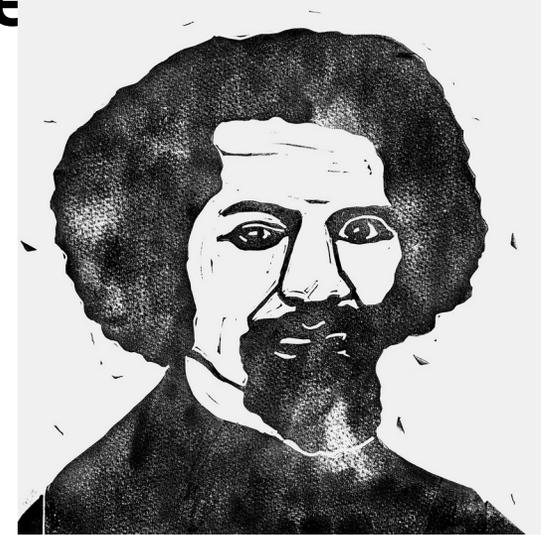


EQUALITY AND UNIVERSALISM: KS 4

Curriculum Subject Areas: History, Literature

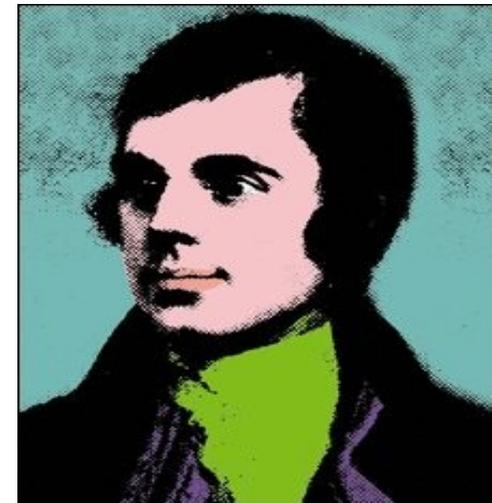
Frederick Douglass

'In a composite nation like ours, as before the law, there should be no rich, no poor, no high, no low, no white, no black, but common country, common citizenship, equal rights and a common destiny.'



Robert Burns

'To see Oursels as Others See us!'



Suggested Questions on images A- D

- Look at the following images and texts and consider:
- Which countries or periods would you associate these images with?
- How might you describe the different experiences of each of these people?
- Could there be any shared experiences between these figures?
-

Image A

-
-
-



Image B



Image C

“To a Mouse”

I'm truly sorry man's
dominion
Has broken Nature's
social union,
An' justifies that ill
opinion
Which makes thee
startle
At me, thy poor, earth-
born companion
An' fellow mortal.



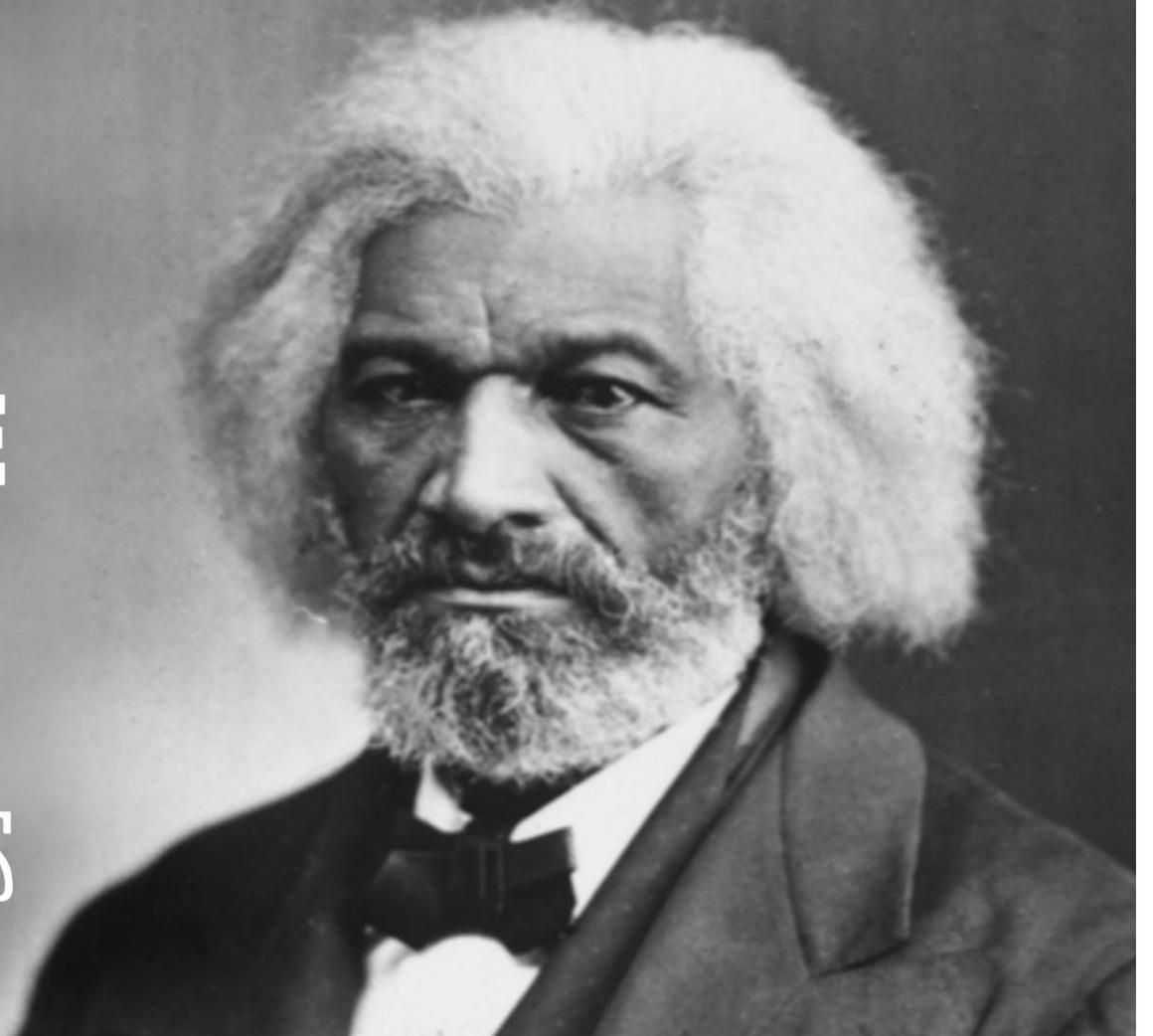
Image D

“

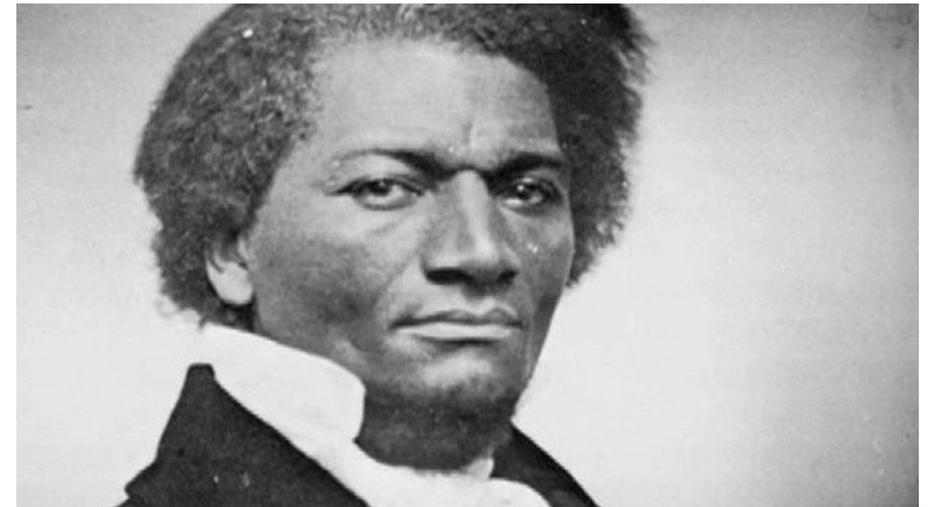
ONCE YOU LEARN TO
READ, YOU WILL BE
FOREVER FREE.

”

FREDERICK DOUGLASS



- **Robert Burns**, (1759 – 1796) was a famous Scottish poet and song lyricist.
-
- His work had a great influence on **Frederick Douglass** (1817-1895). Douglass was a famous author and orator who was instrumental in ending slavery in the USA.

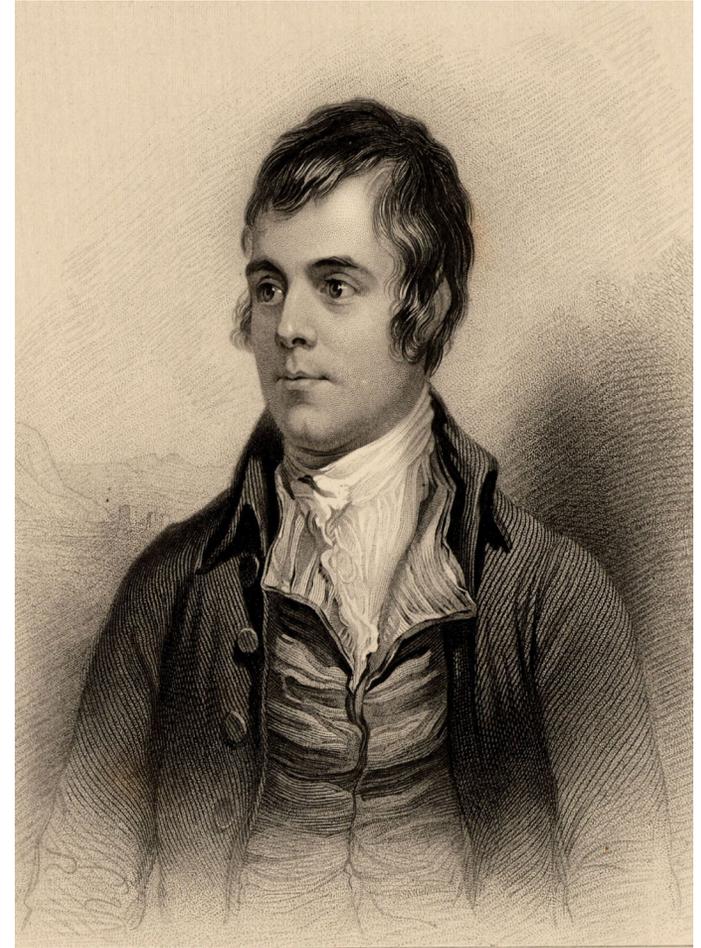


What is going on in the pictures?

- A = **Robert Burns** was a child labourer, together with his tenant farmer father.
- C = Burns wrote a famous poem titled 'To a Mouse' where he thinks about the injustice of him destroying a mouse's nest and compares its situation to the tragedies that humans experience.
-
-
- B = **Frederick Douglass** was a slave when he was a teenager on a plantation. He suffered regular physical and mental abuse.
- D = Douglass was a voracious reader. He believed that education and self discipline was the way for people of all races to live free and independent lives.

More About Robert Burns 1759-1796

- Robert Burns widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland and is celebrated worldwide. He is the best known of the poets who have written in the Scots dialect, but he also wrote political commentary in standard English.
-
- He is regarded as a pioneer of the Romantic movement and after his death he became an icon and inspiration to political and social movements across the world.
- In 1786, Burns was tempted to make a career in the West Indies, and he accepted a job as a book-keeper on a slave plantation in Jamaica. He faced several personal and financial difficulties and a new life abroad, even on a slave plantation, seemed attractive. However, the sudden success of a new publication of poems made him think again. He went on to write *The Slave's Lament*, 1792 and *A Man's a Man for a' That*, 1795, showing his commitment to the egalitarian ideals of the American and French Revolutions.



More About Frederick Douglass 1818-1895

- Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in 1818 in Maryland. He became one of the most famous intellectuals of his time, advising presidents and lecturing to thousands on a range of causes, including women's rights and Irish home rule.
- Among Douglass' writings are several autobiographies describing his experiences in slavery and his life after the American Civil War, including the well-known work *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.
- On his tours of Scotland between the 1845 and 1859 Douglass was able to pay homage to Burns, a man whose writing he deeply admired. He saw in him a kindred spirit; someone who *'broke loose from the moorings which society had thrown around him.'*



Compare the Writings of Burns and Douglass

- Read the four texts and consider the following questions:

- 1) Burns and Douglass write about different aspects of slavery (texts 1 & 3) What things does each writer emphasise? Do you think one description is more powerful than the other? Give reasons for your choice.

- 2) Both writers deal with themes of equality and inequality (texts 2 & 4) in different ways, but they agree that there is something about every human being that makes them equal. What things do they believe makes people equal despite social differences?

- 3) Douglass gives a vivid account of both the physical and the moral degradations inflicted on slaves. Which do you think is worse?

1) A Slave's Lament by Robert Burns (1792)

It was in sweet Senegal that my foes did me enthrall,
For the lands of Virginia,-ginia, O:
Torn from that lovely shore, and must never see it more;
And alas! I am weary, weary O:
Torn from that lovely shore, and must never see it more;
And alas! I am weary, weary O.

All on that charming coast is no bitter snow and frost,
Like the lands of Virginia,-ginia, O:
There streams for ever flow, and there flowers for ever blow,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:
There streams for ever flow, and there flowers for ever blow,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:

The burden I must bear, while the cruel scourge I fear,
In the lands of Virginia,-ginia, O;
And I think on friends most dear, with the bitter, bitter tear,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:
And I think on friends most dear, with the bitter, bitter tear,
And alas! I am weary, weary O:

2) A Man's A Man For A' That by Robert Burns (1795) (Standard English translation)

Is there for honest poverty
That hangs his head, and all that?
The coward slave, we pass him by -
We dare be poor for all that!
For all that, and all that,
Our toils obscure, and all that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gold for all that.

What though on homely fare we dine,
Wear rough grey tweed, and all that?
Give fools their silks, and knaves their wine -
A man is a man for all that.
For all that, and all that,
Their tinsel show, and all that,
The honest man, though ever so poor,
Is king of men for all that.

You see that fellow called 'a lord',
Who struts, and stares, and all that?
Though hundreds worship at his word,
He is but a dolt for all that.
For all that, and all that,

His ribboned, star, and all that,
The man of independent mind,
He looks and laughs at all that.

A prince can make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and all that!
But an honest man is above his might -
Good faith, he must not fault that
For all that, and all that,
Their dignities, and all that,
The pith of sense and pride of worth
Are higher rank than all that.

Then let us pray that come it may
(As come it will for a' that)
That Sense and Worth over all the earth
Shall take the prize and all that!
For all that, and all that,
It is coming yet for all that,
That man to man the world over
Shall brothers be for all that.

3) Excerpt from Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845)

Captain Anthony. . . was not considered a rich slaveholder. He owned two or three farms, and about thirty slaves. His farms and slaves were under the care of an overseer. The overseer's name was Plummer. Mr. Plummer was a miserable drunkard, a profane swearer, and a savage monster. He always went armed with a cowskin and a heavy cudgel. I have known him to cut and slash the women's heads so horribly, that even master would be enraged at his cruelty, and would threaten to whip him if he did not mind himself. Master, however, was not a humane slaveholder. It required extraordinary barbarity on the part of an overseer to affect him. He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slave-holding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it.

4) From Douglass's lecture on slavery, Rochester, USA, 1850

The slave is a man, "the image of God," but "a little lower than the angels;" possessing a soul, eternal and indestructible; capable of endless happiness, or immeasurable woe; a creature of hopes and fears, of affections and passions, of joys and sorrows, and he is endowed with those mysterious powers by which man soars above the things of time and sense, and grasps, with undying tenacity, the elevating and sublimely glorious idea of a God. It is such a being that is smitten and blasted. The first work of slavery is to mar and deface those characteristics of its victims which distinguish men from things, and persons from property. Its first aim is to destroy all sense of high moral and religious responsibility. It reduces man to a mere machine. It cuts him off from his Maker, it hides from him the laws of God, and leaves him to grope his way from time to eternity in the dark, under the arbitrary and despotic control of a frail, depraved, and sinful fellow-man. As the serpent-charmer of India is compelled to extract the deadly teeth of his venomous prey before he is able to handle him with impunity, so the slaveholder must strike down the conscience of the slave before he can obtain the entire mastery over his victim.

Some Further Questions to Think About/Discuss

1) How different do you think the childhood experiences of Burns (as a labourer) and Douglass (as a slave) might have been?

2) To what extent can Burns put himself in the shoes of a victim of the trans-Atlantic slave trade?

•

3) How can it be seen that the writings of Burns and Douglass were heavily influenced by the American Revolution and the sentiment of the first line from the Declaration of Independence: *'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'*.

4) To what extent is the journey towards emancipation, equality and freedom an interconnected one across races and culture? To what extent are they particular to different groups? Is it important that they are treated as such?

Suggested Task – Opinion Writing

Equality or Difference?

Burns and Douglass lived in different places and times, yet they share a belief in the fundamental equality of all people.

Do you agree with this sentiment or do you think that in 2021 we need to think more closely about our different experiences and backgrounds?

Some Vocabulary

Cotter= a tenant farmer, occupying a cottage and the land attached to it.

Abolition = the action of abolishing a system, practice, or institution

emancipation = the act or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions; liberation.

Universalism = the principle that treatment of people should be the same across all groups independent of culture, race, ethnicity, gender and religion.

Struggle (political) = strive to achieve or attain something in the face of difficulty or resistance.

Romanticism = a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.

Suggested Resources

- Frederick Douglass and Robert Burns: The American Abolitionist and Scotland - History Scotland
-
- BBC Scotland - Burns in the USA, Robert Burns was an inspiration to many Americans, including Frederick Douglass (African-American social reformer)
-
- BBC Scotland - Burns in the USA, From the New York streets to the White House, many can identify with Robert Burns' ethos