

HIGH SCHOOL | BLUE VALLEY DISTRICT NOVEL RATIONALE

***The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass**

English Language Arts, 11th Grade

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Douglass's Narrative is like a highway map, showing us the road from slavery to freedom. At the beginning of the book, Douglass is a slave in both body and mind. When the book ends, he gets both his legal freedom and frees his mind. And if the book is like a highway map, then the mile markers are a series of "epiphanies," or moments of realization, that he has along the way. These events are turning points in Douglass's life, but they also help show how he got there, and what he had to learn along the way.

The first epiphany is Douglass's realization about what slavery is. He's born a slave on Colonel Lloyd's plantation, but as a child he's mostly spared the worst kinds of suffering. So his first turning point is sort of simplistic, but also important: realizing that he is a slave and all that that entails. The second stage of his life begins when the seven-year-old Douglass is sent to work for a new set of masters in Baltimore. Baltimore is a whole new world for him, with a lot of new experiences, but the most important thing he learns there is the power of education. As Douglass becomes a young man, he starts fighting to actually be free. When he talks back to his master, his master sends him to work for a notorious "slave breaker," Covey, who tries to destroy Douglass's spirit. For a while it works, and Douglass is reduced to the state of mind of an animal. This is the lowest point in his life. His third epiphany happens, however, when he decides that he'd rather die than be treated like a slave anymore. So the next time Covey tries to whip him, he stands up to him, and after a two-hour fight, Covey leaves him alone. Douglass vows never to be whipped again. And he never is.

After this, Douglass bounces from master to master, but he's always on the lookout for a way to escape to freedom. And after one failed attempt, he finally succeeds and makes his way first to New York, then to Massachusetts. But even after he's free, he discovers that his journey isn't over. This is his final epiphany: even after he acquires his own freedom, he realizes he can't rest until all slavery is abolished. He not only becomes an abolitionist activist himself; he writes the narrative of his life to teach others, white and Black, how to follow in his footsteps.

CONNECTIONS TO CURRICULUM*

The following are some, but not all, of the connections to curriculum for this novel.

- **Unit 1: Language and Perspective**
 - Essential Questions: "How do texts reflect society both historically and linguistically?" and "How can crafting your story reflect personal identity?"
- **Unit 2: Complex Issues**
 - Essential Questions: "How does written language challenge and change an individual's mind? What role does the writer play in challenging and changing an individual's mind?"

- **Unit 3: Universal Human Experience**

- Essential Questions: “How does sustained inquiry of the past inform and motivate change?” and “How do we prepare for an uncertain future?”

- **Unit 4: Personal Responsibility**

- Essential Questions: “How can we challenge and develop our perspective on a real world issue?” and “How can I use my voice to create an impactful contribution?”

KEY STANDARDS ADDRESSED

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.11.1
- Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.11.2
- Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama. RL.11.3
- Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging. RL.11.5
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading. RL.11.10
- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.11.11
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. RI.11.12
- Read and comprehend grade-level appropriate nonfiction literature. RI.11.13
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. RL.11.4