

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARIES

Roundtable participants prepare for their roles by first researching or reading about their selected or assigned individual. During the Roundtable students act in character as they respond to questions posed by the moderator (teacher) or other Roundtable participants. They also ask questions of other individuals and comment on the issues.

ANTEBELLUM ROUNDTABLE students will understand that beginning in the nineteenth century, women participated in social and political reform movements in unprecedented ways and numbers. Students gain an overall appreciation of the reasons for reforms, the methods and strategies that reformers employed, and why reform movements succeeded or failed.

To introduce the issues facing antebellum America, students read two **Biographical Summaries**, then complete a composition task.

**Option 1:** Students work in pairs, prepare a script, and act out the dialogue that they devise.

**Option 2:** Students work individually to prepare a written dialogue.

### Assignment

Compose a dialogue between these two historic reformers. Write using their “voices” as closely as you can imagine. During their conversation, have Ms. Dix and Mr. Douglass discuss at least three of the following topics:

- What is the major issue facing America today? (1855)
- What kind of community should America be?
- What are your major goals?
- Do you support other reform movements?
- How does the women’s rights movement relate to abolition or other reform movements?
- Does religion influence your opinions and beliefs?
- Why is your major goal more important than the goals of other reformers?

### An Important Note about Historical Accuracy

Most reform organizations were located in New England. The simulated roundtable is set in Boston, a popular city for reformers to congregate. It was quite common for major organizations such as the American Antislavery Association to sponsor a meeting that would be attended by numerous reformers. In spite of the fact that many reformers knew each other, and some collaborated on their causes, never in history did all of the individuals represented in ANTEBELLUM ROUNDTABLE actually meet in one place.



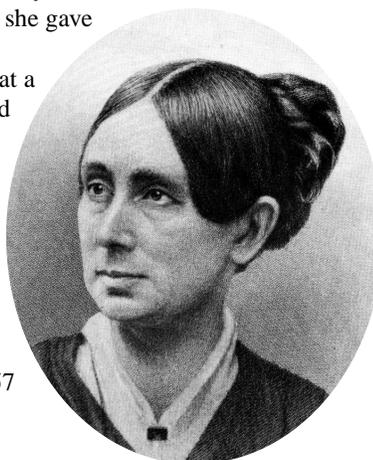
*1 hour*

*Role-playing educational, social, religious, and political reformers ANTEBELLUM ROUNDTABLE students participate in a roundtable discussion set in 1855.*

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARIES

Reform movements often appear extreme to the majority of people at the time but those extreme ideas are often accepted by later generations and integrated into society. In the decades before the Civil War several important reform movements attracted many concerned and committed people. Read the following **Biographical Summaries**, then complete the assignment.

**Dorothea Dix**, advocate for the humane treatment of the mentally ill and insane, was born in 1802 in Maine. She moved to her grandmother's house in Boston when she was 10. She began teaching school at age 14 and started her own girls' school, the Dix Mansion. Reverend William Channing, the minister of her Unitarian church was a powerful influence in her thinking. She wrote many books between 1820 and 1835. Many were children's books. At the age of 33 she gave up teaching for health reasons. She went to England to recuperate, and returned to Boston in 1838. In 1841 she began to teach Sunday school at a Cambridge prison. At that time most of the mentally ill were considered to be criminals and were locked up in prison. She spent two years investigating the treatment of the mentally ill in jails, almshouses, and hospitals. Horrified by the standard treatment of the mentally ill, she asked influential Massachusetts legislators to improve conditions in the jails and almshouses. After a bill was passed in Massachusetts Dix began to investigate conditions in other states. She visited hundreds of institutions. Between 1841 and 1852 she helped to draft legislation to help the mentally ill. Her efforts caused states to build or enlarge hospitals devoted to the care of the mentally ill. Between 1854 and 1857 she visited institutions in Europe for the same purpose. In the mid-nineteenth century, it was not acceptable for women to speak in public. Therefore, Dorothea Dix did not speak publicly, but accomplished her lobbying efforts by appeals to individual legislators. She died in 1887.



**Frederick Douglass**, a freed slave and advocate of abolition, was born in 1817. He escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1838 and moved to New England. Soon after attending and speaking at a Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society meeting, the Society hired him as an agent. He was a representative for the New England Anti-Slavery Society as well. Because of his sophisticated way of speaking, many doubted that he had been a slave. He endured mobs, mockery, and segregation as a result of his public appearances. Initially he and William Lloyd Garrison shared beliefs and worked together. By the early 1850s, their views differed to a great degree. They did not reconcile until after the Civil War. He wrote the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1845. To avoid persecution for his writing, Douglass traveled through England and Ireland for two years. Upon his return in 1847, Douglass settled in upstate New York. He published his own newspaper, the *North Star*. The name of the newspaper was a code for escaping slaves who followed the North Star to freedom. Douglass not only worked for abolition but also supported women's rights. He attended the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Douglass married his first wife, an African-American woman named Anna Murray, when he first escaped from slavery. After Anna died, he married again, this time a white woman named Helen Pitts in 1884. He died in 1895 the same day that he attended a woman's suffrage meeting.

