

Happy Birthday Frederick Douglass

A Model for Teaching Literacy Narratives of Freedom in the Classroom

A. Vincent Ciardiello

Introduction

*Reading is the river
To your liberty
For all your life to come
Let the river run
Learn
Learn to read.*

—From Maya Angelou's
"Reading is the Pathway"
in Pinkney, 2006

The above verse from acclaimed African-American poet Maya Angelou expresses in lyrical form the important connection between reading and freedom. The poet believes that literacy could liberate enslaved people from oppression. Yet the message in the poem is baffling to many young students. It is not in the experience of young students to associate literacy and liberty. They cannot conceptualize how some people in history and contemporary society have had to violate the law (break the rules) to learn how to read. For them learning how to read and write are viewed as natural and universal skills that help prepare a person for life.

One of my pre-service elementary teachers detected this belief during a teaching session on Frederick Douglass, a slave who was taught how to read. She asked a fourth grader, "Do you know why slave masters did not want their slaves to read?" The student responded, "They didn't want them to be smarter than them."

For children who are born free, there is little in their lives that would lead them to connect learning how to read and write with matters of freedom. Of course, this is generally not the case for refugee immigrant children escaping from totalitarian regimes as they may know firsthand the

connection between liberty and literacy. But in America, we often take for granted that we are born with the rights of liberty and literacy.

Critical literacy educator Jerome Harste (2010) tells us that teachers are constantly asking how theoretical concepts can be applied to their teaching repertoire. Childhood literacy teachers need models about literacy and freedom that can be adapted to classroom application (Ciardiello, 2004).

This article provides a model for teachers to expand students' thinking about the liberating nature of literacy. Literacy is not just about making kids smarter or preparing them for future careers. Neither is it passive, neutral, or innocent. It is infused with values and ideology. It can be used by people to promote freedom or support tyranny. It can challenge or foster stereotypes. It can create or submerge identities as well as silence voices. It involves matters of freedom, identity, and voice.

Teaching literacy narratives that contain issues of emancipation can provide an educational tool to help literacy educators translate abstract concepts such as freedom, identity, and voice to the realities of classroom instruction.

Before presenting the model, it is relevant to provide an overview of the teaching sequence I have used with my pre-service teachers. I begin by encouraging them to write their own stories of how they first learned to read and write. Then I ask them to assist their young students (elementary and early middle school) to write about their (children's) earliest literacy experiences. As an example, I select a picture book about Abraham Lincoln's early years (St. George, 2008) as a class reading assignment, because it contains many of the key characteristics of a literacy narrative as described below.

Characteristics of Traditional Literacy Narratives

Literacy narratives are a genre of literature that tell stories of the lives of people that deal with matters of learning how to read and write (Bullock & Googin, 2007). In most literacy narratives various key people, places, and things play a significant supporting role in the quest. Literacy scholar Deborah Brandt (1998) identifies these helpers as literacy sponsors.

In effect, literacy sponsors can be people (family and friends), places (schools), or objects (print, non-print, digital) that aid the literacy seeker. Also included in literacy narratives are those people, places, and things which block literacy development. These literacy blockers provide the adverse background that the literacy seeker must overcome in the quest for success.

Most literacy narratives follow a traditional format in the sense that they focus on early literacy experiences in a generally supportive environment. In this setting, literacy sponsors win over blockers, and those who strive for literacy are almost universally successful. Indeed, sometimes these stories are called "rise to success narratives" (Williams, 2004, p.344).

Traditional literacy narratives play an important role in elementary education. Elementary school teachers favor these assignments and young students enjoy learning and writing about their own earliest literacy memories. Often these stories are romanticized versions of these experiences in which they overcome whatever obstacles have been placed in their paths. Ohio State University has created a website entitled a "Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives" (<http://daln.osu.edu>) which contains helpful prompts for writing literacy narratives as well as samples of young students' writings.

Traditional literacy narratives

A. Vincent Ciardiello is an associate professor in the Teacher Education Program at Iona College, New Rochelle, New York.

typically incorporate what is known as the “literacy myth.” Literacy historian Harvey Graff (2010) coined this term to describe “the state in which the acquisition of literacy is a necessary precursor to and invariably results in economic advancement, democratic practice, upward social mobility, and cognitive enhancement” (p.640).

These uplifting stories view literacy acquisition as a universal good, with few if any conflicting or paradoxical elements. Generally they do not take into account that literacy has often fostered repression and sanctioned social iniquities for marginalized groups, i.e., laws prohibiting literacy. It should be noted that the literacy myth is not an outright falsehood but rather a commonplace and often fanciful interpretation of literacy events. Literacy scholars refer to literacy narratives as romanticized stories that progress from one linguistic community to another that is more typically advanced or powerful (Corkery, 2005; Serafini, 2004).

The literacy narrative of young Abe Lincoln presented in nearly all children’s and juvenile biographies captures the essence of the literacy myth. The glowing tale of a young frontiersman walking miles to attend a pioneer one-room schoolhouse is ubiquitous. Overcoming obstacles such as poverty, social barriers, parental (father) indifference, Lincoln’s literacy journey was that of a self-made man. It led him on the path to the Presidency.

A picture-book biography of the young Lincoln (St. George, 2008), as referred to earlier, concludes with a large portrait of the 16th President superimposed over a young boy carrying a bag of books on his shoulder as he makes his way toward the White House. A third grade student exclaimed excitedly after reading this story that he was going to tell his little sister how important it is to read, especially if you want to be president.

What Are Literacy Narratives of Freedom?

In literacy narratives of freedom, literacy events and practices are connected to matters of power and control. They are not autonomous events and practices. Additionally, literacy sponsors and blockers associated with events and practices no longer appear as unified and stable literacy agents as is often the case in traditional literacy narratives. These agents often appear as conflicting personalities, who sometimes support and sometimes challenge the protagonist in his/her quest for

literacy. For the protagonist too, literacy acquisition can follow conflicting pathways.

One’s quest for literacy often leads to both freedom and oppression at the same time. As African-American writer Richard Wright (1945) wrote in the literacy narrative section of his autobiography, *Black Boy*, “I burned to learn to read novels and I tortured my mother into telling me the meaning of every strange word I saw, not because the word itself had any value, but because it was the gateway to a forbidden and enchanting land” (p.49). This double-sided “forbidden and enchanting” dimension of literacy is often neglected in traditional literacy narratives.

Literacy events should not be viewed in isolation or independent of social practices. Events and practices work in tandem. According to Barton and Hamilton (1998), “literacy is a set of social practices inferred from events, which are mediated by written texts” (p. 7). Whereas events are observable units of behavior, practices are more conceptual in nature. Literacy practices are highly contextualized. There is also an ideological dimension to literacy practices in that they represent status and power positions in conflict. They also fuse with values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships (Street, 2003).

Social Practices of Literacy Narratives of Freedom: Theoretical Foundations

Reclaiming Identity

One of the distinguishing characteristics of literacy narratives of freedom are discursive identity practices. In line with the New Literacy Studies, the way we speak and write is tied into who we are (Puhl & Rowell, 2005). Language is a window into our identity.

In contrast to traditional literacy narratives in which identity is fixed and stable, literacy narratives of freedom are closely aligned with multiple identity transformations. One’s identity is viewed as flexible and adaptable to social conditions—not fixed and immutable.

Critical theorist James Gee (2000-2001) has developed an analytical model of identity reconstruction and literacy development that provides a theoretical rationale for the study of literacy narratives of freedom. In particular, Gee views the social construction of identity as composed of several different perspectives. These include the natural perspective, the institutional perspective, and the discursive perspective. (I have excluded a fourth perspective

of Gee’s that does not apply to my model of literacy narratives). These perspectives can help us analyze the impact of literacy narratives of freedom especially on people outside of the mainstream. In a later section of this article, I will illustrate how Gee’s identity perspectives can be used to critically analyze Frederick Douglass’s literacy development.

Acquiring Authentic Voice

A second major social practice of literacy narratives of freedom is the protagonist’s attempt to acquire an authentic voice through dialogue and discourse. Russian literacy theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) offers an explanation for the importance of voice in both oral and written communication. He tells us that authentic voice is never mono-vocal; rather, it is dialogical in that it is an expression of utterances between two or more communicators in which one person’s voice is refracted through the voice of another.

Bakhtin defines this communication act as double-voiced. When the discourse of one person selectively assimilates the words of another, then you have an example of double-voicedness that is real to the extent that it is true to the intentions of the communicators. At this point, the dialogue becomes authentic.

Bakhtin (1981) uses the terms “authoritative discourse” and “internally persuasive discourse” to describe situations in which inequitable status relationships prevent authentic dialogue from taking place (pp. 344-345). A person or group using “authoritative discourse” asserts power and authority over its subjects.

On the other hand, a person or group expressing “internally responsive discourse” challenges the dominant discourse or official line. This discourse is one in which the protagonist uses acts of stealth and trickery to acquire literacy.

Indeed, these acts can be described as “stealing literacy.” Nineteen century African-American poet Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1872) expressed this idea in a poem entitled “Learning to Read.” Here is a brief verse:

Our masters always tried to hide
Book learning from our eyes . . .
But some of us would try to steal
A little from the book,
And put the words together,
And learn by hook or crook . . .

Bakhtin’s dialogical theories are especially relevant to slave literacy narratives in that there is a sharp conflict between the

official line as represented by the master's narrative and the non-official position as represented by the "silenced" slaves. When the slave challenged the dominant discourse of the master, he/she expressed what critical race theorists call "counter-stories" (Ladsen-Billings & Tate, 1995, p 57). It is in the counter-stories that the slave expressed his/her authentic voice.

Literacy narratives of freedom require an adaptation of instructional procedures from that of traditional literacy narratives. Guidelines for critically reading and discussing literacy narratives of freedom are summarized in Table 1 and are modeled for classroom application using the canonical slave narrative of the young Frederick Douglass introduced below.

The Literacy Narrative of Freedom of Frederick Douglass

Teacher: Today we are going to read and discuss the young life of Frederick Douglass. He was one of the bravest slaves and he was able to achieve many goals that other slaves were not able to do.

Student (6th grader): Really? I've definitely never heard this story before. In my class we never learned about slaves achieving anything special. It's always the same stuff like working on farms and being mistreated by their owners.

In the above dialogue between one of my pre-service teachers and a 6th grade student, note how this student has learned a distorted view of slavery. This view does not take into account the heroic efforts of

a small but important group of slaves to obtain their literacy and freedom at all costs. Reading critically age-appropriate renditions of slave narratives can help correct distortions such as those mentioned by the 6th grader above. Slaves did make many contributions. Learning the history and culture of another person or group's background can help correct initial negative and distorted views of an out-group member.

Findings from a review of research on African-American youth across grades revealed that young students are quite adept at discussing issues related to race and racism in critically complex ways (Brooks & McNair, 2009, pp. 145-146). For young White students, too, children as young as second graders demonstrate racial understanding in class discussions about relatively complex topics such as racist and antiracist attitudes and actions (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

Learning about the cultural achievements of African-American slaves can be a first important step in preventing racial teasing and taunting in class. Pica-Smith (2009) reports an incident in a fourth grade classroom in which some White classmates often called African American kids "slaves" (p. 41). This is obviously unacceptable behavior. Learning about cultural traditions and achievements of African Americans or any minority group is an important process for attitude change and prejudice reduction" (Pettigrew, 1998).

In the paragraphs below, I will demonstrate how an age-appropriate reading

and analysis of the literacy narrative of freedom of Frederick Douglass can serve as a model for the classroom application of the genre of literacy narratives of freedom. This will be provided by referring specifically to critical literacy events prominent in the canonical slave narrative of the famous American slave (see Table 2). In addition, I suggest examples of children and juvenile literature related to other slave narratives (in addition to Douglass) containing salient characteristics of literacy narratives of freedom (see Table 3).

Applications of Literacy Narratives of Freedom

"Happy Birthday Frederick Douglass"

In the very first page of his famous narrative, Douglass (2005, 1845, original publication) spoke sadly about not knowing his date of birth. He said,

I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The White children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. (p. 19)

Many of my pre-service teachers were surprised to learn that no birthday celebrations occurred in the slave cabins. When they taught the story to their own childhood education students, there was disbelief and sadness as expressed in the following encounters:

Teacher: Did you know that most slaves did not . . . know their birthdays?

Student (Third Grade): No, that's hard to understand. I love to celebrate my birthday. Poor Frederick Douglass, he must be sad he doesn't have a birthday. I would be.

A sixth grade student echoed this sentiment but placed the birthday story in a socio-cultural context. The child stated that:

. . . he [Frederick] was never treated as a human being. He was always treated as an object or an animal. Once he found out his birthday it made him into a real person . . . I mean he was treated as a human . . . like all the White boys who got to celebrate their birthday when they were little.

Note how closely the sixth grader's understanding of Douglass's suppressed humanity compares to African-American scholar Gates's (1987) following interpretation:

Table 1
Guidelines for Critically Reading and Discussing Literacy Narratives of Freedom

- ◆ Teacher presents own literacy narrative.
- ◆ Encourage students to write earliest memories of literacy acquisition with assistance of literacy sponsors such as parents and other relatives.
- ◆ Select a traditional literacy narrative presented in children and /or juvenile biographical literature, i.e., "Stand tall, Abe Lincoln."
- ◆ Define and discuss salient characteristics of literacy narratives of freedom.
- ◆ Encourage students to interview parents and relatives about their experiences related to matters of literacy and freedom.
- ◆ Compare characteristics of traditional literacy narratives and literacy narratives of freedom.
- ◆ Select children and juvenile biographical literature that contain stories of literacy and freedom. Refer to Table 3 for suggestions.
- ◆ Identify major critical literacy events and practices in selected narrative.
- ◆ Compare roles of literacy sponsors and blockers.
- ◆ Discuss connections between literacy, freedom, and identity formation.
- ◆ Discuss connections between and literacy, freedom, and authentic voice.
- ◆ Summarize the educational values of critically reading and discussing literacy narratives of freedom.

... the deprivation of a birth date contains all the hallmarks of identity and humanity. The slave owner's world in which slaves know no more of their birthdates than horses do theirs negates and perverts the values of humanness. (p. 93)

Satisfied with the sixth grader's understanding of the connection between slave status and identity formation, the pre-service teacher asked the child to create a poem expressing her enlightened attitude. The sixth grader wrote the following poem that she entitled "Identity."

Frederick
The animal
The slave
The object
No birthday
No family
No freedom
Run! Run!
Frederick
The son
The husband
The man
A birthday
A wife
A daughter
Free.

Reinventing Himself

Literacy had given Douglass a new identity. It transformed the runaway slave by providing not only physical freedom, but what Blight (2003) calls a "real, self-conscious freedom" (p. viii). However, this psychological freedom did not guarantee a full liberating personhood. As a former slave, Douglass would always be limited in his personal actions and self-definition. In a word, Douglass would always be in process of "reinventing himself" (Levine, 2009, p. 102).

This reinventing process adheres to

what Gee (2000-2001) calls "perspectives on identity" (p. 100). As mentioned earlier, these include natural, institutional, and discursive identities. According to the natural perspective, slaves were born without a human identity. To support this natural perspective, the slave states passed anti-slavery laws including those against literacy that fostered an institutional identity perspective.

Slaves who secretly and stealthily acquired literacy challenged the natural perspective as well as the institutional one. For them a radically different identity perspective emerged. Gee (2000-2001) calls this a "discursive perspective" (p. 103). This perspective developed through liberating discourse and dialogue between slaves and their literacy sponsors. Unlike the other perspectives, this one is flexible depending on variations in individual and social circumstances.

"Trading Bread for Words": Acquiring a Dialogical Voice through Subterfuge and Trickery

After losing his first literacy sponsor, slave mistress Mrs. Auld, the young Douglass set out to learn to read on his own. This time he resorted to stealth and trickery. Taking the extra copy-books that the young master Thomas laid aside when he was at school, Douglass would use this spare time to write in the spaces left in the book, copying over what the White boy had written. He continued to do this until he could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas. Gates (1997) states that "writing in the spaces in . . . the copybook" indicated that the "creative life of the slave commenced at the margins of discourse" (p. xiii). Learning at the "margins of discourse"

prompted the slave to "steal literacy" in order to attain it.

On other occasions, the young Douglass sought out new literacy sponsors from poor White boys on the streets of Baltimore. Often he would trade extra food that he carried with him in exchange for their reading assistance. As Douglass (2005, 1845) described the literacy event, "the bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins" was done so that "in return they would give me the more valuable bread of knowledge" (p. 53).

A fourth grader reacted to this part of the literacy narrative by stating,

I was surprised how Frederick had to sneak around to read and write. I thought that everyone should be allowed to learn how to read and write.

A third grader also reacted with disbelief in stating,

I cannot believe that Frederick Douglass had to go through all of that just to learn how to read and write. . . I did not learn how to read in secret.

A fourth grader responded in kind, claiming that,

Frederick Douglass didn't go to school like normal kids. He had to teach himself and trick people to help him. This is an unusual situation.

But it was not an unusual situation for any slave who sought literacy and freedom. It was part of what scholars call the "the trickster" or "counterfeit" traditions of slave narratives in using deceit and duplicity to acquire one's natural rights of literacy and freedom (Hyde, 1998; Young, 2012).

Bakhtin's (1981) literary concept of double-voicedness" appears as a central motif in the slave narratives of Douglass (2005, 1845). The young Frederick learned early in his life that slaves have no authentic voice. He wrote:

In separating members of a slave family, we had no more voice in the decision than the brutes among which we were ranked. A single word from the White man was enough—against all our wishes, prayers and entreaties—to sunder forever our dearest friend, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings. (p. 59)

When Douglass was about twelve years old, he overheard some White boys in the neighborhood talking about a popular book that they were reading in school. It was entitled *The Columbian Orator* and consisted of speeches, plays, and poetry to inspire patriotism. Douglass was so im-

Table 2
Sequence of Literacy Events for Young American Slave, Frederick Douglass

- ◆ "Birthday Blues": No knowledge of birthday.
- ◆ Observes slave mistress (Mrs. Auld) reading aloud to her child.
- ◆ Asks slave mistress to teach him to read.
- ◆ Slave mistress reprimanded by slave owner (Mr. Auld) for teaching Frederick.
- ◆ "Formal" literacy instruction stops.
- ◆ Carries out plan to trick white playmates to teach him how to read.
- ◆ Purchases copy of "The Columbian Orator," a book of readings used in 19th century American schools.
- ◆ Practices writing skills while working in Baltimore shipyards.
- ◆ "Steals" old notebooks from young son of master and practices writing in the margins.
- ◆ Teaches Sabbath school to other slaves in secret.
- ◆ Writes (forges) freedom pass.

pressed that he bought his own copy. One of the speeches that Douglass loved was a fictional dialogue between a master and a slave. The issue concerned the emancipation of the slave. What shocked the young Douglass was that a slave could, through intelligent and convincing argument, gain his own freedom.

Reading and memorizing this dialogue daily gave him courage to utter thoughts of freedom that were hidden in his heart. But these thoughts were a double-edged sword, for they gave him a view of his wretched condition without providing a realistic remedy. They were a curse as well as a blessing and he admitted that he often envied his fellow slaves for their ignorance.

Literacy Practices Integrated in a Major Literacy Event

In some literacy narratives of freedom, a single literacy event is of such magnitude that its influence is primary in the life of the protagonist. In the literacy narrative of Frederick Douglass, this event is the one in which the seven-year-old slave was first taught to read. As mentioned earlier, his first literacy sponsor was Mrs. Auld, wife of Douglass' slave master. Douglass (2005, 1845) tells us that he himself took the initiative when "having no fear of her, I asked her how to teach me to read" (p.48). She readily agreed and taught him the ABC and in spelling words of three or four letters as she read to him from the Bible. (See Figure 1 containing a 19th century drawing of Mrs. Auld teaching young Frederick to read).

But this critical literacy event represented only one perspective of the situation. Indeed, Mr. Auld strongly disapproved and admonished his wife that it was unlawful and unsafe to teach a slave how to read—even a young one. The slave owner warned that "if you learn him to read, he'll want to know how to write, and, this accomplished, he be running away with himself" (as quoted in Gates (1994, p. 217). These circumstances would provide the young slave with a reconstructed and dangerous discursive identity as well as an authentic voice for freedom.

In teaching this critical literacy event to a 6th grader, my pre-service teacher recorded the student's reaction:

Student: I can't believe this happened to Frederick.

Teacher: What can't you believe?

Student: That Mr. Auld was so worried

about Frederick learning how to read. Even though he was a slave I still think they [sic] deserve to read too.

The sixth grader did not understand that literacy could be as dangerous as Mr. Auld warned. Ironically, Douglass tells us that his master's prohibition only served to inspire in him a desire and determination to learn all the more. In fact, the young slave admitted that he owed almost as much to the bitter opposition of his slave master than to the kindly aid of his slave mistress. He acknowledged the benefits of both his literacy sponsor and blocker.

A Birthday Message for Everybody: "I am Somebody Special"

Even though the free Douglass never learned his real birth date, he chose February 14, Valentine's Day, to celebrate it. Douglass' biographer Dexter Preston (1980) tells us it was an arbitrarily chosen date. Douglass recalled how his separated slave mother, on her last visit to him, had called him her "Valentine" and had given him a heart-shaped cake. Later in life, the famous ex-slave allowed his family and friends to celebrate this date as his own birthday.

A few years after his emancipation, Frederick Douglass (1848) wrote a letter

to his former slave master, detailing the reasons why he ran away. He explained:

I am myself: you are yourself . . . we are distinct persons and are each equally provided with faculties necessary to our individual existence. In leaving you, I took nothing but what belonged to me . . . (as quoted in Andrews, 1996, pp 103- 104)

In a later writing, he elaborated when he stated that he pursued "that freedom every living being made after God's image intuitively feels in his birthright" (as quoted in McKanon, 2002, p. 48).

This "birthright" of freedom inspired future leaders of the civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a speech to high school students (with a message that could apply also to students in all grade levels) on April 26, 1967 in Cleveland, Ohio, on the importance of what he called the concept of "somebodyness." The civil rights leader stated:

I would like to suggest some of the things you must do . . . in order to be truly free. Now the first that we must do is to develop within ourselves a deep sense of *somebodyness* (italics mine). Don't let anybody make you feel that you are nobody. Because the minute one feels that way, he is incapable of rising to his full maturity as a person.

Conclusion

Critically reading and discussing literacy narratives of freedom using age-appropriate sources of literature can provide students with the valuable knowledge that literacy, freedom, identity, and voice are interrelated social practices. Hopefully, with this new understanding, students can progress into the "full maturity" of personhood and humanity.

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Figure 1
Mrs. Auld Teaches
Young Frederick Douglass to Read



Source: Douglass, F. (1892). *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Boston: DeWolfe & Fiske Company.

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Table 3
An Annotated List of Some Literacy Narratives of Freedom
Written for Children and Juveniles

- Bradby, M. (1995). *More Than Anything Else*. New York: Orchard Books. Based on childhood years of Booker T. Washington's autobiography, *Up from slavery*, this chapter book describes incidents in a nine year old slave's life who more than anything else wants to learn how to read. The young slave describes his quest as driven by a "hunger . . . in my head" (p.7).
- Cameron, A. (1995). *The Kidnapped Prince: The Life of Olaudah Equiano by Olaudah Equiano*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Landmark narrative of West African slave adapted for juvenile readers. Young slave runaway is taught how to read on a slave ship. Douglass used Equiano's book as guide for writing his own slave narrative.
- Cline-Ransome, L. (2012). *Words Set Me Free: The Story of Young Frederick Douglass*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. Only one of two published picture book biographies of the young Frederick Douglass devoted primarily to the slave's literacy acquisition. It contains all the major events in the young slave's literacy narrative of freedom.
- Girard, W. L. (1994). *Young Frederick Douglass: The Slave Who Learned to Read*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman Company. A children's book that is also primarily about the literacy experiences of the young Frederick Douglass. Unfortunately, the book is out of print, but copies exist in some libraries.
- Malone, M. G. (Ed.). (2004). *The Diary of Susie King Taylor: Civil War Nurse*. New York: Marshall Cavendish. A juvenile chapter book based on the self-published autobiography of a Georgia-born female slave. It contains several literacy events of freedom about the young slave's life including being taught secretly how to read by a white adult and young white playmate. In like manner to Douglass's experiences in the city of Baltimore, Taylor grew also up in a city (Savannah) where she had relatively easy access to literacy sponsors.
- McCurdy, M. (Ed.). (1994). *Escape from Slavery: The Boyhood of Frederick Douglass in His Own Words*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. This book is a shortened version of Douglass's first autobiographical narrative of the life of a slave. He wrote three autobiographical versions in total. To aid young student readers, the text has been simplified and abbreviated.
- Sanders, N.I. (2012). *Frederick Douglass for Kids: His Life and Times with 21 Activities*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press. This book is written for upper level elementary and middle school grade students. It devotes Chapter One to the literacy events in the young life of Douglass. It highlights the continued efforts of the famous American ex-slave to discover his real birthday.