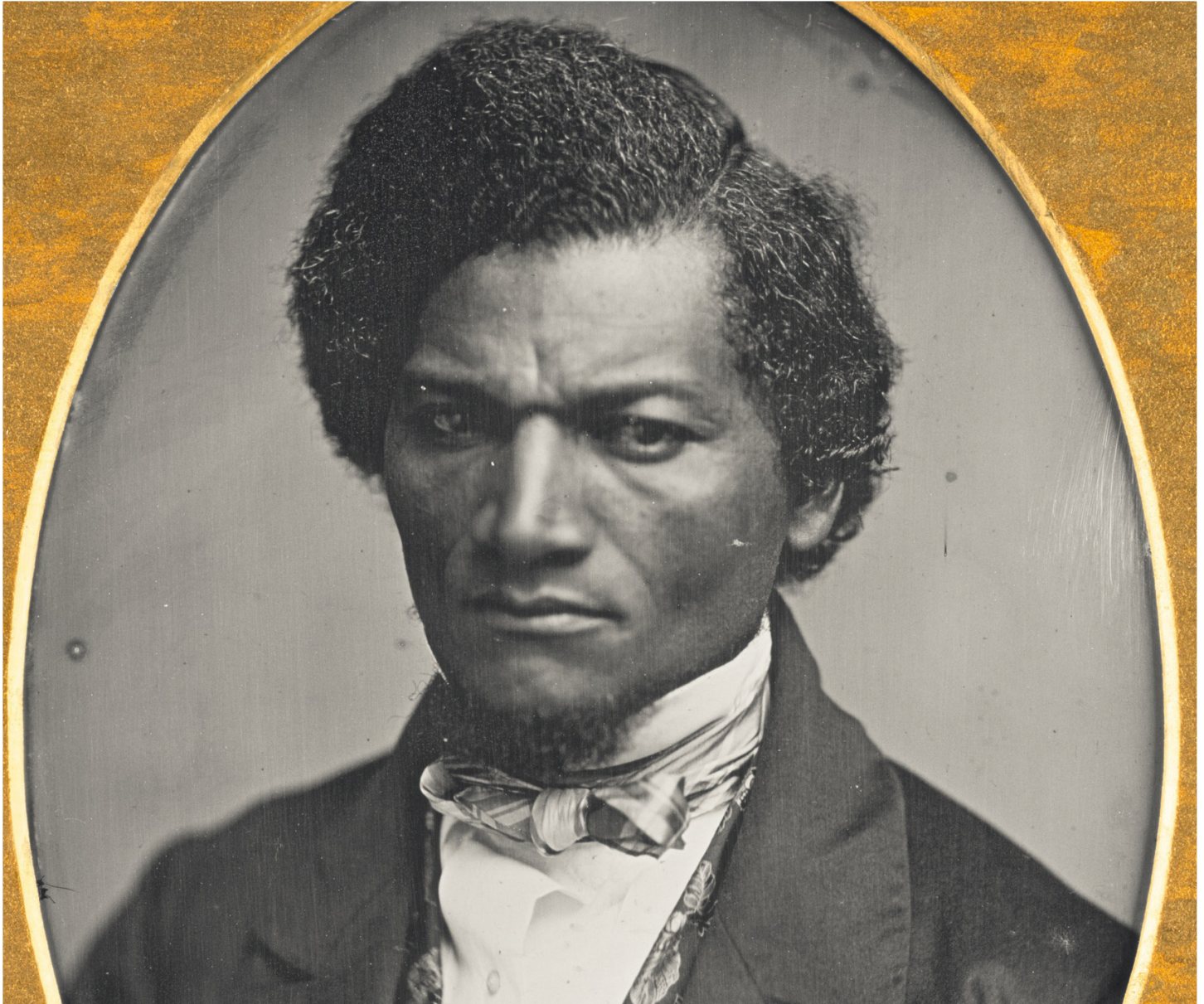


Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech, 1852



Frederick Douglass, photographed by Samuel J. Miller, ca. 1847–1852 (Art Institute of Chicago)

Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech, 1852

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute's director of curriculum development and instructional design.

CONTENTS

Lesson 1	5	Lesson 1 Handouts	11
Lesson 2	7	Lesson 2 Handouts	14
Lesson 3	8	Lesson 3 Handouts	15
Lesson 4	9	Lesson 4 Handouts	16
Lesson 5	10	Lesson 5 Handouts	17

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: The unit is structured for five 45-minute class periods, but Lessons 1 and 2 and Lessons 3 and 4 can be combined. In addition, the essay could be assigned as a take-home exercise.

UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. These skills will enable students to understand, summarize, and evaluate documents and other resources of historical significance.

Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the speech Frederick Douglass delivered on July 5, 1852, in which he asked, "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?" The first four lessons require students to read excerpts from the speech "like a detective." Through summary organizers, practice, and discussion, they will master the technique of identifying keywords, creating summaries of selections from the text, and, as an assessment in the final lesson, writing an argumentative essay.

Students will be able to

- Identify keywords in a historical text
- Read and analyze a speech, identifying the major claims using textual evidence
- Draw logical inferences from what is explicitly stated
- Review, synthesize, discuss, and explain their summaries of a historical text
- Write an argumentative essay that makes inferences from a primary source and support their conclusions with explicit information derived solely from the text

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How did Frederick Douglass describe the meaning of the Declaration of Independence for African Americans before the Civil War?
- Where did Frederick Douglass place the blame for slavery in America and how did he make that argument?

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5: Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.a: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content; Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), and create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), reasons, and evidence.

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from Frederick Douglass, *Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852*, Rochester, NY, 1852, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06829
- Summary Organizers 1–4
- Creating an Essay activity sheet

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**ABOLITION, THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW, AND
FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S FIFTH OF JULY SPEECH**

by Leigh Fought, Le Moyne College

Since July 4, 1776, Americans have celebrated the shared principles of freedom that define their nation. Yet through 1865, the continued enslavement of more than three million Americans undermined the United States' pride in itself as a beacon of liberty. For opponents of slavery, especially Black abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, the July 4 celebration underscored such hypocrisy. The Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society's invitation to Douglass to speak on Monday, July 5, 1852, came at a critical time for the future of Black people in America, abolitionist strategies, and Douglass himself. He rose to the occasion, delivering a denunciation of injustice that reverberates across the ages.

The nearly 600 people present in Rochester's Corinthian Hall that day included active abolitionists from the Rochester area as well as subscribers to Douglass's paper, antislavery fundraising fair attendees, and others sympathetic to the cause. Their immediate concern was the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which strengthened earlier laws permitting enslavers to retrieve people who had fled from slavery. As Douglass pointed out in his address, since enslaved people could not provide testimony, this new act forbade the accused from defending themselves, already presuming them "guilty." The law also provided financial incentives to rule against the purported "fugitive." Douglass himself had fled bondage in 1838 at the age of twenty, but only the purchase of his freedom in 1847 and his fame kept him safe from this 1850 law. Whether self-emancipated or born in freedom, most other African Americans and their communities became suspect. The spirit of the law emphasized the reality that slavery was not the peculiar institution of the South alone. Enslaved people remained enslaved by law, including in states that had ended slavery.

The Fugitive Slave Act gave the different antislavery organizations a common enemy—one they shared with people who ordinarily did not count themselves as abolitionists. Federal law had forced northern people into complicity with an institution that their legislatures had abolished decades earlier. Although many people in such states were perhaps antislavery in the broadest sense, they abhorred abolition in part because the concept was synonymous with the American Antislavery Society's (AAS) social agenda of racial and gender equality and its shocking denunciation of the US Constitution. Another leading abolition organization, the Liberty Party, intended to dismantle slavery through legislation and used the Constitution to justify their purpose. These organizations comprised only a small percentage of the northern population, and they fought one another bitterly over the role of slavery in the Constitution.

In his speech, Douglass synthesized the strategies of the AAS and the Liberty Party to galvanize that previously disengaged audience of people opposed to slavery but disapproving of abolitionists. He shaped his speech as a jeremiad, warning the nation of retribution if it did not retreat from the sin of slavery. Yet the sin was not simply a moral one, as envisioned by the AAS or the Second Great Awakening, but a national one that required Americans to act on their own convictions in remedy. He drew upon Revolutionary African American rhetoric by juxtaposing the contradictions of being both American and Black. By using the nation's definition of itself to claim citizenship for all African Americans, he discarded a calcified conception of the Constitution for a more malleable, inclusive interpretation. In doing so, his thundering rhetoric transcended the immediate crises specific to his era, allowing the underlying moral, ethical, and Constitutional questions to remain relevant today.

Leigh Fought is an associate professor of history at Le Moyne College. She is the author of Given Her Time: A Biography of Sally Hemings (2024) and Women in the World of Frederick Douglass (2017) and an editor of Frederick Douglass Papers, Series III: Correspondence, 1842–1855, vol. 1 (2009).

LESSON 1

LESSON 1

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and gain a clear understanding of Frederick Douglass’s What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech, given in 1852. Through reading and analyzing the original text, the students will learn what is explicitly stated, draw logical inferences, and demonstrate their knowledge by writing a succinct summary of excerpts from the text. In the first lesson the whole class will work together on the first selection from the text.

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 2)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the speech Frederick Douglass delivered on July 5, 1852, in which he asked, “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?”

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from Frederick Douglass, *Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852*, Rochester, NY, 1852, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06829
- Summary Organizer 1

PROCEDURE

1. Tell the students that they will explore what Frederick Douglass said in a speech he delivered on July 5, 1852, to the Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society in Rochester, New York. This address has come to be known as the What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech or the Fifth of July Speech. Resist the temptation to provide additional information as the students should develop ideas based solely on Douglass’s words.
2. Hand out the excerpts from Frederick Douglass’s speech and “share read” them with the class. This is done by having the students follow along silently while you begin reading aloud, modeling prosody, inflection, and punctuation. Then ask the class to join in with the reading after a few sentences while you continue to read aloud, still serving as the model for the class. This technique will support struggling readers as well as English language learners (ELL).
3. Hand out Summary Organizer 1 and display it in a format large enough for all the students to see. This is the first selection from the speech. Ask the students to read it silently to themselves. You may also choose to share read this excerpt with the class again.
4. Tell the students that they will analyze the first selection from the speech today and learn how to do in-depth analysis for themselves. The whole class will be going through this process together. Make certain that students understand that the original text has been excerpted for this lesson. Explain the purpose and use of ellipses.

5. Explain that the first task is to select keywords from the text and then use those words to create one or two summary sentences that demonstrate an understanding of what Douglass was saying.
6. Guidelines for Selecting Keywords: Keywords contribute to the meaning of the text. Without them the selection would not make sense. These words are usually nouns or verbs (not “connector” words like *are, is, the, and, so,* etc.). The number of keywords depends on the length of the text. This selection is 275 words, so you can pick up to 12 keywords. The students must know what the keywords mean, so there will be opportunities to teach students how to use context clues, word analysis, and dictionary skills to discover word meanings.
7. Students will now select up to 12 words that they believe are keywords and underline them in the text.
8. Survey the class to find out what the most popular choices were. After some discussion and your guidance, the class should decide on 12 keywords. For example, the class might select *slave, plantation, escaped, celebration, National Independence* (you can allow two words as a keyword on occasion if they make sense as a unit), *political freedom, America, young, stream, refreshing, angry, and dry up*. Now, no matter which words the students had previously selected, have them write the agreed-upon keywords in their organizers.
9. Explain that the class will use these keywords to write two or three sentences that demonstrate an understanding of what Douglass was saying. This should be a class negotiation process. For example, “I escaped from a slave plantation. Today is a celebration of National independence and political freedom. America, a young country, is like a stream that can be refreshing, angry, or just dry up.” The class might find that they don’t need some of the words to make the summary more streamlined. This is part of the negotiation process. All the students will write the final negotiated sentence into their organizers.
10. Now guide the students in restating their summary sentences in their own words. Again, this is a class negotiation process. For example, “I escaped slavery and am here to talk about this young country’s freedom and future.”
11. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. You can have students use the back of their organizer or other vocabulary form to make a note of these words and their meaning.

LESSON 2

LESSON 2

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and gain a clear understanding of Frederick Douglass’s What to the Slave Is the 4th of July Speech, given in 1852. In the second lesson the class will work with partners and in small groups.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer 2

PROCEDURE

1. Review what the class did in the previous lesson and the meaning of the first selection.
2. Distribute Summary Organizer 2 and display a copy in a format large enough for the whole class to see. Tell the students that they will work on the second selection from the speech with partners and in small groups.
3. Share read the second selection with the students as described in Lesson 1.
4. Review the process of selecting keywords, writing a summary of the text using those words, and then restating the summary in their own words to show their understanding of Douglass’s speech.
5. Pair the students up and have them work together to select the best keywords. This passage is 234 words, so they can choose 10 to 12 words.
6. Now put two pairs of students together. These four students will negotiate with each other to come up with their final keywords. Be strategic in how you make your groups in order to ensure the most participation by all group members.
7. Once the groups have selected their final keywords, each group will use those words to construct two or three sentences that summarize what Frederick Douglass was saying. During this process, try to make sure that everyone is contributing. All of the students should write the group’s negotiated sentence into their organizers.
8. Ask groups to share out the summary sentences that they have created. This should start a teacher-led discussion that points out the qualities of the various responses. How successful were the groups at getting at Douglass’s main idea and were they careful to use the keywords in their summaries?
9. Now direct the groups to restate their summary sentences in their own words. Again, this is a group negotiation process. They should write their restatement in their organizers. Have the groups share out and discuss the clarity and quality of the responses.
10. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. You can have students use the back of their organizer or other vocabulary form to make a note of these words and their meaning.

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 1)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the speech Frederick Douglass delivered on July 5, 1852, in which he asked, “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?”

LESSON 3

LESSON 3

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and gain a clear understanding of Frederick Douglass’s What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech, given in 1852. In the third lesson, the students will work independently.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer 3

PROCEDURE

1. Review what the class did in the previous two lessons and the meaning of the first two selections from the speech.
2. Distribute Summary Organizer 3 with the third selection from Douglass’s speech. You may decide to share read the text with the students as in prior lessons or have them read it silently to themselves.
3. Review the process of selecting keywords, writing a summary using the keywords, and then restating the summary in the students’ own words. This text is 211 words, so the students can pick up to 10 keywords.
4. After the students have worked through the three steps, have them share out their restated summaries, and guide a class discussion of the meaning of Douglass’s words.
5. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. You can have students use the back of their organizer or other vocabulary form to make a note of these words and their meaning.

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 4)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the speech Frederick Douglass delivered on July 5, 1852, in which he asked, “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?”

LESSON 4

LESSON 4

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

Students will be asked to “read like a detective” and gain a clear understanding of Frederick Douglass’s What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech, given in 1852. In the fourth lesson, the students will work independently.

MATERIALS

- Summary Organizer 4

PROCEDURE

1. Review what the class did in the previous three lessons and the meaning of the first three selections from the speech.
2. Distribute Summary Organizer 4 with the fourth selection from Douglass’s speech. You may decide to share read the text with the students as in prior lessons or have them read it silently to themselves.
3. Review the process of selecting keywords, writing a summary using the keywords, and then restating the summary in the students’ own words to demonstrate understanding of Douglass’s main points. There are 285 words in this selection, so the students can select up to 12 keywords.
4. After the students have worked through the three steps, have them share out their restated summaries, and guide a class discussion of the meaning of Douglass’s words.
5. Wrap-up: Discuss vocabulary that the students found confusing or difficult. You can have students use the back of their organizer or other vocabulary form to make a note of these words and their meaning.

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s director of curriculum development and instructional design.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be combined with Lesson 3)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the speech Frederick Douglass delivered on July 5, 1852, in which he asked, “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?”

LESSON 5

LESSON 5

BY TIM BAILEY (CREATED 2012, REVISED 2024)

OVERVIEW

In the fifth lesson, the students will review and integrate their work from the previous four lessons. They will demonstrate their comprehension by writing an argumentative essay in response to one of the essential questions.

MATERIALS

- Excerpts from Frederick Douglass, *Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852*, Rochester, NY, 1852, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06829
- Completed Summary Organizers 1–4
- Creating an Essay activity sheet

Tim Bailey taught middle school and elementary school in Utah for over two decades. Named the 2009 National History Teacher of the Year, he is the Gilder Lehrman Institute's director of curriculum development and instructional design.

GRADE LEVELS: 7–12

RECOMMENDED TIME FOR COMPLETION: One 45-minute class period (may be done for homework)

UNIT OVERVIEW: This unit is one of the Gilder Lehrman Institute's Teaching Literacy through History™ (TLTH) resources, designed to align with the Common Core State Standards. Students will learn and practice skills that will help them analyze, assess, and develop knowledgeable and well-reasoned points of view on a primary source. Over the course of five lessons, students will read, analyze, and gain a clear understanding of the speech Frederick Douglass delivered on July 5, 1852, in which he asked, "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?"

PROCEDURE

1. Students should review the work from the previous lessons by using their completed Summary Organizers. Engage in a short class discussion to clarify any areas that students may have found confusing or would like to discuss further. This discussion should reinforce the students' understanding of Douglass's text. You may share some of the information in the historical background essay to put the speech into context for the class.
2. The students will write a short essay in response to one of the prompts in class or as an out-of-class assignment. Remind the students that they must back up any arguments they make with evidence taken directly from the speech. You may have them use the Creating an Essay activity sheet to help them organize their response and their evidence before writing their essay.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION PROMPTS

- How did Frederick Douglass describe the meaning of the Declaration of Independence for African Americans before the Civil War?
- Where did Frederick Douglass place the blame for slavery in America and how did he make that argument?

Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech, July 5, 1852 (Excerpts)

The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable—and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here to-day, is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude. You will not, therefore, be surprised, if in what I have to say, I evince no elaborate preparation, nor grace my speech with any high sounding exordium. With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting to your patient and generous indulgence, I will proceed to lay them before you.

This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. . . . There is consolation in the thought, that America is young.—Great streams are not easily turned from channels, worn deep in the course of ages. They may sometimes rise in quiet and stately majesty, and inundate the land, refreshing and fertilizing the earth with their mysterious properties. They may also rise in wrath and fury, and bear away, on their angry waves, the accumulated wealth of years of toil and hardship. They, however, gradually flow back to the same old channel, and flow on as serenely as ever. But, while the river may not be turned aside, it may dry up, and leave nothing behind but the withered branch, and the unsightly rock, to howl in the abyss—sweeping wind, the sad tale of departed glory. As with rivers so with nations. . . .

The simple story of it is, that, 76 years ago, the people of this country were British subjects. . . . You were under the British Crown. . . . But, your fathers . . . went so far in their excitement as to pronounce the measures of government unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not to be quietly submitted to. . . . To say *now* that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy . . . but there was a time when, to pronounce against England, and in favor of the cause of the colonies, tried men's souls. . . .

On the 2d of July, 1776, the old Continental Congress, to the dismay of the lovers of ease, and the worshippers of property, clothed that dreadful idea with all the authority of national sanction. . . . It may refresh your minds and help my story if I read it.

“Resolved, That these united colonies are, and of right, ought to be free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain *is*, and ought to be, dissolved.”

Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success. The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore, may properly celebrate this anniversary. The 4th of July is the first great fact in your nation's history—the very ring-bolt in the chain of your yet undeveloped destiny. . . .

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the every day practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival. . . .

Behold the practical operation of this internal slave-trade, the American slavetrade, sustained by American politics and American religion. . . . Fellow-citizens, this murderous traffic is, to-day, in active operation in this boasted republic. . . . I see the bleeding footsteps . . . on the way to the slave-markets, where the victims are to be sold like *horses, sheep, and swine*. . . . My soul sickens at the sight. . . . But a still more inhuman, disgraceful, and scandalous state of things remains to be presented.

By an act of the American Congress . . . slavery has been nationalized in its most horrible and revolting form. . . . The Fugitive Slave Law makes MERCY TO THEM, A CRIME; and bribes the judge who tries them. An American JUDGE GETS TEN DOLLARS FOR EVERY VICTIM HE CONSIGNS to slavery, and five, when he fails to do so. . . . Let this damning fact be perpetually told . . . that, in tyrant-killing, king-hating, people-loving, democratic, Christian America, the seats of justice are filled with judges, who hold their offices under an open and palpable *bribe*. . . .

I take this law to be one of the grossest infringements of Christian Liberty, and, if the churches and ministers of our country were not stupidly blind, or most wickedly indifferent, they, too, would so regard it. . . . They are utterly silent in respect to a law which robs religion of its chief significance, and makes it utterly worthless to a world lying in wickedness. . . . Allow me to say, in conclusion . . . I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably, work the downfall of slavery. "*The arm of the Lord is not shortened,*" and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with *hope*.

Source: Frederick Douglass, Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852, Rochester, NY, 1852, The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC06829.

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 1: Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech

Original Text

The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantation, from which I escaped, is considerable—and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here to-day, is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude. You will not, therefore, be surprised, if in what I have to say, I evince no elaborate preparation, nor grace my speech with any high sounding exordium. With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting to your patient and generous indulgence, I will proceed to lay them before you. This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. . . . There is consolation in the thought, that America is young.—Great streams are not easily turned from channels, worn deep in the course of ages. They may sometimes rise in quiet and stately majesty, and inundate the land, refreshing and fertilizing the earth with their mysterious properties. They may also rise in wrath and fury, and bear away, on their angry waves, the accumulated wealth of years of toil and hardship. They, however, gradually flow back to the same old channel, and flow on as serenely as ever. But, while the river may not be turned aside, it may dry up, and leave nothing behind but the withered branch, and the unsightly rock, to howl in the abyss—sweeping wind, the sad tale of departed glory. As with rivers so with nations. . . .

Source: Frederick Douglass, Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852, Rochester, NY, 1852.

Keywords

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 2: Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech

Original Text

The simple story of it is, that, 76 years ago, the people of this country were British subjects. . . . You were under the British Crown. . . . But, your fathers . . . went so far in their excitement as to pronounce the measures of government unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not to be quietly submitted to. . . . To say *now* that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy . . . but there was a time when, to pronounce against England, and in favor of the cause of the colonies, tried men's souls. . . . On the 2d of July, 1776, the old Continental Congress, to the dismay of the lovers of ease, and the worshippers of property, clothed that dreadful idea with all the authority of national sanction. . . . It may refresh your minds and help my story if I read it.

“Resolved, That these united colonies are, and of right, ought to be free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain *is*, and ought to be, dissolved.”

Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success. The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore, may properly celebrate this anniversary. The 4th of July is the first great fact in your nation's history—the very ring-bolt in the chain of your yet undeveloped destiny. . . .

Source: *Frederick Douglass*, Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852, *Rochester, NY, 1852*.

Keywords

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 3: Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech

Original Text

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour. Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the every day practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival. . . .

Source: Frederick Douglass, Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852, Rochester, NY, 1852.

Keywords

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Summary Organizer 4: Frederick Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech

Original Text

Behold the practical operation of this internal slave-trade, the American slave-trade, sustained by American politics and American religion. . . . Fellow-citizens, this murderous traffic is, to-day, in active operation in this boasted republic. . . . I see the bleeding footsteps . . . on the way to the slave-markets, where the victims are to be sold like *horses, sheep, and swine*. . . . My soul sickens at the sight. . . . But a still more inhuman, disgraceful, and scandalous state of things remains to be presented. By an act of the American Congress . . . slavery has been nationalized in its most horrible and revolting form. . . . The Fugitive Slave Law makes MERCY TO THEM, A CRIME; and bribes the judge who tries them. An American JUDGE GETS TEN DOLLARS FOR EVERY VICTIM HE CONSIGNS to slavery, and five, when he fails to do so. . . . Let this damning fact be perpetually told . . . that, in tyrant-killing, king-hating, people-loving, democratic, Christian America, the seats of justice are filled with judges, who hold their offices under an open and palpable bribe. . . . I take this law to be one of the grossest infringements of Christian Liberty, and, if the churches and ministers of our country were not stupidly blind, or most wickedly indifferent, they, too, would so regard it. . . . They are utterly silent in respect to a law which robs religion of its chief significance, and makes it utterly worthless to a world lying in wickedness. . . . Allow me to say, in conclusion . . . I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably, work the downfall of slavery. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened," and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with *hope*.

Source: Frederick Douglass, Oration, Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester, by Frederick Douglass, July 5th, 1852, Rochester, NY, 1852.

Keywords

Keyword Summary

In Your Own Words

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Creating an Essay: Analyzing Douglass's What to the Slave Is the 4th of July? Speech

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in Maryland in 1818. He successfully escaped and migrated north to freedom in 1838. Beginning in the 1840s, Frederick Douglass gave abolitionist lectures in the United States and overseas. In his first public address, "I Have Come to Tell You Something about Slavery" (1841), Douglass noted that White abolitionists, no matter how well meaning, "cannot speak as I can from experience; they cannot refer you to a back covered with scars, as I can; for I have felt these wounds; I have suffered under the lash without the power of resisting."

In the nineteenth century, Independence Day celebrations were more reflective than celebratory. When Douglass spoke in Rochester, New York, on July 5, 1852, he challenged his audience to question how the nation honored its founding principles and declared, in biting oratory, "This 4th of July is *yours*, not *mine*. You may rejoice, *I* must *mourn*."

Choose one of the following questions as an essay prompt. Support your essay by providing evidence from the speech concerning these topics.

- How did Frederick Douglass describe the meaning of the Declaration of Independence for African Americans before the Civil War?
- Where did Frederick Douglass place the blame for slavery in America and how did he make that argument?

Topic Sentence or Paragraph

Evidence

NAME

PERIOD

DATE

Evidence

Evidence

Concluding Sentence or Paragraph