Exploring the Hypocrisy of American Slavery with Frederick Douglass’
“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

“Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World…search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without rival.” ~Frederick Douglass

Overview
On July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass, former slave and abolitionist, delivered a groundbreaking speech in Rochester, NY, entitled “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” In this lesson, students will read and discuss an excerpt of Douglass’ July 5th oration, examining the contradictions and hypocrisies he raised regarding a nation who owned slaves while celebrating the ideals of liberty and equal rights. Students will apply their understanding of the speech and its themes by planning their own modern day Fourth of July celebration for the White House.

Grades
10-11

North Carolina Essential Standards for Civics & Economics
• CE.C&G.1.4 - Analyze the principles and ideals underlying American democracy in terms of how they promote freedom (i.e. separation of powers, rule of law, limited government, democracy, consent of the governed / individual rights –life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, self-government, representative democracy, equal opportunity, equal protection under the law, diversity, patriotism, etc.
• CE.C&G.1.5 - Evaluate the fundamental principles of American politics in terms of the extent to which they have been used effectively to maintain constitutional democracy in the United States (e.g., rule of law, limited government, democracy, consent of the governed, etc.
• CE.C&G.4.2 - Explain how the development of America’s national identity derived from principles in the Declaration of Independence, US Constitution and Bill of Rights (e.g., inalienable rights, consent of the governed, popular sovereignty, religious and political freedom, separation of powers, etc.)
• CE.C&G.4.5 - Explain the changing perception and interpretation of citizenship and naturalization (e.g., aliens, Interpretations of the 14th amendment, citizenship, patriotism, equal rights under the law, etc.

North Carolina Essential Standards for American History I
• AH1.H.1.2 - Use historical comprehension...
• AH1.H.1.3 - Use historical analysis and Interpretation...
• AH1.H.1.4 - Use historical research...
• AH1.H.3.4 - Analyze voluntary and involuntary immigration trends through Reconstruction in terms of causes, regions of origin and destination, cultural contributions, and public and governmental response (e.g., Puritans, Pilgrims, American Indians, Quakers, Scotch-Irish, Chinese, Africans, indentured servants, slavery, Middle Passage, farming, ideas of the Enlightenment, etc.)
• AH1.H.4.1 - Analyze the political issues and conflicts that impacted the United States through Reconstruction and the compromises that resulted (e.g., American Revolution, Constitutional Convention, Bill of Rights, development of political parties, nullification, slavery, states’ rights, Civil War)
• AH1.H.4.3 - Analyze the social and religious conflicts, movements and reforms that affected the United States from colonization through Reconstruction in terms of participants, strategies, opposition, and
results (e.g., Second Great Awakening, Transcendentalism, abolition, temperance, mental illness, prisons, education, etc.).

- AH1.H.4.4 - Analyze the cultural conflicts that impacted the United States through Reconstruction and the compromises that resulted (e.g., displacement of American Indians, manifest destiny, slavery, assimilation, nativism, etc.)
- AH1.H.5.1 - Summarize how the philosophical, ideological and/or religious views on freedom and equality contributed to the development of American political and economic systems through Reconstruction (e.g., natural rights, First Great Awakening, Declaration of Independence, transcendentalism, suffrage, abolition, “slavery as a peculiar institution”, etc.

**Essential Questions**
- Who was Frederick Douglass and in what ways did he contribute to the abolitionist movement?
- What as the purpose of Douglass’ speech, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”
- What examples of American contradictions and hypocrisy does Frederick Douglass point out in the speech?
- What techniques does Douglass employ to highlight the barbarity of slavery to his audience?
- How can America celebrate the Fourth of July today while also being respectful to our nations actual history?

**Materials**
- “Exploring the Hypocrisy of American Slavery” Power Point accompaniment, available (in PDF format) in the Database of K-12 Resources
  - To view this PDF as a projectable presentation, save the file, click “View” in the top menu bar of the file, and select “Full Screen Mode”
  - To request an editable PPT version of this presentation, send a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu
- Optional: “Frederick Douglas Mini Bio” Video; laptop with Internet access, speakers, and a projector will be needed for sharing with students
  - Available for free viewing at www.biography.com (search “Frederick Douglas” and videos will populate in a box on the right)
- Instructions for Reading and Discussing “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” attached
- Edited Excerpt – “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July,” attached
- Optional: “Frederick Douglass’ Fourth of July Speech”, a Podcast including a dramatic reading of excerpts from the speech with historian commentary; available at http://backstoryradio.org/shows/independence-daze-2015/
- Culminating Assignment: “Celebrating All Americans, Past & Present,” attached

**Duration**
- 60+ minutes for lesson
- Additional time may be needed for the completion and presentation of the culminating activity

**Preparation**
Students should have an understanding of slavery, governmental decisions and actions regarding slavery, and the abolitionist movement. Students should also have a basic knowledge of Frederick Douglass, his life during enslavement, and his work as an abolitionist.

**Procedure**

**Warm Up: What Does the Fourth of July Mean to You?**
1. As a warm up, ask students to consider America’s 4th of July holiday. Discuss:
   - What does July 4th mean to most Americans? (chart answers on paper)
   - What does it mean to you personally?
   - How do you or others you know typically celebrate the 4th of July?
   - Why is July 4th considered a national holiday?
• Many of our responses to these questions have involved patriotism, pride, and other positive connotations. Is there anyone who may feel differently than this about the 4th of July? Who and why? (If students initially only consider who in modern times may feel negatively towards the holiday, prompt them to consider this question historically as well.)
• Consider the history of slavery in the US. Why might an enslaved person during the 1800s view the 4th of July differently than did white Americans?
• What does it say about our nation in the 1800s, for it to celebrate freedom and independence, while slavery was legal and widely practiced?

Who Was Frederick Douglass?

2. Tell students that when considering the 4th of July, it is important to reflect on this national holiday from multiple historical perspectives, rather than just taking it at face value. Explain that one such alternative perspective comes from the famous Frederick Douglass, with his speech “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” Ask students if anyone is at all familiar with the speech, or with Frederick Douglass and the time period in which he lived. Chart what students already know about Frederick Douglass and the time period in which he lived on the board or chart paper. Go through slide 2 of the Power Point to provide a review/overview of Frederick Douglass. Afterwards, discuss:
• Based on what you already know about Douglass, how would you characterize him and why?
• Why do you think Frederick Douglass chose to write and speak about his experiences as an enslaved person?
• What might have been difficult to write or speak about such hard experiences? What might have been positive about writing or speaking about his experiences?
• Why is it important to study Frederick Douglass and his writings today, even though he lived over 160 years ago?

Optional: As an alternate or additional review of the life of Frederick Douglass, play the short 3-minute overview video available at www.biography.com (search “Frederick Douglas” and videos will populate in a box on the right.) After showing the video, discuss:
• What did you learn about Frederick Douglass in that clip?
• What difficulties were noted that Frederick Douglass faced?
• The video notes that Douglass became an abolitionist. What is an abolitionist? What do you already know about the abolitionist movement?
• How was Frederick Douglass characterized by other slaves? By masters? What does this characterization tell you about him?
• What risks did Frederick Douglass take by becoming an abolitionist and advocating for emancipation of all people?
• What other causes did Frederick Douglass advocate for in addition to the end of slavery?

Teacher Note: For a detailed lesson on Frederick Douglass, see the Consortium’s lesson plan, “The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave,” available in the Database of K-12 Resources or by sending a request to CarolinaK12@unc.edu

Who Was Frederick Douglass?

3. Move on to slides 3-5 to discuss what the atmosphere was like in 1852, the year Frederick Douglass delivered “What to a Slave is the Fourth of July?” Discuss:
• Slide 3: Why do you think Frederick Douglass was particularly bothered by the Fugitive Slave Act?
• Slide 4: Why do you think so many people were reading Stowe’s novel? Since this book attempted to show some of the cruelty in the institution of slavery and with so many people reading it, how might it have affected the public?
• Slide 5: Why do you think Douglass would only speak on the 5th of July, rather than the 4th? Given everything we’ve just discussed regarding who Douglass was and what the atmosphere was like in...
1852, and considering the title “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” what do you imagine his speech is going to be about?

**“What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”**

4. Tell students that they are going to read the first part of Douglass’ speech then discuss it in groups. Divide students into groups of 4-5 then provide them with the attached 6-page speech excerpt and the instructions for reading and discussing. Teachers can determine whether to have the students read individually or as a group before discussing the material. (If reading individually, students will likely finish at different times. Teachers should thus have an assignment for students to work on while waiting for others to finish reading. For example, instruct students to illustrate what they feel would have been the most impactful or moving moment of the speech.)

5. Teachers should also assign one student in each group to facilitate the discussion, ensuring everyone in the group participates in answering the questions provided. Since there are 25 questions provided, teachers may want to divide the questions among all of the groups, so that each group only answers an assigned 5 or more questions. Students can then report back to the remainder of class regarding their discussion on those particular questions.

- **Teacher Note:** A wonderful option is to have someone from the school or community who is skilled in oration to portray Frederick Douglass and do a dramatic reenactment of the speech for students. Students can follow along on their own copy of the speech then move into group discussions after the performance. After students have read and discussed the speech, another option is to play the Podcast [http://backstoryradio.org/shows/independence-daze-2015/](http://backstoryradio.org/shows/independence-daze-2015/), which includes pieces of the speech read dramatically, interspersed with commentary by historian David Blight.

6. After the students have completed their discussions and discussed some of their thoughts as a class, project the interior image of Corinthian Hall on slide 6 of the Power Point and ask:
   - Imagine stepping up on this podium, in this grand auditorium, and preparing to speak these words you just read to 600 people. Remember that the year was 1852. How do you imagine Frederick Douglass would have been feeling?

7. Go over slides 7-9 to give students further information about the speech they just read. When reaching slide 10, explain to students that they only read the beginning of the speech, and give them some information regarding the remainder of Douglass’ oration by going over slides 10-11.

**What to Frederick Douglass is the Fourth of July?**

8. Ask students to think back on what they have learned and read, and to share their thoughts about what they think the Fourth of July meant to Frederick Douglass. After students have responded, share the information on slide 12 then further discuss:
   - Who else might have shared Frederick Douglass’ opinion of the Fourth of July and why?
   - Who may have held an opposite opinion and why?
   - What impact do you think the speech had? (Teachers may want to review the 1857 Dred Scott decision, when the US Supreme Court affirmed the constitutionality of slavery. This would have served as a serious blow to Douglass’ determination to read the Constitution as an anti-slavery document. Teachers may also want to discuss how the nation continued to drift closer to Civil War, with the issue of slavery being at the forefront. Remind students that on January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued but it was not until after the Civil War that slavery was finally ended.
   - Considering Douglass’ opinion and this history, should we change the way we celebrate the Fourth of July today? Why or why not? Is there a way to make the holiday more inclusive of the entirety of our nation’s history? Explain.

**Optional Culminating Assignment:** Planning the Next Fourth of July Celebration for the White House
9. As a culminating activity, have students get into groups of 3 or more and pass out the attached culminating assignment. Go over the assignment with students and let them know when they should plan on presenting their proposal. (This will likely need to be during the next class meeting.) Answer any questions students may have about the assignment and if time permits, allow them to begin their brainstorming process.

10. On the day students present, go over the expectations of respectful audience members, allow groups to volunteer to present their proposal, and instruct the class to take notes regarding each presentation. Once all groups have presented, students can vote on which celebration proposal was most creative and best addressed the assigned theme.
INSTRUCTIONS: Reading and Discussing “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

I. Visually Inspect: First, silently skim the 6 pages provided to you. Does anything pop out first? (i.e.do you see any clues as to what the speech may be about; is there anything that catches your attention or that you find interesting or confusing?; etc.)

II. Read: Carefully read through the document provided to you. The language or particular words may be confusing to you. Take your time and reread as needed. As you read, mark the text:
  o Circle any words that are unfamiliar.
  o Underline any parts of the document that you think are most important or that stick out to you.
  o If you are confused by any part of the document, write a question mark by that line or section. You can also write out questions on the text.
  o If anything surprises you or evokes a strong emotional response from you, you can write an exclamation mark by the line or section.
  o If a particular thought pops in your head that connects to the reading, write it in the margins.

III. Group Up: When you meet with your group, arrange yourselves in a circle where everyone can see and effectively communicate with everyone else.

IV. Discuss: The “Facilitator” will lead your group in discussing the following questions. You can also raise your own questions for discussion.

   1. After reading this speech, what word or phrase comes to mind when now considering the 4th of July?

   2. In the first three paragraphs of the speech, what message does Douglass’s choice of language convey? What is his purpose in these first three paragraphs? Is there any disharmony you sense between his words and his true message? Explain.

   3. In the fourth paragraph, and throughout the speech, what pronoun does Douglass employ when describing the Fourth of July? Why is the repeated use of this pronoun significant? What effect do you think this had on Douglass’s audience?

   4. In paragraphs 5-14, how does Douglass describe the “founding fathers?” (Note specific phrases.) Why do you think he presents this positive portrait?

   5. According to paragraph 6, what risk were those who spoke out against England’s oppression taking? To what group of people in 1852 might Douglass be drawing a parallel?

   6. What does Douglass say regarding oppression in paragraph 10? What double message is he trying to convey?

   7. How does Douglass present the founding fathers’ choice to demand their freedom from England? What message do you think he is sending by detailing the Patriot fight for freedom?

   8. In paragraph 16, Douglass encourages his audience to “Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost…” What is he really asking his audience to do?
9. In paragraph 18, Douglass says that the Founding Fathers “loved their country better than their own private interests...” Do you think he would say the same for the people living in 1852? Why or why not?

10. In paragraph 22, as he concludes his discussion of the Founding Fathers and their fight for independence, Douglass refers to it as “a branch of knowledge in which you feel, perhaps a much deeper interest than your speaker?” What does he mean?

11. In paragraph 23, Douglass says that “…as a people, Americans are remarkably familiar with all facts which make in their own favor” and that “…whatever makes for the wealth or for the reputation of Americans, and can be had cheap, will be found by Americans.” Do you see examples of this today? Explain. What might Douglass’ statement say about how our history is written and passed down?

12. What change in the tone of the speech takes place after paragraph 24, as Douglass moves into discussing the present?

13. What message is Douglass conveying when he asks in paragraph 26, “…why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence?”

14. What does Douglass mean in paragraph 28 when he refers to the “sad sense of disparity” between he and the audience? Why does he say that “This Fourth of July is yours, not mine…”?

15. In paragraph 30, how does Douglass respond to criticism that he is not advocating for the end of slavery in an appropriate way? Do you agree with his answer? Why or why not?

16. What details does Douglass share that affirm the “manhood of the Negro race?” How does he feel about having to “prove that we are men…”?

17. Douglass says that “scorching irony, not convincing argument is needed” in regards to considering those enslaved men who are entitled to liberty. What is he trying to say?

18. How does Douglass answer his own question of “What to the slave is your 4th of July?”

19. Why does Douglass say that “America reigns without a rival” in terms of “revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy?”

20. How does Douglass’ portrayal of the Fourth of July change from the beginning of the speech to the middle and end? Explain using quotations from the document.

21. How does this speech compare to the typical message conveyed in speeches at 4th of July celebrations?

22. How do you think the audience responded to this speech and why?

23. Choose what you feel is the most striking phrase, sentence, or passage from the speech and explain why.

24. Do you feel that this speech is anti-American? Why or why not?

25. In your opinion, who else should read this speech and why?
Assignment: “Celebrating All Americans, Past & Present”

The White House Social Secretary is responsible for the planning, coordination and execution of White House events. Your team works for the Social Secretary and has been given the important job of planning the White House’s next Fourth of July celebration! This year’s theme is “Celebrating All Americans, Past & Present.” Together, brainstorm and create a plan for a 2-hour (or longer) celebration that will fit this theme. You will present this proposed plan to the White House Social Secretary. The most creative plan that best fits the theme will win!

When planning your event, consider:

- Make sure your event fits the theme, “Celebrating ALL Americans, Past & Present.” (Remember our discussion of Frederick Douglass’ “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” when brainstorming!)
- Where will the event take place and why?
- How will the location be decorated? (What items will be used for decorating? What colors will be used? Will there be any displays as part of the decoration (i.e. particular art, historical pieces, etc.)?
- What will take place throughout the event? Will there be entertainment? If so, who and what? (i.e. music; dramatic monologues by actors; speeches by politicians, famous/prominent people, or average Americans; etc.) Will food be served? If so what and why? Will you use any typical Fourth of July entertainment, such as fireworks?)
- How will this event be creative and original? How will this be unlike any Fourth of July celebration that’s taken place before?
- Who will be invited to attend the event and why? What should attendees get out of the event? Will anything be asked of attendees?

After brainstorming, prepare the following:

- A 3-5 minute pitch that you will deliver to the White House Secretary explaining your event and how it matches the theme of “Celebrating All Americans, Past and Present.” Your pitch should be persuasive and include as many details as possible regarding the questions above. Make sure you show the Social Secretary why your idea should be chosen for the next White House Fourth of July celebration. Be as creative as you want to be!

  *Student responsible for writing down & delivering final pitch: ________________________

- Share your agenda for the 2-hour (or longer) celebration. For example, if your event is scheduled to last from Noon-5 PM, outline what will take place during that time. If it’s to last over an entire weekend, make sure you share how each day and evening will be spent.

  *Student responsible for writing down and summarizing final agenda during pitch: __________

- Prepare a visual to accompany your presentation. Your visual should assist others in imagining what your day would be like and it should further encourage the Social Secretary to choose your idea.

  *Student responsible for creating and sharing visual during pitch: ________________________

*All group members should assist in planning all three aspects of the event (pitch, agenda, and visual); while the students assigned to each aspect are responsible for ensuring a final draft of the pitch, agenda, or visual is created, they should also make sure all group members contribute ideas.