



WORDS SET ME FREE: THE STORY OF YOUNG FREDERICK DOUGLASS

by Lesa Cline-Ransome
Illustrations by James E. Ransome

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Nominee 2015
Grades 3-5**

*Submitted by Liz Nelson, Librarian, North Highlands Elementary, Shreveport, LA
and
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Title: *Words Set Me Free*

Author: Lesa Cline-Ransome

Illustrator: James E. Ransome

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

Pages: 32

SUMMARY

This picture book biography is based on the childhood of Frederick Douglass. Douglass narrates, recalling how his Mama, who was sold to another plantation when Douglass was very young, walked twelve miles in the middle of the night to see him until she fell ill. He remembers eating his two meals a day with the other slaves from a trough just like the barn animals, envying that the animals got to rest in the hot sun the way he did not. At the age of eight, he is rented out to a new master in Baltimore. The master's wife treats him well; she even teaches him the alphabet—until her husband finds out. Then Douglass begins to teach himself. When he is returned to his original plantation, he begins teaching the other slaves so they can devise a plan to escape to freedom.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lesla Cline-Ransom grew up in Malden, MA. Her mother loved to read, and Lesa went with her to the public library weekly. By the time she started middle school, she knew she wanted to be a real writer, a journalist, and it wasn't until she met her husband James, a book illustrator, that she became interested in writing children's books. After completing a graduate degree in Elementary Education she began writing for children. Her first book was *Satchel Paige*. Now she enjoys regular trips to the library with her own children.

Biographical information taken from the author's website at

<http://www.lesaclineransome.com/bio.html>,

Accessed August 27, 2014.



ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHY

James Ransome was born in Rich Square, North Carolina. He planned a career in film making, but a high school art class changed his interest to a degree in illustration. He received the Coretta Scott King Award for his book *The Creation*, and he has received various other awards for the many books he has written and illustrated.

Biographical information taken from the illustrator's website at <http://www.jamesransome.com/about.html>,
Accessed August 27, 2014.

AWARDS

Eureka Award Winner for Excellence in Nonfiction 2012

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Author website <http://www.lesaclineransome.com/>

Illustrator website <http://www.jamesransome.com/>

OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR

Before There Was Mozart: The Story of Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-George (2011)

Helen Keller: The World in Her Heart (2008)

Light in the Darkness (2013)

Young Pele': Soccer's First Star (2011)

OTHER TITLES BY ILLUSTRATOR

It Is the Wind (2005)

Sky Boys (2012)

This Is the Dream (2009)

What Lincoln Said (2008)

RELATED TITLES

Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: The Story Behind an American Friendship by Russell Freedman

Frederick Douglass for Kids: His Life and Times by Nancy I. Sanders

A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass by David A. Adler

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Language Arts:

- Write a story or poem about what your life might have been like in Frederick Douglass's place.
- Codes were important for the Underground Railroad, and Frederick Douglass was struggling to learn to read written language. Have students break into groups, write coded messages, and create only partial code keys. Exchange them between the groups and discuss how difficult it is to learn something with only partial information. Some codes for kids:
<http://kidsactivitiesblog.com/27282/secret-codes-to-write-a-coded-letter>

Social Studies:

- Have children watch “Frederick Douglass for Children” on YouTube and write a response:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Yjf3a0CYWI>
- Discuss Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad.

Art:

Another way to pass messages is through symbols, which can be used to create a picture. Have students draw/paint/etc. a picture that is also a message.

Vocabulary:

Breeches
Shift
Wharf
Trough
Abolition
Spiritual
Quill

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the title mean?
2. How important is the ability to use language well? Why? What can't you do if you cannot communicate well?
3. Why were slaves forbidden to learn to read?
4. Why would young Frederick Douglass be willing to take such a risk? What would you be willing to take such a risk for?
5. How did words truly set Fredrick Douglass free at the end of the book?

RELATED WEBSITES

Words Set Me Free Lesson Plan

<http://rformat.wikispaces.com/file/detail/IRA+Cline-Ransome.docx>

Includes read-aloud discussion questions

What was it like to be a slave?

<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=2921>

Brainstorming activities

What does this song really say?

http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/lessons/grade-3-4/What_does_this_song_say.aspx

Messages behind African American spirituals