

Mill Girls' Slavery Rhetoric and the Realities of Enslavement

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Introduction

The following lessons are adapted from the Tsongas Industrial Center's teacher guide, *Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict*. While the texts themselves are appropriate for an eleventh-grade audience, few of my students are reading on grade level. As a special education teacher, most of my direct students are reading at an elementary school level. Another large portion of my students are new arrivals to the United States and are at a basic English level. In anticipation of extensive vocabulary barriers, I have incorporated several "vocabulary gallery walk" opportunities for students to research and share definitions for key terms. Alternatively, I could decide to exclude these supplemental activities if my students do not appear to need them.

While there are several opportunities for me to step in and provide supports, I also build scaffolds in which students support one another. For example, in Day 3, students record key quotes on post-its that hang throughout the classroom, which supports them in using textual evidence on the exit ticket. After all, students' use of textual evidence is one of the main focal standards for this 3-part lesson series!

Throughout these lesson plans, I try to prepare for several alternate, and even overlapping instructional realities. Students could learn in-person, but our class might also take place exclusively online. We could also find ourselves in a hybrid environment in which students are online on even days and in-person on odd days. Better yet, some students might complete their work asynchronously from home, or even tune in via Microsoft Teams as we "simulcast" the lesson. Teachers will inevitably have to adjust their instruction depending on their current reality.

Lesson Plans

Grade Level:
11 Special Education

Subject:
English III

Materials:

- Do Now on Canvas
- Handout on Canvas
- Exit ticket(s) on Canvas
- Lesson Plan (teacher facing materials)
- Classroom PowerPoint (teacher facing materials)

Lesson Overview

Applicable Standards (C.1)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.1](#)

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.2](#)

Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.5](#)

Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.8](#)

Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and use of legal reasoning (e.g., in U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents) and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy (e.g., *The Federalist*, presidential addresses).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.10](#)

By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Lesson Objective (C.1, A.3)

By the end of these three lessons, students will be able to...

How	. . . Explain the differences in work conditions between enslaved Africans in bondage vs. Americans who worked in the factories of the Industrial Revolution
What	By examining and citing primary sources from 1845 (Frederick Douglass’s Narrative + <i>Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict</i>)
Why	In order to write a well-written paragraph comparing these varying perspectives.

Assessment (B.1, B.2,C.1, C.2)

Assessment items:

- Do Now responses
- Independent practice (Kernel Activity on Canvas)
- Exit tickets

Evidence of understanding

All records of student participation, including Do Now, collaborative practice, independent practice, and each day’s exit ticket responses can help the instructors adjust the lesson to ensure all students reach the objective.

Day 1

Lesson Objective (C.1, A.3)

By the end of these three lessons, students will be able to...

How	. . . Explain the differences in work conditions between Americans in bondage vs. Americans who worked in the factories of the Industrial Revolution
What	By examining primary sources from 1845 (Frederick Douglass’s Narrative + <i>Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict</i>)
Why	In order to write a well-written paragraph comparing these varying perspectives.

Connect and Engage (A.2, B.1, C.1) 15 minutes

Instructions to the Teacher:

As the students enter class (either in-person or online), the text in the blue box will be projected on the opening slide, directing students to Canvas to complete their Do Now online. “Complete the **Do Now** online on Canvas.”

(Copy link here to share with students in the video call chat.)

Do now instructions:

Movement – Find your seat, open your computer, and begin the Do Now posted in discussions on Canvas.

Voice level – Quietly (Voice level 1)

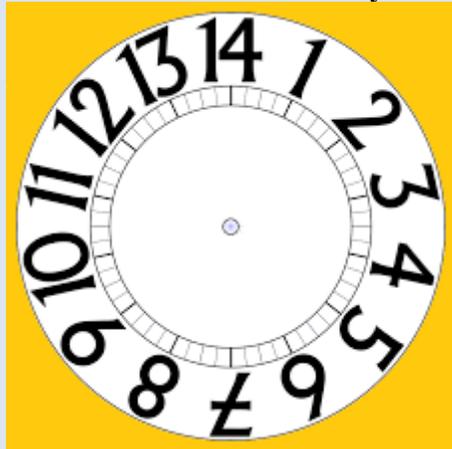
Participation – Independently

Time – 7 minutes

Answer the following question in at least 4 complete sentences.

Imagine our school day lasted 14 hours. (!!!!!!!)

Do you believe school should last 14 hours? Why or why not? If not, what would you do to shorten the school day?



Source: <http://clipart-library.com/clipart/6TpLMeAac.htm>

Instructions to the Teacher:

After 7 minutes of quiet work time (or soft music, at the teacher’s discretion), go over student answers for ~3 minutes.

After students share out their responses, explain that the workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, faced a similar dilemma to the one you described in the Do Now:

Teacher explanation:

“Workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, and other factories during the Industrial Revolution, experienced the conditions described in the Do Now—they had to work for twelve, or even fourteen hours! Instead of hanging out with their wonderful teachers in school, though, they were working hard physically, standing on their feet for hours on end and completing repetitive physical labor in mills/factories.

*“Pay attention to the argument the writer (likely Sarah Bagley) makes in advocating for change. What comparisons does she make? When I say **go**, you and your groupmates will read the handout and answer the provided questions. Be prepared to explain the argument Sarah Bagley makes in this excerpt. Using the provided group chart projected on the board, select your role within your group. **Go** ahead and transition into your groups now.”*

Teacher Model

Teacher Instructions:

When I say go, examine this time table for the next 2 minutes or so. Talk with a partner—what do you notice? How would you describe these girls' quality of life?

DOCUMENT 16

Time Table of the Lowell Mills, 1853

One unified bell schedule dictated the structure of the work day, week, and year for all of Lowell's mills.

TIME TABLE OF THE LOWELL MILLS,
 Arranged to make the working time throughout the year average 11 hours per day.
TO TAKE EFFECT SEPTEMBER 21st, 1853.
 The Standard time being that of the meridian of Lowell, as shown by the Regulator
 Clock of AMOS SANBORN, Post Office Corner, Central Street.

From March 20th to September 19th, inclusive.
 COMMENCE WORK at 6.30 A. M. LEAVE OFF WORK, at 6.20 P. M., except on Saturday Evenings.
 BREAKFAST at 6 A. M. DINNER, at 12 M. Commence Work, after dinner, 12.45 P. M.

From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.
 COMMENCE WORK at 7.00 A. M. LEAVE OFF WORK, at 7.00 P. M., except on Saturday Evenings.
 BREAKFAST at 6.30 A. M. DINNER, at 12.30 P. M. Commence Work, after dinner, 1.15 P. M.

BELLS.

From March 20th to September 19th, inclusive.

<i>Morning Bells.</i>	<i>Dinner Bells.</i>	<i>Evening Bells.</i>
First bell, 4.30 A. M.	Ring out, 12.00 M.	Ring out, 6.30 P. M.
Second, 5.30 A. M.; Third, 6.30	Ring in, 12.35 P. M.	Except on Saturday Evenings.

From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.

<i>Morning Bells.</i>	<i>Dinner Bells.</i>	<i>Evening Bells.</i>
First bell, 5.00 A. M.	Ring out, 12.30 P. M.	Ring out at, 7.00 P. M.
Second, 6.00 A. M.; Third, 6.50	Ring in, 1.05 P. M.	Except on Saturday Evenings.

SATURDAY EVENING BELLS.
 During APRIL, MAY, JUNE, JULY, and AUGUST, Ring Out, at 6.00 P. M.
 The remaining Saturday Evenings in the year, ring out as follows:

SEPTEMBER.	NOVEMBER.	JANUARY.
First Saturday, ring out 6.00 P. M.	Third Saturday ring out 4.00 P. M.	Third Saturday, ring out 4.25 P. M.
Second " " 5.45 "	Fourth " " 3.55 "	Fourth " " 4.35 "
Third " " 5.30 "		
Fourth " " 5.20 "		

OCTOBER.	DECEMBER.	FEBRUARY.
First Saturday, ring out 5.05 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 3.50 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 4.45 P. M.
Second " " 4.55 "	Second " " 3.55 "	Second " " 4.55 "
Third " " 4.45 "	Third " " 3.55 "	Third " " 5.00 "
Fourth " " 4.35 "	Fourth " " 4.00 "	Fourth " " 5.10 "
Fifth " " 4.25 "	Fifth " " 4.00 "	

NOVEMBER.	JANUARY.	MARCH.
First Saturday, ring out 4.15 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 4.10 P. M.	First Saturday, ring out 5.25 P. M.
Second " " 4.05 "	Second " " 4.15 "	Second " " 5.30 "
		Third " " 5.35 "
		Fourth " " 5.45 "

YARD GATES will be opened at the first stroke of the bells for entering or leaving the Mills.

*• SPEED GATES commence hoisting three minutes before commencing work.

Penhallow, Printer, Wyman's Exchange, 28 Merrimack St.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why were there different bell schedules for March to September and then from September to March (and different Saturday schedules monthly from September to March)?
2. How many times a day would these bells ring?
3. How many days per week did mill operatives work? How many hours a day (on average)?
4. Why is such a strict schedule necessary to mill operations?

Used courtesy of American Textile History Museum.

Collaborative/Guided Practice (25 minutes)

Instructions to the Teacher:

Conduct a shared reading using one of the following formats:

- 1) Read aloud the text (Document 19: Excerpt from the Voice of Industry, December 26, 1845 -- A Mile of Girls) with the class, OR
- 2) Invite student volunteers to read aloud to the whole class.
- 3) Alternatively, break the students into groups (either homogeneous or heterogenous, at the teacher's discretion). Group members should self-select among the following roles, although *all students must contribute throughout the activity:*

Facilitator	Reads aloud the questions and prompts their group to remain on-track
Record-keeper	Maintains the <i>cleanest</i> notes, although everyone must pass in their notes for full credit!
Timekeeper	Keeps track of time and ensures their group finishes during the allotted time
Reporter	Shares the group's findings with the larger class

Vocabulary Extension Assignment:

Be prepared to define the following terms. Depending on students' RI (Reading inventory) scores and WIDA English Language scores, provide a separate handout with defined terms.

Optional vocabulary gallery walk:

Teacher instructions: Write each of these terms on a blank sheet of paper. Then, distribute the papers among the students, so that each student has his or her own paper. Instruct students to research and record the definitions of their term. Ask students to share their term with their groupmates. Finally, have each student tape up their term in the classroom and invite students to circulate through the "vocabulary gallery."

Terms from the TDQs (Text-dependent questions):

- 1) Textile
- 2) Manufacturer
- 3) Forbidden
- 4) Remonstrances
- 5) Editorial
- 6) Petitions
- 7) Tyrannically (Tyrant)

Terms from the excerpt:

- 1) Rejoice
- 2) Emancipating (emancipate; emancipation)
- 3) Oppressed
- 4) Extension
- 5) Confined
- 6) Degrading
- 7) Supervision
- 8) Operatives
- 9) Ameliorate
- 10) Inducements
- 11) Premises

Teacher Instructions: As students read document 19 from *Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict*, they should answer questions (copied from the handout) using group protocol:

1. What two kinds of “**remonstrances**” or protests does this document mention?
2. Which type of **remonstrance** or protest did the **textile manufacturers forbid**? What specific complaints, according to this document, were the mill **operatives** trying to express?
3. In 1846, less than a year after this **editorial** appeared, mill workers fighting for a ten-hour work day sent to the Massachusetts legislature a 130-foot-long petition signed by 4,500 people. If it is true that **petitions** were “**tyranically forbidden**,” how do you suppose the workers managed to get so many signatures?

D O C U M E N T 1 9

Excerpt from the Voice of Industry, December 26, 1845 -- “A Mile of Girls”

The Voice of Industry (1845-1847) was a labor newspaper whose stated aim was “to promote the great principles of universal love, charity, good-will, just, equal and productive industry among mankind.” In late 1845 the paper was moved from Fitchburg, Massachusetts, to Lowell. The paper’s publishing committee of three persons included Sarah G. Bagley, who had worked in Lowell’s textile mills. Bagley may have written the article below, published in response to an item which appeared in the Stafford [NH] Transcript. Like many newspapers of the time, the Voice frequently reprinted articles from other newspapers.

A MILE OF GIRLS.-- . . . The women of Lowell, God bless them, who have signed the remonstrance against the extension of slavery [into Texas], if they were to join hand in hand, would stretch more than a mile. Probably not a few of them are the young women, called “white slaves” at the South, who work in the factories. They have signed the remonstrance from no selfish calculation, but from pure, heaven-inspired sympathy for the oppressed slave.--Stafford [NH] Transcript.

Yes “God bless” the factory girls of Lowell-- . . . we rejoice to see them enlisted in the great and good cause of emancipating the oppressed slaves of the South.

. . . We feel it is our duty to question [why textile manufacturers] circulate remonstrances against the extension of black slavery at the South, while thousands of the fair daughters and noble sons of New England, are daily confined from 12 to 14 hours within the prison walls of our noisy, health-destroying and humanity-degrading mills, under their immediate supervision. Why can such articles find free access into the mills, and be urged upon the sympathy of the operatives, while ten hour petitions and every thing calculated to lessen the hours of labor and ameliorate the condition of those who have been drawn from the homes of their childhood by pinching necessity, [or by] anticipated good or false inducements, to seek employment in the factories, are tyrannically forbidden, and the individual who attempts to offer anything of the kind is driven from the premises as a lawless intruder?

QUESTIONS:

1. What two kinds of “remonstrances” or protests does this article mention?
2. Which type of remonstrance or protest did the textile manufacturers forbid? What specific complaints, according to this article, were the mill operatives trying to express?
3. In 1846, less than a year after this editorial appeared, mill workers fighting for a ten-hour work day sent to the Massachusetts legislature a 130-foot-long petition signed by 4,500 people. If it is true that petitions were “tyranically forbidden,” how do you suppose the workers managed to get so many signatures?

Voice of Industry, December 26, 1845. Used courtesy of Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Exit ticket (A.3, B.1, D.1, D.2, D.3) (15 minutes)

Instructions to the Teacher:

At the end of class, project the following prompt on the final slide and direct students to complete the prompt in Canvas.

Exit ticket Prompt:

Answer the following question in 5-7 sentences using evidence from Document 19, as well as other texts we have read this unit about slavery (i.e. Frederick Douglass's narrative).

Sarah Bagley argues that economic necessity forces mill workers into the factories. **Explain the strengths and weaknesses of her argument comparing the work of the mill girls and the work of enslaved people.**

Day 2

Lesson Objective (C.1, A.3)

By the end of these three lessons, students will be able to...

How Explain the differences in work conditions between Americans in bondage vs. Americans who worked in the factories of the Industrial Revolution
What	By examining and citing primary sources from 1845 (Frederick Douglass's Narrative + <i>Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict</i>)
Why	In order to write a well-written paragraph comparing these varying perspectives.

Connect and Engage (A.2, B.1, C.1) (15 minutes)

The Teacher says:

Welcome, students!

Complete the **Do Now** online on Canvas:

Do now instructions, posted in the class powerpoint:

Movement – Find your seat, open your computer, and begin the Do Now posted in [discussions](#) on Canvas.

Voice level – Quietly (Voice level 1)

Participation – Independently

Time – 7 minutes

Answer the following prompt in at least 4 complete sentences.

What do you remember about the Lowell mill girls' quality of life? What did they do to advocate (push for) better conditions?

Instructions to the Teacher:

After 7 minutes of quiet work time (or soft music, at the teacher's discretion), go over student answers for ~3 minutes.

After students share out their responses, transition to today's lesson.

Teacher Modeling (A.1, A.2, B.1, B.2, C.1, C.3, D.1, D.2, D.3) 10 mins

Instructions to the teacher:

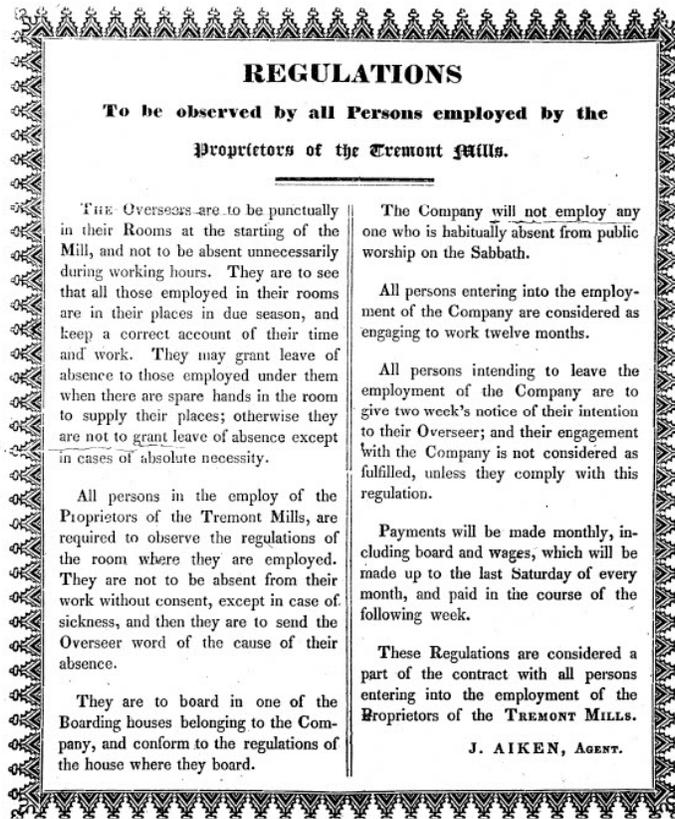
As a class, read through the rules and regulations in the Tremont Mills (Document 15). Then, ask students the provided questions (copied from Document 15, page 2).

1. Which of these rules deal with the actual workplace?
2. Which rules govern workers' activities outside of the mill?
3. Do any of these rules seem unfair to you? Which ones and why?

DOCUMENT 15

Regulations of the Tremont Mills, ca. 1830

The regulations that female and male workers had to follow at the Tremont Mills were typical of the rules in all of Lowell's textile mills. Through such regulations, mill managers were able to exert control over the activities of their workers.



Used courtesy of Lowell National Historical Park.

Collaborative/Guided Practice (25 minutes)

Instructions to the Teacher:

Conduct a shared reading using one of the following formats:

- 1) Read aloud the text (Document 18: Excerpts from the Voice of Industry, September 18, 1845 -- "The Whip of Necessity") with the class, OR
- 2) Invite student volunteers to read aloud to the whole class.
- 3) Alternatively, break the students into groups (either homogeneous or heterogenous, at the teacher's discretion). Group members should self-select among the following roles, although *all students must contribute throughout the activity:*

Facilitator	Reads aloud the questions and prompts their group to remain on-track
Record-keeper	Maintains the <i>cleanest</i> notes, although everyone must pass in their notes for full credit!
Timekeeper	Keeps track of time and ensures their group finishes during the allotted time
Reporter	Shares the group's findings with the larger class

Vocabulary Extension Assignment:

Be prepared to define the following terms. Depending on students' RI (Reading inventory) scores and WIDA English Language scores, provide a separate handout with defined terms.

Optional vocabulary gallery walk:

Teacher instructions: Write each of these terms on a blank sheet of paper. Then, distribute the papers among the students, so that each student has his or her own paper. Instruct students to research and record the definitions of their term. Ask students to share their term with their groupmates. Finally, have each student tape up their term in the classroom and invite students to circulate through the "vocabulary gallery."

Terms from the TDQs (Text-dependent questions):

- 1) Elements

Terms from the excerpt:

- 1) Monotonous
- 2) Tedious
- 3) Voluntary
- 4) Remarkable
- 5) Dwellings
- 6) Recollections
- 7) Compelled
- 8) Overseer

Excerpts from the *Voice of Industry*, September 18, 1845 -- "The Whip of Necessity"

The Voice of Industry (1845-1847) was a labor newspaper originally published in Fitchburg and later in Lowell and Boston. Its stated aim was "to promote the great principles of universal love, charity, good-will, just, equal and productive industry among mankind." The editors of the Voice often reprinted other periodicals' essays and news items that they believed would be of interest to working men and women.

In 1845, one such essay from The Harbinger, a literary and reform-minded periodical issued from the experimental Brook Farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, appeared in the Voice. Brook Farm's Charles A. Dana, who understood the plight of Lowell's working women, wrote this piece as a review of three books on Lowell, two of which he believed were far too generous in their praise of the textile corporations and factory work. Dana alludes to the slave South in condemning the Northern social and economic conditions that compelled women and men to toil in Lowell's textile mills.

The [factory] laborer is shut up in a close room from ten to twelve hours a day in the most monotonous and tedious of employments. This is not wrong, we shall be told; they come voluntarily and leave when they will. Voluntary! we might reply, much the worse if they do; but let us look a little at this remarkable form of human freedom. Do they from mere choice leave their fathers' dwellings, the firesides where all their friends, where too their earliest and fondest recollections cluster, for the factory and the Corporations boarding house? . . . A slave too goes voluntarily to his task, but his will is in some manner quickened by the whip of the overseer. The whip which brings laborers to Lowell is NECESSITY. They must have money; a father's debts are to be paid, and aged mother is to be supported, a brother's ambition to be aided, and so the factories are supplied. Is this to act from free will! . . . Is any one such a fool as to suppose that out of six thousand factory girls in Lowell, sixty would be there if they could help it? Everybody knows that it is necessity alone, in some form or other, that takes them to Lowell and that keeps them there. Is this freedom? To our minds it is slavery quite as really as any in Turkey or Carolina. It matters little as to the fact of slavery, whether the slave be compelled to his tasks by the whip of the overseer or the wages of the Lowell Corporations. In either case it is not his own free will leading him to work, but an outward necessity that puts free will out of the question.

QUESTIONS:

1. What elements does this piece add to the understanding of factory life in Lowell?
2. In what ways are mill workers compared with slaves?

Voice of Industry, September 18, 1845. Used courtesy of Center for Lowell History, University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Exit ticket (A.3, B.1, D.1, D.2, D.3) (15 minutes)

Instructions to the Teacher:

At the end of class, project the following prompt on the final slide and direct students to complete the prompt in Canvas.

Exit ticket Prompt:

REVISIT yesterday's exit ticket response. Has your reasoning changed at all, based on Document 18? REPLY to your response yesterday using evidence from today's texts.

Yesterday's prompt:

Sarah Bagley argues that economic necessity forces mill workers into the factories. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of her argument comparing the work of the mill girls and the work of enslaved people.

Tomorrow's homework:

Reread Chapters 1 and 5 of Frederick Douglass's narrative on Canvas. Be prepared to discuss Douglass's portrayal of slavery.

Day 3

Lesson Objective (C.1, A.3)

By the end of these three lessons, students will be able to...

How	. . . Explain the differences in work conditions between Americans in bondage vs. Americans who worked in the factories of the Industrial Revolution
What	By examining and citing primary sources from 1845 (Frederick Douglass's Narrative + <i>Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict</i>)
Why	In order to write a well-written paragraph comparing these varying perspectives.

Connect and Engage (A.2, B.1, C.1)

Do Now:

Welcome, students!

Complete the **Do Now** online on Canvas:

(Copy link here to share with students in the video call chat.)

Do now instructions:

Movement – Find your seat, open your computer, and begin the Do Now posted in discussions on Canvas.

Voice level – Quiet (Voice level 1)

Participation – Independent

Time – 7 minutes

Instructions: Answer the following prompt in at least 4 sentences.

What do you remember about the way Frederick Douglass described slavery in his narrative? How do the conditions he described compare to the conditions the mill girls faced?

Instructions to the Teacher:

After 7 minutes of quiet work time (or soft music, at the teacher's discretion), go over student answers for ~3 minutes.

After students share out their responses, transition to today's lesson.

Collaborative/Guided Practice (15 minutes)

The teacher says:

“In your groups, discuss the following questions. Be prepared to share out with the class.”

Instructions to the Teacher:

Conduct a shared reading using one of the following formats:

- 1) Read aloud the text and corresponding questions with the class, OR
- 2) Invite student volunteers to read aloud to the whole class.

- 3) Alternatively, break the students into groups (either homogeneous or heterogenous, at the teacher’s discretion). Group members should self-select among the following roles, although *all students must contribute throughout the activity*:

Facilitator	Reads aloud the questions and prompts their group to remain on-track
Record-keeper	Maintains the <i>cleanest</i> notes, although everyone must pass in their notes for full credit!
Timekeeper	Keeps track of time and ensures their group finishes during the allotted time
Reporter	Shares the group’s findings with the larger class

Instructions to the teacher:

Post the following questions on the board. Instruct students to record textual evidence on post-it notes and post these notes on

The teacher says:

Answer the following questions based on Chapter 1 of Douglass’s narrative:

1. What are some characteristics of Douglass’ early life in slavery?
2. How do the circumstances of Douglass’s birth – being born of an enslaved mother raped by her enslaver – manifest in his position on the plantation?
3. What is Douglass’s first memory of the barbarity (horror/savagery) of slavery?

Exit ticket (A.3, B.1, D.1, D.2, D.3) (25 mins)

Access the **Exit Ticket** on Canvas:
(Copy link here to share with students in the video call chat.)

Do Now Prompt:

Answer the following prompt in at least 10 complete sentences using evidence from both Frederick Douglass’s narrative and the *Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict* series.

Compare and contrast the experience of the mill girls to enslaved people. How were their experiences similar? How were they different? Explain what advantages mill girls might have been aiming for by comparing themselves to enslaved people.

References

Fitzsimons, G., Kirschbaum, S., *Cotton, Cloth, and Conflict: The Meaning of Slavery in a Northern Textile City*. The Tsongas Industrial History Center.

English Language Arts Standards » Reading » Grade 11-12 | Common Core State Standards Initiative. (n.d.-b). Retrieved August 15, 2021, from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/>