

Honoring Frederick Douglass

February is Black History Month—a great time to remember an icon of American history, the famed abolitionist, human rights advocate, writer, and orator Frederick Douglass.

Born Frederick Bailey on a Maryland plantation in 1818 to an enslaved black woman and a white man (speculated to be the plantation owner), Douglass never knew his actual birthday, but opted to celebrate it on February 14—Valentine's Day.

His early survival was a testament to his native genius, determination, and faith. Taken from his mother as an infant, he lived with his maternal grandmother until age six, when he was "given" to the wife of Maryland plantation owner Thomas Auld, who subsequently sent him to work for relatives in Baltimore.

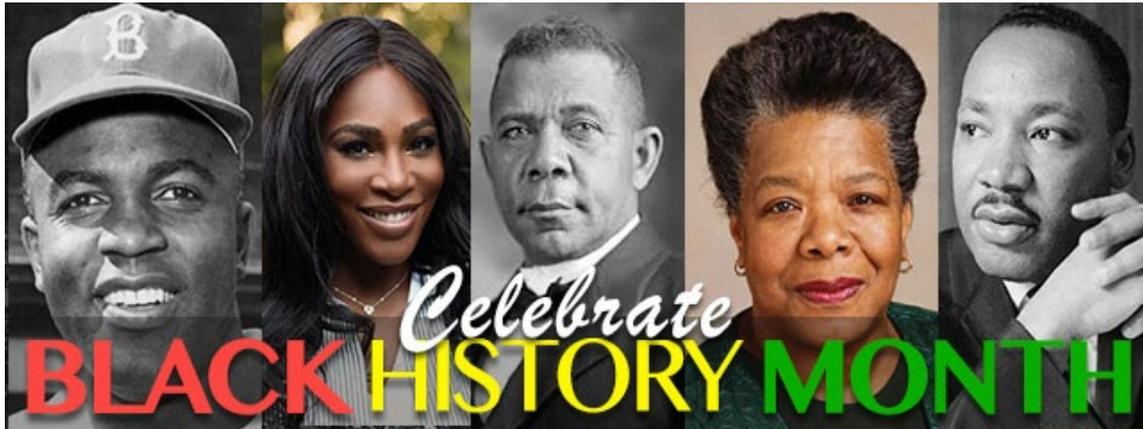
Auld's sister-in-law taught Douglass the alphabet, and he subsequently taught himself to read and write, using the Bible as his text. He began teaching other slaves as well. He was eventually discovered, and when he was a teen, the Aulds punished him by sending him to a cruel "slave breaker" named Edward Covey, who beat him regularly.

After several failed attempts, Douglass successfully escaped to New York in 1838. Once established, he sent for his fiancé, Anna Murray, a free black woman from Baltimore. The two married, ultimately having five children, and settled in New Bedford, Mass., where they changed their name to Douglass (after a character in a Walter Scott poem) and became active abolitionists. Frederick Douglass gained celebrity as an orator and writer.

In later life, Douglass continued working for human rights and feminism. Widowed in 1882, he sparked an uproar in 1884 when he remarried, to feminist Helen Pitts, who was not only 20 years younger, but also white. Douglass laughed off the controversy: "This proves I am impartial. My first wife was the color of my mother and the second, the color of my father." Douglass died in 1895, at age 77; his inspiring work and important legacy live on today.

Your students can learn more about Frederick Douglass with these [titles](#) from Perma-Bound.

To find a variety of additional titles related to African American history, historical events, and the individuals who helped shape them, visit our [Black History Month web page](#).

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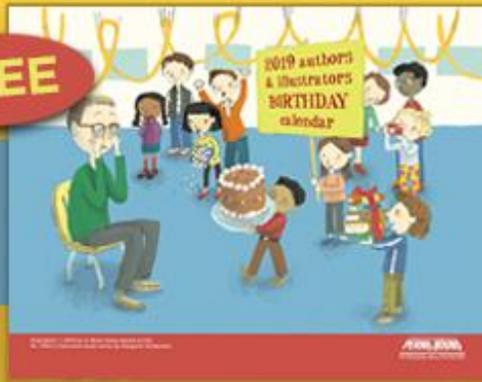
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