

Is freedom free?



Library of Congress: North Star, June 2, 1848.

Supporting Questions

1. How did the idea of freedom both inspire and torment Frederick Douglass?
2. Did emancipation mean freedom?
3. Was freedom complete after emancipation?

6-8 Grade Teaching with Primary Sources Hub Freedom and Emancipation Inquiry
by C3 Teachers Development

Is freedom free?	
Inquiry Standard	D2.His.15.6-8. Evaluate the relative influence of various causes of events and developments in the past.
Staging the Compelling Question	Is freedom free?

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
How did the idea of freedom both inspire and torment Frederick Douglass?	Did emancipation mean freedom?	Was freedom complete after emancipation?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Identify evidence that supports how freedom inspired Douglass and how freedom tormented Douglass.	Using evidence that describes the political, social and/or economic consequences of freedom for ex-slaves, complete a graphic organizer categorizing the evidence.	Identify evidence that explains the political, social and/or economic benefits of freedom for ex-slaves.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself Frederick Douglass 1845	Source A: "What I Keer About Bein' Free?" Nannie Bradfield 1937 Source B: "I heard Lincoln set us free" Henry Cheatham 1937 Source C: Caroline Richardson 1937	Source A: "Slaves Happy To Be Free" Rhody Holsell N.D. Source B: "Ex-Slave Blind but Happy" Mintie Wood N.D. Source C: "Never Sold His Vote" Louis Hamilton N.D.

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT Write an essay that answers the compelling question, "Is freedom free?"
	EXTENSION Create an artistic representation of the ways in which freedom encompasses the spectrum of freedom examined in the formative tasks.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Research a freedom in the Bill of Rights and determine how it is used for people to express freedoms today. ASSESS Determine the ways in which the things learned in the investigation relate to current events and can be shared with others. ACTION Write an editorial to a local newspaper describing how the freedom being examined is being expressed in a current context.

Inquiry Description

This inquiry introduces students to ex-slave narratives in two genres. The first source, an excerpt from Frederick Douglass' narrative, is autobiographical in nature. The other sources are biographical sketches composed from interviews with ex-slaves completed as a part of the Federal Writer's Project of the Works Project Administration (WPA) in 1936-1938. Students might discuss how the contexts of historical memory and interview interpretation affect these sources prior to their analysis. It should also be noted that the language used in ex-slave narratives completed by the Federal Writer's Project reflects white interpretations of black speech. If students are struggling with this language, teachers might consider modeling the reading of the excerpts aloud. Teachers could provide alternate transcriptions of the interviews alongside the original copy. More information about the language used in these narratives can be found at the Library of Congress at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snlang.html>.

Structure

This inquiry includes three supporting questions, each focusing on a unique aspect of the concept of freedom while integrating Common Core reading and writing standards into social studies instruction. It draws upon texts from Common Core ELA Appendix B and the Library of Congress and culminates in an argumentative essay that utilizes the Literacy Design Collaborative's Template Task Collection. By completing this inquiry, students will build their social studies content knowledge as well as their reading and writing skills. This inquiry integrates Common Core reading and writing standards into social studies instruction.

Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling Question	Is freedom free?
---------------------	------------------

Staging the compelling question

Find a current popular reference to freedom in a song, book, movie or some other media. Discuss how freedom is portrayed and how that portrayal compares to understanding of freedom as a political right.

Supporting Question 1	
Supporting Question	How did the idea of freedom both inspire and torment Frederick Douglass?
Formative Performance Task	Identify evidence that supports how freedom inspired Douglass and how freedom tormented Douglass.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source A: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself Frederick Douglass 1845

The first supporting question asks students to examine the complexities around freedom by exploring the internal struggle that plagued Frederick Douglass. By answering this question, students become acquainted with the varying emotions that ex-slaves felt surrounding the idea of freedom. By reading the excerpt from the Autobiography of Frederick Douglass' that is featured in the Common Core ELA Standards' Appendix B, students will not only identify specific reasons why Douglass felt both inspired and tormented by the notion of freedom, but will understand the depth of his point of view.

Formative Performance Task

Students should read the Frederick Douglass narrative and discuss his internal struggle in small groups; it might also be helpful for students to use an organizer such as a T-chart or a Venn Diagram to identify the specific parts of the text that help to illuminate the "inspiration" and the "torment" that Douglass went through.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source A

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself Frederick Douglass 1845

Excerpt

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey’s ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. “You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life! Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?” These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled “The Columbian Orator.” Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation which took place between them, when the slave was retaken the third time. In this dialogue, the whole argument in behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed of by the slave. The slave was made to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master—things which had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation resulted in the voluntary emancipation of the slave on the part of the master.

In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan’s mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance. The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved. 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 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. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. 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 trumpet 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.

Source:

Douglas, Frederick. (1845). Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself

Supporting Question 2	
Supporting Question	Did emancipation mean freedom?
Formative Performance Task	Using evidence that describes the political, social and/or economic consequences of freedom for ex-slaves, complete a graphic organizer categorizing the evidence.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Source A: "What I Keer About Bein' Free?" Nannie Bradfield 1937 ● Source B: "I heard Lincoln set us free" Henry Cheatham 1937 ● Source C: Caroline Richardson 1937

The second supporting question requires students to look beyond Frederick Douglass' experience to the broader experiences of other ex-slaves. In doing so, students move away from one person's interpretations of freedom and toward the seemingly counter-intuitive idea that emancipation fell short of making life for ex-slaves better. Although each source is a personal account, by analyzing them together students will be able to construct an understanding of the complex nature of life after slavery and provide specific details about how many freedoms were hindered for ex-slaves after emancipation.

Formative Performance Task

Students should also be encouraged to look beyond the words of the text and to make inferences from the more nuanced or subtle themes and ideas of the narratives. This close analysis of ex-slave narratives might require more teacher assistance and prompting depending upon students' experience with analyzing primary sources. By having students focus on the specific ways in which emancipation did not make life better for ex-slaves, students should begin to recognize how many obstacles were in place to limit the freedoms of formerly enslaved African Americans.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source A

"What I Keer About Bein' Free?" Nannie Bradfield 1937

Excerpt

"Tell me something about your self and your family, Nannie," I said. "Der ain't nothin' much to tell 'cep I was born in slav'y times and I was 'bout twelve year old in May when 'mancipation come. My Pa and Ma b'longed to mars James and Miss Rebecca Chambers, Dey plantation was jes' on de aige of town and dats what I was born. Mars James' son, William was in de war and old miss would send me to town whar all de sojgers tents was, to tote sompen good to eat to dem. I don't 'member much 'bout de war 'cep de tents and de bum shells shootin'. I was little and couldn't do much but I waited on Miss Liz'beth, my young Miss and waited on table, totled battle cakes and sich like. No ma'am I don't know nothin' 'tall 'bout de katterollers or de Klu Kluxers but I know all 'bout de conjer doctors. Dey sho' kin fix you. Dey kin take yo' garter or yo stockin' top and drap it in runnin' water and make you run de res' of yo' life, you'll be in a hurry all de time, and if dey gits holt of apiece of de seat of yo' draw's dey sprinkles a little conjer powder on it and burns it den you can't never set down in no peace. You jes' like you settin' on a coal of fish 'till you git somebody to take de spell offen you."

"Nannie were you glad when the war was over and you were free?"

"What I keer 'bout bein' free? Didn't old Marster give us plenty good sompin to eat and olo's to wear? I stayed on de plantation 'till I mah'ied. My old Miss give me a brown dress and hat. Well dat dress put me in de country, if you mahie in brown you'll live in de country."

Source:

Bradfield, N. (1937). Oral history interview with Nannie Bradfield. WPA Slave Narrative Project, Alabama Narratives, Volume 1.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source B "I heard Lincoln set us free" Henry Cheatham 1937

Excerpt

"Dem was good ol' days, Mistis, even iffen us did have a hard time, an' I don't know iffen it warn't better'n it is now. I has to almos' go hongery, an' I can't git no he'p from de government, 'caze I is over 65 years old. Fact is, I believe I druther be alivin' back dere dan today 'caze us at least had plenty som'n t'eat an' nothin' to worry about. An' as for beatin'; dey beats folks now iffen dey don't do right, so what's de difference. Yassum, Mistis, I worked as long as I was able an' didn't axe nobody for nothin', but now it's diff'rent, 'caze I ain't able to do no work. I'ze tried to do raght, and ain't never been in but one fight in my life. I now belongs to de Corinthian Babbtist Church, an' I'se tryin' to live so when de good Lawd calls I'll be ready to answer wid a clean soul.

"I'se had two wives, but Iw as only a young nigger when I had de fust un, an' had two chilluns by her, den I lef' her 'caze she warn't no 'count. Dats been forty year ago, an' I aint neber seen my chilluns in all dem years. My second wife I got when I lived thirty miles below Birmingham, Alabama, at de ol' Bank Mines. Dats been thirty-five years ago an' us is still together. Us ain't neber had no chilluns. No'm I don't know nothin' bout Abe Lincoln 'ceptin' dey say he got us free, an' I don't know nothin' 'bout det neiber.

Source:

Cheatham, H. (1937). Oral history interview with Henry Cheatham. WPA Slave Narrative Project, Alabama Narratives, Volume 1.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source C

Caroline Richardson 1937

Excerpt

“Yes mam, I ‘members de blue uniforms an’ de brass buttons, an’ I ‘members how dey said as dey come in de gate dat dey has as good as won de war, an’ dat dey ort ter hang de southern men what won’t go ter war.

“I reckon dat dey talk purty rough ter Marse Ransome. Anyhow, mammy tells de Yankee Captain dat he ort ter be ‘shamed of talkn’ ter a old man like dat: funder more, she tells dem dat iffen dats de way dey’re gwine ter git her freedom, she don’t want it at all. Wid dat mammy takes Mis’ Betsy upstairs whar de Yankees won’t be a-starin’ at her.

“one of de Yankees fin’s me an’ axes me how man pairs of shoes I gets a year. I tells him dat I gits one pair. Den he axes me what I wears in de summertime. When I tells him dat I ain’t wear nothin’ but a shirt, an’ dat I goes barefooted in de summer, he cusses awful an’ he damns my marster.

“Mammy said dat dey tol’ her an’ pappy dat dey’d git some land an’ a mule iffen dey was freed. You see dey tried ter turn de slaves agin dere marsters.

“at de surrender most of de niggers le , but me an’ may family stayed fer wages. We ain’t really had as good as we done before de war, an’ ‘cides dat we has ter worry about how we’re goin’ ter live.

“We stayed dar at de same place, de ole Zola May place, on de Wake an’ Johnston line, fer four or five years an’ I went to school a little bit. Atter we le dar we went to Mr. John H. Wilson’s place near Wilson’s Mill. It wus at de end of dese ten years dat mammy wus gwine ter whup Bill, my borther, so he went off ter Louisanna an’ we ain’t seed him since.

Source:

Richardson, Caroline. (1937). Oral history interview with Caroline Richardson. WPA Slave Narrative Project, North Carolina Narratives, Volume 11, Part 2.

Supporting Question 3	
Supporting Question	Was freedom complete after emancipation?
Formative Performance Task	Identify evidence that explains the political, social and/or economic benefits of freedom for ex-slaves.
Featured Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Source A: "Slaves Happy To Be Free" Rhody Holsell N.D. ● Source B: "Ex-Slave Blind but Happy" Mintie Wood N.D. ● Source C: "Never Sold His Vote" Louis Hamilton N.D.

The last question asks students to consider the alternative to their analysis under the second question and to look specifically at the ways in which ex-slaves' lives were improved after emancipation. By analyzing the specific ways in which freedoms improved for ex-slaves, students will be able to construct an understanding of the spectrum of experiences of ex-slaves. As with the previous supporting question, students should be encouraged to make inferences from the more nuanced or subtle themes and ideas presented in the narratives. Students should also be encouraged to begin thinking about how these sources differ and how they are similar from the previous sources.

Formative Performance Task

Again, it might be helpful to have a graphic organizer to help students categorize evidence by the types of freedoms suggested (political, economic and social). For students who are struggling, text marking (e.g. numbering paragraphs, underlining, and circling words) or other content literacy strategies could be used. Students should describe other ways that emancipation resulted in an uneven experience for ex-slaves based on their previous knowledge and their new understanding of the complexity of freedom. By having students consider the limitations of emancipation related to social, political and economic conditions for ex-slaves, students should now be prepared to discuss the various ways in which freedom is free or not free.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source A

"Slaves Happy To Be Free" Rhody Holsell N.D.

Excerpt

"When dey turned me loose I was naked, barefoot, and didn't have nothin' to start out on. They turned us loose without a thing and we had to kinda pick ourselves up. We would go out of a Sunday and dig ginseng and let it dry for a week and sell it to de store. We would make about a dollar every Sunday dat way, and den we'd get our goods at de store. The master and all de boys was killed in de war and de mistress married some 'hostle jostle' who helped to kill the boss. I was jus' not goin' to stand dat so dis was when I le home.

"Abraham Lincoln done put a piece in de paper saying dat all de slaves was free and if dey whipped an of de slaves a er dey was set free dey would prosecute them. Me and another little old woman done some shoutin' and hollerin' when we heard 'bout de freedom. We tore up some corn down in de field. De old missus was right there on de fence but wouldn't dare touch us den. Once de mistress struck me after we was freed and I grabbed her leg and would have broke her neck. She wanted to apologize with me de way she had treated me but I would not let her. They it was awful dat dey could not whip de slaves any longer.

Source:

Holsell, R. (n.d). Oral history interview with Rhody Holsell. WPA Slave Narrative Project, Missouri Narratives, Volume 10.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source B

"Ex-Slave Blind but Happy" Mintie Wood N.D.

Excerpt

"Dey owned so much land, cattle, corn, sorgum, tobacco, millet, barley and everything the very finest kind and the wealth was handed down from one generation of the Gilberts to the other. Dey was so rich dey didn't know how much dey was worth themselves, but dey was altogether different than most of dem slave owners. Dey was prosperous 'cause dey was better folks. When peace was declared everyone of Marse Gilbert's slaves dat had sense enough and did stay wid him, got half of everything they earned turned in on land and stock to be independent right der on de same spot where we had been a slave. And he had so many of his family and darkies, too, he has his own graveyard where everyone of us black or white dat ever been in de Gilbert family can be buried without costing us a penny."

[...] "I never did vote, and never lived in Virginia nor know nothing about it. I do know de slaves 'spected a salary for der work when dey got free. Some of 'em got part of de promise, but most of 'em got nothin' but de promise. My owners were exceptions. Dere might have been some more like 'em but not many. I least I never heard of 'em.

Source:

Wood, M. (n.d). Oral history interview with Mintie Wood. WPA Slave Narrative Project, Missouri Narratives, Volume 10.

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source C

"Never Sold His Vote" Louis Hamilton N.D.

Excerpt

"When de war was over we moved across de creek to ourselves and my father bought 25 or 30 acres. I felt like anew man when de war was over. I stayed with my grandfather until I was 21 and got married in Perry County when I was 32. I had 4 children and dey is all dead. My wife has been dead about 14 years. I've lived 25 years in Fredericktown. De young Negroes ain't no account as compared to when I was a boy. De parents nowadays don't make dem work hard enough. Dey can sleep all day if dey want to. Some of de young Negroes around here work in de shoe factory. Some load ties.

"Once when I was a baby, my sister was sitting by de fire-place rocking me and she fell asleep and let me fall in de fire=place and I was burned on de hand. Four of my finger was burned and have never come out straight. When I was a boy I did not know what a stove looked like. We had dese old corded beds. Dere used to be a lot of wild hogs around dere and dey would eat anything dey got hold of. We would put up ice from de Mississippi River. It was over a foot thick. We wore home-made clothes and did not buy no clothes. We wore copper-toed shoes called brogans. De first time I voted was for Teddy Roosevelt. I been voting ever since. Lots of dem have told me how to vote but I never sold my vote."

Source:

Hamilton, L. (n.d). Oral history interview with Louis Hamilton. WPA Slave Narrative Project, Missouri Narratives, Volume 10.

Summative Performance Task	
Compelling Question	Is freedom free?
Argument	Write an essay that answers the compelling question, "Is freedom free?"
Extension	Create an artistic representation of the ways in which freedom encompasses the spectrum of freedom examined in the formative tasks.

Argument

In this task, students will write an essay that answers the compelling question of whether or not freedom is free. At this point in students' inquiry, they have examined the various ways in which freedom was both interpreted and applied to real life. Students have examined how freedom was both hindered and enhanced by emancipation and should have an understanding of the complex nature of freedom. The argumentative task allows students to use their understanding of the spectrum of freedom and take a position on whether or not this was "free" or not.

Students' answers likely will vary, but could include responses such as:

- Freedom is free in that it is a right to which all humans are freely entitled.
- Freedom is not free and required significant effort and sacrifice to attain.
- Freedom from slavery was worth significant effort and sacrifice, but was not the entirety of freedom that ex-slaves sought.

Because the inquiry encourages students to see the broad spectrum of the nature of freedom, their responses are likely to reflect this broad open interpretation as well. However, students could find support for any of these arguments or more in the provided sources and through their careful reading and analysis of the sources.

Extension

The sources in this inquiry suggest that freedom was both a inspiration and torment for Fredrick Douglass. The Emancipation Proclamation, as examined in formative tasks two and three, provides another lens by which to consider the concept of freedom. Through an artistic representation of the spectrum of freedom represented in the sources that accompany the three tasks, students are able to explore some of the emotional characteristics of freedom. The artistic representation might be a drawing, illustration of historical events, a diorama, or even a dramatic reading or skit.

Taking Informed Action	
Understand	Research a freedom in the Bill of Rights and determine how it is used for people to express freedoms today.
Assess	Determine the ways in which the things learned in the investigation relate to current events and can be shared with others.
Action	Write an editorial to a local newspaper describing how the freedom being examined is being expressed in a current context.

This taking informed action task provides students with an opportunity to examine a current issue in the context of the rights protected in the Bill of Rights. In theory, the emancipation of en-slaved persons would have provide those individuals with the a chance to enjoy those fundamental rights. Of course, history did not play out that way. Understanding how freedoms are expressed and limited in current contexts is critical for students' civic life.

