

African American Literature: Slavery (Early Childhood and Elementary)

Quick read-aloud links for the busy teacher:

- *especially during COVID-19, and*
- *during this period of heightened attention and awareness on African American topics.*
- *Key words are highlighted for ease in incorporating into teaching units, or for use as extra story-time sessions for students.*

For the Teacher <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0VzAL3WnGY> (2:36) to introduce the assimilation of African Americans into American history, using *Heart and Soul: the Story of America and African Americans* by Kadir Nelson.

For the Teacher

<https://smithsonianapa.org/learn/> A TED Talk about teaching taboo topics of equity. Hard history can be taboo. This teacher's talk sets the stage for educators in an encouraging and challenging way.

For the Teacher (Background info about the general topic of slavery in America):

<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/classroom-videos> (12:20) Grades 7 – 12 (For upper grades, but good info for teachers of all ages).

An introductory documentary explaining the enslavement of indigenous peoples in the Americas, pre-dating the enslavement of Africans in this country. Understanding of the earlier slavery sets the stage for the understanding of the practice of the enslavement of Africans.

All Are Welcome <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwS3FOn4-Ow> (4:09) PreK – Grade 1
Setting: anywhere. A beginning-of-the-school-year book, with the recurring theme appearing on each page, that “all are welcome here,” it’s a celebration of **diversity, inclusivity and affirmation**.

The Undefeated <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evOokjgNPQc> (:41) (an excerpt) All ages

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLCLX8xW11k> (3:34) (With a commanding dynamic, the artist reads the book!)

A great **introduction** to an overview of the history of African Americans, this beautiful book is not to be missed!

An African American Alphabet: D is for Drinking Gourd Grades PreK - 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHa8emvlbuQ> (7:05)

Another excellent **introductory overview** to the history of African Americans in America! (Teacher note: the actual book contains info for the teacher, but this reader in the video reads the text geared to the children.)

Freedom in Congo Square PreK – Grade 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YI2CpLsIOiY> (2:37) A book review – great intro to the book.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KH10eq3xeE> (3:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96-mvnCdhTI> (3:03) an animated rap about the origins of jazz, reference to Congo Square

Setting: Congo Square, New Orleans. Appropriate for the youngest children, the vivid colors and rhythm of the anticipatory, hopeful words draw the listeners into the era, as an **introduction** to the tragic time of slavery.

Harriet Tubman: My First Biography PreK – Grade 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ir7ut1Bpeig> (3:40)

Excellent for the youngest students. A great intro to Harriet Tubman and to slavery.

Before She Was Harriet PreK – Grade 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_JZemL5SWI&list=PLQpH6m6XNooGTg5llloi7onYY6jmxS6g6&index=7&t=0s&app=desktop

(3:18)

A biography of Harriet Tubman.

Harriet and the Promised Land PreK – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL-hOsoUKxs> (6:11) (Skip to 2:24 to begin).

A biography of Harriet Tubman in rhyme.

Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave PreK – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UCAuZFNyg4> (3:49)

Setting: SC. Enslaved people were forced to do all kinds of back breaking, soul-sucking, menial work. A few were given work that required skill, and the work of a potter was one of these. Still without choices or pay, but often beauty shone through, like these that remain of David Drake.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzV362LcaeU> (5:54) (For the teacher and also for older students). More info about the life and work of Dave, the potter. Very interesting!

*Follow the Drinking Gourd: An **Underground Railroad** Story* PreK – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSQAYMQomCO> (7:59)

The reader sings the song, while explaining its meaning.

Underground <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXs0HDxTa4o> (2:06) PreK – Grade 3

Even though the words are few, and the length brief, this is a heart-stopping, riveting video presentation of an **escape** by enslaved people. Simple, but profound. Sensitive to the subject. Read in conjunction with **Harriet Tubman** stories.

*Barefoot: **Escape** on the Underground Railroad* PreK – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtXhap1HY8M> (4:45) Similar to *Underground*, the listener travels a short distance with “Barefoot,” the unnamed enslaved man, as he is hiding in order to escape slavery. A miraculous mass of mosquitoes and the noise of a deer lead his captors away from him, allowing him to breathe again, and to find a safe house, identified by a quilt hanging outside. (Many enslaved people did not escape, but some did. Hopeful, since each story about slavery, is told one person at a time.

Show Way <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oM3DesXftrQ> (12:09) PreK – Grade 3

The author, Jacqueline Woodson, reads her book about generations in her family. Accompanied by music, with the selections changing with each generation.

Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad PreK – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7XFTjOdOJI> (8:43)

“ The master had been good to Henry and his mother....” - the “good master” myth is dismantled in this story, as a real look at slavery is given through this true story. A sensitive, evocative reading that will engage listeners of every age, as they hang onto each word to see if freedom would ever be for Henry and for those he loved.

Juneteenth for Mazie <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5AHtPxsuDQ> (5:10) PreK – Grade 3

Finally, the date of freedom from slavery can be celebrated in all of the southern states: **Juneteenth**. After the end of the Civil War, Union soldiers were able to give the news to enslaved people in TX. The event continues to be celebrated today.

All Different Now <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRIExoTfm3g> (2:50) PreK – Grade 3

Setting: the Civil War South, in TX. **Juneteenth**. A simple look at one simple principle: that life for enslaved people, in gaining official emancipation in the South, after the end of the war, would be different. (Life, in many cases, was not really ostensibly different at all, as the terror of Jim Crow laws and white supremacy oppression replaced the actual status of slavery. But for one day, at least, they could celebrate. The event is still celebrated today.)

Mumbet's Declaration of Independence K – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nk40CGAd05g> (8:36)

Setting: The late 1700s, after the Revolutionary War. Mumbet's longing and quest for **freedom** became reality as **Mumbet** learned new truths at the house of her master during meetings about the Massachusetts constitution, and decided that she would have it, too. Advocating for herself and for her daughter, she determined to pursue a **legal trial**, enlisting the help of a sympathetic lawyer who not only helped her to pursue her dream, but who worked with her to make it come true.

Minty <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGoY3ShBAbl> (16:28) K – Grade 3

Biography of Harriet Tubman.

Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom K – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvuSK59gX-A> (8:58)

A biography of Harriet Tubman.

*Moses: When **Harriet Tubman** Led Her People to Freedom* K – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWtL98XLUqk> (17:39)

An African American librarian makes this story come to life! Exciting, expressive and authentic, she uses master storytelling methods to engage young listeners. A must-see.

*Poet: The Remarkable Story of **George Moses Horton*** K – Grade 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFza2_8UjRA (2:59) (A book review by the author)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pc-i-cnn8IE> (9:11) (An uninspired reading of a book about the inspiring life of a man dedicated to his craft and determined to follow his path, but it is the entire story, and it's the only one available on YouTube).

Setting: NC in the 1800s. Enslaved until the age of 66, when he was freed following the end of the Civil War, Horton wrote poetry most of his life. Published when still enslaved.

Hope's Gift https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9B6q_nk66I (6:48) K – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3JPcVwDbJU> (1:00) (A preview of the book for older students)

Setting: **Civil War**. With a promise of **freedom** in the hearts of many enslaved people, Hope's father's tender good bye to his family is witnessed before his escape to fight in the war. Their hope that President **Lincoln** would bring that freedom provided patience for them to "hang on," as the listener waits for that to be realized.

*So Tall Within: **Sojourner Truth's** Long Walk To Freedom* K – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC7xEnB3xgs> (11:55)

Setting: Pre- and post- Civil War. A lovely reading. With the story of Sojourner Truth's biography told in the context of hope and promise, the story gives a clear account of what slavery looked like. Sojourner Truth, a strong woman in a time when strength in women was not appreciated, she was an early voice for advocacy, enlisting the aid of the court system, winning the freedom of her son. Walking and talking against slavery, she met Abraham Lincoln, giving him her support. After the Civil War, her powerful voice and message stopped people (and even traffic in the city!) - right in their tracks as she walked and talked and then walked and talked some more.

Sojourner Truth's Step Stomp Stride K – Grade 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbAhvmyE2lw> (9:59)

This strong, big, bold, Black, beautiful girl ran – and “refused to stop until she saw hope,” accepting the gift of freedom from kind abolitionists. Once she tasted freedom, she began to discover new truths about it, and used her powerful, courageous voice to effect change. Hearing powerful men say that women were inferior to them, and that “men should be allowed to boss them” lit a fire under her, and she charged, strided and stomped right up that aisle to the front of the church where the men had been speaking. “**Ain’t I a woman**,” she yelled, blasting every false premise that the men had declared. “Down came both fists. Bam! Bam!” And then she was done: “...nothin’ more to say.” A strong, big, bold, Black, beautiful book!

The Bell Rang <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwbtrVy48qw> (4:00) K - Grade 3

Hard history. Historical fiction. A realistic story that includes the **escape** of Ben, big brother to our protagonist. The bell rang: each day, before sunrise, the day of each enslaved worker began. It was the same every day: the bell rang. Same time, same work, each day the same. The shroud of hopelessness of their situation is cut for our little girl with Ben's gift before he goes, a doll. On Sundays, when there is no bell, they hope again. Singing, praying, and rejoicing together, they remember: “Ben made it.”

Video: African Drums <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dHzlPFUA1E> (:50) Grades K – up

(Based on *In The Time of The Drums*, which has no read-aloud video, but which contains an important element of the culture of enslaved persons, and should not be neglected.)

Song: “Follow the Drinking Gourd” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNyhfQ7argU> (1:35)
Grades K – up

Song: “Roll, Jordan, Roll” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oFcFzJT7Tw> (1:55)

Grades K – up

Song: “Wade in the Water” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_euSS86dvE (3:10)

(No pictures, just text, but beautiful). Grades K – up

Words Set me Free <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3WbLYLbe8M> (13:33) Grades K – 4

Biography of Frederick Douglass, including his journey to freedom through learning to read.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atJrxxV4azg> (1:57) An animated rap about Douglass.

Frederick’s Journey: The Life of Frederick Douglass K – Grade 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doPakvwllr8> (9:29) The story of Frederick during early childhood through adulthood. A story of possibilities.

Song: A simple, biographical folk song about Frederick Douglass (Ballads of Black America)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzGW4lphSWM&fbclid=IwAR0w-WPfp488LKUXaW28qBLA3bxio0QhIxsOYQ0QTSfEax6oEonWm_6qi7w&app=desktop (3:45)

Tick Tock Banneker’s Clock Grades 1 - 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPyDraNQQgk> (11:11)

Setting: The late 1700s, near **Baltimore** – when **Washington** and **Jefferson** were alive.

Banneker, unlike most African Americans in that era, was born free. A mathematician whose life intersected with the most well-known American historical figures, his work was integral to the building and planning of Washington, D.C. This book contains a biographical slice of Banneker’s young adult life.

Sweet Clara and The Freedom Quilt Grades 1 - 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mbgenJxgJA> (12:14)

Underground Railroad, Canada, **escape** route map. When Clara heard these words, she wanted to help and knew she could use her seamstress skills to create a freedom quilt.

Phillis's Big Test Grades 2 - 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2liCT3p6lXk&list=PLQpH6m6XNooGTg5lIloi7onYY6jmxS6g6&index=6&t=0s&app=desktop>

Setting: Boston in the 1700s. The story of **Phillis Wheatley**, the enslaved teen girl poet.

A Spy Called James: The True Story of James Lafayette, Revolutionary War Double Agent

Grades 2 – 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgbmMGVAIAE> (1:18) (a rap about James Armistead Lafayette)

(Teacher note: there is no youtube available of this book, but it's excellent, and his story is critically important to the ending of the Revolutionary War.)

Brick by Brick <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kppzyts5Ct4> (15:22) Grades 2 – 6

A wonderful book about the building of the White House in Washington, D.C. (The book is really for PreK – Grade 3, but the author is reading the book and adding a lot of comments on a recording of a live zoom presentation.)

I Survived: The Battle of Gettysburg Grades 2 – 6

Part 1 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=seqZAYTUY6c> (13:22)

Part 2 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk81AtYoKQ8> (14:03)

Part 3 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pqvgjrutaqk> (13:09)

Part 4 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwBvFiP4vEk> (11:57)

Part 5 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3Nzk8LC0sl> (13:38)

Part of the "I Survived" series, this is the story of Thomas and Birdie, enslaved children who found themselves in the middle of the **Civil War** – a horror which turned out differently than they could ever have imagined.

The Freedom Ship of Robert Smalls Grades 2 - 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6HrpYMmEys> (10:33)

Setting: South Carolina during the **Civil War**. The uncertain, life-starving plight of the enslaved - the cost of slavery vs. Freedom - is clear in this story about a great African American Civil War hero.

The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch Grades 2 – 6

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp0rOi4dMJ8> (1:17) An inviting, sobering book review.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eFm3f6ZiTI> (18:37)

Setting: Mississippi, pre- and post- Civil War years. **Abraham Lincoln. Reconstruction. Hard history**; includes an illustration with a white man preparing to whip a Black man tied to a tree. (Not a photograph, so it's age appropriate, creating context and accuracy). After grabbing opportunities to teach himself to read, and after a meteoric rise in prominence, Lynch was elected to the House of Representatives. But while John Roy Lynch was serving as a **Congressman** in Washington, D.C., life in his hometown area was rife with the evils that had plagued Black citizens during slavery. With rampant acts of violence and terror, and a determination by whites to succeed in crippling the newly freed Black citizens, voter suppression, burnings, beatings and murder were the norm. Lynch fought for civil rights during Reconstruction, later even becoming a historian to set the record straight to combat the inaccurate narrative of white supremacy that had reigned for so long.

Ellen's Broom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFKRg9ZHorE> (8:57) Grades 2 - 3

Although set during Reconstruction, the tradition of "broom weddings" is explained in the story.

Elijah of Buxton Grades 3 – 7 (Chapter book; no video read-aloud available)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVCG3Qx5yf4> (preview only) (Teacher note: the video begins with a graphic photograph of enslaved children, with chains around their necks, as they're about to be presented for sale, that may not be suitable for your students. Discretion and judgement required.)

A page turner of a story as Elijah's poor choices almost end in life-changing disaster. Elijah, born free, in a settlement in Canada, called Buxton, is historical fiction.

Freedom Over Me: Eleven Slaves, Their Lives and Dreams Brought to Life by Ashley Bryan

Grades 4 - up

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUEPNkM8uFI> (For the teacher – book trailer)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2RWWXB8Nlc> (For the teacher – an intro)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-wG8PUcAk> (32:06)

Although enslaved people were usually simple entries in plantation bookkeeping records, with only rudimentary info given (“field hand” - \$800, girl - \$100”), the author allows these 11 slaves to come to life, as each one tells his / her own stories. Powerful.

Chains

Grades 5 – 9

Historical fiction. Setting: The **Revolutionary War** era. 1st in an award-winning **trilogy**, the story is gripping, intense and revolutionary on many levels. Readers will not want to put it down, and listeners will not want to stop hearing what comes next. (Warning: students may not be happy, if copies of the next 2 books in the series, *Forge* and *Ashes*, are not available at the library!)

Chapters 1 – 5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fSsM7FS_J8s (49:22)

Chapters 6 – 13 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s4evctAWRxE> (1:04:18)

Chapters 14 – 19 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcC86BR1R0c> (38:24)

Chapters 18 – 20 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oEFay8TPeM> (26:48)

Chapters 21 – 24 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hu5-SMQsoCY> (34:43)

Chapters 25 – 29 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAIHctxlwto> (36:03)

Chapters 30 – 35 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Yq32tRlqB8> (53:17)

Chapters 36 – 40 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzcMMgFSEa8> (52:26)

Chapters 41 – 45 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ja5pBK0Y3XY> (51:30)

Love Twelve Miles Long https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C902TCHr_zo (8:14) Grade 7

This is not a video of this book. The book is beautiful and is for younger readers. But the video gives the viewer an idea of how long 12 miles really are by following a group of young adults around NYC. Frederick Douglass was taken from his mother when he was young, but she would walk the 12 mile distance between her and her son when she could.

The Middle Passage <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qjtIQLQMj0> (6:58) Grades 11 – 12

Setting: the 1500s - 1800s, Africa. The crossing of the Atlantic. Powerful and evocative, the audio in the video is music only. Text appears at the outset to introduce the book, giving the reason for art only in the book. Hard history. Non-fiction.