

# Three Voices for Freedom



## Lesson 9

### Grades: Fourth & Up

**Overview:** This lesson teaches students about the significant role free African Americans played in the abolition of slavery in the 19th century. Abolitionists held different views about how to end slavery and the oppression of African Americans. This lesson demonstrates some of the different opinions expressed by three powerful Black “voices for freedom”: David Walker, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and John Day.\* Students receive biographical information about each of these three individuals and their writings as well as additional stories of enslaved Americans who claimed their freedom.

### Estimated No. of Class Periods: 3

### Resources/Materials in Kit:

- 1) An excerpt from an antislavery speech of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and one from a letter. A one-page biography of her.
- 2) An excerpt from David Walker’s “An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World” first published in 1829. A one-page biography of him.
- 3) John Day’s open letter sent from Liberia and addressed to “the free people of color of the United States.” A one page biography of him.
- 4) Stories of enslaved Americans who courageously claimed their freedom.

**Prerequisites:** None

### Learning Outcomes:

After completing this lesson, students should be able to:

- recognize that a variety of political opinions existed among free African Americans of the antebellum period regarding how to end slavery.
- compare and contrast these three historical figures and their viewpoints.
- develop “personal viewpoints” regarding abolition and the “slavery problem” using one or more arguments from the speeches to support their viewpoints.

\* *John Day was Thomas Day’s brother. He became a founder of Liberia on the west coast of Africa.*

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## Vocabulary

**abolitionist** – a person in the 19th century who worked to end slavery

**antebellum** – the period of time (1830–1860) before the Civil War (pronounced “auntie bellum”)

**benevolence** – a kindness: good deed

**brethren** – brothers ( as in “my fellow men” )

**coffles** – groups of enslaved Americans who were taken from one part of the country to another; they were usually tied to each other with ropes or chains.

**congenial** – friendly and agreeable

**daguerreotype** – an early photograph printed on a metal plate

**disdain** – state of despising someone or something; scorn; contempt

**eloquent** – well-spoken; able to express oneself very clearly and impressively in words

**emancipation** – act or process of freeing slaves

**emissary** – a person sent on a mission by someone else

**Free Produce** – products were produced by free not enslaved labor. Members of the Free Produce movement boycotted cotton, sugar, and other products produced by slave labor in the South. They brought their goods at Free Produce stores, where they could be assured that all of the goods were produced by free labor, not enslaved.

**groveling** – bowing down low in subservience to another person

**incongruity** – something that is not harmonious with something else

**Liberia** – a colony on the west coast of Africa established for free African Americans and former slaves

**malignant** – evil or malicious in nature; a tumor is said to be malignant when it is spreading throughout one’s body

**oppression** – exerting power over others without regard to their humanity or to justice

**reversion** – an act or instance of changing one’s views or actions to ones that are the opposite or very different from previously held views

**submission** – that act of being subservient to the will of another

**treachery** – treason or betrayal of trust

**Zion** – the homeland sought by the ancient Israelites in the Bible, symbolic for any ideal homeland or displaced or enslaved peoples

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## Suggested Instructional Steps:

*Show and ask questions about:*

1. Show pictures of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and John Day. A picture of David Walker does not exist.

2. Possible questions:

- Do you recognize any of these people?

(It is doubtful that anyone will recognize them)

- What race are they?

*(They are African American. John Day may look “white” in the daguerreotype, yet he was a free African American.)*

- When do you think that this man and this woman lived?

- Do you think that these people were slaves?

*(Explain that while the majority of African Americans were enslaved in the 19th century, a very small percentage of African Americans were free. John Day, David Walker and Frances were born free because their mothers were free. )*

- How could an African American be free before the Civil War?

*Appropriate responses:*

- *He or she could :*

✓ Be born free (if one’s mother was free, the child would inherit the status of his/her mother).

✓ Be freed by one’s master.

✓ Purchase one’s freedom. Sometimes a master “hired out” his slaves to work for others. Some slaves were allowed to keep a portion of the money they earned and a few saved up this money and “purchased” themselves from their master, thereby “buying” their freedom.

✓ Run away from slavery and find a “safe” state or country (such as Canada) to live as a free man or woman. The freedom claimed by runaways was in jeopardy because of the Fugitive Slave Law, which made it legal to capture slaves even if they were caught in a state where slavery was illegal.

3. Ask students to read through the documents. This could be done individually in small groups, or out loud as a class activity. (Vocabulary list covers most difficult vocabulary.)

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4. Provide copies of three short **biographies** of each person for students to read.
  5. Ask students **Reading Comprehension Questions** on pages 9-6 and 9-7. (*Note: These may be a homework assignment or a follow up class assignment.*) After the students complete these questions, collect them or discuss the answers as a class or have students discuss them in their groups.

*When the Reading Comprehension exercise is complete, you may:*

6. Conclude the lesson by reviewing key facts about each historical figure and his or her position; *or* to get the students more involved in “active learning,” use one of the Extensions below:

### **Extension A. - Talk Show Format**

1. Select a host and then divide the rest of the class into four small groups.
2. Ask three of the four groups to prepare a “guest” (Day, Walker, or Harper) for the talk show. These groups will make up the studio audience, and will ask questions for the host and the guest (*Note: Have students use the Reading Comprehension questions to prepare the guest.*)
3. The fourth group will be the video crew who will prepare the host and who will video the talk show.
4. Questions for the Host to ask for the talk show ( Each guest should know the answers to the hosts questions)
  - a. Where were you born?
  - b. How did you become free?
  - c. How were you educated?
  - d. Where do you live? Did you always live there?
  - e. What do you do for a living?
  - f. Do you own slaves?
  - g. What’s your position on slavery?
  - h. What are the best options for free black Americans?
  - i. How can African Americans become citizens of this country?
  - j. Have you managed to obtain respect and material success?
  - k. Should free blacks leave the United States?
  - l. Can free blacks live successfully in North Carolina or anywhere in the United States?
  - m. What obligation do you, as a free black, have to enslaved Americans?
  - n. What can be done to change public opinion about slavery?

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## Extension B – Socratic Seminar

1. Review seminar rules with the students
  - One person may talk at a time
  - No rudeness to the speaker
  - Stick to the text
  - This should not be personal
2. Open the seminar with general questions. Go around the room until all respond. In a Socratic Seminar, the teacher facilitates or guides the discussion. These questions may take a while to answer and there may be follow up questions. It is not necessary to answer all of the questions.

### *General Questions*

- Why do you think these readings were chosen?
- Which piece do you find the most interesting and why?
- Share one thing you learned from these selections?

### *Follow-Up Questions*

- What themes, if any, do the writers have in common?
- Which writer do you think represented the most prevalent opinions of the antebellum period among African Americans? Why?
- Which writer would you have most liked to have met? Why?
- Why do you think that each of these writers developed different approaches to the problem of slavery?
- What do you think are the main points that each writer tries to make?
- Which writer do you believe is the most optimistic? Why?
- Who was the audience for these writings? What effects do you think each piece had on its audience?
- Why do you think Christianity plays such an important role in two out of the three selections?
- If these three writers ever met, do you think they would have gotten along? Why or why not?

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*Suggested Activities after the Seminar or Talk Show Format*

- Write a persuasive essay supporting a position or positions taken by one or more of these writers; use the actual words of the writers, to support your position
- Write a letter to the editor of the “Liberator,” “Colored American” or another abolitionist newspaper supporting or disagreeing with any of the writings. These may be shared among students or graded as the teacher chooses.

**Reading Comprehension Questions: *Three Voices for Freedom***

***General Questions***

**Who said what?**

*“How could we be so submissive to a gang of men who we cannot tell whether they are as good as ourselves?”*

**Answer:** David Walker

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*“My dear brethren, you do not know what Liberians are nor what Liberia is.”*

**Answer:** John Day

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*“Oh, could slavery exist long if it did not sit on a commercial throne?”*

**Answer:** Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

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**Questions from Walker’s Appeal**

1. What does Walker mean when he begins, “Are we men?”
2. Why “men”?
3. What does Walker imply is in store for whites?
4. What are “mulattos of Asia”?
5. List the specific evidence, or charges, that Walker uses or makes against Whites.
6. What did Walker mean when he said, “The Lord will give it to them to their satisfaction. I hope and pray my God they will make use of it, that it may be well with them”?
7. Who was his audience? What impact do you think this passage was intended to have on them?
8. What is the threat implied in the passage, “Have we any other master but Jesus Christ alone?”
9. How do you think Walker’s black contemporaries in Boston would have judged him based on the things that he said? What about his white contemporaries?

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## Questions from John Day's Letter

1. Who was Day's intended audience for this letter?
2. Why do you think he wrote it?
3. Summarize Day's main point.
4. Summarize the arguments Day uses to convince people to come to Liberia.
5. Why does John Day believe that African Americans will find equality in Liberia?
6. Why does John Day describe America as a "Land of Oppression"?
7. What responsibility does he say he has toward the poor "heathen of this country"?
8. How does he compare life in the "free states" with life in Liberia?
9. What efforts have been necessary to adapt to life in Liberia? What problems were there to overcome?
10. What does the passage "That colored men who breathe the proper atmosphere, surrounded by proper influences, incited by proper objects, will become as learned, as noble, as great as any other men" mean?
11. John Day refers to three different groups of people as his "brethren." What were these groups? Why do you think he calls these groups "brethren"?

## Questions from Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Speech and Letter:

1. In Harper's 1857 speech, what does she mean by "a fearful alchemy by which this blood can be transformed into gold"?
2. What does Harper mean by, "Instead of listening to the cry of agony, they listen to the ring of dollars and stoop down to pick up the coin."
3. Summarize Harper's main point in the speech.
4. Why did Harper mention how kind her treatment had been traveling in New England in the letter?
5. What does Harper mean by "Free Produce?"
6. Why does Harper believe that the Free Produce movement is the best kind of abolition?
7. Why does she have to pay more for a dress made by free labor?