

Relevant Unit Objectives

Module 2: Resistance and Self-Determination

This lesson addresses the following Essential Questions:

- What constituted an act of resistance of African Americans against the institution of slavery?
- Are some acts of resistance more effective than others?

Objectives of the Lesson

Aim

Is Frederick Douglass's method of resistance still relevant in today's society?

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain Frederick Douglass's philosophy of resistance.
- Read a speech by Frederick Douglass and highlight elements of the speech that defines Frederick Douglass's philosophy of resistance.
- Write their own speech about resisting discrimination in today's world in which they support or oppose Frederick Douglass's method of resistance.

Introduction

An Image of Frederick Douglass

Teacher will give students a picture of Frederick Douglass from 1866.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2962b.html>

The teacher leads the class in a discussion about the image. Some discussion questions to include are:

- What do you notice about this man's facial expression, his dress, and his posture?
- Who or what do you think he is he looking at?
- What do you think he is he thinking about?
(If you were to add a thought bubble above his head, what would it say?)
- What else would you like to know about the image?

Instructional Procedures

Step One: Additional biographical information about Frederick Douglass

The teacher provides background information about Frederick Douglass. This may be done as a summary of the main points listed below, as a worksheet, as a PowerPoint presentation, mini-lecture, or other appropriate strategy.

In 1838, dressed as a sailor, Frederick Bailey stepped ashore a free man, but he was not safe until the great abolitionist David Ruggles took him into his home. At that time, New York was crawling with slave catchers. Within days, Frederick sent for his fiancée, married, and moved to a safer city. Then he changed his name to Frederick Douglass.

Frederick Douglass was not only self-emancipated, he was self-educated too. As a boy, he started learning the alphabet on his own, which horrified his master. Reading and writing would make the boy unfit to be a slave. Thus, young Frederick grasped the importance of learning to read, and he began trading bread with poor white kids for lessons. He saved money to buy a book about freedom and liberty. He read secretly and learned how to write and speak well—very well. When William Lloyd Garrison heard Douglass speak, he asked him to lecture for the Anti-Slavery Society. And so began a new career for Douglass that would last a lifetime.

Douglass spoke against slavery, for women’s rights, and for justice. He lectured across the country and in Europe. He spoke with presidents and world leaders. He was called one of the greatest speakers of the century. In addition, Douglass wrote books, articles, essays which are still read today. And in 1847 he began publishing his own newspaper — *The North Star* — which broadcast his message to thousands of readers. The paper reached thousands of readers. His books are still read today. Douglass continued lecturing and writing up until his death in 1895.

For more information, teachers can refer to Douglass’s autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, A Slave*, published in 1845, but still widely available in paperback version today. This is a highly readable book, one that is often assigned in whole or in part to middle and high school students.

Step Two: Frederick Douglass’s methods of resistance.

Printable image of Douglass’s speech, “West India Emancipation,” can be found at:

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/ampage?collId=mfd&fileName=21/21039/21039page.db&recNum=21&itemLink=%2Fammem%2Fdoughtml%2FdougFolder5.html&linkText=7>

A typed version of the speech can be found on Handout 3.

The most relevant section of the speech begins at the top of page 22 and continues through the middle of the page: [“If there is no struggle there is no progress...lives of others.”]

Students read the excerpt of Douglass’s speech and respond to the questions listed in Handout 1.

Step Three: Double-Entry Journals

The double-entry journal asks students to choose passages in the speech that highlight Douglass’s ideas about resistance.

Step Four: Discussion

The teacher leads a class discussion about the passages students have chosen for their double-entry journals. Additional questions to include:

1. Some abolitionist believed that convincing people of the immorality of slavery through intellectual arguments was the only effective method of resistance to slavery. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
2. We have discussed types of resistance ranging from self-determination and education, to intellectual argument, to direct, (and at times violent) political struggle. Which of these methods do you think were most effective against slavery? Why?
3. Which of these methods do you think are most effective against oppression today? Why?

Conclusion (Optional)

1. Students write a speech about how to overcome racism and discrimination in their own society. In the speech, students should support Douglass's idea of resistance or come up with an alternative form of resistance that they think would be more effective.
2. Students research John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859. Did Douglass offer any response to this event?
3. Students investigate Gandhi's approach to "passive resistance" in India in its effort to throw off the colonial rule of England; they compare/contrast it with Douglass's ideas.

Materials

Printable image of Douglass's speech

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mfd&fileName=21/21039/21039page.db&recNum=21&itemLink=%2Fammem%2Fdoughtml%2FdougFolder5.html&linkText=7>

Handout 1: Frederick Douglass Question Sheet

Handout 2: Double-Entry Journal

Handout 3: Typed version of speech

Handout One: Frederick Douglass: "West India Emancipation" Question Sheet

1. How does Frederick Douglass believe that slavery must be resisted?
2. What is the role of struggle and/or violence in this definition?
3. What do you think Douglass meant by the statement "power concedes nothing without a demand"? Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
4. Would you think that Douglass's method of resistance is effective? Why or why not?
5. What kind of person do you think would agree with Douglass's method of resistance?
6. Do you think that you would participate in the type of resistance about which Douglass talks? Why or why not?
7. [If you have already taught the lesson on James McCune Smith]: How does Douglass's method of resistance compare to the way that James McCune Smith resisted slavery? Which method do you think is more effective? Why?

Handout Two: Double Entry Journal for Analyzing Frederick Douglass’s Philosophy of Resistance

Use the excerpt from Frederick Douglass’s speech “West India Emancipation” to complete the following Double Entry Journal.

- In the left hand column write down words, phrases or passages that you think highlight Douglass’s ideas about effective resistance against slavery.
- In the right hand column, explain how this passage connects to resistance against slavery

| Passage | Explanation |
|---|---|
| <p><u>Example</u> “If there is no struggle there is no progress”</p> | <p><u>Explanation</u> Here Douglass is saying that violence is necessary for resisting slavery. People must be willing to physically fight in order to move forward.</p> |
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Handout Three: Frederick Douglass: "West India Emancipation"**The excerpt below is taken from:**

The Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, Two Speeches by Frederick Douglass; West India Emancipation.. And the Dred Scott Decision (Series: Speech, Article, and Book File---A: Frederick Douglass, Dated)

Link:

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mfd&fileName=21/21039/21039page.db&recNum=21&itemLink=%2Fammem%2Fdoughtml%2FdougFolder5.html&linkText=7>

The excerpts can also be found in the following source:

Douglass, Frederick. [1857] (1985). "The Significance of Emancipation in the West Indies." Speech, Canandaigua, New York, August 3, 1857; collected in pamphlet by author. In *The Frederick Douglass Papers*. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. Volume 3: 1855-63. Edited by John W. Blassingame. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 204.

"If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. In the light of these ideas, Negroes will be hunted at the North, and held and flogged at the South so long as they submit to those devilish outrages, and make no resistance, either moral or physical. Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppressions and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for their removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others."