

Lesson Plan #12 for *Genius of Freedom: Examining Distinguished Men of Color* by Amy Cohen

Grade Level: Middle or high school

Topics: Frederick Douglass, African American leaders

Pennsylvania History Standards: 8.1.6 B, 8.1.9 B, 8.3.9 A, 8.3.9 B, 8.3.9 D

Pennsylvania Core Standards: 8.5.6-8 A, 8.5.9-10 A, 8.5.11-12 A, 8.5. 6-8 B, 8.5.9-10 B, 8.5.11-12 B

***African American History*, Prentice Hall textbook:** pages 301, 428-430

Overview: Students will look at the *Distinguished Men of Color* lithograph in order to review accomplishments of Frederick Douglass and to understand the role of imagery in asserting middle class status among Northern African Americans. They will then research the lesser-known figures depicted on the poster and share this information with their peers. They will also connect these figures from the past to the current day.

Materials:

Projected image of *Distinguished Colored Men*

Internet access or print material about the men in the poster

Procedures:

1. Project an image of *Distinguished Colored Men* in the front of the class. Ask students to examine it carefully.

- How many of the people depicted have they heard of?
- What do they think might be the common thread among the eleven men depicted (other than sex and race)?
- Have them focus on the background images; why would the developer of the print want to include images reminiscent of the rural, agricultural South?
- Does anything about the image surprise them?
- What do they think was the purpose of this print; who was the intended audience? From the label copy from the Genius of Freedom exhibit: *As the 19th century progressed, the parlor became an increasingly important symbol of middle-class respectability in the United States. The parlor was a site for displaying a family's identity as well as the products of its material success. Advances in technology meant prints were easily reproduced in a range of qualities and prices, making them affordable for working- and middle-class Americans. As Douglass notes, Northern African Americans emphasized racial pride and celebrated their new citizenship status by decorating their homes with inspirational pictures of black life and accomplishments. At the same time, publishing firms found it profitable to produce caricatured depictions of African Americans. However, in response to new demands from black Americans, lithographers and other publishers produced a variety of pictures depicting dignified African American subjects. These were widely sold throughout the North to native black Northerners and recent Southern transplants.*

2. Ask students what they know about Frederick Douglass and why they think he is the central figure on the lithograph. Make sure that the following points are elicited:

- Douglass was born into slavery in 1818 but was able to escape at the age of 20, fleeing Maryland for New York.
- Although it was illegal, he learned how to read and write and taught these skills to other enslaved people.
- He was a prominent abolitionist speaker, writer, and activist.
- During the Civil War, he met with President Lincoln and helped to recruit black soldiers.
- After the Civil War, he pushed for civil rights and voting rights for African Americans and was appointed to several high level political offices.
- He spoke out for the rights of women, Native Americans, immigrants and the poor.
- He wrote several volumes of autobiography.

3. Then, ask students to discuss what message Frederick Douglass would want to share with young people like themselves if he were alive today.

4. Divide the class into 10 pairs and/or small groups. Have each group use the Internet, printouts that you have collected, and/or selected books to research each of the figures other than Douglass. Each group should summarize the person's biography, explain why they were worthy of being put on the lithograph, and determine what would be the message that this person would want to share with young people today.

5. Have students share their findings aloud OR have them post their findings in writing and hang on the classroom wall. Either way, students should learn from each other's research.

6. Discuss OR have students complete a written reflection answering the following questions:

- If Frederick Douglass were not in the center of the poster, which of the other figures would most deserve that place of honor?
- Which person's story most surprised and/or inspired you?
- What would be another appropriate adjective to describe these men other than "distinguished"?
- What would have been a more fitting background than the one on the poster?
- What are some common threads you found among the men?

7. Extension: Working either individually or in small groups, have students design their own poster—either hand drawn or using computer

printouts/magazine cutouts. You can have them choose their own theme for a poster, assign one of the following, or give students a choice among the following:

- Distinguished Colored Women (from a similar era)
- Distinguished African American Men and/or Women of the 20th Century
- Distinguished African American Men and/or Women of the 21st Century

You may want students to give a written explanation of whom they chose.

DISTINGUISHED COLORED MEN



ROBERT BROWN ELLIOTT,
EX-MEMBER OF CONGRESS



BLANCHE K. BRUCE,
EX-SENATOR U. S.



HENRY HIGHLAND GARNETT,
LATE MINISTER OF LIBERIA



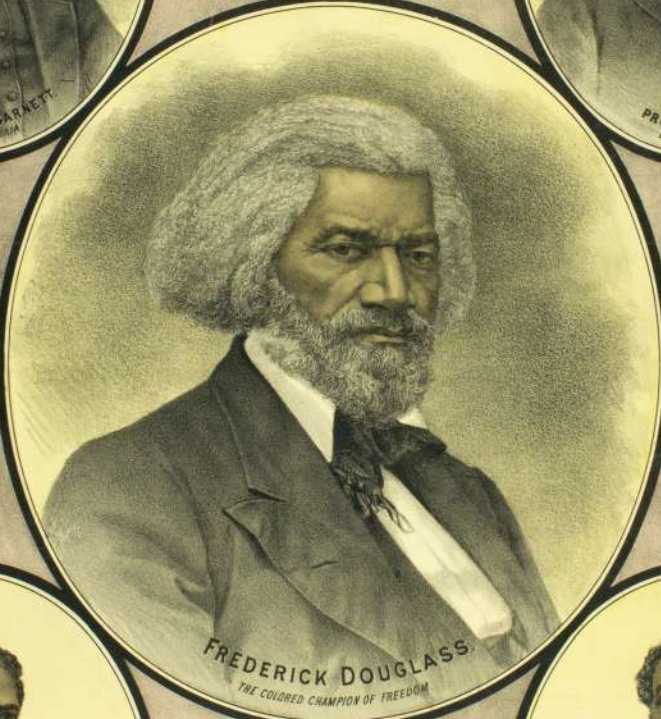
WM. WELLS BROWN, M. D.,
AUTHOR OF 'THE RISING SON'



PROF. R. T. GREENER,
DEAN HOWARD UNIVERSITY



P. B. S. PINCHBACK,
EX-GOVERNOR OF LOUISIANA



FREDERICK DOUGLASS,
THE COLORED CHAMPION OF FREEDOM



RT. REV. RICHARD ALLEN,
BISHOP OF THE AFRICAN M. E. CHURCH



JOHN MERCER LANGSTON,
MINISTER TO HAITI



E. D. BASSETT,
EX-MINISTER TO HAITI



J. H. RAINEY,
EX-MEMBER OF CONGRESS

