

Lesson Plan: Heroes in Art

Provided by the Art Institute of Chicago Department of Museum Education

Suggested Grade Level: 9-10

Estimated Time: Two to three class periods

Introduction

In this lesson plan, students will explore the life and portraits of Frederick Douglass in order to gain an understanding of the history of slavery in the United States. While further examining an anti-slavery speech written by Douglass and a modern sculpture by Richard Hunt, students will begin to understand the concept of heroism and develop speech-writing and speaking skills.

Lesson Objectives

- Examine the history of the anti-slavery movement and identify aspects of slave life in the United States
- Describe important events in the life of Frederick Douglass
- Define the concept of heroism
- Demonstrate personal beliefs through speech writing

Key Terms

- heroism
- abolitionist
- emancipation
- daguerreotype
- construction

Instructional Materials

- Chapters 1 and 11 of Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Douglass/Autobiography/>), 1845
- Frederick Douglass' "The Hypocrisy of American Slavery" (<http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/douglass.htm>)
- Pencils
- Paper

Procedures

Discussion

- Introduce students to the life of Frederick Douglass and the history of slavery in the United States by asking them to read chapters one and eleven of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Discuss the text with students and help them put Douglass's life into a historical context. Ask students the following questions:
 - What conditions did Douglass live in as a child?
 - How did he manage to escape slavery?
 - What historical events relating to slavery happened during his lifetime? (for example, Harper's Ferry, Emancipation Proclamation)
 - Based on Douglass's writings, how would you describe his personality?
- Have students examine and discuss the daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass. Start the discussion by asking what visual clues in the daguerreotype reveal Douglass' temperament (his pose and expression).
- Discuss the concept of a hero. Make a list of the qualities a hero displays (strength, bravery, leadership, etc.). Ask students to describe how Douglass's image represents heroism.
- Show students Richard Hunt's sculpture *Hero Construction*. Ask them to think about the following questions:
 - Why did Hunt call this sculpture *Hero Construction*?
 - What elements of the sculpture suggest the figure's heroic status?
 - Imagine his heroic deed.

Activity

Ask students to think like speech writers for the figure in *Hero Construction*. Encourage them to imagine what he would speak about, where he would give the speech, and who would attend. In preparation for writing, have students read Douglass's speech "The Hypocrisy of American Slavery," delivered July 4, 1852. Discuss the speech, asking students if they think it is effective and why. Ask them to name the elements that make the speech effective (use of interrogatives, length, etc.).

Encourage students to write a one-page speech for the figure in *Hero Construction* and ask them to read their work aloud in small groups.

Evaluation

Base students' evaluation on their participation in the discussion, written work, and oral presentations.

Follow-Up

Have students start an oral-history project focused on a hero from their family, school, or neighborhood. As a class, develop questions for students to ask their subjects and formulate a list of people for them to interview. Ask students to write a brief paper describing the actions of this individual and each naming the qualities that make him or her heroic. Have students submit a photograph of this individual that captures his or her heroic status.

Glossary

abolitionist (*n; adj*)

a person who spoke, wrote, or fought against slavery. Some abolitionists were free African Americans, others were escaped slaves, and many were Caucasian; of or relating to the anti-slavery movement

construction (*n*)

an assembly (usually three-dimensional) of diverse materials, such as found objects

daguerreotype (*n*)

invented in France in 1839, one of the two original forms of photography. Daguerreotypes are unique, non-reproducible images produced on copper plates coated with silver that has been made sensitive to light. Daguerreotype images are remarkably clear and detailed, which makes them perfect for portraits.

emancipation (*n*)

the act of freeing from restraint, control, or bondage, especially slavery

Emancipation Proclamation

signed in 1863 by President Lincoln, this document freed the slaves of the Confederate states in rebellion against the Union

Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)

black American ex-slave whose speeches and writings brought him to the forefront of the American abolitionist movement. Douglass became the first black citizen to hold high rank in the U.S. government as minister and consul general to Haiti.

Harper's Ferry Raid

one of the major events that precipitated the Civil War. On October 16, 1859, an armed band of abolitionists led by John Brown attacked the arms arsenal of Harper's Ferry (then located in Virginia). The two-day raid was intended to help create an independent stronghold of freed slaves in the mountains of Maryland and Virginia. However, Brown and his band of sixteen whites and five blacks were overwhelmed by federal troops.

Seventeen men died in the raid, and Brown and six surviving followers were hanged before the end of the year.

portrait (*n*)

the likeness of a person (especially a face) in a work of art, such as a painting, drawing, sculpture, or photograph

Illinois Learning Standards

English Language Arts: 1-4

Social Science: 16

Fine Arts: 25