



National Park Service  
Teaching with **MUSEUM** Collections  
Management Program  
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum>

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**A. Title: Frederick Douglass' Hat**

- Developer:** Sara Mark Lesk
- Grade Level:** Middle School
- Length of Lesson:** One 45-minute session.

**B. Overview of this Collection-Based Lesson Plan**

- Park name.** Frederick Douglass National Historic Site.
- Description:** *Frederick Douglass' Hat* is the introductory activity in series of lesson plans using museum objects from Frederick Douglass' home at Cedar Hill in Washington, D.C. This lesson demonstrates how objects can serve as primary sources for learning about an individual, his society and the cultural values of the time. By examining similar objects, a contemporary straw hat and students' hats, students will also learn the steps of object analysis and active inquiry, observation and deduction.
- Essential question.** What do Frederick Douglass' hat and the lithograph tell us about Mr. Douglass and his world?

**C. Museum Collections used in this Lesson Plan**

Mr. Douglass' wide-brimmed Panama hat and a lithograph of Douglass wearing the hat.



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- Panama Hat, Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, FRDO 2197
- Lithograph: *Frederick Douglas with Madam Hyppolite in Haiti wearing the Panama Hat* Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, FRDO 157

Print images of the Panama hat and the lithograph from the Frederick Douglass: American Visionary web exhibit at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/douglass/allimg.html>

**D. National Educational Standards**

Select the most appropriate or relevant national standard for your lesson plan, such a history standard for:

National Standards for US and World History (5-12)

*Chapter 2: Standards in Historical Thinking*

Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Standard 4: Historical Research and Capabilities



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And/or

*Chapter 3: U.S. History Standards for Grades 5-12*

Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1800-1861)

Standard 3: The extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800.

Standard 3B-The student understands how the debates over slavery influenced politics and sectionalism.

Standard 4: The sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period.

Standard 4A-*The* student understands the abolitionist movement.

Standard 4B-The student understands how Americans strived to reform society and create a distinct culture.

And/or

Era 5, Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

Standard 2: The course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people.

Standard 2B -The student understands the social experience of the war on the battlefield and home front.

Standard 2D-The student understands the rapid growth of "the peculiar institution" after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery.

Standard 3: How various reconstruction plans succeeded or failed.

Standard 3B-The student understands the Reconstruction programs to transform social relations in the South.

## E. Student Learning Objectives

After completing the activities in '*Frederick Douglass' Hat*,' students will be able to:

- Name six to eight categories for analyzing an object: physical description, materials, maker/manufacture, function, use, value and meaning at the time, modern equivalents and meanings.
- Demonstrate how to analyze one object based on these categories;
- Create a hypothesis based on their analysis about the use and significance of the objects (the hat and the lithograph) in its historical context (Douglass' life);
- Do an object analysis of one of their own hats or the hats of a parent or grandparent.
- Compare their analysis of Douglass' hat to the role, function, materials of modern hats or parents' hats.
- Draw conclusions about nineteenth and twentieth century society from this comparison.

## F. Background and Historical Context

Douglass had a multifaceted life. Though he is best known for his work on the *national* stage as abolitionist and women's right advocate, Douglass played many other roles: as *individual*, and as a *family* man, as *local* Washington, DC leader, and on the *international* stage, as the United States minister to Haiti.

*What can the hat tell us?*

The Panama hat is acts as a "telescope" into viewing his appointment by President Harrison to the Haitian post. By focusing on the hat and its wearer, the lesson plan will allow students to consider the breadth of Douglass' fame, his accomplishments, influence on, and contribution to



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the world. It will also focus their concentration on the function of hats in Douglass' time, and the present.

In 1889, President Harrison appointed Douglass, by then thought of as an elder statesman, to be minister resident and counsel general to Haiti. Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with Dominica [now the Dominican Republic]. Douglass and his wife Helen moved to Port au Prince, Haiti's capital. It was here, where more than a century before, African slaves had arrived chained in the holds of ships. A slave rebellion in 1791 led by Toussaint L'Ouverture led to Haiti's independence from France. It was the first free black republic in the Western Hemisphere.

Haiti's climate: "*In spring and summer, Haiti suffers vicious winds, sudden and torrential rains, and unbearable humidity. The heat is often merciless. Although Douglass and his wife lived in a villa overlooking carefully tended gardens and lush vegetation, Port-au-Prince soon became a hell on earth for both of them. His wife was weakened by the climate and in July of 1890, Douglass took a leave of absence so that they could go back to Cedar Hill. They returned at the end of the year.*" From *Frederick Douglass* by Peter Burchard

Also link to [www.cr.nps.gov/museum](http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum) and go to Frederick Douglass: American Visionary and [www.nps.gov/FRDO](http://www.nps.gov/FRDO) for more information on Frederick Douglass.

The following information was extracted from the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site museum catalog cards and the curator's notes.

#### *Panama Hat*

Cord, ribbon. Circumference 42.5, Height 12, Diameter 17.4cm  
Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, FRDO 2197

Frederick Douglass wore this wide-brimmed "Panama" hat in Haiti, where he served as minister from 1889-1891.

The straw hat is called a Panama. It is made of natural fiber, with a black grosgrain ribbon wrapping the crown. It dates from 1889-91, when Douglass served in Haiti. The straw hat is finely woven, slightly yellowed and in "fair condition." There are two small holes on one side of the brim. The hat is exhibited on a chair in Frederick Douglass' bedroom.

#### *Curatorial Research on Panama Hats.*

Panama hats were made by the native people in Ecuador and sold through Latin America. They were introduced to Europe at the World Exhibit in Paris in 1855. The hats were made of natural fiber called *Carludovica palmate* or *Paja toquilla*. They were used by troops during the Spanish-American War in 1898. They became known as Panama hats as they were worn by many who worked to build the Panama Canal. The broad brim and tight weave were designed to keep the wearer cool, protecting the face and neck from bright sun rays. It is said that authentic Panama hats can be rolled up over a short period of time, without apparent damage. The hats are highly prized, and can be quite costly.

#### *Lithograph*

*Frederick Douglas with Madam Hyppolite in Haiti wearing the Panama Hat*

By James E. Taylor

Circa 1891

Paper, L59, W 48.8 cm

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, FRDO 157



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The lithograph shows Douglas wearing a Panama hat to protect himself from the intense Haitian sun. Haiti's tropical climate is depicted by palm trees, fronds and by strong light and harsh shadows. Everyone except the young girl in the background wears a hat with brim. Dr. Fritz Daguillard, a Haitian researcher, identified the woman standing behind Douglass in the prints as Victoire, the Haitian president Hyppolite's companion. He said President Hyppolite was a widower when Douglass was United States minister to Haiti.

For additional background information on Panama hats: go to [www.exploringecuador.com/articulos/nuevos/panama\\_hats.htm](http://www.exploringecuador.com/articulos/nuevos/panama_hats.htm)

### **G. Materials Used in this Lesson Plan**

Use the materials listed below for this lesson plan. All are locally available, and are ready substitutes for the museum objects described in this lesson plan, or fill the same function.

#### *Similar items.*

- A light, large-brimmed straw hat with a low crown. Consider adding a dark ribbon to approximate the band on Douglass' hat.
- Object analysis question list
- Map of the world
- Chart paper
- Contemporary hats: ball caps and others

### **H. Vocabulary**

Abolition  
Abolitionist  
Analysis  
Circa  
Climate  
Curator  
Lithograph  
Object  
Primary source  
Tropics  
Tropical

### **I. Teacher Tips**

- Use as an introductory lesson with Forward March: Continuing Frederic Douglass' Footsteps *Teaching with Museum Collections* lesson plan.
- Print and laminate images of Mr. Douglass' Panama hat and the lithograph.
- See teacher discussion points in each activity noted below.

### **J. Lesson Implementation Procedures**

*Activity 1: Introduction and Warm-up*



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1. Inform the students that the class is starting a unit on Frederick Douglass, using a multipart lesson based on his objects; including real things, artwork, period photographs, and documents that Douglass actually owned, used, created, or had in his home at Cedar Hill in Washington, DC. Their goal is to learn all they can about Douglass by closely examining these objects. At the end of the lesson, they will assess the value of learning by analyzing different types of objects as primary sources.
2. Ask students what they know about Douglass. Record their answers on the board or chart paper. Students may know that he was a former slave and abolitionist; if students are totally unaware of Douglass' background, give them these two descriptors.
3. Explain that the lesson will start with two objects that belonged to Douglass, and that you will work together to see what you can learn from close examination of these objects.
4. *Object #1: Douglass' Panama Hat.* Bring out the similar broad-brimmed straw hat. Do not name it, but tell them that Douglass owned a very similar object and show the printout of Douglass' hat.
5. Ask students to look carefully at the object. Let each student handle it, wear it, manipulate it. Then ask the following questions, recording all answers on chart paper or on the board. Remind students that for the purposes of this activity, there are "no wrong answers."

*Activity 2: Object Analysis Questions*

*Object 1: Panama Hat*

1. Describe the object. Tell me everything you can about its physical characteristics. Is there anything unusual or surprising about the object?
2. Do you have a similar hat? What kind of hat do you wear? (Have a student's ball cap ready for comparison.) When do you wear it? What is its purpose? Does it have some sort of social value, special meaning for you? Where and how was it made? Is it unusual in any way?
3. Now look back at the big straw hat. Do you know anyone who has a similar hat? Who is it? Where do they wear it? What is its purpose? Is it important to its owner? Why or why not? Is it a rare item, difficult to find? Is it expensive? Where do you think the modern day version is made? Would you wear a hat like this one? Why or why not?
4. Now consider that Frederick Douglass had a very similar hat. Take a look at this photograph of Douglass' hat. Who do you think made his hat? Here's a clue: it's called a Panama hat.
  5. When and where do you think it was made?
  6. Who do you think it was made for?
  7. Why was it made? How was it actually used?
  8. What does it say about fashion of the time?
  9. What does it say about the technology of the time? Was it hand or machine made?
  10. How has the object's meaning changed over time? (When you use it in conjunction with the lithograph showing the context in which Douglass wore it, you learn a lot about the man: it's not a slave's field hat; it's a diplomat's hat!)
  11. What does it tell you about the social conditions of the time?
  12. What cultural issues does it raise?

*Teacher Discussion Points for this Activity:*

Students will give a variety of answers and hypotheses about the hat. Encourage them to discuss its hand-made, peasant quality: how the finely-woven straw acts as an efficient sun block for wearers. Compare the low-tech peasant production of the Panama hat to mass-produced, stylishly-designed, brightly-dyed sun hats and ball caps worn today.



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Students may infer that Douglass wore the hat when working in the fields as a slave. While this is a fair assumption, encourage students to do more research. They will find that Douglass never worked as a field slave. When they examine prints and pictures of slaves in 19<sup>th</sup> century America, they will discover that slaves did sometimes wear straw hats in the fields to protect themselves from the sun. Female slaves are pictured in bandanas or straw work hats, men in straw work hats, most likely woven from dried grasses.

Images of blacks and whites pictured together from this period often reveal that white slave owners, overseers and auctioneers wore hats, while slaves are pictured mostly hatless. Ask what can students deduce from these images? Are hats symbols of power? Find other examples to show students.

Douglass wrote the following in his autobiography about what he and other slaves were given to wear. *“The slaves of all the other farms received their ...yearly clothing that consisted of two course linen shirts, one pair of linen trousers, like the shirts, one jacket, one pair of trouser for winter, made of course negro cloth, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes; the whole of which could not have cost more than seven dollars.”*

Hats aren't mentioned. Discuss the implications of this statement.

*Object #2: Douglass lithograph:*

Now show students the lithograph of Douglass in Haiti. Ask them to describe everything they see. Ask students the following questions:

Is Douglass in the print? What is he wearing? Where is he? Is he prosperous, successful? How can you tell? Why would a skilled artist choose to make a work of art with Douglass at its center, facing out at the viewer? [Note: The lithograph is contemporary with Douglass' appointment so it follows that his importance was recognized at the time (not after the fact).]

Why is the white woman placed high on a pedestal? What does this say about race in Haiti?]

Ask students: Who are the other people in the print? Why are they dressed and positioned as shown?

*Teacher Discussion Points for this Activity:*

Students may think that, in this lithograph, Douglass is portrayed in the American south, possibly Florida, where palm trees are found. They may infer that the “poor” barefoot children in the background are American slave children or the children of slaves.

The title of the lithograph and the curator's notes tell us that the lithograph shows Douglass wearing the Panama hat in Haiti. He is dressed as a professional in jacket and carries a cane or walking stick (he is a diplomat). He seems to be conversing with another gentleman. The woman is identified as President Hyppolite's companion, Victoire.

The man facing Douglass in the lithograph is not identified. Could it be President Hyppolite? Douglass tried, unsuccessfully, to negotiate with Hyppolite for the US Navy to construct a coal station in Haiti. Hyppolite was a ruthless leader. One source reports that *“Douglass witnessed an uprising during which Hyppolite rode a horse through the streets and ordered the wholesale slaughter of his enemies. As he led his soldiers in suppressing the insurgents, his hat fell off. This was taken by his superstitious people as a sign that evil lay in store for him. In fact, five years*



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later, he fell off his horse as he was suffering a fatal heart attack.” In *Frederick Douglass* by Peter Burchard, page 196.] Ask students to comment on this example of the hat as symbol.

*Activity 3: Lesson wrap-up questions:*

How remarkable is it that African-American Douglass went from poverty and slavery to wealth and positions of diplomacy during his lifetime?  
How well do his Panama hat and the lithograph “telescope” or focus the story of Douglass’ life?  
How does the print help to place the Panama hat in context?  
How valuable is the print to drawing accurate inferences or conclusions about the hat?

### **K. Evaluation/Assessment for Measurable Results**

- Assess each student on his/her active participation in analyzing the Panama hat and lithograph and in comparing hats through history.
- Ask students to complete an “How to Read an Object” worksheet on the Douglass’ hat and on his/her own hat to assess their understanding of the categories for object analysis.

### **L. Extension and Enrichment Activities**

*Extension Activity 1: Map study:*

As you discuss the hat, have students locate and mark on a world map the places that connect to Douglass’ life: Ecuador (where Panama hats were originally created and are still produced), Panama (where the straw hats were worn and took their name) and Haiti (where Douglass served as minister.)

Use map for entire Douglass lesson. Have students indicate where Douglas was living/working when he used each of the various objects they will analyze in the lesson.

*Extension activity 2: More Hats!*

What others hats did Douglass wear? What do they tell us?

Look at the other hats found at Douglass’ home: [have images online to print out]

- Top hat
- Derby or bowler hat

*Questions for this Activity.*

- Where are top hats worn? For what types of occasions? Do you or a family member own a top hat? Do you know anyone who does?
- Where did Douglass wear his top hat? (perhaps to the White House to meet with President Lincoln, or on any number of occasions of official business in Washington D.C. or in Europe. There is a photograph showing him in his top hat on his honeymoon with Helen, see NPS photograph)
- How many African-American men owned and wore a top hat during Douglass’ time? Was it common?
- Douglas also owned a derby, or bowler hat. How many African-Americans of this era had several different hats to choose from? (There are three hats in Douglass’ home at Cedar Hill.) What does the variety in Mr. Douglass’ hats tell you about him?





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*Hats Yesterday:*

According to a children's book on 19<sup>th</sup> century clothing, men and women wore hats every day. Based on your analysis of Douglass' hat and consideration of slave issues in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, do you think the source is correct? How might you qualify this statement?

*Hats Today:*

Who wears hats in your community? What type of hats? Where are they worn? How often? Select a specific hat and do an object analysis. Can you draw inferences about people and society of today from this analysis?

## M. Resources

*Web sites*

National Park Service websites:

Museum Management Program: Frederick Douglass: American Visionaries exhibit

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/douglass/>

Frederick Douglass National Historic Site: <http://www.nps.gov/frdo/freddoug.html>

Other web sites:

Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/doughtml/doughome.html>

PBS feature: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html>

Frederick Douglass autobiography online:

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Literature/Douglass/Autobiography/>

*Books on Frederick Douglass:*

Burchard, Peter, *Frederick Douglass, For the Great Family of Man*, Athenaeum Books for Young Readers, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2003.

Miller, Douglas T., *Frederick Douglass and the Fight for Freedom*, Makers of America, Facts on File, New York, 1998.

Ware, Melva Lawson, *Frederick Douglass, Freedom's Force*, Time-Life Education, Alexandria, Virginia, 1998.

*Books by Frederick Douglass or "in his own words"*

Frederick Douglass: *Autobiographies*, Literary Classics, New York, 1994.

*Narrative of the Life My Bondage and My Freedom Life and Times*

McCurdy, Michael, ed., *Escape from Slavery, The Boyhood of Frederick Douglass in His Own Words*, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., New York, 1994.

Meltzer, Milton, *Frederick Douglass, In His Own Words*, Harcourt Brace and Company, New York, 1995.



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*Books for young readers:*

Adler, David A., *A Picture Book of Frederick Douglass*, Holiday House, New York 1993.

□ **Site Visit**

Contact the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site to arrange for a tour.

Take a virtual tour of rooms at Cedar Hill at:

Museum Management Program: Frederick Douglass: American Visionaries exhibit

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/douglass/>

And visit the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site: <http://www.nps.gov/frdo/freddoug.html>