



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

EFLA TEACHING GUIDE

UNIT 5: Slavery in the U.S. (1619 – 1865)

CLASS 8: Free Blacks During Slavery

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the quality of life for free Blacks in the South
- ✓ Identify the restrictions placed on free Blacks in the North and South
- ✓ Discuss ways in which many free Blacks used their status as free persons to fight against slavery and racial oppression
- ✓ Recognize the legacies free Blacks passed down to future generations

MATERIALS

- EFLA Quiz 5.8
- Internet Access and Audio/Visual Equipment
- Biography of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (EFLA Handout)
Link: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/frances-ellen-watkins-harper>
- “Lines” a poem by Frances E. W. Harper (EFLA Handout)
Link: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/182616>

UNIT 5 CLASS 8: QUIZ 5.8 (with answer key)

(35 – 40 minutes)

Instructions

- Distribute EFLA Document: Quiz 5.8 (below), which is based on the homework assignment from the previous class. Give students approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the quiz. The answers are provided. Some answers may vary.
- Once the quiz is complete, call on student volunteers to provide the answers to each of the questions. Facilitate a class discussion by reviewing the answers together. Allow students the opportunity to grade their own quiz. Collect and review graded quizzes for accuracy and place in student folder.

1. What role did free Blacks play in the “Underground Railroad”?

“Although it was neither subterranean nor a mechanized means of travel, this network of routes and hiding places was known as the “underground railroad.” Some free Blacks were active “conductors” on the underground railroad while others simply harbored runaways in their homes.” (African American Odyssey: “Free Blacks in the Antebellum Period”)

2. How did free Blacks, such as the Hodges family, contribute to the struggle to free enslaved Blacks? What were the risks involved?

Many participated in the abolitionist movement in varying degrees. Some went beyond advocacy and helped escaped slaves make it North through the Underground Railroad and some even helped plan violent revolutions to overthrow slavery. It was rumored that the Hodges family was planning “a second Nat Turner rebellion.” Willis Hodges also started a weekly black paper called “The Ram’s Horn,” to discuss matters that concerned all black people, free and enslaved. In addition, Willis and William advocated for abolition through their ministries, and Willis served as a delegate to a convention of colored people in Albany and Troy, New York. The Hodges family risked losing their property, their freedom and even their lives.

3. What was the significance of free Blacks knowing how to read and write? What was the literacy rate of white Americans during the time Willis Hodges wrote his autobiography?

Learning to read and write enabled free Blacks the opportunity to read the Bible for themselves. In doing so, they discovered a messianic message in Christianity

and used it to fight against slavery and to inspire downtrodden Blacks with hope of redemption in heaven and on Earth. Two of the Hodges sons became ministers, preaching an anti-slavery gospel to Blacks, in contradiction to the pro-slavery scriptures often quoted by white ministers sympathetic to slavery.

In 1848-49, when Willis Hodges wrote his autobiography, the literacy rate of whites was 10%.

4. How did the accumulation of wealth benefit Charles Hodge's heirs beyond economic gain?

As a free Black man, Charles Hodges was able to educate his children when only 10% of the white population could read and write at the time. His wealth and education helped him successfully win acquittals on two serious criminal charges. Also, his children went on to become influential members of their communities abolitionists, independent farmers, merchants, ministers, journalists, authors, and statesmen.



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

QUIZ 5.8

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. What role did free Blacks play in the “Underground Railroad”?

2. How did free Blacks, such as the Hodges family, contribute to the struggle to free enslaved Blacks? What were the risks involved?

3. What was the significance of free Blacks knowing how to read and write? What was the literacy rate of white Americans during the time Willis Hodges wrote his autobiography?

4. How did the accumulation of wealth benefit Charles Hodge’s heirs beyond economic gain?

Class Activity 1

(45 – 60 minutes)

MATERIALS

- Biography of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911)
Link: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/frances-ellen-watkins-harper>
- “Lines” a poem by Frances E. W. Harper (Distribute Attached Handout)
Link: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/182616>

INSTRUCTIONS

Introduce students to writer, poet, and abolitionist, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and analyze one of her poems as a form of protest.

1. Distribute the biography of Frances E.W. Harper as well as her poem, “Lines.”
2. Call on students to read portions of the biography aloud.
3. Ask students to read the poem, “Lines” to themselves in silence.
4. After the first read, ask students to read the poem again and take notes in the margins. Ask them to considering the following:
 - What is the tone of the poem? Identify evidence of the tone.
 - What is Harper’s message regarding the future?
 - Why is the poem called Lines?
 - What are other possible titles that would capture the message of the poem?
 - Using your own words, how would you describe the meaning of the poem to a friend?
5. Ask students to share their responses.



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825 – 1911)



Born in Baltimore, poet, fiction writer, journalist, and activist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was the only child of free African American parents. She was raised by her aunt and uncle after her mother died when Frances was three years old. She attended the Academy for Negro Youth, a school run by her uncle, until the age of 13, and then found domestic work in a Quaker household, where she had access to a wide range of literature. After teaching for two years in Ohio

and Pennsylvania, she embarked on a career as a traveling speaker on the abolitionist circuit. She helped slaves escape through the Underground Railroad and wrote frequently for anti-slavery newspapers, earning her a reputation as the mother of African American journalism.

A prolific writer, Harper published many collections of poetry, including *Autumn Leaves* (also published as *Forest Leaves*) (1845); *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854), which was reprinted 20 times; *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872), which chronicles Reconstruction; *Poems* (1857); *The Martyr of Alabama and Other Poems* (1892); *The Sparrow's Fall and Other Poems* (1894); and *Atlanta Offering* (1895). Harper also published several novels, including *Iola Leroy* (1892), and essay collections. Her short story "The Two Offers" was the first short story published by an African American. Her poetry has been collected in *Complete Poems of Frances E.W. Harper* (1988, ed. Maryemma Graham), and her prose in *A Brighter Coming Day* (1990, ed. Frances Smith Foster).

She married Fenton Harper in 1860. He brought to the marriage three children of his own, and together they had a daughter. When her husband died in 1864, Harper continued to support her family through speaking engagements. During Reconstruction she was an activist for civil rights, women's rights, and educational opportunities for all. She was superintendent of the Colored Section of the Philadelphia and Pennsylvania Women's Christian Temperance Union, co-founder and vice president of the National Association of Colored Women, and a member of the American Women's Suffrage Association. Harper was also the director of the American Association of Colored Youth.

She was active in both African Methodist Episcopal and Unitarian Universalist churches, and was buried in Philadelphia's Eden Cemetery, next to her daughter Mary.



Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

“Lines”

A Poem by Frances E.W. Harper

At the Portals of the Future,
Full of madness, guilt and gloom,
Stood the hateful form of Slavery,
Crying, Give, Oh! give me room—

Room to smite the earth with cursing,
Room to scatter, rend and slay,
From the trembling mother's bosom
Room to tear her child away;

Room to trample on the manhood
Of the country far and wide;
Room to spread o'er every Eden
Slavery's scorching lava-tide.

Pale and trembling stood the Future,
Quailing 'neath his frown of hate,
As he grasped with bloody clutches
The great keys of Doom and Fate.

In his hand he held a banner
All festooned with blood and tears:
'Twas a fearful ensign, woven
With the grief and wrong of years.

On his brow he wore a helmet
Decked with strange and cruel art;
Every jewel was a life-drop
Wrung from some poor broken heart.

Though her cheek was pale and
anxious,
Yet, with look and brow sublime,
By the pale and trembling Future
Stood the Crisis of our time.

And from many a throbbing bosom
Came the words in fear and gloom,
Tell us, Oh! thou coming Crisis,
What shall be our country's doom?

Shall the wings of dark destruction
Brood and hover o'er our land,
Till we trace the steps of ruin
By their blight, from strand to strand?

Source: *American Poetry: The Nineteenth Century* (The Library of America, 1993)

