

Name _____ Date _____

Frederick Douglass

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

Excerpt from Frederick Douglass's Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Chapter 7

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The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well as the most wicked of men. As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! that very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out.

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I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm.

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Frederick Douglass was born into slavery around February of 1818 in Maryland. He was separated from his mother when he was only a few weeks old, and his grandparents raised him until he was about six years old. From a young age, Douglass experienced and witnessed the harsh realities enslaved people faced.

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After many failed attempts, Douglass was finally able to escape in 1838. With the help of his wife Anna Murray, he disguised himself as a free Black sailor and boarded a northbound train to New York.

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The following is an excerpt from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave as Douglass recounts his escape.

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\xe2\x80\x9dIt required no very vivid imagination to depict the most frightful scenes through which I should have to pass, in case I failed. The wretchedness of slavery, and the blessedness of freedom, were perpetually before me. It was life and death with me. But I remained firm, and, according to my resolution, on the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind.\xe2\x80\x9d

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After escaping slavery, Douglass and Murray settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts. While living in New Bedford, Douglass attended abolitionist meetings and spoke about his experiences as an enslaved man. He became known for his phenomenal speaking and writing skills, and he used these skills in the fight to end slavery.

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He met William Lloyd Garrison, who was an abolitionist and publisher of an anti-slavery newspaper called The Liberator. Inspired by Douglass's powerful speeches, Garrison encouraged Douglass to become a leader in the abolitionist movement. Douglass traveled across the US and abroad to lecture and share his story.

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Notes

In 1845, Douglass published his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. This book detailed the extreme hardships that enslaved people faced and his experiences of escaping slavery. It garnered a lot of attention and became a powerful instrument in the abolitionist movement. In 1847, Douglass began publishing his own anti-slavery newspaper, *The North Star*. The first issue of his newspaper outlined its purpose:

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\xe2\x80\x9cThe object of the *North Star* will be to attack slavery in all its forms and aspects; advocate universal emancipation; exalt the standard of public morality; promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the colored people; and hasten the day of freedom to the three millions of our enslaved fellow countrymen.\xe2\x80\x9d

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In the following years, he published two more autobiographies, *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. After the Civil War, Douglass held government positions and continuously advocated for civil rights, working as an activist until his death in 1895.

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His legacy serves as an inspiration to many people, encouraging them to bring about change and fight for social justice.

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