. Fortunately for the South, she found a race adapted to that purpose to her hand. A race inferior to her own, but eminently qualified in temper, in vigor, in docility, in capacity to stand the climate, to answer all her purposes. We use them for our purpose, and call them slaves. We found them slaves by the common "consent of mankind," which, according to Cicero, "*lex naturae est.*" The highest proof of what is Nature's law. We are old-fashioned at the South yet; slave is a word discarded now by "ears polite;" I will not characterize that class at the North by that term; but you have it; it is there; it is everywhere; it is eternal.

The Senator from New York said yesterday that the whole world had abolished slavery. Aye, the name, but not the thing; all the powers of the earth cannot abolish that. God only can do it when he repeals the fiat, "the poor ye always have with you;" for the man who lives by daily labor, and scarcely lives at that, and who has to put out his labor in the market, and take the best he can get for it; in short, your whole hireling class of manual laborers and "operatives," as you

call them, are essentially slaves. The difference between us is, that our slaves are hired for life and well compensated; there is no starvation, no begging, no want of employment among our people, and not too much employment either. Yours are hired by the day, not cared for, and scantily compensated, which may be proved in the most painful manner, at any hour in any street in any of your large towns. Why, you meet more beggars in one day, in any single street of the city of New York, than you would meet in a lifetime in the whole South. We do not think that whites should be slaves either by law or necessity. Our slaves are black, of another and inferior race. The status in which we have placed them is an elevation. They are elevated from the condition in which God first created them, by being made our slaves. None of that race on the whole face of the globe can be compared with the slaves of the South. They are happy, content, unambitious, and utterly incapable, from intellectual weakness, ever to give us any trouble by their aspirations. Yours are white, of your own race; you are brothers of one blood. They are your equals in natural endowment of intellect, and they feel galled by their degradation. Our slaves do not vote. We give them no political power. Yours do vote, and, being the majority, they are the depositories of all your political power. If they knew the tremendous secret, that the ballot-box is stronger than "an army with banners," and could combine, where would you be? Your society would be reconstructed, your government overthrown, your property divided, not as they have mistakenly attempted to initiate such proceedings by meeting in parks, with arms in their hands, but by the quiet process of the ballot-box. You have been making war upon us to our very hearthstones. How would you like for us to send lecturers and agitators North, to teach these people this, to aid in combining, and to lead them?"

Lesson Title: Close Reading of a passage from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*.

By: Linda Dursteler and Vivian Easton, Teacher Consultants, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question: By reading a passage from a slave narrative concerning literacy, will students be able to appreciate the power of literacy?

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Understand rhetorical devices used in the passage, *i.e.*, appeals, syntax, diction, tone, imagery.
- Recognize the importance to a slave of literacy and learning to read.
- Appreciate the dehumanizing effects of slavery on both the slaves and the slave owners.

Context: A high school class reading *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*.

Materials: A passage from Chapter VI of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. This activity can be repeated with other passages from the writings of Frederick Douglass. The challenge is to devise guided questions appropriate for the class using the text.

Time Span: One day plus follow-up as needed.

Procedures:

1. Prior to class, distribute copies of the passage to the students to read and annotate before class discussion.
2. Conduct guided discussion of the passage, using the following questions:
 - What role does learning to read ultimately play in the development of Douglass' personality and his escape from slavery?
 - Why does he describe his owner's refusal to allow him to learn to read as "shutting me up in mental darkness"?
 - What is the effect of the repeated contrasts between Douglass and his master in each sentence near the end of the passage, beginning with "What he most dreaded, that I most desired"?
 - What is Douglass' tone when he says, with regard to the roles his master and mistress played in his learning to read, "I acknowledge the benefit of both"?
3. Culminating **writing** activity: Students respond in a one- to two-page paper to the discussion of the questions in Step Two.

Extensions: Students can research other slave narratives – some written, others oral testimony – to continue the study of rhetoric and language.

Rationale: American slave owners recognized the power and the danger of a literate slave population and enacted laws to prohibit the education of slaves in order to keep them in bondage.

Note: In studying slavery and slave narratives, students may encounter images, language, descriptions, and opinions that they find offensive or unsettling. Teachers should be mindful of student backgrounds and be sensitive to these issues.

Resources:

- Coulson, Joseph, Lavine, Mike, and Hattleman, Steve, eds. *Readers Guide to the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Great Books Foundation: Chicago, 2004.
- Douglass' *Narrative* is available online from the Library of Congress American Memory Project: <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/lhbcb:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28lhbcb25385%29%29>
- Also from the Library of Congress are the WPA oral histories of former slaves: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>
- From the National Humanities Center are essays and other materials compiled by Lucinda MacKean for "Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs: American Slave Narrators" <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/essays/douglassjacobs.htm>
- For helpful materials about rhetoric (the study of effective speaking and writing, the art of persuasion), see *Silva Rhetoricae*: <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>
- Excerpt from Chapter VI, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. To use his own words, further, he said, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master--to do as he is told to do. Learning would ~spoil~ the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty--to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. It was just what I wanted, and I got it at a time when I the least expected it. Whilst I was saddened by the thought of losing the aid of my kind mistress, I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master. Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read. The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible

of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn. In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both.

Lesson Title: *The Plight of a Slave – Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

By: Kathryn L. MacKay, Teacher Consultant, Wasatch Range Writers Project

Burning Question: How can students better understand the plight of a slave?

Objective/Introduction: Students will explore the life of a slave by making a close reading of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs.

Context: High school students studying slavery in America.

Materials:

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, edited and with introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah, New York: Modern Library, 2000.
- Statistics about slavery
- Writing supplies for students

Time Span: 2 or 3 class periods

Procedures:

1. Students will read the first 5 chapters of *Incidents* and write one or two paragraphs in response to Jacobs statement: “I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away” (125). What does this statement convey about the conditions of slavery?
2. Students will work in small groups to discuss the following questions, handed out randomly. They will create a short written statement:
 - In what ways was Harriet’s mistress kind? How does she hurt Harriet?
 - Describe Harriet’s grandmother. How is she unique? What is ironic about her situation as a slave?
 - Harriet writes that her kind mistress taught her to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (127). How is this a hypocritical statement?
 - After her mistress’s death, Harriet is bequeathed “to a child of five years.” What does this demonstrate about the situation of a slave?
 - Read pages 17-18 in which Harriet relates the confusion her brother has with his role as slave versus son. What has slavery done to the family unit?
 - How does Harriet characterize Mrs. Flint? What traits does she have that seem incongruous to that of a proper Southern woman? (focus on page 132)
 - On page 23-24, the story of a young slave giving birth is told. What was her situation? How was she treated? Why did she feel happy to die?
3. Students will report orally their written group statement.

Extensions:

1. Students read additional sections of *Incidents* and follow the same procedures. Discussion/writing questions could focus on the sexual abuse of slave women.

In the 19th century writing about this was taboo. Harriet had struggled over whether or not to expose herself so publicly. But she realized the significance of her story and so

decided to go ahead, although she wrote under the pseudonym, Linda Brent, and assigned fictitious names to everyone mentioned in the book.

Maria Child, a prominent white abolitionist, agreed to edit Jacobs' book. Child, too, was aware of the provocative nature of Jacobs' descriptions of slave women's lives. She wrote in the book's introduction:

"I am well aware that many will accuse me of indecorum for presenting these pages to the public; for the experiences of this intelligent and much-injured woman belong to a class which some call delicate subjects, and others indelicate. This peculiar phase of Slavery has generally been kept veiled; but the public ought to be made acquainted with its monstrous features, and I willingly take the responsibility of presenting them with the veil withdrawn."

2. Some chapters of *Incident* focus on issues for slave mother. In the chapter "The New Tie to Life," Harriet describes how her plan has not worked; her master does not sell her to the father of her child. Illness precedes the birth of her child; Harriet and her child are close to death. Harriet writes, "Alas, what mockery it is for a slave mother to try to pray back her dying child to life! Death is better than slavery!" Discussion/writing questions could focus on children and families. Students could compare the sentiments expressed by Jacobs with those expressed by her contemporary Frances Ellen Watkins Harper in her poetry.

Rationale: Students will come to understand the challenges for slaves in America—particularly women.

Note: In studying slavery and slave narratives, students may encounter images, language, descriptions, and opinions that they find offensive or unsettling. Teachers should be mindful of student backgrounds and be sensitive to these issues.

Resources:

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave & Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, edited and introduction by Kwame Anthony Appiah.
- When Jacobs reached the age of fifteen, James Norcom tried to manipulate Jacobs into a sexual relationship. Jacobs resisted his attempts, but for years she lived in fear of her master's sexual advances. From *North Carolina Digital History* is a guided reading of the section from Jacobs' autobiography which documents her struggle with her master: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-antebellum/5340>
- *The Slave Mother*, by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, 1854

Heard you that shriek? It rose
So wildly on the air,
It seem'd as if a burden'd heart
Was breaking in despair.
Saw you those hands so sadly clasped—
The bowed and feeble head—
The shuddering of that fragile form—

That look of grief and dread?
Saw you the sad, imploring eye?
Its every glance was pain,
As if a storm of agony
Were sweeping through the brain.
She is a mother pale with fear,
Her boy clings to her side,
And in her kirtle vainly tries
His trembling form to hide.
He is not hers, although she bore
For him a mother's pains;
He is not hers, although her blood
Is coursing through his veins!
He is not hers, for cruel hands
May rudely tear apart
The only wreath of household love
That binds her breaking heart.
His love has been a joyous light
That o'er her pathway smiled,
A fountain gushing ever new,
Amid life's desert wild.
His lightest word has been a tone
Of music round her heart,
Their lives a streamlet blent in one—
Oh, Father! must they part?

Frances E. W. Harper was one of the most productive African American authors of the nineteenth century. She wrote poetry, essays, stories, and was avidly involved in the Anti-Slavery movements. Her collection, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, deals with themes of equal rights, racial pride, female self-reliance, and the horrors of slavery.

For statistics on slavery in America, see "Slavery in the United States," by Jenny B. Wahl, for the *Economic History Association*: <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/wahl.slavery.us>