



# FREDERICK DOUGLASS

## Bright Star Touring Theatre Study Guide



### ***About the show:***

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) was one of the foremost leaders of the American abolition movement, as well as an author, orator, and statesman. Born into slavery on the eastern shore of Maryland, Douglass escaped at the age of 20 and lived an inspirational life dedicated to his belief that all people are created equal - regardless of race, gender, or nation of origin.

Frederick Douglass firmly believed that education was a powerful tool that could help people change their lives. When he was a child, it was against the law in America for anyone to teach slaves how to read or write. Fortunately, when he was 12, the wife of his owner taught him the alphabet. Douglass was able to continue his lessons on his own by watching and listening to other people in his neighborhood.

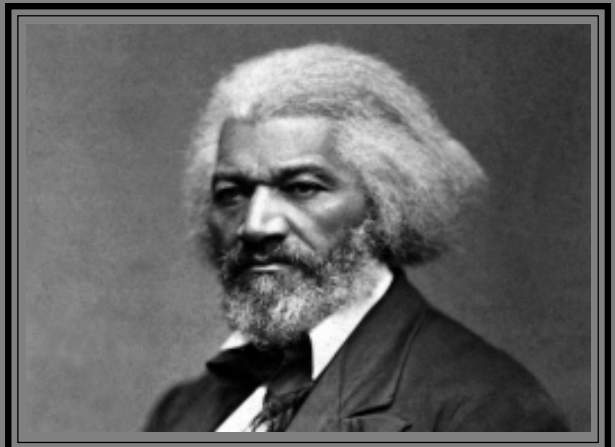
Once he was able to read, he began to read anything he could find, including newspapers and every type of book. Douglass got in trouble when he began teaching other slaves to read and write. He also attempted to escape slavery several times, and finally was successful in 1838, when he was 20 years old.

After his escape, Frederick Douglass began giving anti-slavery speeches and wrote his first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which became a bestseller. He also published many abolitionist newspapers, and was sought as a anti-slavery lecturer throughout the United States and Europe. He gave valuable advice to Presidents Lincoln and Johnson, was appointed to various political positions, and was nominated for Vice President of the United States in 1872.

In the Bright Star production of *Frederick Douglass*, we celebrate the life of one of America's most inspirational and honorable figures.

### **About Our Production:**

This production is a touring show with Bright Star Theatre. During its run, this production may be seen by audiences in as many as 15 different states! Professional actors join Bright Star from across the United States to tour our shows. In a typical week, they'll perform in 10-13 venues for all kinds of audiences. Our actors travel in minivans, averaging 800-1000 miles of driving *per week*, and they have performed for as many as 10,000 people *in one week*! After the show, our actors are available for you to ask questions about this production and their lives as actors - it's one of the most exciting parts of the Bright Star experience - and we hope you'll have a chance to have your question answered!



*A photograph taken of Frederick Douglass in 1879 by George K. Warren*

# Words to Know:

Theatre is a form of storytelling that has been entertaining people for thousands of years. Theatre has its own kind of language. Here are some terms that actors, directors, and other “theatre people” use all the time!

**Audition:** A hopeful actor will either read, sing or dance (or sometimes all three!) in order for the director to decide which actor she wants to cast in a particular role.

**Director:** The director reads the script, and tells the actors where they should go and what they should do. Each director has a different way of telling a story from every other director, and this means that each play will be unique from every other play!

**Set:** All of the scenery on the stage is part of what is called the “set.” It helps to paint a picture of where the story takes place, so it is easier for the audience to follow the play. For *Frederick Douglass*, our actors use a backdrop, which is the colorful painted background.

**Costumes:** All of the clothes that are worn onstage by the actors are costumes. The hats, the coats, and even the shirts and shoes are all part of the costumes!

**Props:** Anything that an actor carries during the show is a prop. Can you remember any of the props used by the actors in this play?

**Rehearsal:** Once the cast of the play is set, everyone on the show needs to practice to get ready for the show. This can take weeks, and that gives time for the sets and costumes to be built, and for the actors to learn their lines.

**Actors:** These are the people that you see on stage. They each have a character to play, and they spend a long time rehearsing before they perform. They have to learn where they should walk, when they should talk, and how their characters should act. It's a lot of work!

## and of course -

**Audience:** Perhaps the most important element in the show! The audience consists of the people who come out to watch the play. You were our audience for *Frederick Douglass*!

# Timeline:

**1818:** Frederick Douglass is born a slave in Talbot County, Maryland.

**1826:** He is sent to live with Hugh Auld's family in Baltimore.

**1827:** Sophia Auld, the wife of Hugh Auld, teaches Frederick the alphabet. He later learns to read and do arithmetic on his own.

**1838:** He escapes north by boat and by train and settles in New Bedford, Massachusetts with his new bride, Anna Murray.

**1839:** Frederick hears a speech by and is inspired by William Lloyd Garrison, a leading abolitionist.

**1841:** Garrison hears Douglass speak at an anti-slavery meeting and asks him to give a speech for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's annual convention. Douglass is hired as an anti-slavery lecturer and tours the country, attracting large and enthusiastic crowds.

**1845:** He writes *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, his first autobiography (he will write two more). The book is so successful that he is forced to flee America for England - despite escaping from slavery, he is still considered the property of Hugh Auld.

**1846:** British supporters purchase his freedom from his former master.

**1847:** Frederick publishes the first issue of his abolitionist newspaper *The North Star* in Rochester, NY. This is the first of several newspapers Douglass will edit and publish.

**1848:** He begins lifelong crusade for women's rights at Women's Rights Convention in Seneca, NY.

**1850s:** He assists hundreds of escaping slaves as a “stationmaster” with the Underground Railroad.

**1861:** He calls for African-Americans to be allowed to fight for the Union Army during the Civil War. By the end of the war, 10% of the Union Army had been comprised of black soldiers ([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)).

**1863:** Frederick visits President Lincoln for the first of several conversations between the two leaders.

**1865:** The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, which outlaws slavery, is ratified by Congress.

**1870:** The Fifteenth Amendment is passed, which allows all citizens the right to vote regardless of race.

**1872:** Frederick Douglass is nominated for Vice-President of the United States.

**1870s-1890s:** He holds several high-ranking political positions, continues to lecture on behalf of civil & women's rights, and moves to Washington, DC.

**1895:** Frederick Douglass dies from heart failure after addressing the National Council of Women.

# Classroom Activities:

## Scene Study!

*This activity incorporates creative thinking, research, writing, and performance!*

1. Break students into small groups. Have each group research an event in Frederick Douglass' life. Some examples are: his first meeting with President Lincoln, his recruitment of black troops into the Union Army, his escape from slavery, his travels in England and Ireland.
2. Turn the research into a presentation. Presentations could take the form of a newscast, an interview, a play, a song - the possibilities are endless! Have each group think about how costumes, props, and the set could help bring their presentation to life. If there's time, try to create some of these props or costume pieces from everyday items!
3. Time for performance! Have each group perform their presentation. Remind the other students about being good audience members while they watch their friends onstage!

## Map It!

*This activity incorporates social studies and geography!*

**Find the following places associated with Frederick Douglass on a map:** Baltimore, Maryland; New Bedford, Massachusetts; Rochester, New York; Washington, DC; England; Ireland

## Writing for *The North Star*

*This activity incorporates creative thinking, reading, visual art, and writing!*

1. Break students into teams of two.
2. Have each team write an article or draw a cartoon that could be included in Frederick Douglass' anti-slavery newspaper *The North Star*. Be creative!
3. Have each team read or present their article or drawing. Talk about why the team made their specific choices.
4. Put together all the articles and drawings into a classroom version of *The North Star*. Feel free to send a copy to Bright Star Touring Theatre!

## Seeing the Play:

Attending the theatre is very different than going to the movies or watching television. For one thing, the actors are real people who can hear and see everything that's happening in the audience. It's important to know a few rules before seeing a play:

- ★ Please be quiet and respectful during the performance so that those around you can hear what's happening.
- ★ If something's funny, it's okay to laugh!
- ★ If you like the play, be sure to clap at the end.

What else can you add to the list?

## Questions for Discussion:

1. Frederick Douglass once said, "***What is possible for me is possible for you.***" What do you think he meant by that? What personal goals and dreams would you like to achieve?
2. Frederick Douglass lived his life based on three basic rules: 1) Believe in yourself. 2) Take advantage of every opportunity. 3) Use the power of education to bring about positive change for yourself and your community. What examples can you give from his life that demonstrated these rules?
3. Have you ever thought about reading being a privilege? Do you think everyone should learn how to read? Why would someone want to control who learns to read?
4. Imagine the bravery it took for people to stand up for their beliefs against slavery while being threatened. Are there injustices today that deserve our attention and help?

# Write your own review!

Your assignment is to write a review of *Frederick Douglass*. If you were writing a review for a newspaper, here are some items that you would need to include:

- ★ Your reader may not have seen the performance. Start by placing your reader in the middle of the action by describing some of the high points.
- ★ Was there a scene or character that you especially liked? Write about what made that character or scene special to you.
- ★ Most reviews comment on the acting, the direction, the sets, the script, and the costumes. Choose at least three from the list to include in your review

Create a headline for your review: \_\_\_\_\_

Byline (your name): \_\_\_\_\_

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**It would be a great honor if your class sent us pictures, drawings and writings about our play!  
We cannot thank you enough for them - and neither can our performers!**



**Bright Star Touring Theatre  
National Touring Division  
136 Round Top Road  
Asheville, NC 28803  
[www.brightstartheatre.com](http://www.brightstartheatre.com)**

