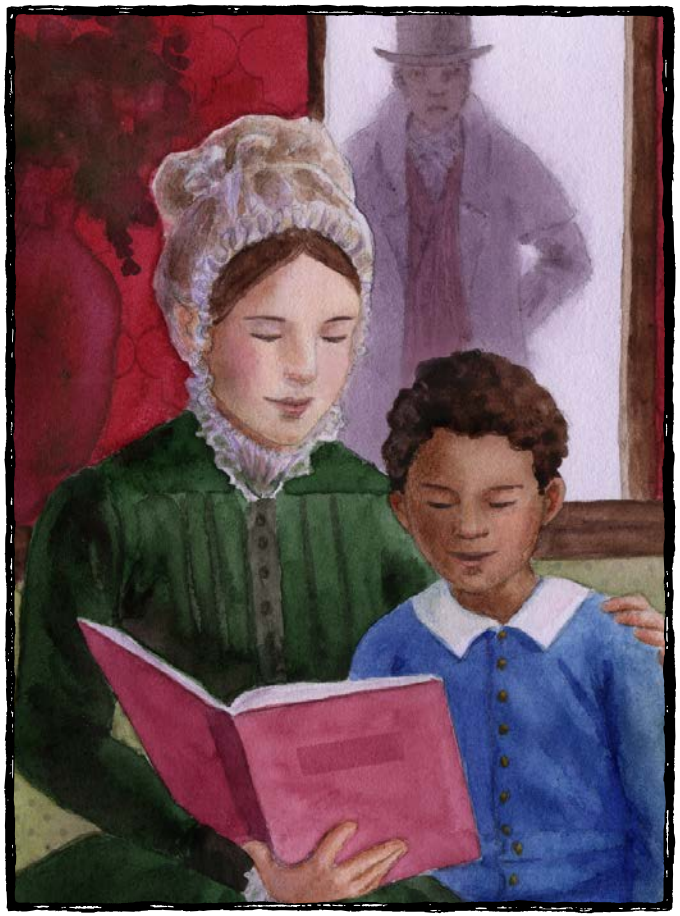
Frederick Douglass: Forever Free

A Reading A–Z Level V Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,337



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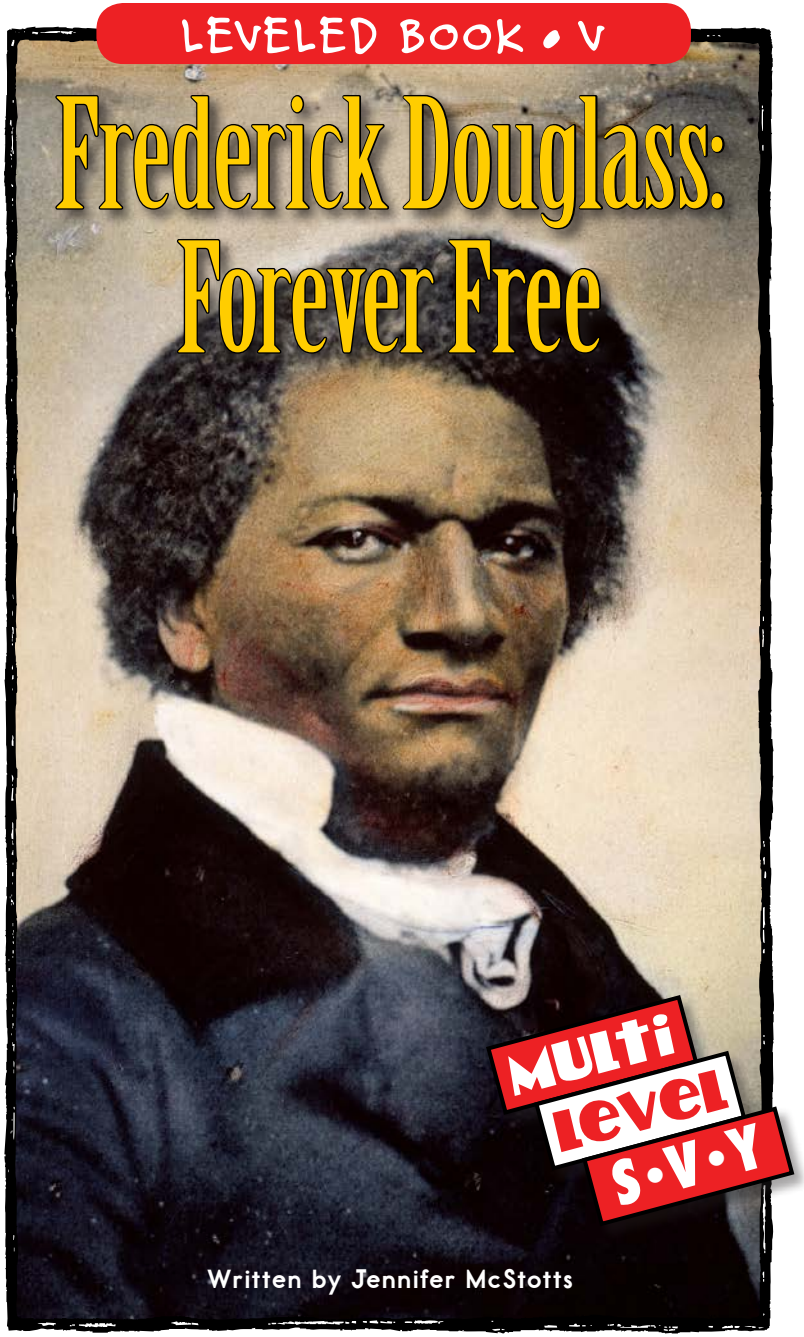

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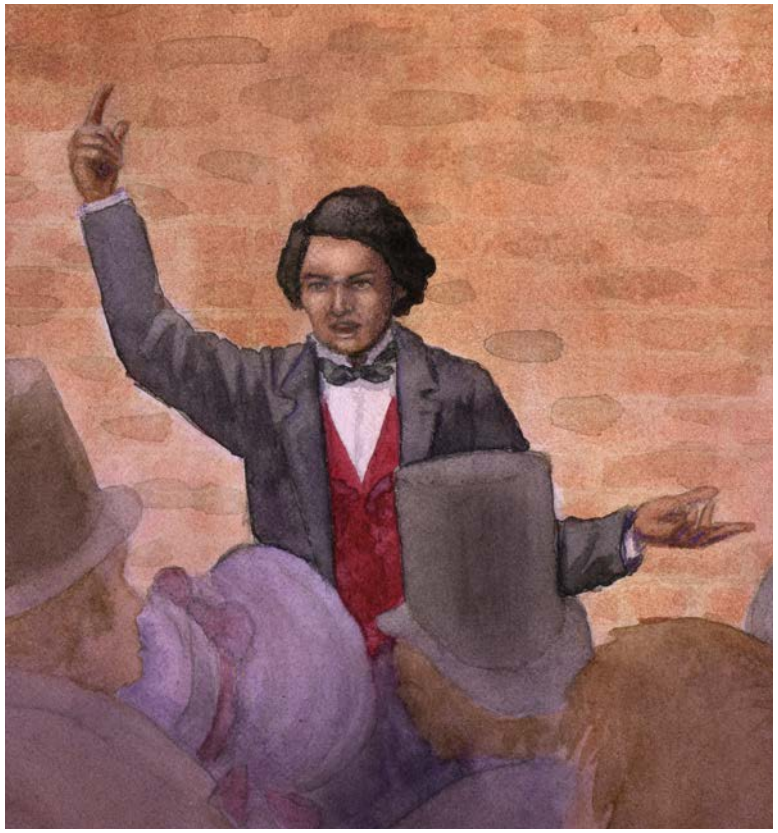

Written by Jennifer McStotts

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Correlation

LEVEL V	
Fountas & Pinnell	R
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40

Table of Contents

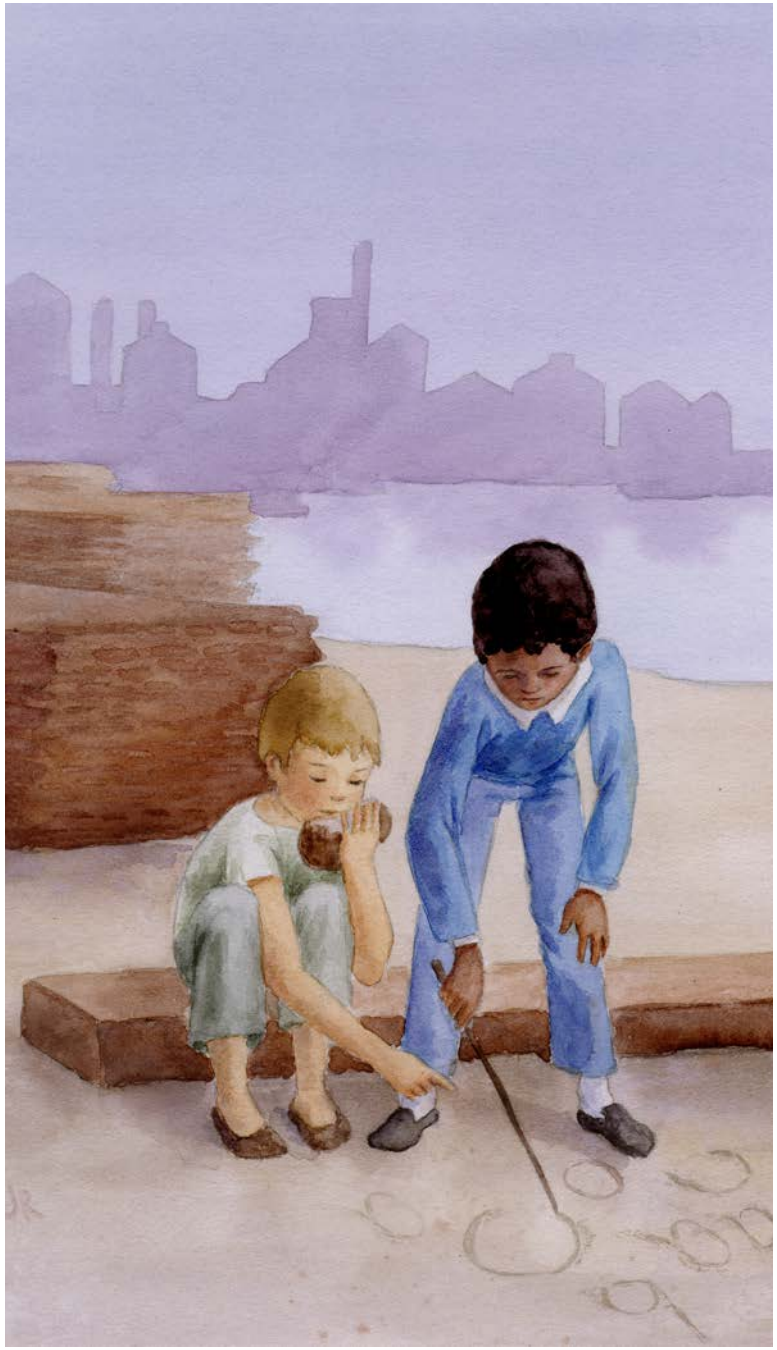
Bread for Lessons

Eight-year-old Frederick Douglass took a loaf of bread from the kitchen and slipped out the back door to run errands. Frederick was a slave, but he knew he had more to eat than some boys in his neighborhood. So he traded them bread for something he wanted even more—to learn how to write.

Just the day before, his owner's wife, Sophia Auld, had snatched a newspaper away from him as he tried to read it in secret. All Frederick wanted was an education, but for slaves in the 1820s, that was against the law.

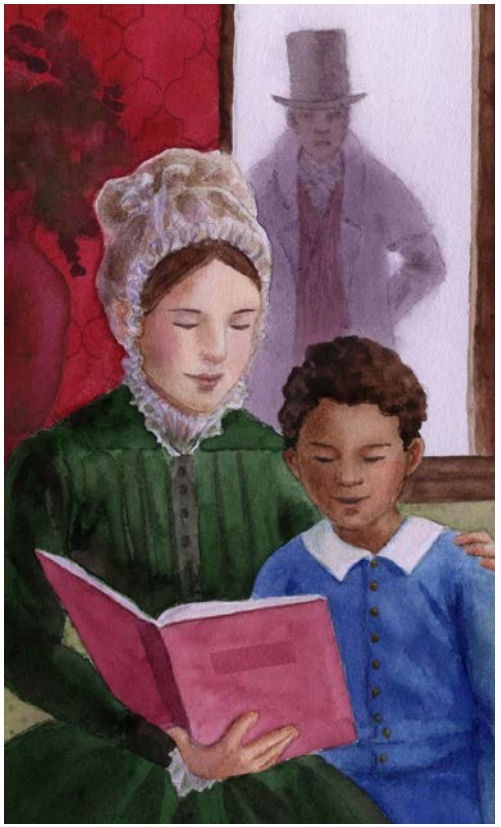
The white boys Frederick knew might be poor, but they had been allowed to go to school. He'd tease them, saying, "I bet I know more of the alphabet than you do!" Then he'd write a few letters in the dirt, the other boys would write what they knew, and Frederick would learn to write those new letters. Now, he was trading food for proper lessons in reading and writing.

Up ahead, Frederick saw one of his friends waiting to give him a lesson and hurried to join him. Frederick would give up his lunch every day to learn!



Born a Slave

Frederick was born in February of 1817 or 1818. He never knew the date of his birth, and though he knew his father was white, he never knew who he was. His mother was Harriet Bailey, but Frederick was raised by his grandmother, Betsey Bailey. When he was eight years old, Frederick was sent to work for some of his owner's relatives, the Auld family in Baltimore, Maryland.



When Frederick first arrived, Sophia Auld helped teach him the alphabet. She gave him several lessons before her husband stopped her. Education and slavery were **incompatible**, he said—a slave who learned to read would grow dissatisfied with his condition and desire freedom.

Auld's words proved to be true. The more Frederick read, the better he understood his situation, the more he hated slavery, and the unhappier he was.

For some time, Frederick struggled to understand the word **abolition**. Whenever a slave ran away or did something a slaveholder said was bad, abolition was blamed. Frederick tried looking up the word in the dictionary, but it merely said "the act of abolishing." What was being abolished?

In 1831, Frederick read a newspaper article about the abolition movement and the people who were fighting to end slavery. Now he understood—some white people wanted to abolish slavery, too! He also learned that blacks were free in some states, and he began dreaming of escape.

"Once you learn to read," Douglass wrote later in life, "you will be forever free."

Understanding that education and freedom went hand in hand, he began giving lessons to other slaves until slaveholders stopped his Sunday school. He earned a reputation among slaves as a leader—and among slave owners as a troublemaker.

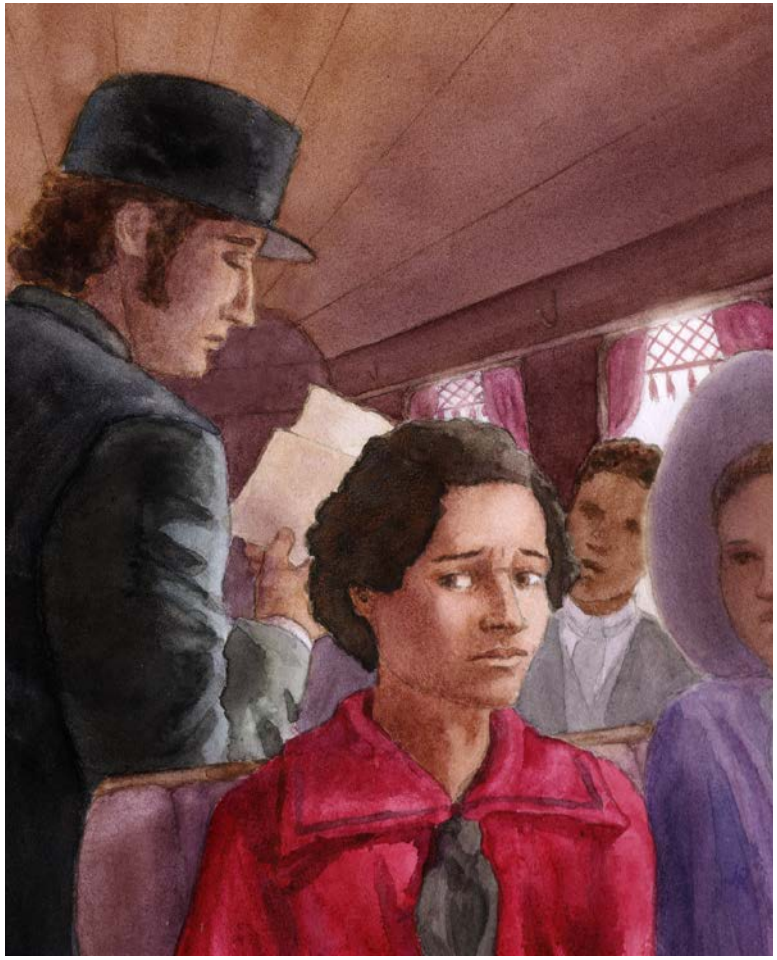
Escape!

For years, Frederick had lived the easier life of a slave in the city. At fifteen, he was sent to work on a farm as a field hand for Edward Covey, a man known as a "slave breaker." Covey would beat slaves into obedience. Loaning Frederick to Covey may have been Auld's way of punishing him for trying to educate himself and other slaves.

Covey almost succeeded in breaking Frederick's spirit. After enduring six months of abuse, though, sixteen-year-old Frederick had had enough. The next time Covey tried to beat him, he fought back for two hours. Covey never tried to beat him again. Still, Frederick began to plan his escape. He tried once but was caught.

Frederick continued to dream of freedom and work on his **literacy.** He even joined the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society, a debate club. It was there that Frederick met Anna Murray, a free black woman.

Together, Anna and Frederick planned his escape. Dressed in a sailor's uniform and carrying a freedman's passport, Frederick traveled through Delaware and Pennsylvania to New York.



The escape took a little less than twenty-four hours, but as Frederick later wrote, "I lived more in one day than in a year of my slave life."

Speaking to audiences years later, Frederick would say, "I appear before you this evening as a thief and a robber. I stole this head, these limbs, this body from my master and ran off with them."

Escaping didn't mean that a slave like Frederick was truly free. Slaves who made it to a free state could live as if they were free, but they could still be seized and taken back to a slave state.

Frederick sent for Anna to join him, and they were married in 1838. Since Frederick was a **fugitive** who could be caught and forced back into slavery, the newlyweds changed their name to Douglass. They settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and had five children together.

A Railroad for Runaways


safe house in Ripley, Ohio

Abolitionists organized a secret network to help fugitive slaves in the 1800s. This network came to be called the *Underground Railroad*. Places with food, clothing, and shelter were called *safe houses* or *stations*. Because many fugitives traveled on foot, people helping the slaves—known as *conductors* or *stationmasters*—tried to provide a station every fifteen miles.

Frederick Douglass stayed in safe houses when he first escaped. He himself later became a stationmaster in Rochester, New York, helping some slaves escape to Canada.

Writing and Speaking

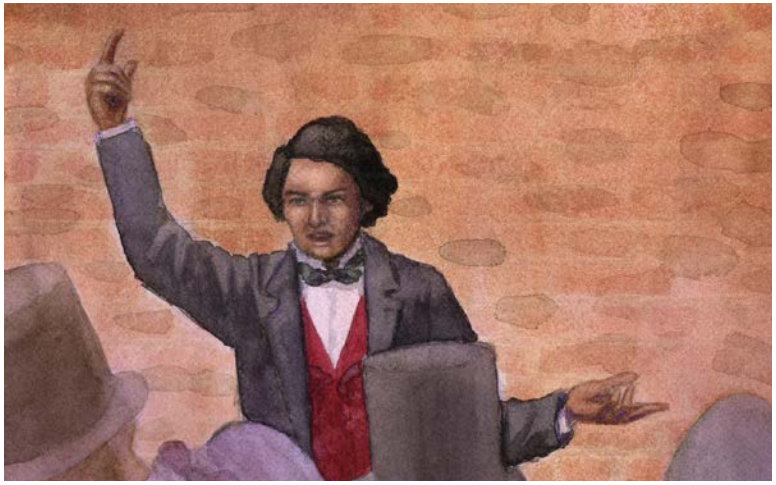
Douglass began to speak at antislavery meetings and soon became the voice of the abolition movement. Slaveholders argued that slaves lacked the intellect to function as free American citizens. Each time Douglass spoke, his **eloquence** countered that. Yet he was so eloquent that some whites refused to believe he had ever been a slave.

Douglass wrote three **autobiographies** in his lifetime. The first, published in 1845, was *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Critics said that the book, like Douglass himself, was fake: no slave was smart enough to write so well, they argued. Yet the book was an instant success and persuaded many people that a slave could possess a great mind.

At the same time, the book included details that could have led to Douglass's arrest as a fugitive slave. In order to avoid recapture, Douglass left the country on a two-year speaking tour. An electrifying speaker, Douglass was a star in England. Fans there raised $711 for Douglass's freedom, a purchase called *manumission*.

When Douglass returned to the United States in 1848, he founded a newspaper. He also wrote thousands of speeches and **editorials** calling for an end to slavery. "I expose slavery in this country," wrote Douglass, "because to expose it is to kill it. Slavery is one of those monsters of darkness to whom the light of truth is death."

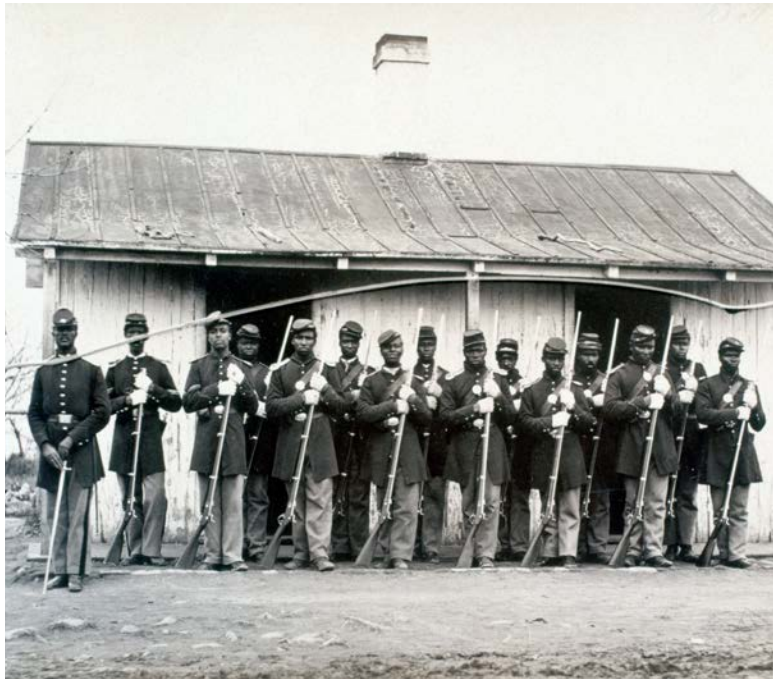
One of his most famous speeches was "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" When he delivered the speech on July 5, 1852, Douglass surprised his audience by posing questions about what Independence Day meant for slaves and former slaves. "What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great **principles** of political freedom and of natural justice, . . . in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?"



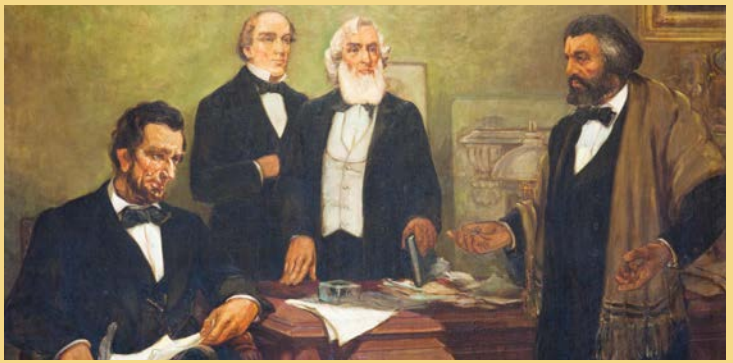
Land of the Free

By the Civil War, Douglass was the most famous black man in the United States. In 1863, he served as President Lincoln's advisor on the Emancipation Proclamation, an order that freed the majority of slaves. He repeatedly urged Lincoln to make emancipation a stated goal of the war. Some historians think Douglass helped **inspire** the famous Gettysburg Address.

Douglass also convinced Lincoln to allow black soldiers to fight for the North. When they did, two of Douglass's sons were among them.



Guards of the 107th United States Colored Troops



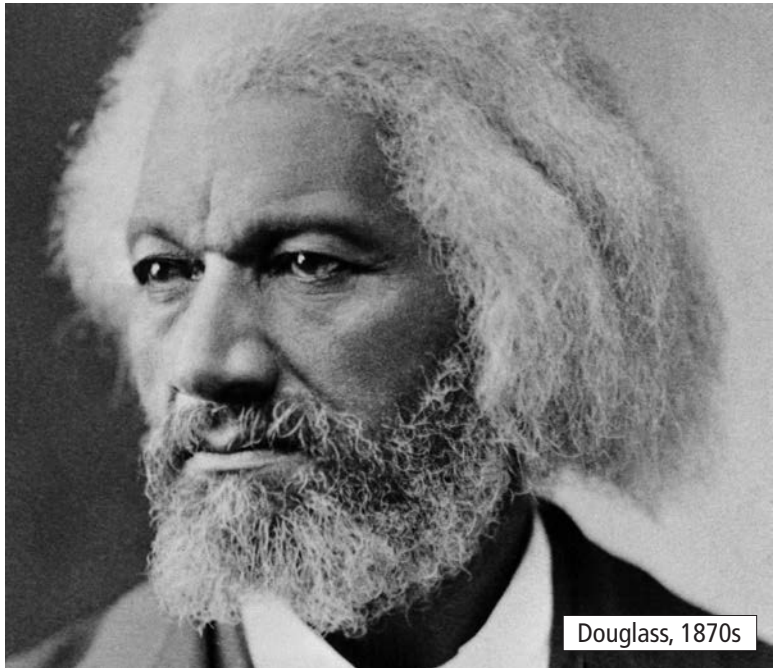
Douglass and President Lincoln

Lincoln and Douglass didn't always see eye to eye. After Lincoln died, though, Douglass gave the keynote address at a memorial honoring Lincoln. The crowd gave Douglass a standing ovation, and the president's widow, Mary Todd Lincoln, gave him Lincoln's favorite walking stick in appreciation. The walking stick still rests in Douglass's house.

Douglass's writing and speaking helped end slavery with the Thirteenth **Amendment,** passed after the Civil War ended in 1865. Three years later, the Fourteenth Amendment granted **citizenship** to former slaves. Shortly after that, in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment gave every male citizen, including former slaves, the right to vote.

Douglass and Women's Rights

Douglass didn't live to see universal suffrage—the right of every adult to vote—but he fought for it until he died. In 1920, the states ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote.



Douglass, 1870s

Douglass wanted the United States to reach its potential as a "land of the free" for blacks, women, Native Americans, and immigrants, too. "I would unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong," Douglass said. He continued to fight for equality for the rest of his life. Douglass died on February 20, 1895.

Today, Douglass is often called the father of the **civil rights** movement. He changed the way Americans thought about slavery and race. He left behind words to continue to inspire Americans, including this motto: "Right is of no sex, truth is of no color."

Glossary

abolition *(n.)* the act of doing away with or ending something; the act of making slavery illegal (p. 7)

amendment *(n.)* a change or addition to a document or law (p. 14)

autobiographies *(n.)* true stories about a person's life, written by that person (p. 11)

citizenship *(n.)* the state of being an official member of a country (p. 14)

civil rights *(n.)* legal, social, and economic rights that guarantee freedom and equality for all citizens (p. 15)

editorials *(n.)* articles in a newspaper or magazine that express the opinion of the publisher (p. 12)

eloquence *(n.)* clear, effective writing or speaking (p. 11)

fugitive *(n.)* a person who is running from something, usually legal authorities (p. 10)

incompatible *(adj.)* unable to coexist without trouble or conflict (p. 6)

inspire *(v.)* to encourage a person to act (p. 13)

literacy *(n.)* the ability to read and write (p. 8)

principles *(n.)* basic values or ideals that guide an action or decision (p. 12)