

RESOURCE 8

Sample Grade II Unit Plan: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Nonfiction

Text: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass (Simon & Brown, 2012)
Standards Addressed: RI.1, RI.2, RI.3, RI.4, RI.6

Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
<p><i>R</i>eaders use all the information available before diving into Chapter 1.</p> <p>There is a rich amount of valuable information to pay attention to outside of the “beginning” of many biographies and other nonfiction texts—the front- and back-cover blurbs, of course, but also the table of contents in addition to (in this case) a short bio, timeline, preface, introduction, and letter.</p> <p>What are all the things we learn already before even reading any of the author’s words?</p>	<p><i>R</i>eaders of nonfiction pay close attention to the context in which it was written.</p> <p>Readers might ask themselves questions: Who is speaking? What perspective do they represent? Whose voice was not represented? What were the conflicts at the time? Who had power? Who did not? Text excerpt: p. 1 of preface, including footnote at the bottom explaining who William Garrison was and what group he represented.</p>	<p><i>R</i>eaders of nonfiction pay attention to character (or subjects) just as they do in fiction. What are the traits of the characters or subjects we can notice in our autobiographies? Text excerpt: p. 18 “I never saw my mother . . .”</p> <p>This paragraph conveys a great deal about Douglass’s mother, such as her capacity for silent suffering and her dedication to her child, through key details such as walking twelve miles at night just to lie by her child.</p>	<p><i>R</i>eaders of autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs infer all they can about relationships between the subject and other key players, using explicit and nuanced evidence to support their theories.</p> <p>Text excerpt: p. 17 “White children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege.”</p> <p>pp. 18–19 “. . . such slaves . . .” when describing the poorer treatment of slaves fathered by White</p>	<p><i>R</i>eaders of nonfiction try to read as much as they can about that one subject, choosing easier books on a challenging topic first to better acquaint themselves with more background knowledge.</p> <p>The teacher models questions that arise while reading <i>Narrative</i>, such as the laws regarding children born from rape, the prohibition of education, and the differences between slavery in urban and rural areas. Then, the teacher shows that by</p>

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Text excerpts: TOC, book jacket and author photo, bio, timeline, preface, introduction, and letter. Also p. 1 of letter, including explanatory footnote, from Wendell Phillips.

In contrast, details of the slave owner on p. 21 are staggeringly brutal and cruel.

masters. There are subtle distinctions even among inhumanely treated slaves, degrees to which cruelty is inflicted.

p. 20 when Douglass is both a witness and a participant, seemingly, to a whipping. The teacher models noticing the more subtle relationships between the slaves, not simply unified in suffering.

finding some easier, more accessible texts on the subject, such as http://abolition.e2bn.org/slavery_40.html, www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/teachers/readings7.html, and www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/timeline/, he or she is able to have a better grasp of the subject. The teacher might model going back to something such as p. 22 (“He was the overseer of overseers”) and showing how this term is now clear.

Lesson 6

Readers of nonfiction determine the central ideas and how they are developed in a text through details.

Text excerpt: pp. 30–31, where one of the central ideas is an argument

Lesson 7

Readers of nonfiction consider how the author develops ideas through structure.

Text excerpt: Chapter 4, where we see the horrific anecdote of a

Lesson 8

Readers of nonfiction analyze how the writer’s perspective might evolve as it presents new information.

Text excerpt: pp. 40 and 43 where Douglass

Lesson 9

Readers of nonfiction break the work into parts and look at how those parts work together to create a certain effect.

Text excerpt: The big sections of text up

Lesson 10

Readers think about how autobiographies are often structured, so they are better prepared anytime they read a biography.

Text excerpt: Other texts

<p>against slavery. The riches of the estate are made possible only through the suffering of slaves, who never enjoy the fruits of their labor. And yet, here they are fighting among themselves as to who has the better owner, brainwashed into thinking their reality is worth fighting for. Also, here they see the master treating animals far better than people. These details are written with no melodrama or emotion, letting the depravity and cruelty speak for themselves.</p>	<p>slave being killed after escaping into a creek to soothe his wounds from whipping. Then, Douglass shares the law that killing a slave is not considered a crime by the courts or by the community in Maryland. Then, he provides two more examples of owners murdering slaves and escaping punishment. This structure is powerful to showcase the hypocrisy of the legal system, by mixing anecdote with law, then further examples to hammer home the argument.</p> <p>The reader is horrified, then further horrified. The relentlessness of examples of atrocity, coupled with hard facts carries great impact.</p>	<p>is glowing in his praise of the kindness of his new white owner, Mrs. Auld. But then, he learns that slavery has corrupted her morals as well, as she refuses to teach him to read. After first imagining that life in the city may be better for slaves, he ends Chapter 6 saying that indeed, any slavery is evil and involves mistreatment.</p>	<p>until Chapter 8, where we see stark changes and progressions in Douglass's life, from childhood to young adulthood, learning to read, and more. His spirit is broken and reemerges several times so far.</p> <p>The pattern of conquering evil and looking ahead, only to be broken yet again, serves to ignite extreme empathy in the reader, reinforce the character traits of perseverance and suffering, and emphasize his arguments against slavery. Were it only a straightforward "success" story, it would feel less authentic and less harrowing, and not deliver the same impact.</p>	<p>The teacher uses <i>Autobiography</i> by Benjamin Franklin to look at another structure, pointing out chronological sweep and linear structure, similar to <i>Narrative</i>. Unlike memoirs (e.g., <i>I Am Malala</i>, <i>Wild, Night</i>) that focus on a brief period, autobiographies are more encompassing. Both the Franklin and Douglass biographies emphasize sacrifice and hard work, as well as political positions through their own rise from poverty. Douglass presents evidence in an objective manner, while Franklin's <i>Autobiography</i> contains much more emotional rhetoric. Both, however, are structured in a linear way.</p>
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Lesson 11	Lesson 12	Lesson 13	Lesson 14	Lesson 15
<p>Readers of nonfiction continue to look at how a text is structured for effect.</p> <p>Text excerpt: p. 43</p> <p>Douglass recounts Mrs. Auld's shift to being hardened and refusing to tutor him or let him learn to read.</p> <p>By showing both her initial kindness and then contrasting it with her learned cruelty, he shows how slavery hurts even the slave owners, eliminating any true Christian values. The structure of her "before" and "after" strengthens the idea that slavery is unnatural not only for slaves, but for all.</p>	<p>Readers of nonfiction continue to examine the author's point of view and track if that point of view becomes nuanced or shifts throughout the text.</p> <p>Text excerpt: p. 45</p> <p>Douglass finds the text <i>The Columbian Orator</i>, and this helps him fully articulate his case against slavery. But it also shows a shift in perspective as he becomes more painfully aware of the injustices he suffers. He shifts from a call to arms to a hopelessness in the face of inhumane treatment and little possibility of escape.</p>	<p>Readers will look at what ideas are posed by the author, and how the most convincing and important ideas are best supported.</p> <p>Text excerpt: throughout</p> <p>The idea that slaves are treated as property, and not as humans, is apparent throughout the text with examples and evidence relayed without emotion. The impact of this is striking—we see humans treated more poorly than animals in example after example. In addition, we see slaves valued only for their ability to do hard labor, and never for intellect or any other measure.</p>	<p>Readers of nonfiction will evaluate which ideas are strongest throughout the text, and which become less essential or supported.</p> <p>Text excerpt: Previous chapters where Douglass supported the idea that the city offered some degree of freedom and escape from cruelty for slaves. This idea, however, fades to some degree as we see slaves treated inhu manely there, too. Another idea that is apparent in parts of the text, but not as strong as the overall argument against slavery, is the dehumanization toward female slaves, which Douglass provides multiple examples for</p>	<p>Readers read a lot. They continue to find time to read even when homework and extracurricular demands are great.</p> <p>The teacher models how he or she finds time to read even when life is very hectic, and shares his or her schedule and where reading fits in by having a book on his or her person at all times, reading in snippets, using audiobooks, reading other tasks, and reading instead of watching TV.</p>

The cumulative impact of these examples and evidence makes this one of the strongest ideas in the text.

toward the beginning of the book.

The idea of knowledge as the best way to empower and free slaves, however, is consistent throughout.

Lesson 16	Lesson 17	Lesson 18	Lesson 19	Lesson 20
<p><i>Readers pay attention to the sequence of events in a work of nonfiction, and whether they are linear or nonlinear, chronological or based on another organizing factor, and why the author may have organized the text so.</i></p> <p>Text excerpt: p. 62 “I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery . . .”</p> <p>We see Douglass encountering the most wretched circumstances after having been</p>	<p><i>Readers of nonfiction consider how conflicts are made compelling and emotional, just as they are in fiction.</i></p> <p>Text excerpt: Douglass’s fight with Covey in Chapter 10</p> <p>This comes after Douglass’s spirits are lower than ever, and we find ourselves rooting for the underdog, just as in a powerful work of fiction. The desire for Douglass to win is as fervent as in any film or</p>	<p><i>Readers of nonfiction pay attention to the author’s use of allusions and metaphors to strengthen their ideas.</i></p> <p>Text excerpt: p. 74 where Sandy Jenkins gives Douglass a root, and this root becomes a symbol of the African approach to religion. <i>The Columbian Orator</i> is another symbol throughout, as it is a written text that offers freedom to the slave in the text, and it</p>	<p><i>Readers of nonfiction consider the author’s choice of words and use of language to create impact.</i></p> <p>Text excerpt: throughout</p> <p>This could be a time to examine the title and the inclusion of the word <i>American</i>. As a highly educated and thoughtful writer, we know Douglass was conscious of every word choice and its impact. The “land of the free” next to the</p>	<p><i>Readers challenge themselves in their book choices, not just in text complexity but in genre choice, for example choosing an autobiography if they haven’t yet done so this year.</i></p> <p>The teacher shares his or her personal reading preferences and habits, and what genres he or she tends to gravitate toward. Also, the teacher shows how he or she will consciously</p>

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treated with some kindness. This linear progression, along with Douglass's own path from hopeful to hopeless and broken, is again a powerful structure as it shows Douglass's incredible perseverance and strength. We also see a growing theme around true and false Christianity in the slave owner's false justifications in the name of religion.

story, and it comes after the protagonist has a revelation, much as in many works of fiction we know well.

also offers a degree of freedom for Douglass. It gives him hope, and the written word is also a symbol for education and literacy of slaves in general.

word *slave* is a powerful juxtaposition. We can also pull excerpts of Douglass's elevated language, perhaps emulating the style of the Bible and to show his level of education, as well as examples of his direct and informal writing style, which create an intimacy with the reader.

expand those genre choices, perhaps choosing something similar to those genres but slightly out of the comfort zone, or by making a big leap entirely. Consider the impact of showing that you will next read a book suggested by a student!

