

***Frederick Douglass,  
Young Defender of Human  
Rights***

**The Young Patriots Series, Volume 13**

**Teacher's Guide  
And Webquest**

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## ***Frederick Douglass, Young Defender of Human Rights*** **Teacher's Guide**

### **Introduction**

This Teacher's Guide provides a framework for using *Frederick Douglass, Young Defender of Human Rights* in the classroom as a vehicle to engage students and weave literature into multiple content areas.

The Guide offers many suggestions for interdisciplinary activities that students can do before, during, and after they read the book. These learner-centered activities help students move from solely a comprehension, or knowledge-based way of thinking about historical fiction, to higher levels of critical thought that include analysis and evaluation.

### **Before Reading**

1. Before starting any unit of study, it's a good idea to assess what students already know, or think they know about the subject. If students have at least some knowledge of Douglass or his accomplishments, draw a three-column chart on the blackboard with the headings: *What We Know (or Think We Know) About Frederick Douglass, What We Want to Know, and What We Learned.*

Ask students to respond only to the first two columns. After reading the book and doing some or all of the After Reading activities, revisit the chart with the class to complete the third column (*What We Learned*) and to correct any erroneous information in the first column.

2. If students have no knowledge of Douglass or his accomplishments, you can have them begin reading the book without any prior discussion, or you can review the historical timeframe that the book covers (i.e., Douglass' lifespan: 1818-1895). This span covers such events as the Civil War (1861-1865), the Abolitionist Movement, and Underground Railroad (approximately 1831-1865, although some historians date the beginning as early as 1817). You might wish to create a world history timeline or have students create and post their own as they read through the book.

### **During Reading**

While many teachers prefer that students read a book without interruption, others opt to conduct mini-assessments along the way.

1. Have students keep an ongoing literature journal in which they can write about what they're reading and keep an ongoing vocabulary list of unfamiliar

words or phrases. You might also wish to provide writing prompts to help students think about what they're reading and to make connections to their own lives. Example writing prompts:

- In the book, we learn that Fred had moments of great sadness and fear, growing up as a plantation slave, never knowing his real parents. What kinds of words and descriptions describe these emotions throughout the story? Have you ever been sad or fearful? What kinds of words would you use to describe those feelings?
  - What are some of Fred's qualities, or personality traits, that you think helped to shape who he became as an adult? (Students might identify such traits as being brave, determined, or setting goals for himself.) What personality traits did he have that you didn't like? Why? What are some of YOUR best qualities, or traits of which you are most proud?
  - Near the end of the story, we learn that Fred "rode" on the Underground Railroad. It wasn't really a train, so why do you think it was called the Underground Railroad? Who were its passengers and who were its conductors?
  - When he was an adult, Frederick Douglass said to a group of African-American students, "What was possible for me is possible for you ... So long as you remain in ignorance, so long will you fail to command the respect of your fellow men." What do you think this means?
2. As students read the book, be sure to keep a map of the United States posted so that they can identify each city and state mentioned and so that they can follow the route that many slaves took when escaping north to freedom.
  3. As they read, have students identify figures of speech (e.g., metaphors and similes), phrases of alliteration, analogies, and language of the time period.

### **After Reading**

Historical fiction provides wonderful opportunities to weave and blend literature into many different content areas in meaningful ways. Following are a handful of ways for you to integrate a study of Frederick Douglass in your classroom. Although they are organized by content areas, we encourage you to move across content lines to blend them in natural ways AND to encourage your students to conduct further research on any specific topics of interest.

### **Language Arts Connections**

1. Have students skim the story to find specific language of the time period. Make a class chart with the term or phrase and its definition. Example terms or phrases: *sitting spell* and *windfalls* (Chapter 2); *forenoon* (Chapter 5).
2. In Chapter 9, Fred learns about the book entitled *The Columbian Orator*, which the slave owners' children read in school. He eventually learns to read from it himself. Students can actually read parts of *The Columbian Orator* online, on the [19<sup>th</sup> Century Schoolbooks](#) website.
3. Ask students to think about the title of the book: *Frederick Douglass, Young Defender of Human Rights*. Then engage them in a discussion about what human rights are and the ways in which they have been (and continue to be) violated all over the world, including in the United States. Discuss some of the basic human rights that we have in the United States that other countries might not have, as well as human rights that some countries have that we do not. (For example, Canada and Britain believe medical care is a basic human right, so all citizens in those countries have complete medical coverage supported by the government.) Ask students to brainstorm basic rights that they would like to see available to everyone in their class. Then create a "Class Bill of Rights." When complete, post for everyone to see and follow.
4. Read the "[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)," adopted and proclaimed in 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations. Assign each of the Declaration's articles to pairs or small groups. Ask each group to summarize their assigned article for the class. Older students can conduct further research to discover which countries have or have not signed the Declaration and how it was developed.
5. After Douglass escaped, he worked tirelessly to promote freedom for all slaves. He published a newspaper in Rochester, New York, called "The North Star." It got its name because slaves escaped at night by following the North Star. (The publication later became "Frederick Douglass' Weekly" and was followed by "Douglass' Monthly.") The paper's goal was to, in Douglass' words, "...abolish slavery in all its forms and aspects, promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the colored people, and hasten the day of freedom to the Three Millions of our enslaved fellow countrymen." Have students pretend they are journalists writing for "The North Star." Ask them to write an editorial in favor of the abolitionist movement. (See **Social Studies Connections** #1 for a related WebQuest.)
6. In Chapter 8, Mr. Auld's comment that "It's unsafe to teach a slave to read" has a big impact on Fred because it is then that he realizes he must educate himself. Have older students consider the importance of literacy and the effectiveness of using illiteracy as a tool of control. Ask students to list on paper or describe aloud some things that they might normally do in the course

of an average day that they could not do if they were illiterate. Help students to see the ways in which they would be limited and their lives very restricted.

7. Students can research and write short biographies of abolitionists who, like Frederick Douglass, worked diligently to abolish slavery. Abolitionists included William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth. Interested students can also conduct research to learn about the National Antislavery Society, started in 1833 by William Lloyd Garrison and others. A very good site for research is [\*I Will Be Heard: Abolitionism in America\*](#).
8. Students learn at the end of the book, in *What Happened Next?*, that Douglas became a great speaker and writer. Have students visit the Library of Congress American Memory website to read writings by Frederick Douglass in [\*The Frederick Douglass Papers\*](#) exhibit. The papers span the years 1841 to 1964, with the bulk of the material from 1862 to 1895. The collection consists of correspondence, speeches and articles by Douglass and his contemporaries, a draft of his autobiography, financial and legal papers, scrapbooks, and miscellaneous items.

### **Social Studies Connections**

1. Have students work individually to complete the **WebQuest**, following links to learn more about Frederick Douglass' life, the Underground Railroad, and the lives of runaway slave—culminating in the writing of a fictional newspaper article. If desired, compile all articles into one fictional newspaper. Make copies for all students to take home and share with their parents.
2. Have students conduct research on slavery and slave plantations in the 1800s. Learn about the abolitionist movement of the 1830s and the Underground Railroad, the system of helping slaves escape from the southern slave states into northern “free states” or Canada. Students can share their research by creating a printed class history guide, murals, or even multimedia presentations.
3. In Chapter 7, Fred learns of the Fugitive Slave Law. Enacted in 1850, it made any federal marshal or other official who did not arrest an alleged runaway slave liable to a fine of \$1,000. In addition, any person aiding a runaway slave by providing food or shelter was to be subject to six months imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine. Have students research the law to learn more.

4. Not to be missed: students will want to hear/read slave narratives—first-person accounts that were published during the 1930s Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). More than two thousand narratives, which include personal histories and songs, are housed in the [Born in Slavery Collection](#) at the Library of Congress National Digital Library website.
5. Names of prominent figures in American history are scattered throughout the book. These include Patrick Henry, William Pitt, William Lloyd Garrison, and Thomas Jefferson. Have students identify the names and then conduct research on each person. Why do they think Fred admired these people and how did some of their paths cross when Fred was an adult?
6. On the *What Happened Next?* page at the end of the book, students learn that Douglass championed women's rights. In 1848, Douglass participated in the first women's rights convention, held at Seneca Falls, New York. Have students learn more about women’s suffrage, or the right to vote. Steer them to the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment which finally guaranteed this right in 1920.
7. Have students work in pairs to create Venn diagrams (interlocking circles) comparing the northern and southern states that fought in the Civil War. For example, the northern states had small farms and factories and no slave labor. The southern states had farms and plantations where most of the work was done by slaves.
8. Explain to older students that Frederick Douglass is often referred to as “the father of the modern civil rights movement.” Challenge students to learn more about the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and then ask them why they think Douglass earned that distinction.

### **Science Connections**

1. In Chapter 1, Aunt Betsey mentions salting fish. Have students learn why fish was and still is salted (for preservation—salting or curing draws moisture from fish or meat through a process of osmosis). Ask students to determine what common methods we use today to preserve foods. (Canning, freezing and drying are most popular.) Then have students try their hands at canning or pickling, or even creating a solar dryer for apple or banana slices.
2. In Chapter 2, Aunt Betsey makes a megaphone using her hands. Have students learn the science behind the megaphone (i.e., sound waves and how the ear works). Design and make a megaphone from a large sheet of stiff paper or cardboard. Test it outside to see how far the sound of one’s voice can travel. Ask students to compare the loudness of someone speaking with and without a megaphone.

3. In Chapter 3, there is a description of the “business part” of the plantation village. It includes blacksmith’s shops, wheelwright shops, and cooper’s shops. Students can work in pairs or small groups to learn the science behind blacksmithing (i.e., the science of heat energy and why metal changes color as it heats).
4. In Chapter 5, there is a description of a windmill used to pump water, grind grain, etc.. Help students understand how wind energy is created and used and why it is a renewable, non-polluting resource. Then have students make their own model windmills by creating hand-held pinwheels with paper and straw.
5. In Chapter 12, Fred and his friends plan their escape, following the North Star. Have students study constellations and how the night skies appear at different times during the year. Then, have them use florescent paints on large sheets of paper to paint murals of the night sky. Hang from the classroom ceiling, turn off the lights, close the window blinds, move the desks aside, and have students lie down on the floor to stargaze! Ask students why each week’s star map will look slightly different? (The relative position of the stars changes continually.) Students can play hosts of their planetarium, inviting other classes in to stargaze and learn (from student docents) about the night skies.

### **Mathematics Connections**

1. In Chapter 1, we learn that Aunt Betsey keeps a calendar made of clay, upon which she scratches a line for each day that passes. She begins anew for each month. Have students invent and create their own calendar. How would they note the passing of days and months? How did our ancestors do it?
2. In Chapter 4, Fred’s mother makes Aunt Katy give him some gingerbread to eat because he is so hungry. Develop students’ math skills through cooking by having the class make popular recipes of the time period. Civil War-era recipes, including gingerbread, are readily available in books and on the Internet. Students might even try their hand at churning butter and baking biscuits or cornbread.
3. Develop map reading and map-making skills by conducting further research on the routes of the Underground Railroad. Help students understand that homes along the routes were called *stations*, and the courageous men and women directly assisting the runaways, like Frederick Douglass, were known as *conductors*. Routes were sustained to the northern states, Canada, the Caribbean and Mexico, with the most popular routes leading to, and through, Ohio and Pennsylvania. (Ohio alone had at least 23 entry points along the

Ohio River.) Have students conduct further library and Internet research to discover and then draw maps of all of the Underground Railroad routes, including the one Fred took and then eventually helped “conduct.” (See **Arts Connections**, #5 for a related activity.)

4. During the Civil War, the government issued paper money for the very first time. Research the value of the first “greenbacks” that were issued in the 1860s. Where did the name come from? In what denominations were they issued? What currency did people use before greenbacks were in circulation?

### **Arts Connections**

1. Create a mural on a large sheet of paper to illustrate each chapter of the book, based on the descriptive passages.
2. In Chapter 2, we learn that the enslaved children play a game similar to hopscotch. Have students read the description of the game and then use chalk to draw the game board outside and pebbles or dried beans to play the game during recess. In Chapter 9, there is mention of the games *marbles*, *spinning tops*, and *broad jumping*. Challenge students to learn and play those games as well.
3. Create shoebox dioramas of the plantation village described in Chapter 3.
4. In Chapter 2, Fred hears the plantation slaves singing songs as they do their back-breaking work in the fields. Aunt Betsey tells him not to be fooled by the singing because, “They have to sing while they work. Overseers are afraid that quiet slaves might be thinking and thinking could lead to trouble.” These songs, sometimes called spirituals, played an important role in African-American history—from the Underground Railroad to the Civil Rights Movement. Have students learn more about these [songs](#) as a form of communication. See also [Songs of the Underground Railroad](#).
5. In Chapter 6, Fred learns that the songs slaves sang often had double meanings. Since slaves were forbidden to read and write, they had to communicate in ways that would not be obvious to their slave owners. One way was through song. (In tribal cultures of Africa, songs were often used to transmit information and therefore historians tell us that slaves used this same method when captured and enslaved in America.) Have students listen to and/or read the lyrics to the song “[Follow the Drinking Gourd](#)” and then challenge them to crack its code. (Historians know that the lyrics secretly identified landmarks and constellations to guide slaves along the trail to freedom. A “drinking gourd” described the Big Dipper constellation and its North Star, since slaves were familiar with carved gourds which they used to

scoop water from buckets to get a drink.) Teachers can find lyric meanings at [The NASA Quest Archives](#).

6. Dramatize, in short skits, any of the scenes or historic events mentioned in the book.
7. Help students understand that candles, not electric light bulbs, were used to light Fred's plantation rooms. Have students make their own candles. Simple instructions for safely melting and molding wax into candles can be found in most art and craft books. Or, visit the [My Craft Book](#) website.
8. In 1967, the U.S. Postal Service issued a 25-cent stamp to honor Frederick Douglass. View the [Douglass stamp](#). Then have students design and illustrate their own stamp to depict one special event in Fred's childhood or adulthood.

## Assessment

All of the student activities can be assessed in traditional ways (i.e., with quizzes and letter grading systems) to determine how well students can memorize and can recount facts. However, since these activities are rooted in discovery, discussion, communication, and collaboration, they lend themselves to more holistic types of assessment that measure achievement of academic skills, behaviors, and even social/emotional growth. We encourage you to use one or more of the following alternative assessments as students complete the activities.

- **Portfolios**—Keep one portfolio of work for each student to measure progress over a specific period of time. Portfolios are a great aid for both student/teacher and parent/teacher conferences. Encourage students to participate in selecting samples of writing, artwork, research notes, etc. to be included in their portfolios.
- **Rubrics**— Create a rubric, or chart (with or without grades or a numerical grading scale) to assess whether or not students have met specific standards and learning goals that you have previously identified.
- **Self-Assessment**—Hold regular teacher/student interviews to listen to students evaluate their own progress and skills.
- **Peer-Assessment**—Have students give and receive constructive feedback to assess such things as collaborative group work and to critique writing.
- **Anecdotal Notes**—As students work individually or in teams, make informal observations of how they solve problems, think critically, conduct research, work with others, and synthesize newly learned information. Add your notes to students' portfolios and share them during parent/teacher conferences.

## ***WebQuest: A Ride to Freedom on the Underground Railroad***

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the book, you read about Fred's escape to freedom. In this WebQuest, you will learn more about the experiences of escaping slaves. Then you will pretend that you are a journalist living in 1848, writing for Fred's newspaper, the *North Star*. Your assignment is to write an article about one or more slaves who have escaped and made their way north to freedom.

### **PROCESS**

#### **Step 1**

Visit these websites to get background information for your article.

- [Aboard the Underground Railroad](#)
- [The Underground Railroad](#)
- [American Visionaries: Frederick Douglass](#)
- [Ads for Runaway Slaves](#)

#### **Step 2**

Use the information you gathered in Step 1 to write your article. You can write an article about how many slaves used the Underground Railroad to escape or you can pretend to interview and report on one slave's story, in particular.

Remember that a news story gives readers the facts by answering such questions as *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why* and *how*. Be sure to answer these questions in your article. For example, you can write about such things as:

- From where the slave(s) escaped
- What life was like as a slave
- Why the slave(s) decided to escape
- How freedom has changed the slave's life
- What the former slave(s) are doing now

Don't use any former slaves names in your article, in order to protect them from a plantation owner who may still be searching for them. Remember, your article can reveal interesting and important details, without revealing the true identities of former slaves.

#### **Step 3**

When your article is complete, check it for spelling and punctuation errors. Make all the necessary corrections.

**Step 4**

Add a headline, or title to your article. The headline should summarize, in just a few words, the main idea of the article, and it should grab the reader's attention. Example headlines: *Four Slaves Risk Their Lives For Freedom* or *Former Slave Tells His Story*.

**Step 5**

Read your article aloud to the class.