

GROWTH AND REFORM

Link to Literature

Born into slavery and raised on a plantation in Maryland, Frederick Douglass escaped to the north and freedom at the age of 20. After his escape, Douglass became an active abolitionist and a popular speaker against slavery. He published an autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, in 1845. Popular in the North and in Europe, the work helped draw attention to the moral problems caused by slavery, which Douglass believed dehumanized both master and slave. ♦ *Read the excerpt, thinking about how an author can persuade readers to accept his or her point of view. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

I was seldom whipped by my old master, and suffered little from any thing else than hunger and cold. I suffered much from hunger, but much more from cold. In the hottest summer and coldest winter, I was kept almost naked—no shoes, no stockings, no jacket, no trousers, nothing on but a coarse tow linen shirt, reaching only to my knees. I had no bed. I must have perished with cold, but that, the coldest nights, I used to steal a bag which was used for carrying corn to the mill. I would crawl into this bag, and there sleep on the cold, damp, clay floor, with my head in and feet



Frederick Douglass, The Granger Collection, New York

out. My feet have been so cracked with the frost, that the pen with which I am writing might be laid in the gashes.

We were not regularly allowed. Our food was coarse corn meal boiled. This was called *mush*. It was put into a large wooden tray or trough, and set down upon the ground. The children were then called, like so many pigs, and like so many pigs they would come and devour the mush; some with oyster-shells, others with pieces of shingle, some with naked hands, and none with spoons.

He that ate fastest got most; he that was strongest secured the best place; and few left the trough satisfied.

Questions to Think About

1. What does Douglass identify as two major problems with his life as a slave?
2. To what animals does Douglass compare the slave children? Why?
3. **Recognize Ideologies** How can you tell that this passage supports the abolitionist cause?
4. **Draw Conclusions** How might this book have helped the abolitionist movement?