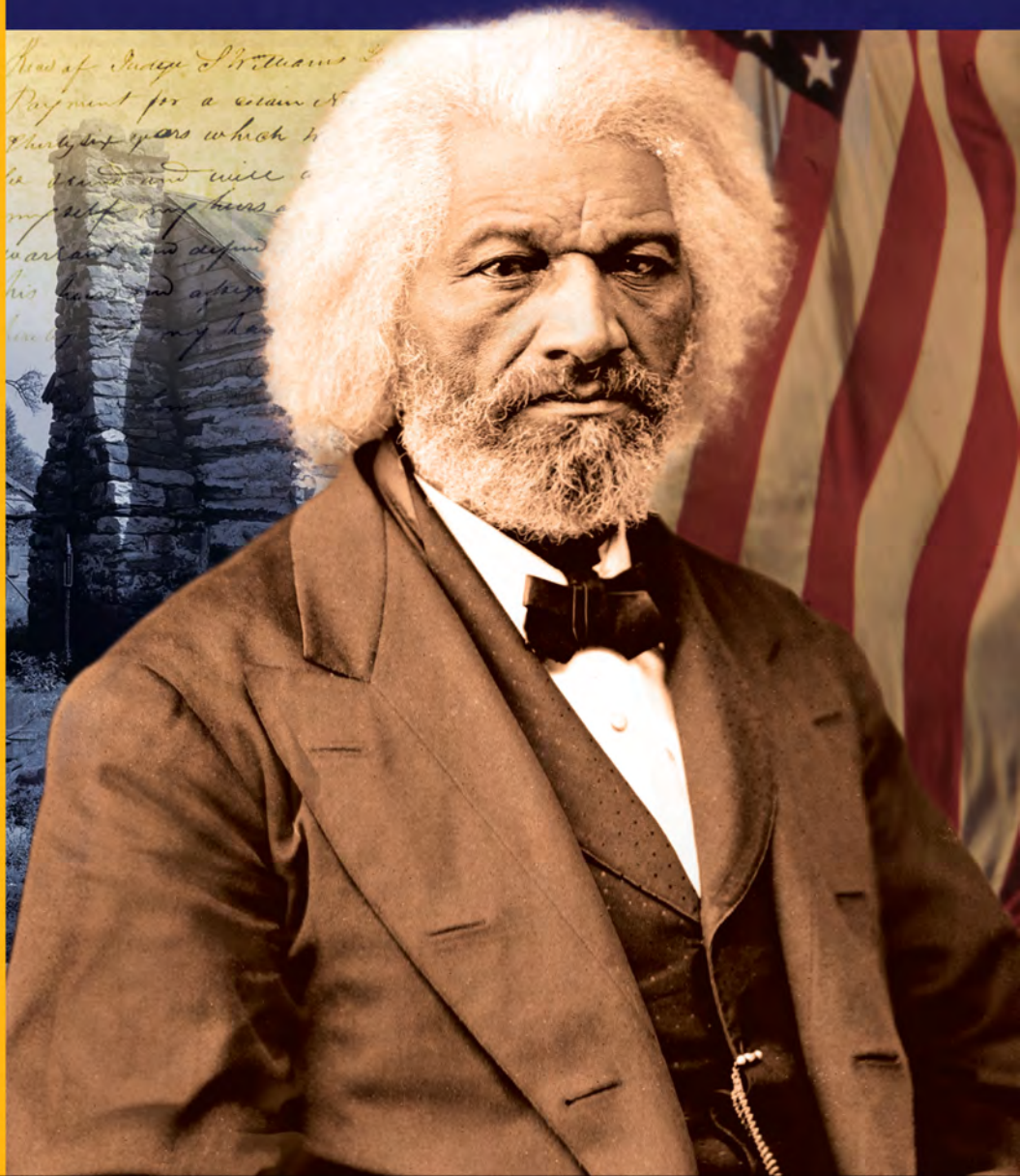


PRESTWICK HOUSE LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS

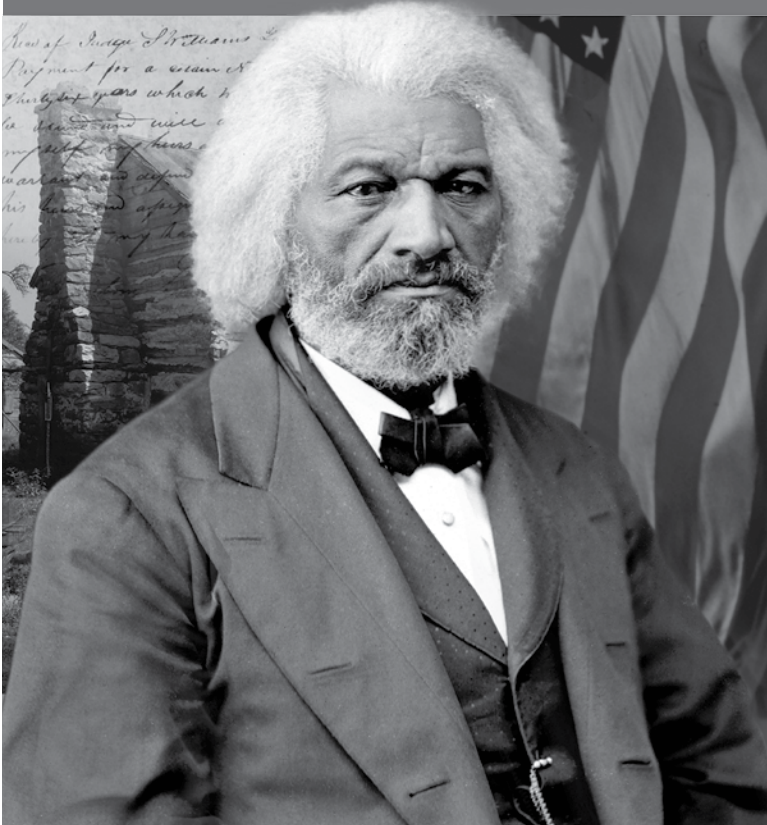
NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

by Frederick Douglass



UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS



F r e d e r i c k D o u g l a s s



Prestwick House

LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS™

P.O. Box 658 Clayton, Delaware 19938 • www.prestwickhouse.com

SENIOR EDITOR: Paul Moliken

DESIGN: Chris Koniiencki

PRODUCTION: Jeremy Clark

 **Prestwick House**
LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS™

P.O. BOX 658 • CLAYTON, DELAWARE 19938

TEL: 1.800.932.4593

FAX: 1.888.718.9333

WEB: www.prestwickhouse.com

Prestwick House Teaching Units™, Activity Packs™, and Response Journals™ are the perfect complement for these editions. To purchase teaching resources for this book, visit www.prestwickhouse.com

This Prestwick House edition, is an unabridged republication of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, published in 1845.

©2004 All new material is copyrighted by Prestwick House, Inc.
All rights reserved. No portion may be reproduced without permission in writing from the publisher. *Revised October, 2013*

ISBN-10: 1-58049-576-1

ISBN-13: 978-1-58049-576-9

Printed in the United States of America

NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS

C O N T E N T S

5		Notes
7		Reading Pointers For Sharper Insights
9		Chapter 1
15		Chapter 2
21		Chapter 3
25		Chapter 4
29		Chapter 5
33		Chapter 6
37		Chapter 7
43		Chapter 8
49		Chapter 9
55		Chapter 10
81		Chapter 11
92		Vocabulary and Glossary

NOTES

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

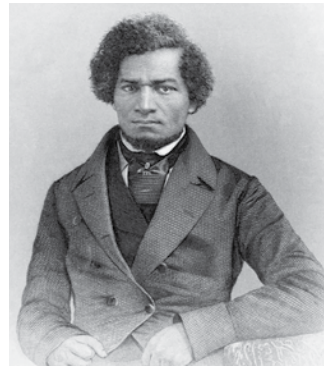
Frederick Douglass F R E D E R I C K D O U G L A S S

FREDERICK DOUGLASS was born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. Douglass was unsure of his year of birth, which is perhaps also a



Photograph of Anna Murray Douglass (1813–1882), the first wife of Frederick Douglass

commentary on the amount of knowledge allowed to slaves. When he was a young boy, Douglass was sent to Baltimore as a house servant. During this time, his master's wife began to teach him how to read and write. He escaped from slavery in 1838 and fled to New York



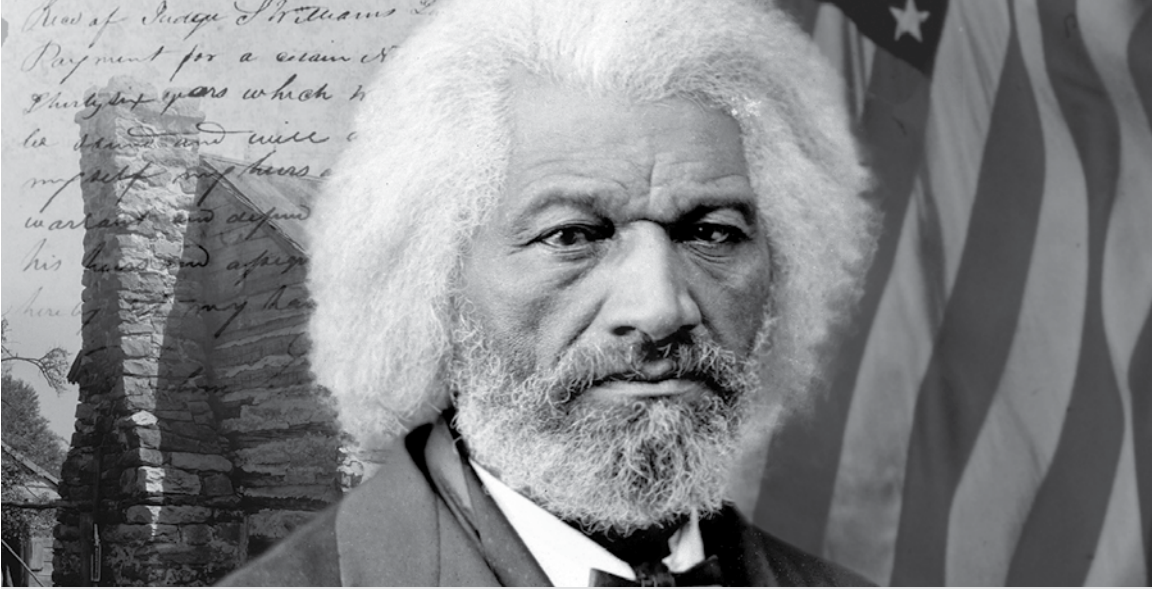
Portrait of Frederick Douglass as a younger man—1855.

City, where he married Anna Murray, who had helped him

READING POINTERS

Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

1. While Douglass's tale often follows autobiographical conventions, see if there are points where it may also resemble other literary forms and genres.
2. The American Anti-Slavery Society originally published *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in 1845. In what ways might publication of the work have worked as a catalyst for the society's cause of abolition?
3. Throughout the book, Douglass reminds his readers of the role of ignorance in successful slave operations. Consider the ways with which white slaveholders maintained their slaves' ignorance.
4. While the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* focuses on Douglass's own reactions and feelings about slavery, one may also note the effects slavery has on slaveholders.
5. Douglass seems to make a point about the religion of his owners and fellow slaves. Examine the ways which Douglass presents slaveholding as a perversion of Christianity.
6. Examine the roles of one or more of the following symbols and motifs found in the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Consider the ways each symbol or motif evolves in the course of the book:
 - female slaves as victims and symbols of the unnaturalness of slavery
 - the white-sailed ships of the Chesapeake Bay as symbols of freedom and spirituality
 - both Baltimore and New York City as contrasts to the rural life;



CHAPTER I

I WAS BORN IN Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it. He deemed all such inquiries on the part of a slave improper and impertinent, and evidence of a restless spirit. The nearest estimate I can give makes me now between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age. I come to this, from hearing my master say, some time during 1835, I was about seventeen years old.

My mother was named Harriet Bailey. She was the daughter of Isaac and Betsey Bailey, both colored, and quite dark. My mother was of a darker complexion than either my grandmother or grandfather.

My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was

my father; but of the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing; the means of knowing was withheld from me. My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labor. For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result.

I never saw my mother, to know her as such, more than four or five times in my life; and each of these times was very short in duration, and at night. She was hired by a Mr. Stewart, who lived about twelve miles from my home. She made her journeys to see me in the night, travelling the whole distance on foot, after the performance of her day's work. She was a field hand, and a whipping is the penalty of not being in the field at sunrise, unless a slave has special permission from his or her master to the contrary—a permission which they seldom get, and one that gives to him that gives it the proud name of being a kind master. I do not recollect of ever seeing my mother by the light of day. She was with me in the night. She would lie down with me, and get me to sleep, but long before I waked she was gone. Very little communication ever took place between us. Death soon ended what little we could have while she lived, and with it her hardships and suffering. She died when I was about seven years old, on one of my master's farms, near Lee's Mill. I was not allowed to be present during her illness, at her death, or burial. She was gone long before I knew any thing about it. Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger.

Called thus suddenly away, she left me without the slightest intimation of who my father was. The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slave-

holder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father.

I know of such cases; and it is worthy of remark that such slaves invariably suffer greater hardships, and have more to contend with, than others. They are, in the first place, a constant offence to their mistress. She is ever disposed to find fault with them; they can seldom do any thing to please her; she is never better pleased than when she sees them under the lash, especially when she suspects her husband of showing to his mulatto children favors which he withholds from his black slaves. The master is frequently compelled to sell this class of his slaves, out of deference to the feelings of his white wife; and, cruel as the deed may strike any one to be, for a man to sell his own children to human fleshmongers, it is often the dictate of humanity for him to do so; for, unless he does this, he must not only whip them himself, but must stand by and see one white son tie up his brother, of but few shades darker complexion than himself, and ply the gory lash to his naked back; and if he lisp one word of disapproval, it is set down to his parental partiality, and only makes a bad matter worse, both for himself and the slave whom he would protect and defend.

Every year brings with it multitudes of this class of slaves. It was doubtless in consequence of a knowledge of this fact, that one great statesman of the south predicted the downfall of slavery by the inevitable laws of population. Whether this prophecy is ever fulfilled or not, it is nevertheless plain that a very different-looking class of people are springing up at the south, and are now held in slavery, from those originally brought to this country from Africa; and if their increase do no other good, it will do away the force of the argument, that God cursed Ham, and therefore American slavery is right. If the lineal descendants of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery at the south must soon become unscriptural; for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their own masters.

I have had two masters. My first master's name was Anthony. I do not remember his first name. He was generally called Captain Anthony—a title which, I presume, he acquired by sailing a craft on the Chesapeake Bay. He was not considered a rich slaveholder. He owned two or three farms, and about thirty slaves. His farms and slaves were under the care of an overseer. The overseer's name was Plummer. Mr. Plummer was a miserable drunkard, a profane swearer, and a savage monster. He always went armed with a cowskin and a heavy cudgel. I have known him to cut and slash the women's heads so

horribly, that even master would be enraged at his cruelty, and would threaten to whip him if he did not mind himself. Master, however, was not a humane slaveholder. It required extraordinary barbarity on the part of an overseer to affect him. 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 own 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 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 any thing. 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.

This occurrence took place very soon after I went to live with my old master, and under the following circumstances. Aunt Hester went out one night,—where or for what I do not know,—and happened to be absent when my master desired her presence. He had ordered her not to go out evenings, and warned her that she must never let him catch her in company with a young man, who was paying attention to her, belonging to Colonel Lloyd. The young man's name was Ned Roberts, generally called Lloyd's Ned. Why master was so careful of her, may be safely left to conjecture. She was a woman of noble form, and of graceful proportions, having very few equals, and fewer superiors, in personal appearance, among the colored or white women of our neighborhood.

Aunt Hester had not only disobeyed his orders in going out, but had been found in company with Lloyd's Ned; which circumstance, I found, from what he said while whipping her, was the chief offence. Had he been a man of pure morals himself, he might have been thought interested in protecting the innocence of my aunt; but those who knew him will not suspect him of any such virtue. Before he commenced whipping Aunt Hester, he took her into the kitchen, and stripped her from neck to waist, leaving her neck, shoulders,

and back, entirely naked. He then told her to cross her hands, calling her at the same time a d-d b-h. After crossing her hands, he tied them with a strong rope, and led her to a stool under a large hook in the joist, put in for the purpose. He made her get upon the stool, and tied her hands to the hook. She now stood fair for his infernal purpose. Her arms were stretched up at their full length, so that she stood upon the ends of her toes. He then said to her, "Now, you d-d b-h, I'll learn you how to disobey my orders!" and after rolling up his sleeves, he commenced to lay on the heavy cowskin, and soon the warm, red blood (amid heart-rending shrieks from her, and horrid oaths from him) came dripping to the floor. I was so terrified and horror-stricken at the sight, that I hid myself in a closet, and dared not venture out till long after the bloody transaction was over. I expected it would be my turn next. It was all new to me. I had never seen any thing like it before. I had always lived with my grandmother on the outskirts of the plantation, where she was put to raise the children of the younger women. I had therefore been, until now, out of the way of the bloody scenes that often occurred on the plantation.

Vocabulary and Glossary

CHAPTER 1

barbarity – savage cruelty

conjecture – an opinion or conclusion based on guesswork

cowskin – a coarse whip of cowhide

cudgel – a club; short, heavy stick

disposed – prepared; inclined

fleshmongers – dealers or peddlers of humans; slave traders

impertinent – disrespectful

infernal – evil, relating to hell

mulatto – a person from mixed black and white ancestry

odiousness – the feeling of intense displeasure, dislike

ply – to act vigorously, violently

profane – obscene, foul, crude

spectacle – a remarkable sight, public display

statesman – a politician who is widely respected

tidings – news, pieces of information

CHAPTER 2

blasphemy – an act of extreme disrespect; sin

brethren – the plural of *brother*; peers

cartwrighting – making or repairing wagons

conferred – awarded, bestowed, given

coopering – barrel making or repairing

deliverance – freedom, liberation

desolate – deserted, lifeless

diligently – showing painstaking effort

evinced – demonstrated, displayed

exultingly – happily, triumphantly

fiendish – evil bad, wicked

ineffable – inexpressible

jargon – meaningless talk or language

manifesting – demonstrating, showing plainly

obdurate – hardened, stubborn, wicked

privation – the lack of life's basic necessities

rapturous – joyous

sloop – a single-masted sailing boat

CHAPTER 3

afforded – gave, provided

ascertaining – discovering, making certain

barouches – four-wheeled carriages with collapsible tops

curried – groomed with a special comb (usually referring to horses)