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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2020 Volume I: American History through American Lives

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## **Rhetorical Inquiry Through the Lives of Douglass and Truth**

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This unit takes stories from biographies of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth and uses a rhetorical inquiry framework to analyze them. The questions work well to study Douglass and Truth as persuaders in their time and space, but they are designed to resist commonly rested upon rhetorical analysis strategies that give students a way out without a lot of thinking or valuable teacher input. The questions push students toward values conversations and social critique and could be adapted as a battery to unpack any rhetorical situation with older high school students, especially those who study Douglass's first autobiography. The additional activities extend, challenge, and complicate the inquiry framework and the lives and legacy of Douglass and Truth, offering other thresholds for how language choices and self-presentation persuade within speaker-audience dynamics.

(Developed for English and AP Language, grade 11; recommended for English, American Literature, and American History, grades 11-12)

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