“You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man.”:

Analyzing authorization in the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave

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Abstract

This thesis looks at how different types of authorization are used to authorize Frederick Douglass’s autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. The thesis examines how Douglass’s uses various strategies to authorize his narrative to make his story both intriguing and believable, and to highlight his transition from an uneducated slave to a well renowned abolitionist. It also answers how Douglass did not have complete authorization over his own material, and had to authorize his narrative through his editors. The analysis is supported with theory on the authorization of autobiographies. The theory highlights different strategies as to how one authorizes personal narratives. This thesis uses theory on authorizing trauma, political movements, agency, truthfulness and design. Lastly, the thesis contains a chapter with suggestions on how Douglass’s life narrative can be taught in conjunction with the Culture and Literature Program at VG3 level in Norwegian upper secondary school. It suggests that Douglass’s narrative can be used to highlight concerns about authorial credibility, as the genre itself provokes strong responses and raises difficult issues. It also states that Douglass’s narrative catalyst for historical comprehension. It also suggests that by reading this autobiography, students can relate to Douglass’s story on a personal level.
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1. Introduction.

Frederick Douglass’s autobiography *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, forms the basis of my research into different strategies as how to authorize an autobiography. Douglass’s narrative was one of the first slave narratives penned by a former slave. Secondly, it was written in a new autobiographical form, celebrating the struggles and successes of the individual, rather than retelling a story in a chronological manner. Inspired by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau and Benjamin Franklin, Douglass incorporated ideologies and philosophies into his work. He made his narrative a tale, which was to be used in a political context, advocating for human rights, and criticizing religion, which was unheard of at the time. This thesis will examine the various strategies that Douglass uses in order to authorize his narrative to make his story both intriguing and believable. It will also try to answer why he chose to present his narrative in a certain way, and how his history, his myth and memory, as well as how his publicists and editors may have altered his story.

I chose this topic because reading autobiographies is something that intrigues me. In my recent years, I have read many autobiographies. Reading these texts made me, as a reader, able to partake in different kinds of lives far from my own. In a sense, the narratives that I read became personal, as I could relate to many aspects presented in those stories. After researching possible topics for my master thesis, I settled on writing about autobiographies. While researching, I realized that autobiographies often come with a purpose, and can be used in many contexts. Captivating life narratives can be seen as potent weapons advocating for human rights. They can give those who are silenced by an oppressive regime an outlet to tell their story. They can provide valuable insight into important historical events, and more importantly, they allow us to partake in someone’s life, completely different from our own,
which opens up for a form of understanding, which can make us as readers reflect on how we deal and interact with people we perceive as different from ourselves. Furthermore, they can have a consolidating effect. If we find ourselves in situations similar to what is depicted in these types of narratives, we can find consolidation in reading how others have overcome such situations. I settled on Frederick Douglass’s narrative because his story seemed very inspiring. The fact that he transcended into a free man, overcoming so many obstacles, and learned to read and write by himself, made me want to read his story. I also thought that reading his narrative would provide me with valuable insight into 19th century American slavery. After reading it, I grew quite fond of it, and so it became the basis of my research. As the narrative encapsulates institutionalized slavery in 19th century America, racism, and a unique perspective on how it was to live under such a regime, it is an excellent book to teach in Norwegian upper secondary school, especially in relation to the Culture and Literature program provided at VG3 level. Teaching this text allows me to elaborate on the historical context of Douglass’s narrative, as well as highlighting authorial authenticity and the provocative nature of such texts. It is also important that students reflect on how we interact and deal with people different from diverse cultural backgrounds, and reading Douglass’s narrative will open up for such reflections. I therefore believe that this book is something that I can use in my future role as a teacher.

To begin my thesis, I will provide a general overview of what a slave narrative is, and how such a narrative is typically tailored for specific purposes. There is a need to build a basis for understanding the mechanics of slave narratives before providing an analysis. From there, I will highlight theories of autobiography and different theories on authorization and authorship in life narratives. I will look at these theories in relation to slave narratives. As self-representation entails the representation of trauma, I will present theories on trauma, and how traumatic events can alter or shape a text. I also find that political movements and agency
are relevant to my analysis, so I will include sections on these topics as well. Lastly, the thesis will examine how Douglass’s narrative can be used when teaching students in Norwegian upper secondary school at VG3-level.

This thesis provides a thorough analysis of Douglass's narrative, looking at the historical context that surrounds his story. It also investigates how Douglass constructed his self-representation around various life events, and how he relates these events in a mythical fashion, relying on biblical language and transcendentalist ideology to cater to his readership. Moreover, the thesis investigates the roles of his editors, and how the anti-slavery abolitionist movement influenced Douglass’s writing.

1.1 What is a slave narrative? An overview of the genre.

In order to understand the stories related to slavery as an institution, the literary genre in which they belong to, and the historical context surrounding them, it is necessary to provide knowledge about the traits and history of such texts. Slave narratives are an account or portion of someone’s life. It is often related by someone else, as slaves most commonly could not read or write. Such narratives are regarded as highly influential in American literature. These narratives were crucial for slave abolitionists, and was meant to prove that a slave was indeed “A man and a brother”, as a reference to the “Anti-Slavery Medallion”\(^1\), for the intended white audience. It was also to prove that the Black narrator was to be trusted despite all propaganda and prejudice (Andrews, 1). During the 19\(^{th}\) century, such narratives evolved, and crucial themes of identity and veracity underwent much revision. Instead of defining the self according to traditional and cultural models, greater attention came to rest on those aspects of

\(^1\) The “Anti-Slavery Medallion” by Josiah Wedgwood, was a medallion modelled after the seal for the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, funded in 1787. These medallions were shipped to Benjamin Franklin in Pennsylvania 1788, and became an immediate success. The design became popular among the abolitionist movement (Anti-slavery medallion).
the self outside the margins of the normal, the acceptable, and the definable, as conceived by the predominant culture (1). Selfhood became identified increasingly with individuality.

To cater to the white readership, Black autobiographers had to be inventive and highlight that they were just as intelligent, intellectual and could write as well as any white man. Black autobiographers knew that they could not assume an equal relationship with the average white American reader. Therefore, as a response to that assumption, they had to prove that they were just as moral, spiritual, and intellectual. However, slaves were often perceived “degraded” by slavery; therefore, such narratives were a great platform to demonstrate how they had elevated from such an “inferior” condition.

Most slave narratives share a typical outline. They usually start with a form of acknowledgement and a selection of testimonials and letters verifying that the slave is indeed the one who is telling the story. These testimonials and letters works as a form of authorizing the credibility of the former slave’s story. Slave narratives often include small narrative episodes of daily life, in order to pique the white reader’s curiosity. They also include accounts of punishment and humiliations, as reading audiences expected them to be included. Another typical trait is the quest for literacy, which demonstrates how the former slave learned to read. The narrator’s literacy serves as proof of the intellectual capacity of the Afro-American. The struggle for literacy is paralleled with their struggle for freedom. Often, they turn to the bible, in order to become upstanding citizens and “good Christians” (DeRose).

Professor David Blight argues that a typical slave narrative is a genre of transformation. In a typical slave narrative, the slave transcends from being enslaved to becoming free; from a pagan to becoming a Christian; from being a sinner to be saved, and from ignorance to enlightenment. However, later in its inception the slave narrative changed focus to the demonstration of respectability, to be pragmatic and practical, and more on one individual’s rise to success (Qtd. in DeRose). The narrative became a path to ownership and
success and achievements. This however, can also be attributed to the radical individualism that was celebrated by the great romantic movements throughout Europe and America in the early 19th century, with writers such as Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson whom emphasized that one should follow one's own instinct and ideas, to become self-reliant and independent. Organized religion and political parties would ruin the individual; therefore, one had to get free from such institutions and become independent, and in turn self-reliant.

1.2 Authorizing slave narratives.

A key issue with slave narratives is the authorization process that had to be commenced in order to get the narratives published. To reiterate, the goal of slave narratives was to gain sympathy with slave abolitionists and make people understand that there was little to no difference between the average white man, and the average Black man. Still, there were certain things that needed to be in order for the narrative to become believable, and convince the audience that what was presented was indeed the truth.

As I mentioned in the former section, it was crucial for such narratives to include some form of acknowledgment to those who had helped the former slave in publishing the narrative. They also had to include letters and testimonials from preferably well renowned abolitionists, abolitionists that were respected and whom people could trust. In the infancy of slave narratives, this practice of including such prefacing was to place the narrative into an intellectual context, which in turn would open the narrative for interpretation. This “white influence”, as William L. Andrews calls it, informed the intended readership (white northern Americans) and enforced the putative meaning and purpose of the narrative (Andrews, 35). As many narratives were retold through someone, there were also alterations considering the diction, style, and tone of the oral speech from which the narrative originated. These alterations were often filtered through their editor’s moral and literary sensibilities, and they had to be compatible with what was being stated in the preface of the narrative. This of
course, makes us question the credibility of such narratives, but at the time, they were perceived as necessary for the intended white readership. There was a certain prejudice as to how the average white readership would interpret a Black slave narrative (35).

In order to cater to white readership there was also an emphasis on Christian values and Christianity. Due to parallels between Black narrators and biblical archetypes like Joseph and Job, white editors often stressed these similarities in the prefaces of slave narratives. The narratives themselves would often display how the slave had made his or her way from heathen to Christian, making events happening in the narrative tie in with a grander spiritual journey. This was due to the strong Christian presence in the American literary tradition at the time. At the same time, there was an idea present of what lay outside of the Christian “White man’s sunny clearings” 2. Outside there was darkness, chaos, and destruction. This however, did not mean that those who were outside the “white man’s clearings” could not be saved. Through evangelical conversion, the slave would prove himself a worthy and devoted Christian, as morally upright as any white person. Due to this emphasis, there would often be segments in the text highlighting their time of self-indulgence, sensuousness, and irresponsibility. This would demonstrate how the former slave was able to redeem himself from the world through their individual experience (39).

There was also an intention by the white editors and publishers to celebrate the acculturation of Afro-Americans into established categories of white social and literary order. Therefore, one tried to incorporate organizing principles and cultural values of popular white autobiographical genres. These would include the conversion account (as referred to in the passage above), the criminal confession, the spiritual autobiography and the journal of

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2 “White man’s sunny clearings” is a metaphor used by William L. Andrews to describe the settled part of America where Christianity was the basis for order and security. Outside the settlement, where the Indians and heathens lived, there was a realm of chaos and destruction.
ministerial labors. Within the boundaries of these genres, one tried to frame the narratives according to the standards of an alienating culture. This made the presentation of the narratives heavily white-controlled. Some would argue that this would leave the narrator with a dual perspective, operating with a “Double Consciousness” as W.E.B. Du Bois would term it (39). In relation to authorizing, we can analyze how white allies and culture influenced the narrative, and how the author tried express his/her own authority through the usage of various literary techniques.

As time progressed, there was a change in style in the slave narratives. This was helmed by Frederick Douglass’s narrative *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. There was an emphasis that his story was written by himself, but unlike other slave narratives, Douglass’s narrative focused more on the individual feats of Douglass himself. This was atypical at the time, but soon became the standard for future slave narratives. Douglass borrowed heavily from a tradition of autobiographical writing that focused on the individual’s rise to success, making a sort of mythical tale about how one, against all odds, would rise “from the ashes” to become a better and more enlightened person. This was already successfully done by writers like Benjamin Franklin. With Douglass being an already well-known slave-abolitionist, he had to provide a captivating narrative to establish his position even further, and to give the people a believable account as to how he became the person that he presented himself.

Douglass’s text investigates the discovery of the “new self.” This was a great way to intrigue new readers, and thus making his narrative even more intriguing. The reader could

3 W.E.B Du Bois writes in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, about how the American world yields him, as a Black man, no true self-consciousness. Instead, he has to operate with a “Double Consciousness”, which is explained as his sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the measure of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.
now relate to how former slaves of Douglass’ stature had empowered themselves. This was rooted in the philosophy of transcendentalism, which I will explain more thoroughly later (1.3). In short, transcendentalism was a Romantic conceptualization of the human spirit (98). The quality of these narratives in terms of language, literary devices and readability, was also beyond what had been presented previously in the genre. Combine this with the fact that the narratives were presented by the former slaves themselves, the stories had the sound of a distinctive authorizing voice, and a sense of an individual authorial personality that the former dictated slave narratives never could have communicated (98-99). The quality of these narratives also helped slave narratives receive widespread recognition and acceptance, which of course was crucial in the fight against slavery.

Another trend prevalent in autobiographies like Douglass’ is to distance the former slave from slavery instead of using slavery as the foundation of the narrative. The fugitive needed to distance himself physically from slavery. Slavery would rather function as a point of self-reference that would always belong to him even after the slave had ceased to belong to it. What abolitionist editors wanted to achieve with this was a sort of recasting of the slave himself, were he would transcend from fugitive to a heroic figure, and become a figure that people would look up to and admire (99). This, and the fact that one wanted to establish a form of ideological importance through these narratives, made the later slave narratives penned by former slaves such as Douglass important for the abolitionist movement.

As I mentioned earlier, a form of authorizing the slave narrative, was to include the journey the slave had made from pagan to Christian. However, as society turned more secular during the mid-19th century, the abolitionists figured that they could use the spirit of American individualism to reorient the concepts of testing and salvation, prevalent in former slave narratives, through the contemporary sociopolitical scene. This was also due to the various implications of abolishing slave narratives and the political climate surrounding this
issue. Some believed that abolishing slavery potentially could ruin the southern economy. Even Northerners saw issues with this, as they feared for the southern textile industry on which they had become dependent. This was due to all the textile mills located in the North. The Northern states also experienced an extraordinary economic and political ascendency. Their increasing power was linked to the large numbers of Northerners who grew or shipped food to feed millions of African slaves in the West Indies. Many bricks in the economic structure of the northern United States were built, indirectly, on the backs of slaves. Cities like New York thrived on being the center of the cotton trade. It drew hundreds of related and unrelated businesses. Combined, these businesses created thousands of jobs. Many people asked themselves: “What would New York be without slavery?” (Frank, 15).

There were also laws and politics in the North that hindered many slaves in gaining citizenship. In May of 1833, a law was passed by the Connecticut General Assembly, which made it illegal for out-of-state students to attend a school without local permission. This was a direct result after a white schoolteacher named Prudence Crandall announced that she planned to open a school for “young ladies and little misses of color.” The announcement for her school was published in white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison’s newspaper, The Liberator. Garrison was also the one who endorsed Douglass’s narrative. This story shows that many Northerners had a negative attitude towards Blacks, as well as a dependency on slavery, rendering it crucial for their wellbeing.

Concerns were raised as how to handle the millions of freed slaves if they were emancipated. Swiss born Harvard geologist, Louis Agassiz, warned against the mixing of blacks and whites. He believed that Northerners should be wary of any policy that would potentially lead the white race to the level of the Black race. Several scientists were of the same opinion. Even abolitionists foresaw no chance of a society where blacks and white lived as equals. They would rather support a form of colonization, in which Africans living in the
United States would be repatriated to the West Coast of Africa (16). As a result of such opinions, many slave narrators deemed it necessary to demonstrate, as a form of authorization, that the former slave was as intelligent as any white person.

Furthermore, through spiritual self-examination, romantic self-consciousness and democratic individualism slave narratives would focus on the self and identity. This led to an extensive usage of the expressive, in the form of emotional responses to certain events, in the text. The extensive use of the expressive in the 1840s represents an important stage in the authorizing of the narrative voice in the slave autobiography (Andrews, 103). It became a radical change in the process of self-authorization for Afro-American autobiographies, allowing emotional response to come forth, painting a vivid picture of the happenings presented in such narratives.

Another change in terms of authorization was the inclusion of a more radical process of self-authorization. This came in the form of reflection. Throughout the 1840s, slave narratives began to include sections of reflection on life changing events that shaped the fugitive in his journey to become a free man. Douglass for instance, often acknowledges the fact that his white readership will read some of his sections with skepticism. Therefore, he decides to address this by justifying his actions and reflections around such events.

To sum up this section, we can see that there has been a development in terms of authorization in slave narratives throughout the 19th century. Like the earlier narratives, the later ones still had to cater to white readership, and they still had to include some sort of acknowledgement from those who helped publish the narrative. As individuality in the form of romanticism and expressive individuality became more of a trend in American culture during the 19th century, slave narratives slowly changed from being defined by traditional and cultural models to investigate more on the self outside the margins of the normal, the acceptable, and the definable, as conceived by the predominant culture. Black authors adopted
these ideas because they were popular with the white American reader. It also allowed them to show the white readers, that they indeed were just as intelligent and intellectual as any white autobiographer was. This was also deemed necessary, due to the blatant racism and attitudes towards slavery in the whole of the United States, not just the South. It also recast the typical role of the Afro-American as a fugitive to a more flattering heroic figure. Success and character building through trials and tribulations became the norm for such narratives, and as a direct result of that the focus on slavery itself became less important. Slavery would function as a point of self-reference. Reflection, emotional response to selected formative events, and justifications addressing potential skepticism among the intended readership also became important in slave narratives throughout the mid-19th century. The development of authorizing slave narratives and the advent of certain literary trends helped slave narratives to become much more captivating, eliciting an even greater emotional response among its readership than before.

1.3 Transcendentalism and autobiographies.

One of the major influences in autobiographical writing in the 19th century was transcendentalism. Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement that celebrated individualism, power and heroism. Transcendentalists were people who advocated for abolition, women’s rights, and religious tolerance. One of the most important aspects of the transcendentalism was its focus on the role of the individual as both an agent of change and the embodiment of the nature of personhood (Lawson, 120). Major works of the period would highlight the role and struggles of the individual as she or he attempted to negotiate the problems of life that often befell them.

The idea is that each individual is a rational thinker with innate moral knowledge. Each individual is to be respected, and each individual should be allowed to develop to the
fullest of his or her ability. In their view, slavery and the oppression of women are socially and morally wrong (119).

Known philosophers that influenced this movement were German philosopher Immanuel Kant and British philosopher John Locke. According to Kant, there is a universal categorical principle in relation to our morals. What one considers one’s moral duty, should apply to every other individual. This implies that one should choose one’s moral principles in relation to what principles one would choose for others. Rather than relying on religion or laws to decide what is morally right or not, one should rely on every individual’s innate moral knowledge (Sagdahl).

John Locke contributed, in the late 17th century, with some interesting thoughts on property and individual rights, by which transcendentalists seem to have been inspired. Locke argued that property is a natural right and that it derived from labor. Individual ownership of goods and property is justified by the fact that it enables us to produce goods, or to utilize the property, so that it becomes beneficial to human society (Tuckness).

In relation to slave narratives, transcendentalism highlights individualism the role of the individual, especially how a person can transcend from a mere slave to an educated, free self-sufficient man. There was something epic in witnessing this struggle.


I have now given an introduction to slave narratives and presented the authorization process related to the publication of these types of narratives. I will now address the more general theories on authority in autobiographies in order to present to which I refer in my analysis of Frederick Douglass.

The theories of autobiography have addressed many of the same issues that I have included about the authorization process of slave narratives. When looking at autobiographical theory, one addresses cultural influences. If we look at the development of
In a broad sense, autobiographical theories evolved as a result of cultural influences in biographical texts. Throughout the 18th century there came about ideas of enlightenment, the liberal human subject, the concept of a “universal man” capable of learning skills in many fields of knowledge, and the transcendent mind. There was also a democratization of society that opened a larger readership and made knowledge became more available to the masses. Then there was radical individualism, mentioned in the former section. This of course, evolved throughout the 19th century, which in turn opened the doors for more mythical figures in autobiographies. One myth that indeed is very prevalent in many American autobiographies, even today, is the myth of the self-made man. We can also attribute this to the advent of Darwinism and the idea of “the survival of the fittest”, as well as the Industrial Revolution, which made more job-opportunities available. This allowed the poor to engage in education and activism, so that they could be able to do varied jobs, which in turn gave them the opportunity to have more control over their own lives. Even though many consider the Industrial Revolution in negative terms, it did increase literacy, and opened for a great outburst of literary activity unheard of before the revolution.

In the 19th century, as autobiographical theorists started investigating the influence of these cultural changes, certain analytical theories came about which proved to be useful when analyzing autobiographies. Since an autobiography is a representation of the self, psychoanalysis proved to be effective. The theories of Sigmund Freud, especially his theories on the “unconscious” and his analytical methods used in psychoanalysis were useful when investigating self-reflection in autobiographies. Other theories that proved useful were the works of Jacques Lacan, whom revised the work of Freud and challenged the notion of an autonomous self (Smith & Watson, 193-235).
During the 1960s, scholars brought a set of assumptions to their readings of autobiographical texts. The autobiographer was to be an autonomous and enlightened other. One focused on theological patterns of development, and self-understanding through reflection on the past representative status of the narrator. Scholars also started investigating the role of the silenced, repressed and ignored. This would include the colonized and people of the working class. Narratives by women were also rarely examined. As a result of this, theories and studies evolved focusing on autobiographies by women as well (193-235).

2.1 Design in autobiographies.

Discussion of autobiographies often focuses on truth telling. Timothy Dow Adams argues in his book *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*, that there is a design to all autobiographies, and that there persists a problem in autobiographies due to that fact.

Some elements of an autobiography can be considered fiction. Some events can be seen as invented. Others are considered as lies. However, if we look at it differently, maybe these lies were added for a rhetorical effect. As for what is considered fiction, authors can even provide composite characters and locations. The story presented in itself can ring true, but the characters and the setting have changed. Some may criticize this as fraud. Nevertheless, such anomalies in autobiographies are so prevalent that virtually all autobiographies share similarly problematic cases.

In relation to Douglass’s narrative, there are events that seem believable, but due to contradicting facts, it can seem like Douglass relies on hearsay, lies and gossip rather than telling the truth. As readers, we must ask ourselves what the intention behind these choices were. Do they in any way undermine the authority of the text, or is the reason behind these choices rational enough to justify Douglass including them? This is something that will be examined in the analysis.
In Douglass’s text, there is also a design in the form of the presentation of the narrative. In the preface, William Lloyd Garrison, elaborates on how he met Douglass at an anti-slavery convention. Douglass’s narrative ends at the very same convention, tying in with what Garrison states about Douglass in his preface. This may have constrained Douglass’s authority over his own narrative.

2.2 Recent approaches to authorization.

Scholars started theorizing the emergent genres of life narratives. Such genres would include trauma, testimonies, and narratives regarding political movements and human rights. Slave narratives for instance, would be considered potent weapons in political movements. They were rallying points for people sharing a defining identity, for instance, a Black slave. Hence why such narratives was banned in the south of the United States.

I will now provide an overview of theories of autobiography in relation to authorization, starting with Phillippe Lejeune’s “autobiographical pact”.

2.2.1 Approaches to authorization: The autobiographical pact.

Philippe Lejeune, author of the influential *On Autobiography*, released in 1989, is considered one of the leading scholars on autobiographical theory. According to Lejeune, the autobiographical text establishes a pact among narrator, reader and publisher that supposes that there is “an identity of name” between the author, such as he figures by his name on the cover of the text itself. The idea here is that there is supposed to be an identicalness of the name of the author, the narrator and the protagonist. The “autobiographical pact” as Lejeune calls it, affirms the text that there is identicalness in the name of the author, narrator, and protagonist. However, the author, the narrator, and the protagonist of the autobiography do not have to be identical. This can raise many problems, which I will try to follow up on.

Firstly, we can establish the fact that identity is expressed in autobiographies through the usage of a first person perspective as well as personal pronouns such as “I”, “you”, “he”
and “she”. Lejeune then argues that the author is not a person. He is rather an implied person who writes and publishes. Straddling the world-beyond-the-text and the text, (referring to the real world) he is the connection between the two. The author is a socially responsible real person and a producer of the discourse. The reader only imagines what he is like through what he produces. If the author is unknown, then he will need to establish an identity he can present to the reader. This is typical in cases where an author has not established an identity through a previous production.

Lejeune also mentions the fact that a reader might know the author from another work that he has produced. This can even be piece of fiction. Often it is written on the cover of the biography “From the author of…” and then referring to some earlier type of work. The reader will then draw a sort of perception, or an already established reality from the former works published by the very same author, and apply that to his or her reading of the current autobiography.

Authors tend to have initial sections in their texts where they address the relationship between the reader by entering in to a contract vis-a-vis the reader by acting as if he were the author, in such a way that the reader has no doubt that the “I” refers to the name shown on the cover, even though the name is not repeated in the text (Lejeune, 14).

2.3 Recent challenges in narrating a life.

In this section I will try to give a glimpse of how scholars have provided theories for analyzing important genres of life narratives. The genres I find most relevant to my thesis are the genres of trauma and political movements, due to the slave narrative’s emphasis on these themes.
2.3.1 Authorizing trauma.

Trauma studies in relation to autobiographies emerged after World War II. Autobiographical scholars, as well as historians and psychologists, explored narratives of the vulnerable that told stories of suffering, violence and harm. Such narratives ranged across many sites, from genocide, to abuse and incest, to disability and human rights crises. This produced a large corpus of studies that focused on the rhetoric of mourning and grief in these personal narratives. Trauma studies have been consolidated as a field since the 1990s (Smith & Watson, 219). In relation to Douglass’s narrative, I will focus on trauma in relation to self-representation and in relation to political agency, as traumatic stories can work as potent weapons in political movements. In this section, I will elaborate more on the conflicting demands of self-representation and trauma, as well as the problematic nature of recalling traumatic events.

Leigh Gilmore argues in her chapter on self-representation, that it (self-representation) entails the representation of trauma. According to Gilmore, there are self-representations in autobiographies and accounts of trauma that have conflicting demands, which can alter the presentation of such a traumatic event. How can the exploration of trauma and the burden that it imposes on memory be representative in a life narrative (Gilmore, 19)?

Gilmore states that truth and memory combined in a representation of trauma undermines it, rather than strengthen the representation of it. Memory of a trauma is only as authoritative as the person who remembers the event, and to a degree, how it is permitted to be accessed in a particular context. A first-person account of a trauma is already at odds with the account of a representative self. Due to the constraints of representing oneself, or wanting to represent certain aspects of oneself, it is not always preferable for the author to include traumatic accounts. Take for instance an account of a sexual trauma. On one hand, it can be a healing process to present such an abuse, connecting it to the therapeutic effect of writing. On
the other hand, it can contain certain elements that one is not comfortable with presenting, and one feels that it will alter or define one’s self-representation, which was not the goal of publishing the narrative in the first place. For example, if one were to publish a slave narrative like Douglass’s, which emphasized masculinity and being self-made, an account of sexual abuse or humiliation of some sort would perhaps not be compatible with the self-representation one wanted to entail in the first place.

As the theorization of trauma has become more and more intertwined with psychology, one has discovered many things that potentially could alter the presentation of traumatic events. Sigmund Freud argued in the late 19th century, that memory is like a permanent record of everything that has happened, and that it can be accessed through analysis. However, we have learned from psychologists like Elizabeth Loftus, that memory can be “implanted” by others. The first account of this happened in child sexual abuse cases in the early 1990s, where one discovered that false memories of things that had not really happened could be “implanted” unintentionally by misguided therapists (28).

If we question such “false memories”, we must look at it in relation to the ways in which its credibility has been established. The idea behind “false memories” suggests that people can be induced to say that they remember details that are suggested to them. However, one must not forget that a very traumatic event is often expressed through flashbacks and fragments, making a truthful account of what actually happened very hard to give. It is then perhaps not all that strange that someone would turn to suggestions induced by others to try elaborating on traumatic events that they have endured in their lifetime. In the context of literary theory, one could wonder how this would pose a problem in establishing a truthful narrative in an autobiography. This is because a “false memory” can present a conflict about memory. It makes us question who is in control when the traumatic event is played out in the narrative. Nevertheless, it is impossible to know if such “false memory” has been imposed on
someone, without knowing the context of such traumatic events. Has the person subjected to these events gone through therapy? Is this account related through someone else? Or are there any sources available that question these events and the therapy the author of the narrative has been given? These questions establish the fact that one will need several variables to conduct such an analysis.

If a trauma is so hard to remember, then what is the purpose of analyzing its truthful meaning? Gilmore argues that trauma is never exclusively personal. It always exists within complicated histories that combine harm and pleasure, along with less inflected dimensions of everyday life. Remembering trauma entails contextualizing it within history (31). This can prove valuable when trying to understand what it must have been like to live under the institution of slavery in America during the 19th century.

With a greater understanding of how a trauma operates and functions, and a greater understanding as to why it is so hard to remember and put words to such an event, we cannot disregard accounts of trauma as lies because they can seem exaggerated, unrealistic or false. Rather, we acknowledge the facts of traumatic memory, and see the event in relation to a greater context, be it historical, or in relation to self-representation.

2.3.2 Political movements.

Through self-construction and self-actualization one often remembers acts of the past differently. Through confessions, memories and traumatic events one can look at them in retrospect with a new understanding, thus contributing to a sort of “self-invention”.

Essentially, one looks back in order to look forward, and in that process gain a greater understanding of oneself. This can also be used in a political context. For instance, all the struggles and life changing events that former slaves had went through, as explained in their narratives, were analyzed in retrospect allowing the former slave to gain a greater understanding of themselves. It also allowed the former slave to see himself/herself in relation
to a larger context. For abolitionist spokespersons like Douglass, this was key. He could use his own life story and look at certain events in relation to the political debates surrounding the issue of slavery itself.

Douglass was heavily involved in the antislavery abolitionist movement. This meant that he was probably very aware of the political context of his narrative. Moreover, as it was released with the help of well renowned white abolitionists like Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison, there was the intention behind the publication that Douglass’s narrative would fuel the antislavery debates. We have also established that many Northerners were skeptical towards ending slavery, and even though many supported its abolition, they still saw Afro-Americans as inferior to white Americans. Douglass then, had all the reasons to prove his opponents wrong by releasing his narrative at that particular time in history.

Let us then try to look more closely at how political movements and ideologies can influence autobiographies. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue how important it is for testimonies and narratives of trauma and survival to be used in political contexts. In a historical sense, an autobiography based on the stories from survivors of the Holocaust for instance, could work as a warning for future generations as to not repeat such an atrocity. It could also provide an understanding for how it must have been to live under such conditions, and it can be used in many contexts for advocating human rights.

As scholars are turning their attention to look at the ways in which life stories and scenes from witnesses, are involved in campaigns for human rights, claim or citizenships or disputes for property, one finds that there are multivalent meanings, as in intricate formations of discourses, protocols, practices, and institutions for dealing with radical suffering. Combined, these meanings work as a sort of “lingua franca” for activism, both nationally and transnationally (Smith & Watson, 220).
Scholars in life writing have often questioned the implications of political activism in life narratives, especially when it comes to human rights discourses. They have criticized the commodification of narratives of suffering in the production, circulation, and reception of witness narratives in global circuits of human rights movements. One looks at the constraints that political contexts and institutional settings may have on the terms of witnessing and the oppressive aspects of scenes of witnessing (221). In essence, when reading narratives that we think are influenced by some sort of political agenda, we have to investigate the basis of the ownership of the narrative. Under such historical contexts such as slavery, it suggests that the ownership of one’s story has historically been less an intrinsic right than a site of contestation, especially for those whose status as citizens was either denied or revoked under law (222).

2.3.3 Agency and writing back.

As we have established in the former section, we can see that narratives are politicized. Douglass used his as a platform to advocate against slavery. This was also the intention of his white allies who shared his agenda. But instead of falling into the typical traits of former slave-narratives Douglass tries to “write back” to challenge the cultural stories and perceptions that have been scripted to him as a former slave. This is a strategy often used in life narratives, as one wants to rid oneself of cultural strictures about self-representation.

Often, this is an even better way to challenge and intervene in social and political formations. Life writing can, in many ways disrupt social arrangements and self-understanding. For instance, in a post-colonial setting where a subject has been marginalized and been perceived by the colonial power as less than human, one often employs strategic means through one’s narrative to create a form of response, or creating a narrative of possibilities rather than asserting to the old established belief held by the former colonial power. Such strategies can for instance, be thematized through the significance of language in the text. We as readers can look at what language(s) and strategies of translation the narrator
employs in telling his or her story. Agency can also derive from acknowledging the limits of knowing ourselves. We can then look at how a narrator thematizes his or her limits of self-knowing, and their ability to interpret their own lives (236).

3. Analysis of Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself.

Frederick Douglass rose to fame with the publication of his 1845 autobiography Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself. The book was one of the first slave narrative penned by the former slave himself. Before, slave narratives were related through someone else. Just by that unconventional fact, it became a huge success, being sold in the excess of 30,000 copies by the year of 1850. It received rave reviews and praise in the press. It is described as a “turning point” in Douglass’s life, and indeed, the book is crafted around turning points, from altercations with his former slave breaker, to mastering reading and writing despite his master’s intention. All of these life-changing events continued after the release of his autobiography. Douglass founded his own newspaper, recruited Afro-American soldiers for the Union Army during the Civil War, and held noteworthy positions in the Republican Administration. When he died in 1895, he had become an international figure recognized as an orator, writer, statesman, and representative of his own race (Lee, 1).

Several slave narratives had been released before Douglass published his. By the time of his publication, editors from the abolitionist movement had learned to produce captivating narratives. They knew how to cater to a white audience, and they were increasingly more professional and clever when it came to publishing and authorizing these kinds of narratives. The editors knew what to include, and what to leave out, with intention to spread the narratives to an even larger audience. Following the success of other famous autobiographies, editors saw it as necessary to emulate the success of such great life narratives; therefore, the role of the editor was less visible in the later slave narratives (1840 and onwards), rather than
before when the stories were often related through them. The focus was the need to revamp the former fugitive into a heroic figure, which people could both relate to and admire. Douglass was in that sense, the perfect match. His talent for writing, his political activism, his story, and his winning personality were perfect for releasing a life narrative that the editors knew would be immensely popular, and at the same time stir up an all but necessary debate around slavery, supporting the abolitionist cause.

Even though Douglass wrote the narrative by himself, he still had to include various forms of authorizing that were prevalent in slave narratives. Like any other slave narrative, Douglass’s narrative included prefaces by known white abolitionists. In Douglass’s case these prefaces, were endorsements from white evangelical William Lloyd Garrison, and orator and lawyer Wendell Phillips. Douglass knew Garrison from before the release of this autobiography. Garrison became Douglass’s mentor as Douglass became impressed with his work through Garrison’s own newspaper: The Liberator. Witnessing Douglass performing a speech at a convention, Garrison took to the stage riffing off Douglass’ speech. He hyped the audience, asking questions like: “Have we been listening to a thing, a piece of property, or a man?” To which the audience responded “A man, A man, A man!” This impressed Douglass, as he witnessed how the audience responded. He soon incorporated Garrison’s rhetoric into his own work, leaving Garrison stunned by its quality. Garrison became his mentor, and through his mentoring, Douglass adopted and learned many techniques, that he used when he wrote his own narrative (15).

Garrison endorsed his narrative, while Douglass incorporated Garrison’s ideology and technique. This meant that Douglass’s text in many ways followed the same blueprint as many other slave narratives. In Douglass’s narrative, we have the quest for literacy, and several accounts of his religious beliefs rooted in Christianity. However, Douglass cannot really be described as a “sinner” or “heathen”. As many of these types of narratives tried to
showcase that the former fugitive slaves had gone through a form of moral, ethical and religious enlightenment, his narrative still contains many accounts attributing to his moral stature, establishing Douglass as a respectable and intelligent individual.

While Douglass’s narrative follows, in many ways, the typical established blueprints of a slave narrative, his narrative was released in the mid-19th century. With him being one of the authors who revamped the genre; his narrative differs in many ways. That being said, he still had to authorize his narrative through many an established technique.

I will now provide an analysis looking at how Douglass authorized his text. I will examine how he uses literary devices, how he tries to be the authority of his own narrative, appropriating white literary history, and in that sense incorporating, and making it his ally. I will also look at several events establishing the “character of Frederick Douglass” – his representation of himself. In a sense, this road to become “Frederick Douglass” is a story of self-development, much in line with the self-help books of today. Along with creating an identity, which fits his role as abolitionist speaker, it is perhaps beneficial to incorporate Philippe Lejeune’s idea of an autobiographical pact. I will also look at how Douglass incorporated Christianity and the language of the Bible as a form of authorizing. Moreover, I will take into account what undermines the authority of his text, as that is just as important as what authorizes it in the first place. What I hope to accomplish with this, is to see how the question of authority, namely who and what authorizes a text, defines Douglass’s narrative.

We have already established that Douglass’s editors influenced him, and that there were prefaces included to endorse the publication of Douglass’s story. To start my analysis I will look at Douglass’s story of self-development, and how he uses it to both incorporate white mainstream American literary history, as well as the philosophy of transcendentalism from writers such as Emerson and Whitman. As I mentioned before, Douglass’s story is
riddled with life changing events. These events contribute to creating a representation of the identity of Frederick Douglass.

3.1 Mythical Douglass, The self-made man.

Douglass begins his narrative in typical autobiographical fashion, with the simple documentary statement: “I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot County, Maryland.” (Douglass, 12). Critic Robert S. Levine states that there is nothing in the opening chapter about representative leadership, nothing about Douglass’s heroic rise from slavery to freedom. Instead, there are confessions of dislocations and confusion. The whole first chapter is quite the opposite from how Douglass presented himself later in his own narrative, and very different from the common depiction of him being a “master of self-reliance”, whose hard work, creativity and dedication helped him rise from slavery to freedom, which is the common overall perception of him as a well renowned abolitionist (Levine, 32). Levine argues that this may be the result of constraints forced upon him by his white sponsors. As I have explained earlier, we know that Douglass’s first narrative was somewhat constrained by the typical blueprint for the slave narrative. As we can see, this is apparent in the first chapter. As the autobiography develops however, Douglass uses slavery as a point of self-reference throughout the rest of his narrative. Using slavery as a point of self-reference became more common in slave narratives published after Douglass’s autobiography. However, Douglass returns to the typical traits of former slave narratives at the end of his novel, elaborating much on what Garrison wrote about him in his preface to Douglass’s text. This fact, makes it evident that Garrison and the likes of him somewhat constrained Douglass’s first release. Garrison and Douglass later fell out due to differences in opinion. Before returning to investigate the connection between Garrison’s preface and the ending of Douglass’s novel, I will elaborate on how Douglass creates this idea of a self-made man.
As Douglass was well known, and already had a following that knew his story, he had to create a narrative that told the story of how he became that person. The fact that he was so well spoken, well dressed, and wrote his own narrative was so unbelievable that he had to create a sort of testimony explaining how “Frederick Douglass” came to be. In a sense, we can say that Douglass and his narrative is a construct, and Douglass is a constructed figure. Remember, Frederick took the name Douglass when he escaped to the North. In fact, there is an initial section in his novel describing in detail his name change, and why he chose to call himself “Douglass”. Frederick was originally called Bailey. In Baltimore, he called himself “Stanley”, and when he got to New York, he took the name of “Johnson”. However, when he came to New Bedford, he found it necessary to alter his name again. The reason, as he states, was that there were so many Johnsons in New Bedford, so it was difficult to distinguish between them (Douglass, 72). In New Bedford, Douglass and his wife gained citizenship in the North, and were regarded as residents, sharing every right that that any other resident would have. Douglass gave Mr. Johnson, an abolitionist aiding them in gaining citizenship, the privilege to choose his new name, but clearly stated, “He must not take from me my name of “Frederick”. I must hold on to that, to preserve my sense of identity” (72). We can wonder why Douglass would want to include his readers in this process. It is perhaps to demonstrate to us, that the author is a constructed figure. His surname is a part of his shaped personality. The free “Douglass” and the enslaved “Bailey” are two different identities, while “Frederick” is the link between them. Frederick is the one thing that connects the two differing identities, and is perhaps kept and emphasized because it shows that this man once had another identity as a slave, a piece of property, while he is now, his own man, and through life shaping events he has constructed and shaped his personality.

Douglass’s name change is also interesting in relation to Philippe Lejeune’s theory on the “autobiographical pact.” As we know, Lejeune talks about how there is a pact between the
identity of the author (such as he/her figures, by his name, on the cover). The author, the narrator, and the protagonist should then be identical. However, this is not case in Douglass’s narrative. Almost until the end of his narrative, Douglass goes by several other names. It is only by the end that he establishes his identity as Douglass. This is also the name that he is known by as an abolitionist and spokesperson. In a sense, his audience knows him already as Douglass, so he is not unknown. Nevertheless, his identity, and how he became the person that he is now, was so questionable at the time that Douglass felt the need to establish how he got the identity.

According to Lejeune there is typically an initial section in a text where the narrator enters into a contract with the reader by acting as if he were the author, in such a way that the reader has no doubt that the “I” refers to the name on the cover, even though the name is not repeated in the text (Lejeune, 14). In the case of Douglass’s narrative, this initial section seems to be the one where he establishes his identity as Douglass, as that is the name his audience knows him by, and that “Douglass” is presented as the author on the cover. Does Douglass then fulfill the autobiographical pact? Perhaps not literally, according to Lejeune. However, this could be intentional; Douglass thereby informs the reader that his newfound identity is indeed a construction. Douglass wants us to see that his name is a part of his project of constructing a new identity for himself, and that his identity is constructed by selected life changing events, which all add up to the mythical figure of “Frederick Douglass”.

To add to this notion, we can safely say that there is a difference between Frederick Bailey in the first few chapters and Frederick Douglass in the last chapters. A.C.C Thompson, one of Douglass’s slaveholders’ even states in his letter, included in Douglass narrative, that he had dismissed his former slave “Frederick Bailey” as “uneducated and rather ordinary” therefore incapable of writing anything like this narrative. Douglass actually agrees with this
in his response to Thompson. “If anyone had told me, seven years ago, I should ever be able to write such a one, I should doubted as strongly as you now do.” Douglass further states: “Frederick Douglass the freeman, is a very different person from Frederick Bailey…” (139). This exchange adds to the idea of Douglass as a constructed identity and seems to corroborate with Lejeune’s ideas on the autobiographical pact.

Let us investigate the life changing events that made Douglass the proclaimed self-made man he establishes himself. Like Emerson and Whitman, Douglass uses himself as a representative for a larger political cause. In Douglass’s case, that is the fight against slavery. Throughout several scenes in his narrative, Douglass tries to disprove every argument used against slaves. This is perhaps most evident in the scene where he is taught the art of reading by Sophia Auld, wife of Master Hugh Auld. Sophia Auld has never owned a slave before. Therefore, she comes across as sympathetic and kind towards Douglass. At Douglass’s request, she begins teaching him to read until Hugh Auld objects. Master Auld states:

If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do. If you teach that nigger […] how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would be forever unfit to him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy (29).

With this statement, Hugh Auld elaborates on common conceptions regarding slaves and slaveholding prevalent in the South during the 19th century. He justifies the fact that Mrs. Auld could not teach Douglass how to read, because this could potentially “harm” the poor slave boy, and in the end make him unhappy. For Douglass however, this event came as a blessing. He now realizes how the white man’s power is used to enslave the Black man. Douglass states: “This was a special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain” (29). Understanding
Mr. Auld’s intentions, Douglass becomes aware of the importance of learning to read, and sets out on a quest for literacy – a classic trait of slave narratives. The quest for literacy is parallel to the journey to freedom. Douglass even states this himself: “From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom” (29). With all of this said, we can establish the fact that Douglass does a complete misreading of his master’s intentions. He sees past his false justifications, and realizes the power the art of reading. In a sense, he embodies what is being denied to slaves, and with his intent to learn how to read and write he disproves every argument the white hegemony has against it.

This revelation of how white men use their power over their slaves is recurring in several sections of the novel. After a failed escape, Douglass is sent back to Baltimore to work for Hugh Auld again. Hugh sends Douglass as an apprentice to a shipbuilder called William Gardner. As time progresses Douglass becomes a valuable worker at the shipyard. However, after an altercation with the workers there, he is in need of recovery and is sent back to Master Auld. After that, he becomes a worker at Hugh Auld’s own shipyard. At the end of each week, Douglass has to turn over all his wages to Hugh Auld. This is something that Douglass is immensely dissatisfied with. Douglass states about his salary:

I was now getting, as I have said, one dollar and fifty cents per day. I contracted for it; I earned it; it was paid to me; it was rightfully my own: yet, upon returning each Saturday night, I was compelled to deliver every cent to Master Hugh. And why? Not because he earned it, - not because he had any hand in earning it, - Not because I owed it to him, - nor because he possessed the slightest shadow of a right to it; but solely because he had the power to compel me to give it up. The right of the grim-visaged pirate upon the high seas is exactly the same (65).

As Douglass is considered Master Auld’s property, it is only right that he will give up all his wages, because his Master will only recognize him as a piece of property. When Douglass gives him his wages, he would look at Douglass with a robber-like fierceness, and say: “Is that all?” (66). However, if Douglass made more money than usual, Auld would give
Douglass up to 6 cents to encourage him. Nevertheless, this only had the opposite effect, as Douglass regarded it as some sort of admission to his whole wages. Douglass states: “The fact that he gave me any part of my wages was proof, to my mind, that he believed me entitled to the whole of them” (66). This is interesting if we look at this event in relation to the notion of individualism and the philosophy of transcendentalism.

English philosopher John Locke argued that one’s property is one’s body, and one creates one’s property through labor. In a sense, one is an individual because one possesses one’s own body. As slaves cannot own any property, and their sole purpose is to work for their Master, they are not considered individuals. They are socially dead. However, if Auld is willing to give up a piece of the wages, then perhaps Douglass is considered an individual after all, though his master does not seem to recognize this when he hands him the money. Needless to say, this event only leads Douglass to further plan his escape.

When Douglass finally escapes to the North, he only found that he had gone from one slavery to another. The freedom in the North is only nominal. In New Bedford, he tried to resume his position as caulker, but encountered prejudice from white workers at the shipyard. Realizing that there was no future in calking, he prepared himself to do any kind of work. After a while, he acquired some work, and even though the work was both hard and dirty, he was glad to be master of himself. There is this notion of self-possession by economic means. Even though work is almost as bad as in the South, he is still able to legally own property, and himself, in a sense. This is important in relation to how the character of Douglass came to be. With more possessions, individual rights, and a sense of being his own man, the construct of the free self-made Douglass is almost complete.

We can also see this in relation to how Douglass emphasizes his marriage by reproducing his marriage contract. Perhaps not the most romantic way of expressing joy over getting married, but it emphasizes the fact that Douglass is now recognized as a contracting
agent, which would be impossible in the South. He can legally make a contract of marriage, and this again adds up to the fact that Douglass is now considered a free individual in the North.

We have now established how the identity of Douglass and its creation is a result of several life-changing events. Then there is the mythical aspect of Douglass – the heroic Douglass. As we already have established, there was a need to portray the former slave as a heroic figure. The tale of how one, against all odds, would rise “from the ashes”, had a sort of mythical appeal. This was very prevalent in autobiographies at the time, and in order to cater the white readership, and perhaps to ignite hope in the average slave, assuming that at least some of them could read, this recipe proved to be successful.

One event that really emphasizes the mythical aspects of Frederick Douglass is the altercation he has with Edward Covey, a notorious slave breaker. Through his stay at Covey, Douglass is treated badly, and Covey is by far the worst of all his “masters”. One day Douglass is looking out on all the beautiful vessels sailing out of Chesapeake Bay, which is close by from where Douglass lives. Here he holds an appeal to the reading audience, asking rhetorical questions. There is a form of antithesis to all his questions. E.g. “You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave!... You are freedom’s swift-winged angels, that fly around the world; I am confined in the bands of iron” (46). There is pathos of feeling and sentiment in this passage. How can one enslave someone who thinks and feels like this? The emotional appeal is used to influence the reader, and to gain sympathy with the abolitionist movement. After Douglass is finished with his sentimental speech, he continues his pathos connecting it to the coming altercation with Mr. Covey. Douglass states:

The circumstances leading to change in Mr. Covey’s course (Referencing to Covey’s abusive manner) toward me form an epoch in my humble history. You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man (46-47).
By alluding this passage the coming altercation between them, Douglass is conveying that this battle is more than Douglass’s personal story. It is rather an altercation of epic proportions. To add a mythical aspect to this altercation, Douglass emphasizes on how he leaves Mr. Covey’s farm after receiving a severe beating to complain to his Master; Thomas. After being declined by Master Thomas, he is to return to Covey’s farm, but is reluctant to do so. On his way back, he meets a slave named Sandy Jenkins. Jenkins gives Douglass a root, which is magical according to him. This root has powers that will protect slaves from getting whipped. However, Douglass finds Jenkins to be “superstitious”, and does not believe that there will be any help in carrying the root. Nevertheless, he carries it with him, only to be surprised upon meeting Mr. Covey again as he does not lay a finger on Douglass. The root as a symbol emphasizes the mythical aspect of Douglass, and the power of an idea – that if you find power in an idea, it can prove helpful in many situations.

Needless to say, Mr. Covey attacks Douglass after a while. This attack leads to a vicious fight between them with Douglass deciding to fight back. This fight is presented to the reader ship as a showdown of biblical proportions. Being pinned down by Covey, Douglass states:

Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment – from whence came the spirit I don’t know – I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected, that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf […] (50).

This triumph over Covey results in Douglass feeling self-confident. The fact that he is able to win over a man who was supposed to break his spirit, leaves Douglass inspired with self-confidence and determination to become free. He states:
This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave, it rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with the determination to become free [...]. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom (50).

In this passage, Douglass uses the language of the Bible to convey his point. Inspired by stories such as David vs. Goliath, Douglass conveys to his readers that this is more than just an incident in his personal story. It adds to the idea of a more “mythical Douglass”, and provides the readers with a greater understanding as to how Douglass was revamped into this heroic figure. Also, we know that slave narrators would draw parallels between Black narrators and biblical archetypes, and they often would include events that could showcase the spiritual side of the journey the individual had made from slave to a free man. Douglass is no different, when he compares winning this battle to the resurrection of Jesus.

It is also interesting how Douglass mentions manhood, and how his sense of manhood was revived during this altercation. There is an implication that slavery emasculated enslaved men, making them unable to fend for themselves and protect their families, therefore rendering them more feminine or lesser men, than their white counterparts. Therefore, this triumph over Covey made Douglass a “man”, and it gave him inspired self-confidence and a determination to become free.

With my analysis of the passages above, we have gained a greater understanding as to Douglass creates this mythical self – a heroic figure who rises from the “ashes”. This notion of incorporating the language of the Bible into life changing events, form these life changing events into a series of conversion moments. Now, we know that white editors wanted to emphasize the rite of conversion, from pagan to Christian and so forth, and we have also established the fact that this autobiography was endorsed and edited by white, evangelical William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison followed the pattern of other slave narratives and probably emphasized to Douglass the importance of tying such events to Christianity. The narrative
and the events that we have now looked upon also had to fit with Garrison’s endorsement in the beginning of the narrative. In this preface, Garrison praises Douglass abilities as abolitionist speaker. Garrison often uses Christianity to display Douglass’s talent and abilities. He also states that God is on the side of those of the oppressed referring to slaves like Douglass. “[…] Without trembling for the fate of this country in the hands of a righteous God, who is ever on the side of the oppressed […]” (7), and that Douglass may continue to “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of God” (Holy Bible – King James Version, Peter 3.18).

Garrison also emphasizes that Douglass has a “true manliness of character”, despite the fact that he has borne himself with “gentleness and meekness” (5). It is interesting that Garrison pinpoints this, as Douglass emphasized how he regained his manhood in the altercation with Mr. Covey. These examples display how important it was to incorporate masculinity and Christianity into Douglass’s narrative in order to authorize it.

In terms of Douglass’s own “resurrection”, how he became “a man” after that altercation, and regained his “self-confidence”, it does not quite fit with the ending and Garrison’s praises of him in his preface. Even though he battles white men, entitles himself to his own wages, and learns to read despite his masters intention, and in the end gains full freedom, allowing the reader to witness his journey from the enslaved Frederick Bailey to the resurrected construct of Frederick Douglass, his self-representation falls short in the ending of his slave narrative. At an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket, Douglass states:

[… ] I felt strongly moved to speak, and was at the same time much urged to do so by Mr. William C. Coffin, a gentleman who had heard me speak in the colored people’s meeting at New Bedford. It was a severe cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down (75).

So, despite his reinvention, and highlighting the life altering events that made Douglass his “own man”, he still has problems with his self-representation until the very end of his
narrative. One would not think that Douglass would have problems addressing a white audience, nor that he would feel like a slave again, because that is somewhat in conflict to the characteristics he had demonstrated to his readers throughout his narrative. Despite all his “conversion moments”, Douglass still has issues with white “authority”. Nevertheless, he regains his confidence when speaking to this audience. He states:

I spoke but for a few moments, when I felt a degree of freedom, and said what I desired with considerable ease. From that time until now, I have been engaged in pleading the cause of my brethren – with what success, and with what devotion, I leave those acquainted with my labors to decide (75).

In a sense, Douglass’s narrative comes full circle in this ending, tying in with what Garrison stated about him in his preface. Remember, Garrison also refers to the convention in Nantucket, as the place where he encountered Douglass for the first time. Even though Garrison states that Douglass production is completely his own, and that he has chosen to write it to the best of his ability in his own style (6), Garrison and his abolitionist movement must have had quite an influence on Douglass. Douglass’s narrative follows so many of the typical slave narrative traits, that it would be highly unlikely if they did not. By establishing what trends were prevalent in white autobiographies at the time, we also know that Douglass had altered his life experiences to incorporate these trends and popular ideologies prevalent at the time of the narrative’s publication. Considering these examples and facts, it is highly unlikely that Douglass had complete authorization over his own material. It is also interesting to look at these examples in relation to the structure of the narrative. We have touched upon this in section 2.1.

As I have mentioned, the autobiography starts with the preface by Garrison and his description of Douglass. Douglass has to live up to this description. He also has to live up to all the religious overtones in Garrison’s preface, and the ending of his narrative where he met
Garrison at the antislavery convention in Nantucket, must comply with Garrisons account of the very same meeting. Given this, it is safe to say that Garrison must have influenced Douglass writing.

3.2 Authorizing political movements in Douglass’s text.

Douglass addresses both slavery and the use of religion as a justification of slavery. Even though he uses the language of the Bible, and often references biblical figures and stories in relation to events in his own life, he also criticizes those (namely the slaveholders of the South) who use a perverted form of Christianity to justify the enslavement of others. Arguably, Douglass and his supporters may have been concerned that his critique against Christian white southerners could seem blasphemous or be misunderstood by a Christian readership as an attack on their religion. Therefore, Douglass has included an appendix at the end of his narrative, in order to add to his criticism, and also to clarify any misunderstanding a reader might have about his views on Christianity as a whole.

If we look at his narrative, there are several incidents in which Douglass questions how his slaveholders are using their religion against him. At the same time, there are sections on how Douglass found comfort in his Christian faith, and how he held sermons while living with Mr. Freeland. Throughout the novel, there is a sort of binary opposition between the “religious slaveholders” versus those who are of proper Christian faith.

While living with the notorious Master Auld, Douglass relates how he hoped that when Master Auld would attend a Methodist Camp Meeting, his conversion would lead him to emancipate his slaves, or at least make him more kind and humane, but Douglass was disappointed in both these respects. Douglass states:

It neither made him more to be more humane to his slaves, nor to emancipate them. If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his own depravity to shield and
sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanctions and support for his slaveholding cruelty (40).

Douglass continues by elaborating on how Master Auld prays every morning, noon and night, and soon became an instrument in the hands of the church making a name for himself and befriending many preachers. Douglass tells how the slaves were forbidden to learn about religion, and how Auld finds justifications in the scripture for his bloody deeds. Auld frequently quotes a passage from the Bible: “He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes” (*Holy Bible – King James Version*, Luke 12.47).

Then there is Mr. Covey, the notorious slave breaker, who is also deeply religious. Douglass states about Mr. Covey “He was a professor of religion – a pious soul – a member and class leader in the Methodist church. All of this added weight to his reputation as a “nigger breaker” (42).

The likes of Master Auld and Mr. Covey all add to a pool of white southerners who use a false form of Christianity to legitimize their slaveholding. Douglass and his fellow slaves’ even uses biblical language when describing Mr. Covey, as he goes by the name of “The snake” as a reference to the Devil himself. He is further described as a great deceiver. Douglass states:

His life was devoted to planning and perpetrating the grossest deceptions. Everything he possessed in the shape of learning or religion, he made conform to his disposition to deceive. He seemed to think of himself equal to deceiving the Almighty (44).

The consensus here seems to be that there are a number of southerners justifying their actions through religion. Even the church and priests are in on it, and overall they are just deceiving themselves and God whilst doing so. Douglass states about religious slaveholders: “I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me. For of all slaveholders with whom I met, the religious slaveholders are the worst” (53). Nevertheless,
there are characters such as Mr. Freeland, whom as mentioned earlier is also a slaveholder. Ironically, Mr. Freeland is described as a quick-tempered man who drives his slaves hard. However, Douglass constantly contradicts Mr. Freeland’s actions as slaveholder. “He required a good deal of work to be done, but gave us good tools with … Like Mr. Covey, he gave us enough to eat; but unlike Mr. Covey, he also gave us sufficient time to take our meals” (54). In a sense, it can seem like Douglass is trying to play down Freeland’s actions. He even states: “I will give Mr. Freeland the credit of being the best master I ever had, till I became my own master” (56). It is unclear why Douglass seems to have a certain form of respect towards Mr. Freeland, but it could be that Douglass remembers him as a “kinder” slaveholder, due to Douglass befriending many other slaves on his estate. Douglass states: “I have never loved any or confined in any people more than my fellow slaves, and especially those with whom I lived at Mr. Freeland’s” (56).

In his appendix, Douglass addresses those who might consider him an opponent of religion. Douglass sets up two oppositions to distinguish between those who call themselves Christians - He makes a distinction between Christianity – as in the slaveholding religion of the United States, and the Christianity of Christ, which Douglass himself is a devoted follower of. In his appendix, he makes serious acquisitions against those whom he considers to be hypocritical Christians. He even makes a mockery of southern churchgoers by parodying the *Heavenly Union*, a hymn that was sung in many Southern churches at the time, and turns to mimic the southern clergy. Mimicry such as this, is effective, and is often a phenomenon that one would investigate in relation to postcolonial texts. Mimicry is a term used when describing how colonized subjects (i.e. Native Americans) imitate the language, politics or cultural attitude of the colonizers. Colonized subjects often turn to mimicry to gain access or to “pass”, so that they can have access to the privileges of the colonizers. However, this is not always the case. Mimicry is never far from mockery (Ashcroft & Griffiths, 136).
Douglass had exceptional knowledge about the southern clergy. To showcase how hollow their belief was, he mimics them, and at the same time mocks them by parodi

With this appendix, Douglass clarifies his views on religion, and tries to make sure that no one would mistake him for being blasphemous. At the same time, it enables him to elaborate more on how religion is used to justify slavery, and to create the illusion that slavery is unproblematic. One would think it pleases his editors given the harsh criticism of Christianity in his novel. It is interesting how Douglass incorporates Christianity by using language and stories from the Bible as reference to events in his own life, and at the same time denounces its hypocritical practices by highlighting how enslavers are using religion against the slaves. With such ambivalence, there would certainly be a need for an appendix highlighting this.

3.3 Truthfulness, design and trauma in Douglass’s narrative.

There are certain events, which undermine Douglass’s narrative. When explaining specific events it seems like Douglass relies more on hearsay and gossip rather than actual events. For instance, there is his account of the death of Demby. Demby is a slave under Colonel Lloyd, and overseen by Mr. Austin Gore, a ruthless, sadistic man. The death of Demby is described in detail. Mr. Gore whips Demby. Demby then runs out into a creek to ease his burns, and refuses to come out. Mr. Gore responds by stating that he will give him three calls, or else he will shoot. Demby makes no response, and so Mr. Gore raises his musket and kills him (24). Douglass then accounts that Mr. Gore had to explain his action to Colonel Lloyd. Douglass provides an account of Mr. Gore’s defense, and Lloyd’s response. It is somewhat strange that Douglass would remember this all so clearly given that he is only 5 years old when this occurred.
Then there is Douglass emphasis on foul language. For instance, when he gives his account of him witnessing the flogging of his aunt, he narrates the whole event using quotations (15). It is somewhat strange that Douglass can narrate this event so well, considering his age at that time. The foul language is censored, but each sentence is supposedly written down as once stated orally. The attention to foul language in combination with the atrocities described, specifically in the beating of defenseless women, is surely going to arouse hatred towards the institution of slavery. It will also question the slave-owners’ sense of morals, as well as questioning their faith in Christianity. I would not say that these scenes specifically undermine Douglass authority, but given the facts surrounding the context of these stories, we have to question their legitimacy.

These events are also something that we can connect with theory on trauma. As we know an account of a trauma, like the ones mentioned above, have conflicting demands in relation to authority and self-representation in autobiographies. In the case of these specific events, it can seem that there is an agenda to describe them in an explicit fashion to arouse hatred towards slavery. Hence, there is a political agenda. We also know that truth and memory (because it is unreliable) can undermine ones self-representation and the overall authorization of the narrative.

Given the age of Douglass when these events occurred, they must have been severely traumatic, and knowing what he has been through, we must contextualize it within history. It is not unlikely that Douglass would witness such events. If he remembers them so thoroughly down to dialogue, and the adult context that surrounds these events is another story, but we cannot discredit these events based on such allegations. For the readership, adding such events would prove valuable, as they would help the reader to understand how it must have been to live under slavery. Perhaps Douglass deemed this necessary, because he knew that even in the North, people had a limited knowledge as to what happened under slavery. We
know scientific research was conducted that undermined the damaging effect of slavery. Notable scientists at the time also established theories that rendered black slaves inferior largely in every respect compared to people of white ethnicity. Including events like the death of Demby, and the beating of Douglass’s aunt would highlight the atrocities of slavery, at the same time they would function to a rhetorical effect, and they would make readers sympathize with the characters involved, and hopefully make them see black slaves as equal to the white majority. By including these events, Douglass may have hoped to create a moral imperative that would compel white Northerners to act out of their consciousness, rather than justifying slavery to uphold their standards of living.

If these events ring true as being retold in their original form may not even matter. Let us look at these events in relation to what Timothy Dow Adams argues about design and truthfulness. We have now established that Douglass may have lied, or claimed to be the one who witnessed these events, when there is factual evidence that prove different. This, however, does not mean that these events are false. Incidents like these happened to many slaves. Douglass may have heard stories like these from other slaves. He may have experienced some of them himself, when he was very young, but due to their traumatic nature and his age he cannot retell them in their original form. Nevertheless, by including such stories, even though others experienced them in reality, they do not necessarily undermine Douglass’s authority, because such anomalies are prevalent in virtually all autobiographies. As I have elaborated on the section above, including these events seem to have multiple purposes. It is also worth recounting that trauma is never exclusively personal. On the one hand, it entails contextualizing trauma within history; on the other hand it can be helpful or consolidating for people who have experienced such traumatic experiences themselves (Gilmore, 19). Perhaps Douglass was trying to cater to a Black readership with these sections
as well, as those black slaves who could read would recognize themselves, or could relate to these types of events.

In terms of a therapeutic effect, we should not undermine the healing process that presenting these types of events can induce. Douglass may have chosen to present these selected traumatic events specifically for his purpose. Knowing what the enslaved had to endure, we can assume that Douglass may have experienced similar traumatic events, or survived traumas that even had a greater impact on him than the ones he has chosen to include in his narrative. Due to constraints, or wanting to represent certain aspects of himself, he may have found it preferable to include these specific events rather than others.

3.4 Authority from within and without: Summary and conclusion.
If we look at the authorization process of Douglass’s narrative, we can divide into two differing forms of authorization. On the one hand, Douglass tries being the authority of the text, and at the same time tries to establish his position as the well-renowned abolitionist he was known as, before the publication of this narrative. On the other hand, Douglass has to get his text authorized with the help of others to establish its truthfulness.

If we sum up this analysis, we can set up two differing oppositions in terms of authorizing. Authorizing from within by the hand of Douglass, and authorizing from without influenced by others like William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips.

Let us start by summarizing how Douglass’s narrative is authorized by influences from without. Firstly, it is the endorsements made by William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. These are included to endorse, and vouch for the authenticity of the narrative. Another intention behind including these is to stress what an upstanding citizen the person writing the narrative is, highlighting the author’s moral and literary sensibilities. In relation to Douglass’s narrative, his editors had a great deal of experience in publishing abolitionist literature. We also know that Garrison took Douglass under his wing, and probably aided him
to become a better writer. It comes as no surprise then, that Douglass slave narrative follows the blueprint of so many other slave narratives. It has the quest for literacy, which in itself functions as a form of authorizing, because it demonstrates the fact that Douglass had learned to write and read. To a potential reader, it is therefore plausible that he wrote his own narrative. The narrative also incorporates Christianity and Christian values, which is not atypical for such narratives; many abolitionists were deeply religious. This is the case for Garrison, who was a well-known evangelist. In the analysis, we have established the fact that Garrison must have influenced the structure of Douglass’s narrative, with his preface tying into the ending of the story. Douglass had to cater to what Garrison had to say about him in his preface. The preface is also riddled with religious overtones, which is something Douglass incorporates in his narrative as a whole. As Douglass also made remarks about Christianity and slaveholding, his editors probably feared that it could seem blasphemous, so the appendix that is included where he addresses his views on Christianity could potentially be a result of his evangelist editors wanting him to clarify his views. Douglass and his editors probably worried about alienating their readers, whom most likely would be Christians. Then there is the fact that Douglass’s narrative is inspired by white contemporary literature in the form of other autobiographical writers like Benjamin Franklin. Like Franklin, Douglass’s work relies heavily on the myth of the self-made man, which is rooted in the philosophy of transcendentalism allowing for an individual authorial personality, that the former dictated slave narratives never could have communicated. These examples from my analysis highlights how Douglass’s narrative was influenced, or authorized, from without. Let us now look at how Douglass tries to be his own authorizing voice.

First off, Douglass tries to free himself from the constraints of typical slave narratives by distancing himself from the institution of slavery. Douglass manages to free himself by using slavery as a point of self-reference, and the narrative in itself, focuses more on the feats
of Douglass as an individual, and how he becomes self-made. This path of to become a free self-made individual is told through many conversion moments. As Douglass was so well known, he already had a following that knew his story. Nevertheless, Douglass wants his readers to take part in his journey, and show us that the identity of Douglass is a construct in itself. The most notable example is perhaps his name change. In this section, Douglass and his wife gain citizenship in the North. In that process, Douglass tells the story of how he got his name, and why he decided to keep his first name. In the beginning of his narrative, Douglass did not have a real identity. He was just the enslaved Bailey, a piece of property. Now, however, he is his own man. The name change can be seen as one of many conversions that form into the identity of Douglass. Among others, we find the reproduction of his marriage contract. The intention behind including the marriage contract is to show that Douglass is recognized as a contracting agent. He can legally arrange a contract of a marriage, and this adds to the identity of the free, self-made identity of Frederick Douglass.

Another form of authorization is through highlighting how he was able to get his wages while working as a caulkker for Master Auld. Auld considered Douglass his property. However, by omitting a tiny percentage of the salary to Douglass, something that was unheard of, as slaves did not have admission to any sort of wages, he unconsciously recognizes the fact that Douglass is an individual rather than a piece of property. Douglass saw this as an admission to his whole wages. In relation to transcendentalism, we have established that Douglass was inspired by John Locke’s idea, which states that one’s property is one’s body and one create one’s property through labor. One is then considered an individual since one possesses one’s own body. Then there is Douglass’s altercation with Mr. Covey, where he uses the resurrection of Jesus and David vs. Goliath to authorize and emphasize the magnitude of that specific event.
Aside from these conversion moments leading up to the establishment of his identity as Douglass, we also have to take into account his responses to former slave-owners that try to undermine his story, as well as his appendix on Christianity. We have established that Douglass was probably influenced by others to include his appendix, clarifying his views on religion. However, in his appendix he clearly is his own authorizing voice, as he turns to mimicry and mocks the religious slaveholders.

Douglass also incorporates the notion that this is more than his personal story. Selected events like how he regained his manhood, and particular stories like the ones about the death of Demby and the flogging of his aunt, are events that readers, perhaps a Black readership, could identify with. It can then seem like Douglass’s narrative tries to provide an authenticity that Afro-Americans and former slaves can relate to.

To conclude, we can establish the fact that Douglass’s narrative, though stated on the cover as; “Written by Himself”, clearly is influenced by others, and needed authorization through various strategies. As it follows many traits of typical slave narratives, contemporary literary trends, and the endorsements of his editors, we can state that Douglass needed authorization from without, both to cater to his readership, but also so that his narrative would retain believability in the historical context it was written in. We can also establish that Douglass tried to be his own authority and take ownership of his text. This is shown through a series of conversion moments where he uses transcendentalism, Christianity and initial sections highlighting how he transcended from an uneducated slave to a self-made man. The same man his audience now knows him as.

4. Teaching the Narrative of Frederick Douglass in Norwegian upper secondary school at VG3 level.

The Core Curriculum of the Norwegian Education Plan states that throughout history, meeting different people with different traditions and cultures has been essential in our
creation of cultural understanding. (Core Curriculum) Therefore, it is important that students can reflect on how we interact and deal with people different from our own culture.

Furthermore, the competency aims of the English Literature and Culture Program at VG3 level stress the importance of interpreting literary texts from a cultural-historical and social perspective. It also stresses that students must be able to elaborate on and discuss a selection of factual prose texts dealing with English culture and language. By teaching literature in the form of autobiographies, we can provide adolescents and young adults with more knowledge on being and the self. If a student can recognize and become involved in an autobiography, they can get a greater understanding what it may be like to live under various circumstances. Maybe there are certain events or characteristics within the text, to which they can relate. In that respect, a captivating narrative can become personal, and at the same time be provocative. As teachers, we can use our academic background as critical thinkers and open up for a using an autobiography in dealing with controversial subjects. Teaching an autobiography like the *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass* will open up for discussions on ethics, morality, social issues, as well as lessons on the historical context of slavery, how slavery was institutionalized, and how discrimination and racism is, even today, so prevalent in American society.

In this chapter, I will provide ideas for how Douglass’s autobiography; *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself*, can be used in teaching in the English Literature and Culture Program at VG3 level. Firstly, I will elaborate on how Douglass’s narrative is related to The Knowledge Promotion Reform (KPR), The Core Curriculum, and the general English Subject Curriculum. Secondly, I will provide some theory on learning and learner differences as the KPR states that teaching must be catered to each individual student. As teachers, we therefore have a responsibility to make use of the
diversity in a class. Lastly, I will try to provide ideas as to how Douglass’s narrative can be used in teaching.

4.1 The Knowledge Promotion Reform and the Core Curriculum

The Knowledge Promotion reform consists of several elements: The Core Curriculum, The Quality Framework, Subject Curricula, and lastly individual assessments. All of these contains guidelines, which form the essence of the requirements set up by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, and is to be incorporated into the education of our youth.

The Core Curriculum emphasizes the essence of the Norwegian school system. The ideal is to create humans that are; Spiritual, creative, liberally educated, social, environmentally aware, hardworking, and integrated (Core Curriculum). This is what Douglass aspires to as well. Douglass was not allowed to socialize with his fellow peers, nor his family. There were rules set up to prevent that from happening. He did not receive any formal education, and was introduced to the spiritual, in the form of religion, much later in life. Through hard work and an admirable conviction, he transcended into his own man, fulfilling many of the ideals that Norwegian school system wants our students to achieve. Students can relate to this (given the emphasis on performativity and progress in Norwegian society). In many ways, Douglass’s narrative follows the tradition of self-help books today, which often exemplify life-changing events in someone’s life, be it historical or contemporary, where a person has to face various challenges to reach his or her untapped potential. Frederick Douglass saw the value in equal opportunities for everyone, much like we strive for in the educational system of today. His heroism and mythical appeal, as well as his captivating language makes his narrative possible to use at VG3 level.
4.2 The English Subject Curriculum

In this section, I will look at the curriculum of the English Culture and Literature program in relation to Douglass’s work.

The English Curriculum for Culture and Literature emphasizes language and language learning, communication and culture, and society and literature. In relation to Douglass’s narrative, reading and analyzing it will provide students with more knowledge of the English language, and the usage of it. Communication wise, reading such a text will help students develop their language skills, providing them with a well-developed and nuanced vocabulary, and make them able to communicate about social issues. Communication also involves precise and coherent expression in a number of oral and written genres, including composite texts.

In relation to culture, society and literature, the Curriculum asks teachers to cover literature, which deals with political, social and economic circumstances in a number of English-speaking countries, with an emphasis on Great Britain and the United States. The Curriculum highlights historical events and processes that have affected the development of society in Great Britain and the United States. Furthermore, it is concerned with current issues and conflicts in the English-speaking world as well. Slavery has had a tremendous effect on the development of US society. Reading and analyzing Douglass’s autobiography will open up for many opportunities to investigate the subject of race, politics, conflicts and even current affairs, as many examples from the narrative can be used in relation to recent news stories.

4.3 Teaching to a diverse group of students

In order to set up a teaching plan for Douglass’s autobiography, it is crucial to make an assessment describing the learners we are to approach. One has to consider their age, their learner differences in relation to individual variations, aptitude and intelligence, good learner
characteristics etc. One also have to consider various methodologies, and the student’s motivation for investigating such a text.

Jeremy Harmer, provides interesting theories on describing learners in his book on English teaching; *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. The age of students at VG3 level, would range 18 to their early 20s. This means that we are talking about adolescent and adult learners. Adolescents, for instance, can often be seen as problem students, yet with great ability for abstract thought and their passionate commitment to what they are doing once they are engaged; adolescents may well be the most exiting students of all (Harmer, 83). Adolescents need to feel good about themselves and valued; therefore, it is important to keep our students motivated when reading a text such as Douglass. When reading a work from another historical context, it can prove valuable to build bridges from the context of the text, to the student’s worlds of thought and experience. The Core Curriculum states that when explaining something new, we have to use expressions, metaphors and analogies, which are already familiar to the student. A lot of new knowledge can be attached to what a student already knows and believe. A good starting point can, for instance be, to make use of our common cultural heritage, as most students should be familiar with that (Core Curriculum, 20).

Adult learners on the other hand, are notable for a number of characteristics. Just as adolescents, they can engage in abstract thought. They have a larger range of life experiences to draw on. Adults, are in general, more disciplined, and unlike children and teenagers, they often have a clear understanding of why they are learning and what they want to get out of it. However, motivation is just as important with adult learners, as it is with adolescent learners. Adult learners can also be critical of teaching methods, as previous learning experiences may have predisposed them to one particular methodological style, which made them unfamiliar
and uncomfortable with other teaching patterns. Adult learners may have experienced failure and criticism in school, which makes them anxious, and less confident (84-85).

Since VG3 students are between adolescence and adulthood, I have to combine their characteristics, and try to tailor a teaching plan that fit them as learners. I mentioned that adult learners often have a clear understanding for why they are learning, and what they eventually will get out of it. This can be problematic for adolescents. Therefore, there is a demand in the Knowledge Promotion Reform, stating that students are to be informed of what they are to achieve when presented with new tasks and assignments (Læreplanverket for Kunskapsløftet, 3-4). This applies for every age group, not just for adolescents and adult learners. I need to have this in mind when teaching Douglass’s autobiography. It also seems like both age groups rely on their own experiences, and relating these to the context of what they are going to learn. It is then crucial, that I as a teacher find ways to connect the historical, political and social context of the text to the students.

4.3.1 Learner differences

I have established that I am going to teach an in-between age group, and that I need to cater to their characteristics. However, I must not forget that a class is composed of individuals. I have to start thinking about how I can adapt my teaching, so that it is beneficial for everyone involved. The Knowledge Promotion Reform states that teaching must be catered to each individual student. (Core Curriculum, 19). I have to consider the mixed abilities of the entire class.

There are different ways to analyze individual variations among students, and there has been developed several theories to highlight these variations. Some people learn in different ways than others. This indicates that that there are differences in the ways individual brains work. It also suggests that people respond differently to the same stimuli (Harmer, 89). In this chapter, I will use, and refer to the theory of Multiple Intelligences – a concept
introduced by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner. Gardner suggested that humans do not possess a single intelligence, but rather a range of ‘intelligences’ (Qtd. in Harmer, 90). The intelligences are Musical/Rhythmical, Verbal/linguistic, Visual/Spatial, Bodily/Kinesthetic, Logical/Mathematical, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal. All people have all of these intelligences, but in each person, one (or several) is more prevalent. (Harmer, 90) Since Gardner provided this theory in 1983, other scholars have added new intelligences to his theory, such as “emotional intelligences” etc. (90). This proves that Gardner’s theory in itself might be lacking to explain the complexities of human intelligence. Nevertheless, it can help us as teachers, to understand that different types of learners respond to different types of stimuli based on their more pronounced intelligence. A person who is considered to be more “visual/spatial”, will predict the contents of a text using an accompanying picture or photo, while someone who is considered more “musical” will relate to a text through accompanied music (Qtd. in Harmer, 91). A person with a pronounced kinesthetic intelligence might prefer an object or an artifact they can accompany to the text or subject they are to learn. As a teacher, I can use this system of multiple intelligences to try to cater my teaching to my individual students.

4.3.2 Different approaches to learning

As teaching must be adapted to each individual according to the Knowledge Promotion Reform and the Education Act, we must try to provide a model, which can help us establish the various needs of each individual students. It is important to remember that the idea of providing an “adapted education” for each student is more of a political goal, than it is a term. (Elevens Verden, 355)⁴. However, one still has to try to provide a multidimensional approach

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⁴ Different Norwegian Governments have used the term “Adaptive Education” in various political contexts, combining the term with their own ideology. Therefore it exits no recipe for how to incorporate “Adaptive
to one’s teaching, incorporating the cultural background of the students, their educational background, their maturity, artistic abilities, as well as their motivation and interest. As teachers, one must ask oneself; what can I do to meet my students with these various dimensions in mind? When providing possible teaching plans for Douglass’s narrative I must consider these dimensions, as they will influence the result of my teaching.

From a didactical viewpoint, one must consider adaptive education in relation to differentiation. By “differentiation”, I am referring to various ways in which one can organize and cater to the needs of each individual student. As differentiation through organizational means often entails dividing students into groups or classes based on their academic competence, one must note that this somewhat frowned upon in the Norwegian school system, and is not considered as normal practice. However, differentiation through a pedagogical approach, also referred to as “pedagogical differentiation” (Lærerens Verden, 309), is potentially fruitful in relation to adaptive education. A typical way of organizing a lesson would be to provide different sets of exercises, so that groups of students can select assignments that may interest, or fit them better educationally (309). Another form of pedagogical differentiation could also be through varying the lesson in itself. As teachers, one will provide the students with a lesson that will cater, through various forms of teaching, each individual student. As an introduction, the teacher may contextualize the subject relevant for the class through discussions, video, lectures etc. The teacher may include an artifact, which is relevant for that particular class. This will potentially spark curiosity among the students, and in turn make them motivated to engage in new assignments.

Education” into ones teaching. (Jenssen & Lillejord, 8-12) Nevertheless, as teachers, we have to provide a multidimensional approach to our teaching, and cater to each student's individual needs, as we are required to do so by the Education Act.
4.4 Teaching slave narratives.

As I have elaborated on in the introduction to this chapter, autobiographies can provide adolescents and young adults with more knowledge on being and the self. In that respect, a captivating narrative can become personal, and at the same time provocative. The Norwegian Knowledge Promotion Reform emphasizes the importance of critical thinking. Students have to be able to ask questions regarding controversial subjects. They have to be able to wonder and find explanations. The reform highlights ethical questions and moral judgements. In the English curriculum, the plan also states that students have to be able to discuss questions regarding social issues. They also have to be able to discuss current affairs (Læreplan i Engelsk). I have to be able to incorporate this, when teaching Douglass’s narrative.

I will now investigate how one can use an autobiography to contribute to develop and improve critical thinking, writing, reading, and allow students to explore the historical context of slavery, as well as investigating the American fascination with individuality and self-expression. Investigating an autobiography such as Douglass’s can also encourage students to be critics of the commodification of “life stories” and the desire of autobiography readers for total authenticity (Brown, 123). The analysis of Douglass’s novel in the previous chapters investigates just that - its authenticity.

Before I begin, I need to provide some objectives for teaching Douglass’s narrative. First off, I want my students to examine this narrative to obtain a more accurate and balanced account of the nature of slavery, and the impact it had on men and women living under it, as well as the implications it have had on US history, even today.

Douglass’s editors, literary trends, and the typical blueprint of many slave narratives has influenced his narrative. Nevertheless, I have established through my analysis that most of his narrative is factual and reliable. Most of what Douglass presents in his narrative can be verified as true accounts. This is due to the sheer number of letters, testimonies, diaries,
records, and documents that all add up to a reliable account of the atrocities of slavery (Gibson). However, some historians argue that narratives like Douglass’s, reflect only the most outstanding and gifted slaves. It is therefore not representative of the thoughts and experiences of the masses. Nevertheless, we cannot dismiss these types of narrative because of such arguments. Rather, narratives like Douglass’s, give much insight, not only into their own response to slavery, but also the experiences of fellow slaves, as well as many typical aspects of slavery (Gibson). In relation to teaching an autobiography like Douglass’s, one can rather recognize the fact that gifted or not, his narrative has much to tell as a story about personal growth and overcoming many trials and tribulations. It also functions as a form of historical documentation, which tells us what it meant to be a black slave the south during the 19th century.

4.5 How can Douglass’s narrative be used in the classroom?

Reading an autobiography such as Douglass’s can contribute to several different lesson plans. Firstly, it can stimulate students into a classroom discussion. By reading a slave narrative like Douglass’s, students should be able to draw their own conclusions, questioning the content as presented. As a teacher, I must then be able to stimulate, and encourage my students to engage in slavery as a topic. For instance, I can provoke my students. A provocative approach make students think critically, thus making them more engaged in the material than they might have been, if they had not been provoked. Megan Brown wrote an article on using the memoir as provocation. Her study focused on undergraduate students in the US, but surely, some of it can be applied to the Norwegian school system as well. Brown argues that memoirs are essentially provocative. The genre itself provokes strong responses and raises difficult issues. Brown gives several examples in which memoirs can be an effective catalyst for discussion and writing assignments.
In relation to Douglass’s narrative, one can discuss the narrative voice of the autobiography with the students, where one highlights concerns about authorial credibility and likeability, as well as the ethics of the writer and readers, much like what I have presented in my analysis of Frederick Douglass’s narrative. This can be a great opener for further investigating the narrative. Students will explore the question of authorial authenticity. By asking questions about self-representation, the intention of lying under various circumstances, confessions for reasons of emotional health and catharsis, as well as reader expectations of learning deep, dark and true secrets students will become more engaged in Douglass’s narrative. As a teacher, I must then be able to establish the fact, that a well-written memoir is not about how interesting and unique the writer is, but rather it is about exploring issues, ideas and emotions that other people can relate to, being part of the human experience (Brown, 129). Douglass wanted to demonstrate that he was just as intelligent and capable of writing a captivating narrative as any white author. By addressing the common perception of a Black man being inferior in every respect, he created a narrative to prove that perception wrong. He played on emotions through a convincing pathos so that people reading his narrative could relate, and be a part of his experience. This is something we as teachers need to make students aware of when asking questions about authorial authenticity. Rather, we can challenge students’ typical assumptions about what authenticity entails. Very little of our lives are constructed out of whole truths. We tell little white lies to make others, and ourselves feel better. We hear lies from others. Can there then be any nonfiction, such as an autobiography, that is truly one hundred percent nonfiction? (Qtd. in Brown, 129). Asking these types of question will provoke students, and look at the matter differently. A discussion about the credibility and likeability of the narrative will then provide as a great opener for further investigating the narrative.
Since Douglass’s narrative is a product of a different time, and a very different political climate from what Norwegian students are used to, it can be a good idea to relate the individual experiences of the students to connect them to the historical, political and social context of the narrative. As I have elaborated on in the section on teaching to a diverse group of students, it seems like the age groups that we are to approach rely on their own experiences, relating these to the context of what they are going to learn. David Campos has written an article about using oral slave narratives as a catalyst for historical comprehension. Campos argues that slave narratives are ideal for lessons designed with historical understanding in mind because they are “interpretive, revealing, and (explain) connections, change and consequences” (Campos, 9). In short, “…Slave narratives afford students a glimpse into the world of slavery through men and women who lived it…” (9). By using slave narratives, students can become immersed in lessons that stimulate them. Firstly, they can ask questions and find support for their answers. Secondly, they can examine historical records beyond their textbooks. Students can also consult various artifacts and data form the past and evaluate them in a historical context. Lastly, they can compare multiple points of view (9). By opening up for opportunities like consulting various artifacts from the past, we can potentially reach the students better and cater to their characteristics. Some students becomes even more intrigued in to the material if they are able to use relate it to a specific artifact, as they have a more pronounced kinesthetic intelligence. In a slave narrative, there are often sections on punishment and humiliation. If students are introduced to an artifact, such as a whip for example, they might have a greater understanding, and become more involved in the text by relating it to a physical object, in which they can touch and feel. As a teacher, I have to adapt my teaching, so that it is beneficial for everyone involved. Consulting various artifacts related to the time-period of the narrative, or the institution of slavery is potentially very beneficial in that respect.
In terms of recalling student’s prior knowledge to engage the students to learn about slavery, Campos suggests asking questions such as: Have you read, watched or heard about slavery? What do you know about how the enslaved felt about slavery? What do you know about the time-period in which they lived (9)? These are straightforward questions that students at VG3 level should be able to answer. Perhaps, we as teachers can try to relate slavery to more contemporary news stories. The production of electronic appliances in the Far East, as well as “sweatshops” where children produce clothing and sneakers comes to mind. In relation to Douglass’s narrative, we have established in the analysis that Northerners in the mid-19th century had problems envisioning a future without slavery, as their economy, and standards of living were so dependent on slavery. This, combined with the fact that many Northerners saw blacks as inferior to whites, meant that they saw few problems with institutionalized slavery. Today, we buy clothing and electronic goods produced under horrible conditions. Most of us are aware of how these products are produced due to reports in the media, but for the sake of convenience and being accustomed to such products, we often tend to look the other way. Students are most likely aware of how their cellphones and clothing are produced, and so we can relate that knowledge when discussing American slavery. In terms of other contemporary sources students can identify with in relation to slavery, there are movies that revolve around 19th century slavery. Films such as Twelve Years a Slave, released in 2013, and Django Unchained (2012) come to mind. Many students have seen these movies, and may have been introduced to slavery in America through these films. Though the depiction of slavery in these movies has been altered for artistic reasons, they give an idea as to how slavery was upheld in the US during the 19th century. When teaching a work like Douglass’s narrative, I can highlight these movies, and refer to them, as the depiction of slavery in these films is relevant to the context of Douglass’s autobiography.
In terms of historical comprehension, Campos argues that constructive mediums, whether its pictures, audio or video, compel students to engage in historical thinking (8). The competence aims for the Literature and Culture program, emphasizes that students should be enable to elaborate and discuss how key historical events (Such as slavery) have affected the development of American and British society. Students can then visit websites and encyclopedias to gather the historical knowledge that is needed to fully comprehend Douglass’s narrative. Visual imagery like photos can be viewed in front of the class, and one can provide informative inserts to complement the photos. Websites regarding slavery and entries in encyclopedias can serve as foundations for future lessons, while photos will complement this information, thus making it more accessible for students. Students with a pronounced visual intelligence, as mentioned in the section on learner differences, will prefer something visual, like a photo, as it will strengthen their comprehension, rather than just reading a text.

While reading Douglass’s narrative, students can also try to picture themselves in Douglass’s situation. This will develop the students understanding of the complex world the slave narratives reveal (9). Students can read the section where Mrs. Auld offers to teach the young Frederick Douglass to read. Master Auld interferes, and provides a rationale for prohibiting Douglass from learning to read. Auld elaborates on common conceptions regarding slaves and slaveholding prevalent in the South during the 19th century. Douglass dismisses Auld, and realizes that this is how the white man has the power to enslave the Black man. As the teacher, we can then ask questions, so that students can relate to Douglass on a more personal level. By using an example such as this one which highlights how slaves were forbidden to learn how to read, one can allow students to analyze the dynamic relationship between those in power and those who were socially, economically and politically marginalized and examine how these opposing forces influenced the circumstances and
course of time (9). Another great example would be to show students how slave-owners along with prominent members of the church, provided various rationales by using quotes and verses from the Bible to support slavery. Here, one can even draw parallels to recent news stories like the ones regarding the expansion of the Islamic State, where its supporters and followers use various interpretations of the Quran to legitimize slavery (Damon). However, one must use caution when discussing Christianity and Islam. Some students, though not supporters of neither the Islamic State nor Christianity in the form that is portrayed in Douglass’s narrative, may feel uncomfortable in discussing their religion in such a context. The Core Curriculum emphasizes the fact that one should have respect for religions and faiths. However, it also emphasizes that students should be able to think critically. Nevertheless, as a teacher, one must know one’s audience very well before getting involved in such a discussion.

4.6 Concluding thoughts on teaching Douglass’s autobiography

Throughout this chapter, I have established that the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, is an autobiography, which can be used when teaching students at VG3 level in Norwegian upper secondary schools. By teaching literature in the form of an autobiography, it can contribute to several lesson plans. Douglass’s narrative works in Norwegian schools because it allows students to interpret it from a cultural-historical and social perspective. It opens up for discussions on ethics, morality, social issues as well as lessons on the historical context of slavery. Through teaching Douglass’s narrative, one can ask provocative questions. This is due to the fact, that the genre in itself provokes strong responses and raises difficult issues. As I have done in my thesis, students can use Douglass’s narrative to highlight concerns about authorial credibility. This can be a great opener for further investigating the narrative. By asking questions about self-representation and lying under various circumstances, students can become more engaged in
Douglass’s narrative. This will also make students realize that very little of our lives is constructed out of whole truths. Approaching an autobiography in this manner, will make students look at such texts quite differently than they did before.

When teaching an autobiography, which is a product of a different time, and a very different political climate, it is also important to relate the individual experiences of the students to connect them to the historical, political and social context of the narrative. As a teacher, one can start by asking questions that will recall a student’s former knowledge of slavery. This can be done through relating events from the narrative, or 19th century slavery into the context of recent news stories.

Slave narratives can then also work as catalysts for historical comprehension. This opens for consulting historical records beyond the students’ textbooks and investigating various artifacts and data from the past, students can become even more intrigued into the historical context of slavery. Constructive mediums, whether its pictures, audio or video, compel students to engage in historical thinking.

Lastly, students can try to picture themselves in Douglass’s situation. By analyzing selected sections from his narrative, students can relate to Douglass on a more personal level. This will allow students to analyze the dynamic relationship between those in power as presented in the narrative.

5. Conclusion

Before Frederick Douglass’s narrative, slave narratives were often orally told by the former slave and put in writing by abolitionists. By being able to write down his own experiences of his life as slave, and how he became a free man, Douglass’s narrative is closer to truth as it is derived through personal memories compared to former slave narratives. Even so, Douglass’s writing still seem somewhat limited by the typical traits of slave narratives and different types of authorization in his narrative.
As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, there was a development in terms of authorization in slave narratives throughout the 19th century. Douglass’s narrative follows the typical outline of slave narratives. It has letters and testimonials included as a form of authorizing. It has the quest for literacy to serve as proof of the intellectual capacity of the Afro-American. Like other slave narratives, it also relies on Christianity and religious overtones. As slave narratives developed throughout the mid-19th century, Douglass incorporated transcendentalism into his work. Transcendentalist philosophy, which emphasized the rite to become a self-made man, was very prevalent in white American autobiographies at the time of the publication of Douglass’s narrative. Slave narrators incorporated popular trends like transcendentalism into their narrative to make the stories more appealing. Lastly, there is the influence by his evangelist editor, as discussed in chapter two, where the ending of the narrative ties in William Lloyd Garrison’s first encounter of Douglass at an abolitionist meeting in Nantucket.

However, despite these observations, this thesis establishes the fact that Douglass, though his authority over his narrative have been limited, still uses several ways to authorize his own story. Douglass’s incorporation of transcendentalism and the myth of the self-made man may have been the result of literary trends prevalent at the time. However, incorporating this myth into his narrative allows Douglass to become a more individual authorial personality that former slave narratives never could have communicated. Douglass was already an established abolitionist speaker before he released his narrative. In that respect, his narrative provides his audience and his opponents with an intriguing background story, which displays how he became Frederick Douglass. As I have argued in my analysis, Frederick Douglass, can seem like a constructed figure. He starts his narrative as Frederick Bailey, a piece of property, socially dead, and through several life-changing events, he transcends into Frederick Douglass. Douglass authorizes his own narrative through allowing the reader to
partake in his journey, where he emphasizes how he gained more and more rights, which in the end culminated into the construct of Frederick Douglass. As examples, I can highlight his section on how he got the name of Douglass, the section where he emphasizes his contract of marriage, as well as his altercations with former slaveholders and slavebreakers like Mr. Covey. Then there are his responses to the letters from his former slaveholders, as well as his appendix on Christianity. I have established in my analysis that Douglass probably was influenced by others, namely his editors, to include his appendix on Christianity. However, in his appendix, he is clearly his own authorizing voice, as he turns to mimicry and mocks the religious slaveholders of the South.

In terms of other types of authorization, I have also touched upon trauma and truthfulness, and political movements. There are some events in his narrative that can be conceived by the reader as based on hearsay, gossip and lies. In some of these passages, there are also an emphasis on foul language, which questions the morals of the slave-owners, as well as their faith in Christianity. This emphasis on foul language could potentially have been added to arouse hatred against the institution of slavery. On the other hand, they could have been added to create a moral imperative that would compel white Northerners reading the narrative to act out of their consciousness. One could argue that this undermines Douglass’s own authority, but as I have elaborated, I believe that adding such events would help the reader to understand how it must been to live under slavery. It can also cater to a Black readership, or others who would find themselves in a similar situation. Furthermore, presenting such events could have had a therapeutic effect for Douglass himself. In relation to autobiographical theory on design and truthfulness, I have argued that if these events as described ring true, as being retold in their original form, may not even matter all that much. Incidents like the ones Douglass has described happened to many slaves. He may have heard
stories from others, or he may have experienced them himself, but due to their traumatic 
nature, he is not able to retell them in their original form.

To conclude, it seems that even though the cover of Douglass’s autobiography states 
“Written by Himself”, he does not have complete authorization over his own story. Douglass 
is influenced by literary trends, his editors, the literary form of typical slave narratives, as well 
as the goals of the narrative. On the one hand, the goal is to provide his audience with a story 
on how he became Frederick Douglass. On the other hand, it has a political agenda to argue 
against slavery. In addition, Douglass is somewhat constrained by religious concerns and the 
historical context of his narrative. Douglass then, does not have complete authorization over 
his own story.

In relation to teaching, I will conclude by stating that the *Narrative of the Life of 
Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, is an autobiography, which can 
be used when teaching students at VG3 level in Norwegian upper secondary school. Teaching 
literature in the form of an autobiography can contribute to several lesson plans. Douglass’s 
narrative can be used to highlight concerns about authorial credibility. It can be used to 
engage the class in discussions, as the genre in itself provokes strong responses and raises 
difficult issues. Douglass’s narrative will also work as a catalyst for historical comprehension. 
Lastly, by analyzing selected sections from this autobiography, students can relate do 
Frederick Douglass on a more personal level.

In the end, I will say that Frederick Douglass’s narrative provides a captivating 
storyline, as well as an interesting look into the inner thoughts and feelings of a former slave. 
Even though he is somewhat constrained by authorization from without, the story as presented 
is very much Douglass’s own. By using the formula of American autobiographical tradition 
with an emphasis on the myth of the self-made man, it seems like many readers can identify
Douglass’s struggle for freedom. This applies even today, as many popular life narratives follow the same formula, though the setting and context may differ.
6. Works cited


