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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2008 Volume II: American Voices: Listening to Fiction, Poetry, and Prose

The Role of Rhetoric in the Abolition Movement: A Study of Voice and Power in Narrative, Speech, and Letters

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This unit is designed for my eighth grade Language Arts class; however, it can easily be adapted to work in a high school English or U.S. History class because the readings and activities are interdisciplinary. The theme of this unit is particularly important to me as a middle school Language Arts teacher because my students tend to feel like their voices are not being heard by their communities. Instead of focusing on the components of an autobiography, I will use this book to teach voice in writing; immersing them in lessons and discussions about the power of voice in writing, thereby helping them develop their voice in writing. Students will be exposed to many different texts written, or spoken, by Frederick Douglass in order to gain an understanding of the role of rhetoric in the Abolition Movement and to develop their own sense of voice. Although *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* will be the main text used in this unit, many letters and speeches will be supplemented throughout the unit so students can understand how one's voice may differ from text to text; the relationship between the writer and his audience; and the different rhetorical devices employed in various texts.

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 8; recommended for Language Arts, grades 7-8 and English, grade 9)

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