STORYBOARD PANEL

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

Group 1: Read this section, then conduct a short discussion using the suggested questions. When you have finished, choose one to three main events from the section and illustrate them on the storyboard pages. Underneath each drawing, title the scene and describe it.

It was the custom in the State of Maryland to require the free colored people to have what were called free papers. These instruments they were required to renew very often, and by charging a fee for this writing, considerable sums from time to time were collected by the State. In these papers the name, age, color, height, and form of the freeman were described, together with any scars or other marks upon his person which could assist in his identification. This device in some measure defeated itself—since more than one man could be found to answer the same general description. Hence many slaves could escape by **personating** the owner of one set of papers; and this was often done as follows: A slave, nearly or **sufficiently** answering the description set forth in the papers, would borrow or hire them till by means of them he could escape to a free State, and then, by mail or otherwise, would return them to the owner. The operation was a **hazardous** one for the lender as well as for the borrower. A failure on the part of the fugitive to send back the papers would **imperil** his **benefactor**, and the discovery of the papers in possession of the wrong man would imperil both the fugitive and his friend. It was, therefore, an act of supreme trust on the part of a freeman of color thus to put in **jeopardy** his own liberty that another might be free. It was, however, **not infrequently** bravely done, and was seldom discovered. I was not so fortunate as to resemble any of my free acquaintances sufficiently to answer the description of their papers. But I had a friend—a sailor—who owned a sailor's protection, which answered somewhat the purpose of free papers—describing his person, and **certifying** to the fact that he was a free American sailor. The instrument had at its head the American eagle, which gave it the appearance at once of an authorized document. This protection, when in my hands, did not describe its bearer very accurately. Indeed, it called for a man much darker than myself, and close examination of it would have caused my arrest at the start.

Douglass, Frederick. "My Escape from Slavery."The Century Illustrated Magazine 23, n.s. 1 (Nov. 1881): 125-131

Discussion Questions:

Explain why free African Americans needed to carry free papers.

What might be the benefits and risks of escaping using a friend's papers?

If you were a free African American, would you loan your papers to another person desiring to be free? Why or why not?

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

GROUP 1 GLOSSARY

personating—pretending to be someone else

sufficiently—enough

hazardous—dangerous

imperil—put in danger

benefactor—kindly helper

jeopardy—danger

not infrequently—often

certifying—confirming, guaranteeing

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

Group 2: Read this section, then conduct a short discussion using the suggested questions. When you have finished, choose one to three main events from the section and illustrate them on the storyboard pages. Underneath each drawing, title the scene and describe it.

In order to avoid this fatal **scrutiny** on the part of railroad officials, I arranged with Isaac Rolls, a Baltimore **hackman**, to bring my baggage to the Philadelphia train just on the moment of starting, and jumped upon the car myself when the train was in motion. Had I gone into the station and offered to purchase a ticket, I should have been instantly and carefully examined, and undoubtedly arrested. In choosing this plan I considered the **jostle** of the train, and the natural haste of the conductor, in a train crowded with passengers, and relied upon my skill and address in playing the sailor, as described in my protection, to do the rest. One element in my favor was the kind feeling which **prevailed** in Baltimore and other sea-ports at the time, toward "those who go down to the sea in ships." "Free trade and sailors' rights" just then expressed the sentiment of the country. In my clothing I was **rigged** out in sailor style. I had on a red shirt and a **tarpaulin hat**, and a black **cravat** tied in sailor fashion carelessly and loosely about my neck. My knowledge of ships and sailor's talk came much to my assistance, for I knew a ship from **stem to stern**, and from **keelson to cross-trees**, and could talk sailor like an "old salt." I was well on the way to Havre de Grace before the conductor came into the negro car to collect tickets and examine the papers of his black passengers. This was a critical moment in the drama. My whole future depended upon the decision of this conductor. **Agitated** though I was while this ceremony was proceeding, still, externally, at least, I was apparently calm and self-possessed. He went on with his duty—examining several colored passengers before reaching me. He was somewhat harsh in tone and **peremptory** in manner until he reached me, when, strange enough, and to my surprise and relief, his whole manner changed. Seeing that I did not readily produce my free papers, as the other colored persons in the car had done, he said to me, in friendly contrast with his bearing toward the others:

"I suppose you have your free papers?"
To which I answered:
"No sir; I never carry my free papers to sea with me."
"But you have something to show that you are a freeman, haven't you?"
"Yes, sir," I answered; "I have a paper with the American Eagle on it, and that will carry me around the world."

With this I drew from my deep sailor's pocket my seaman's protection, as before described. The merest glance at the paper satisfied him, and he took my fare and went on about his business. This moment of time was one of the most anxious I ever experienced. Had the conductor looked closely at the paper, he could not have failed to discover that it called for a

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very different-looking person from myself, and in that case it would have been his duty to arrest me on the instant, and send me back to Baltimore from the first station. When he left me with the assurance that I was all right, though much relieved, I realized that I was still in great danger: I was still in Maryland, and subject to arrest at any moment. I saw on the train several persons who would have known me in any other clothes, and I feared they might recognize me, even in my sailor "**rig**," and report me to the conductor, who would then subject me to a closer examination, which I knew well would be fatal to me.

Douglass, Frederick. "My Escape from Slavery."The Century Illustrated Magazine 23, n.s. 1 (Nov. 1881): 125-131

Discussion Questions:

How did Frederick Douglass use his disguise and **demeanor** to escape?

Why was Douglass still anxious about being caught, even though he had shown his papers?

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

GROUP 2 GLOSSARY

scrutiny—a close and searching look

hackman—driver of a horse-drawn taxi

jostle—people pushing into each other, especially in a crowded situation

prevailed—was widespread

rigged out—dressed up

tarpaulin hat—a sailor's hat made of oiled, painted, or tarred waterproof canvas

cravat—a cloth worn around the neck

stem to stern—front to back of a ship

keelson to cross-trees—bottom to top of a ship

agitated—nervous, restless, emotional

self-possessed—having control of your feelings

peremptory—assertive, leaving no opportunity to argue

rig—clothing

demeanor—behavior, attitude

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

Group 3: Read this section, then conduct a short discussion using the suggested questions. When you have finished, choose one to three main events from the section and illustrate them on the storyboard pages. Underneath each drawing, title the scene and describe it.

Though I was not a murderer fleeing from justice, I felt perhaps quite as miserable as such a criminal. The train was moving at a very high rate of speed for that **epoch** of railroad travel, but to my anxious mind it was moving far too slowly. Minutes were hours, and hours were days during this part of my flight.

After Maryland, I was to pass through Delaware—another slave State, where slave-catchers generally awaited their prey, for it was not in the interior of the State, but on its borders, that these human hounds were most **vigilant** and active. The border lines between slavery and freedom were the dangerous ones for the fugitives. The heart of no fox or deer, with hungry hounds on his trail in full chase, could have beaten more anxiously or noisily than did mine from the time I left Baltimore till I reached Philadelphia.

…A German blacksmith whom I knew well was on the train with me, and looked at me very intently, as if he thought he had seen me somewhere before in his travels. I really believe he knew me, but had no heart to betray me. At any rate, he saw me escaping and held his peace.

The last point of **imminent** danger, and the one I dreaded most, was Wilmington. Here we left the train and took the steam-boat for Philadelphia. In making the change here I again **apprehended** arrest, but no one disturbed me, and I was soon on the broad and beautiful Delaware, speeding away to the Quaker City. On reaching Philadelphia in the afternoon, I inquired of a colored man how I could get on to New York. He directed me to the William-street depot, and **thither** I went, taking the train that night. I reached New York Tuesday morning, having completed the journey in less than twenty-four hours.

Douglass, Frederick. "My Escape from Slavery."The Century Illustrated Magazine 23, n.s. 1 (Nov. 1881): 125-131

Discussion Questions:

What do you think Douglass means by this quote? "The heart of no fox or deer, with hungry hounds on his trail in full chase, could have beaten more anxiously or noisily than did mine from the time I left Baltimore till I reached Philadelphia."

Why do you think the German blacksmith kept Douglass' secret?

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

GROUP 3 GLOSSARY

epoch—a time period marked by particular features

vigilant—alert and watchful

imminent—likely to occur at any moment

apprehended—anticipated, expected with fear

thither—there, to that place

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

Group 4: Read this section, then conduct a short discussion using the suggested questions. When you have finished, choose one to three main events from the section and illustrate them on the storyboard pages. Underneath each drawing, title the scene and describe it.

But my gladness was short-lived, for I was not yet out of the reach and power of the slave-holders. I soon found that New York was not quite so free or so safe a **refuge** as I had supposed, and a sense of loneliness and insecurity again oppressed me most sadly. I chanced to meet on the street, a few hours after my landing, a fugitive slave whom I had once known well in slavery. The information received from him alarmed me. The fugitive in question was known in Baltimore as "Allender's Jake," but in New York he wore the more respectable name of "William Dixon." Jake, in law, was the property of Doctor Allender, and Tolly Allender, the son of the doctor, had once made an effort to recapture MR. DIXON, but had failed for want of evidence to support his claim. Jake told me the circumstances of this attempt, and how narrowly he escaped being sent back to slavery and torture. He told me that New York was then full of Southerners returning from the Northern watering-places; that the colored people of New York were not to be trusted; that there were hired men of my own color who would betray me for a few dollars; that there were hired men ever on the lookout for fugitives; that I must trust no man with my secret; that I must not think of going either upon the **wharves** or into any colored boarding-house, for all such places were closely watched; that he was himself unable to help me; and, in fact, he seemed while speaking to me to fear lest I myself might be a spy and a betrayer. Under this **apprehension**, as I suppose, he showed signs of wishing to be rid of me, and with whitewash brush in hand, in search of work, he soon disappeared.

Douglass, Frederick. "My Escape from Slavery."The Century Illustrated Magazine 23, n.s. 1 (Nov. 1881): 125-131

Discussion Questions:

Why was New York City unsafe for escaped slaves?

Why do you think Douglass tells us (the readers) about Mr. Dixon's slave name? He even capitalizes MR. DIXON to emphasize this new name. What does Mr. Dixon's old name, "Allender's Jake," tell us about slavery?

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

GROUP 4 GLOSSARY

refuge—a place of shelter, protection, or safety

wharves—piers, structures built between the shore and the water in order to dock boats

apprehension—suspicion or fear of future trouble

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

Group 5: Read this section, then conduct a short discussion using the suggested questions. When you have finished, choose one to three main events from the section and illustrate them on the storyboard pages. Underneath each drawing, title the scene and describe it.

… Every door seemed closed against me. I was in the midst of an ocean of my fellow-men, and yet a perfect stranger to everyone. I was without home, without **acquaintance**, without money, without **credit**, without work, and without any definite knowledge as to what course to take, or where to look for **succor**. In such an **extremity**, a man had something besides his new-born freedom to think of. While wandering about the streets of New York, and lodging at least one night among the barrels on one of the wharves, I was indeed free—from slavery, but free from food and shelter as well. I kept my secret to myself as long as I could, but I was **compelled** at last to seek someone who would befriend me without taking advantage of my **destitution** to betray me. Such a person I found in a sailor named Stuart, a warm-hearted and generous fellow, who, from his humble home on Centre Street, saw me standing on the opposite sidewalk, near the Tombs prison. As he approached me, I ventured a remark to him which at once **enlisted** his interest in me. He took me to his home to spend the night, and in the morning went with me to Mr. David Ruggles, the secretary of the **New York Vigilance Committee**… Once in the hands of these brave and wise men, I felt comparatively safe. With Mr. Ruggles, on the corner of Lispenard and Church streets, I was hidden several days, during which time my intended wife came on from Baltimore at my call, to share the burdens of life with me. She was a free woman, and came at once on getting the good news of my safety. We were married by Rev. J. W. C. Pennington, then a well-known and respected Presbyterian minister. I had no money with which to pay the marriage fee, but he seemed well pleased with our thanks.

Douglass, Frederick. "My Escape from Slavery."The Century Illustrated Magazine 23, n.s. 1 (Nov. 1881): 125-131

Discussion Questions:

What were some of the hardships faced by Douglass in New York City? Why?

Do you think fear of being alone in a strange city deterred other slaves from escaping?

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

GROUP 5 GLOSSARY

acquaintance—a person you know

credit—ability to buy now and pay later

succor—relief or assistance

extremity—an extreme situation

compelled—forced

destitution—poverty

enlisted—gave voluntarily

New York Vigilance Committee—an interracial group of abolitionists that helped fugitive slaves escape capture. It may have been part of the Underground Railroad.

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

Group 6: Read this section, then conduct a short discussion using the suggested questions. When you have finished, choose one to three main events from the section and illustrate them on the storyboard pages. Underneath each drawing, title the scene and describe it.

Mr. Ruggles was the first officer on the "Underground Railroad" whom I met after coming North, and was, indeed, the only one with whom I had anything to do till I became such an officer myself. Learning that my trade was that of a **calker**, he promptly decided that the best place for me was in New Bedford, Mass. He told me that many ships for **whaling voyages** were fitted out there, and that I might there find work at my trade and make a good living. So, on the day of the marriage ceremony, we took our little luggage to the **steamer** John W. Richmond, which, at that time, was one of the line running between New York and Newport, R. I. Forty-three years ago colored travelers were not permitted in the cabin, nor allowed **abaft** the paddle-wheels of a steam vessel. They were **compelled**, whatever the weather might be,—whether cold or hot, wet or dry,—to spend the night on deck. Unjust as this regulation was, it did not trouble us much; we had fared much harder before.

We arrived at Newport the next morning, and soon after an old fashioned stage-coach, with "New Bedford" in large yellow letters on its sides, came down to the wharf. I had not money enough to pay our fare, and stood hesitating what to do. Fortunately for us, there were two **Quaker** gentlemen who were about to take passage on the stage,—**Friends** William C. Taber and Joseph Ricketson,—who at once **discerned** our true situation, and, in a peculiarly quiet way, addressing me, Mr. Taber said: "Thee get in." I never obeyed an order with more **alacrity**, and we were soon on our way to our new home. When we reached "Stone Bridge" the passengers **alighted** for breakfast, and paid their fares to the driver. We took no breakfast, and, when asked for our fares, I told the driver I would make it right with him when we reached New Bedford. I expected some objection to this on his part, but he made none. When, however, we reached New Bedford, he took our baggage, including three music-books,—two of them collections by Dyer, and one by Shaw,—and held them until I was able to redeem them by paying to him the amount due for our rides. This was soon done, for Mr. Nathan Johnson not only received me kindly and **hospitably**, but, on being informed about our baggage, at once loaned me the two dollars with which to **square accounts** with the stage-driver. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Johnson reached a good old age, and now rest from their labors. I am under many grateful **obligations** to them. They not only **"took me in when a stranger" and "fed me when hungry,"** but taught me how to make an honest living. Thus, in a **fortnight** after my flight from Maryland, I was safe in New Bedford, a citizen of the grand old commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Douglass, Frederick. "My Escape from Slavery."The Century Illustrated Magazine 23, n.s. 1 (Nov. 1881): 125-131

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Discussion Questions:

Look at the definition for Quakers. Why do you think the Quaker gentlemen helped Douglass and Ruggles?

List all the helpful things people did for Douglass in this excerpt. How would his story have been different if nobody had helped him?

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

GROUP 6 GLOSSARY

calker—a person who fills the holes between the planks in a boat with waterproof material so that the boat doesn't leak

whaling voyages—a sea journey to kill whales, which were used to make lamp oil, dress hoops, buggy whips, corset stays, and many other goods.

steamer—steam-powered ship

abaft—behind (on a ship)

compelled—forced

Quaker—a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Quakers believe that God treats all people equally, and some groups show this by not participating in war, by using thee and thou to refer to all people, wearing simple clothing, and promoting social justice. Quakers were opposed to slavery and many participated in the abolitionist movement.

Friends—a title used by Quakers

discerned—saw, recognized

alacrity—cheerfully, lively

alighted—got out of the vehicle

hospitably—treating guests warmly and generously

square accounts—pay the bill

obligations—debts of gratitude, favors done out of thankfulness

"took me in when a stranger" and "fed me when hungry"—quotes from the Bible (Matthew 25:35)

fortnight—two weeks

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

Group 7: Read this section, then conduct a short discussion using the suggested questions. When you have finished, choose one to three main events from the section and illustrate them on the storyboard pages. Underneath each drawing, title the scene and describe it.

The fifth day after my arrival, I put on the clothes of a common laborer, and went upon the **wharves** in search of work. On my way down Union street I saw a large pile of coal in front of the house of Rev. Ephraim Peabody, the Unitarian minister. I went to the kitchen door and asked the privilege of bringing in and putting away this coal. "What will you charge?" said the lady. "I will leave that to you, madam." "You may put it away," she said. I was not long in accomplishing the job, when the dear lady put into my hand TWO SILVER HALF-DOLLARS. To understand the emotion which swelled my heart as I clasped this money, realizing that I had no master who could take it from me,—THAT IT WAS MINE—THAT MY HANDS WERE MY OWN, and could earn more of the precious coin,—one must have been in some sense himself a slave. My next job was stowing a **sloop** at Uncle Gid. Howland's wharf with a cargo of oil for New York. I was not only a freeman, but a free working-man, and no "master" stood ready at the end of the week to seize my hard earnings…

Becoming satisfied that I could not rely on my trade in New Bedford to give me a living [few were hiring black **calkers** at that time], I prepared myself to do any kind of work that came to hand. I sawed wood, shoveled coal, dug cellars, moved rubbish from back yards, worked on the wharves, loaded and unloaded vessels, and **scoured** their cabins…

I afterward got steady work at the brass-foundry owned by Mr. Richmond. My duty here was to blow the **bellows**, swing the crane, and empty the flasks in which castings were made; and at times this was hot and heavy work. The articles produced here were mostly for ship work, and in the busy season the **foundry** was in operation night and day. I have often worked two nights and every working day of the week. My foreman, Mr. Cobb, was a good man, and more than once protected me from abuse that one or more of the hands was disposed to throw upon me. While in this situation I had little time for mental improvement. Hard work, night and day, over a furnace hot enough to keep the metal running like water, was more favorable to action than thought; yet here I often nailed a newspaper to the post near my bellows, and read while I was performing the up and down motion of the heavy beam by which the bellows was inflated and discharged. It was the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, and I look back to it now, after so many years, with some **complacency** and a little wonder that I could have been so **earnest** and **persevering** in any **pursuit** other than for my daily bread.

Douglass, Frederick. "My Escape from Slavery."The Century Illustrated Magazine 23, n.s. 1 (Nov. 1881): 125-131

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Discussion Questions:

What does Douglass mean by this quote? “To understand the emotion which swelled my heart as I clasped this money… one must have been in some sense himself a slave.”

Why do you think Douglass was happy to do such a variety of jobs around town, even though he was trained as a calker?

Why did Douglass nail a newspaper by the bellows?

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MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY

GROUP 7 GLOSSARY

wharves— piers, structures built between the shore and the water in order to dock boats

sloop—a smallish boat with a single mast

calker— a person who fills the holes between the planks in a boat with waterproof material so that the boat doesn't leak

scoured—vigorously cleaned

bellows—a device used to blow air into a fire, operated by pulling apart two pieces of wood or metal that are joined by webbing and then pushing them together

foundry—a workshop where metal is melted and poured into molds to make objects like tools and home goods.

complacency—pleasure and security

earnest—serious, sincere

persevering—steadfast, persistent

pursuit—occupation or pastime

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LESSON EXTENTION EXCERPT
FROM "MY ESCAPE FROM SLAVERY" BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS

My free life began on the third of September, 1838. On the morning of the fourth of that month, after an anxious and most perilous but safe journey, I found myself in the big city of New York, a FREE MAN-- one more added to the mighty throng which, like the confused waves of the troubled sea, surged to and fro between the lofty walls of Broadway. Though dazzled with the wonders which met me on every hand, my thoughts could not be much withdrawn from my strange situation. For the moment, the dreams of my youth and the hopes of my manhood were completely fulfilled. The bonds that had held me to "old master" were broken. No man now had a right to call me his slave or assert mastery over me. I was in the rough and tumble of an outdoor world, to take my chance with the rest of its busy number. I have often been asked how I felt when first I found myself on free soil. There is scarcely anything in my experience about which I could not give a more satisfactory answer. A new world had opened upon me. If life is more than breath and the "quick round of blood," I lived more in that one day than in a year of my slave life. It was a time of joyous excitement which words can but tamely describe. In a letter written to a friend soon after reaching New York, I said: "I felt as one might feel upon escape from a den of hungry lions." Anguish and grief, like darkness and rain, may be depicted; but gladness and joy, like the rainbow, defy the skill of pen or pencil. During ten or fifteen years I had been, as it were, dragging a heavy chain which no strength of mine could break; I was not only a slave, but a slave for life. I might become a husband, a father, an aged man, but through all, from birth to death, from the cradle to the grave, I had felt myself doomed. All efforts I had previously made to secure my freedom had not only failed, but had seemed only to rivet my fetters the more firmly, and to render my escape more difficult. Baffled, entangled, and discouraged, I had at times asked myself the question, May not my condition after all be God's work, and ordered for a wise purpose, and if so, Is not submission my duty? A contest had in fact been going on in my mind for a long time, between the clear consciousness of right and the plausible make-shifts of theology and superstition. The one held me an abject slave--a prisoner for life, punished for some transgression in which I had no lot nor part; and the other counseled me to manly endeavor to secure my freedom. This contest was now ended; my chains were broken, and the victory brought me unspeakable joy.

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