



PROFILES IN COURAGE

Teacher's Guide

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

CREDITS:

Starring Robert Hooks, Claudia McNeil, Harry Towers, Alfred Ryder, and Mittie Lawrence. Written by Don M. Mankiewicz. Directed by Sherman Marks. Produced by Gordon Oliver and Robert Saudek Associates. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. **50 minutes.** Guide prepared by Social Studies School Service, 1983.

OBJECTIVES:

- To examine a significant episode in the history of the abolition of slavery in America.
- To understand the nature of true freedom, and the dedication necessary to attain it.
- To understand why a democracy cannot be based on unequal treatment of its citizens.
- To understand the meaning of moral courage and why it is important in a free society.

SYNOPSIS:

Born into slavery, Frederick Bailey escapes North to New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1838. The 21-year-old ship's caulker adopts the name Frederick Douglass to protect himself, since he is subject to recapture as a fugitive slave if his former master discovers his whereabouts.

Frederick Douglass is unusual in that, even though he was a slave (it was against the law in many Southern states before the Civil War to teach blacks to read or write), he is highly literate and has a gift for persuasive oratory. But he is reluctant to "raise his head too high" because he fears discovery. Nevertheless, he becomes increasingly involved in the abolition movement in New Bedford.

When famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, editor of "The Liberator," comes to the town, Frederick Douglass is persuaded that it is important for a black who knows the realities of slavery to join Garrison on the podium—even though he must risk

his own freedom to do so.

Frederick Douglass becomes an outstanding spokesman for abolition, but he stirs up controversy and suspicion when he refuses to turn a blind eye to prejudice in the North and hypocrisy among the abolitionists. Some begin to question his credibility, saying that he could not have been a slave since he is so well educated and so eloquent.

Douglass realizes that, unless he responds to these doubts and restores his credibility, his usefulness to the cause is lost. But to do so means to reveal his true identity and place his freedom in jeopardy. Frederick Douglass decides to take this crucial step and publish his life's story, including his real name and the name of his former owner. He has concluded that "the man who cannot speak the truth of himself is not truly free."

After this announcement, Douglass must flee to England to avoid recapture. His freedom is eventually bought by his supporters from his former master, and he returns to America, distinguishing himself as a writer, an advisor to President Lincoln, and U.S. Minister to Haiti.

VOCABULARY:

The following words and phrases appear in the program. Teachers may wish to check for student understanding:

abolitionists	repatriation	bondage
compensated	antagonize	bestiality
impoverished	advocate	discourse
Fugitive Slave Act	hypocrisy	tolerable
concessions	pestilence	doctrine
obligation	caulker	Jim Crow
credibility	fallible	abhor
secession	oratory	agitate
alienate	denounce	mortify
oppression	fetters	mellifluously

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. When Frederick Douglass looks for skilled work as a ship's caulker, he is turned down unless he can do the whole job alone. Why would he have to do it by himself? What is the ship's master telling Douglass about prejudice?
2. Why was it against the law in many Southern states before the Civil War to teach blacks to read and write? Give some examples of how education has continued to be an important civil rights issue in modern times.
3. There are two abolitionist societies in New Bedford—one black and one white. Although they both oppose slavery, they also have different motives and priorities. Describe some of their different viewpoints. Why do the Northern whites primarily oppose slavery? Are they concerned about black equality?
4. How did Frederick Douglass react to the proposal by some abolitionists that blacks be offered repatriation to Africa? What does this imply about how these abolitionists felt about blacks? Did they consider them to be equal?
5. Many times throughout the production, people's actions seem to belie their words. Douglass, in addition to being a great speaker, feels that his words must be backed up by significant actions. Give some examples of people giving "lip service" to noble ideals, while their actions pursue some other course.
6. Frederick Douglass addresses the evils not only of slavery in the South, but of Northern prejudice and hypocrisy as well. Describe some of the injustices portrayed and discussed in this episode. What other examples can you give? Do you think prejudice is still a problem in modern America? In the rest of the world? Why?
7. A white abolitionist tells Frederick Douglass that he would be more believable if there was "less of the drawing room and more of the plantation" in his speech. Douglass objects strongly because he feels this would be demeaning and would reinforce the myth of racial inferiority. Do you agree?

ACTIVITIES:

1. Obtain a film evaluation form from your school district. Have students use this form to evaluate this production as if they would be purchasing it for a school or library. In addition, you may have students write a newspaper review of this episode.
2. Have students prepare questions for an interview or "Meet the Press" conference with Frederick Douglass. Or stage a "To Tell the Truth" panel, with your students asked to determine the "real" Frederick Douglass.
3. Ask your students to use pictures and captions to illustrate a timeline for Frederick Douglass, pointing out at least six highlights in his life. They should include important historical events of the day that affected him (examples: passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, the Emancipation Proclamation).

FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION:

1. Garrison believes that secession may be a morally acceptable alternative to union with the slave-holding South. Frederick Douglass feels that this would be "abandoning every Slave on the continent." With this in mind, how do you think slavery would have been affected if the South had won the Civil War?
2. Find out about proposals to "repatriate" the blacks to Africa. How was Liberia founded? Who was Marcus Garvey? Contrast the concept of "Pan-Africanism" with the idea of "repatriation."
3. Look up the history of how the United States government dealt with the issue of the fugitive slave. Why did the Northern states agree to the Fugitive Slave Act? Was this a fair law? Find out more about other prominent fugitive slaves. Who was Harriet Tubman? What was the Underground Railroad?