from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass
by Frederick Douglass

LITERARY FOCUS: METAPHOR
Writers use metaphors to help us see things in new, imaginative ways. A metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two things that are basically unalike. Metaphors, unlike similes, do not use the words like, as, or resembles.

A poet, for example, describes the moon by saying, “The moon was a ghostly galleon.” This metaphor compares the moon moving across the night sky to a sailing ship. Another writer might express the metaphor differently and say, “The moon sails across the sky.”

As you near the end of this selection, look for a powerful metaphor. In it, Douglass compares a personal victory to coming back from the dead: “It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom.” By connecting a physical victory with a victory of the soul, this metaphor helps readers understand the depth of Douglass’s feelings.

READING SKILLS: ANALYZING A WRITER’S PURPOSE
Frederick Douglass clearly states his purpose in the first paragraph of this excerpt. To make his point clear and dramatic, he uses narration and description. He uses narration to tell us about a series of related events. He uses descriptive language to help us imagine his pain.

Use the Skill As you read, look for ways in which Douglass uses narration and description to describe the horrors of slavery. You will notice that Douglass also uses some powerful metaphors to describe his experience.

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery. Soon after his birth, Douglass was separated from his mother. At the age of eight, he was sent to Baltimore to work as a house servant. Later he was sent to the country to work in the fields. This selection describes an event that happened when Douglass was sixteen years old. At that time, Douglass was “owned” by a man named Thomas. Another man, Mr. Covey, had paid Thomas to use Douglass for one year.
I have already intimated that my condition was much worse, during the first six months of my stay at Mr. Covey’s, than in the last six. The circumstances leading to the change in Mr. Covey’s course toward me form an epoch\textsuperscript{1} in my humble history. You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man. On one of the hottest days of the month of August, 1833, Bill Smith, William Hughes, a slave named Eli, and myself, were engaged in fanning\textsuperscript{2} wheat. Hughes was clearing the fanned wheat from before the fan. Eli was turning, Smith was feeding, and I was carrying wheat to the fan. The work was simple, requiring strength rather than intellect; yet, to one entirely unused to such work, it came very hard.

About three o’clock of that day, I broke down; my strength failed me; I was seized with a violent aching of the head, attended with extreme dizziness; I trembled in every limb. Finding what was coming, I nerved myself up, feeling it would never do to stop work. I stood as long as I could stagger to the hopper with grain. When I could stand no longer, I fell, and felt as if held down by an immense weight. The fan of course stopped; everyone had his own work to do; and no one could do the work of the other, and have his own go on at the same time.

Mr. Covey was at the house, about one hundred yards from the treading-yard where we were fanning. On hearing the fan stop, he left immediately, and came to the spot where we were. He hastily inquired what the matter was. Bill answered that I was sick, and there was no one to bring wheat to the fan. I had by this time crawled away under the side of the post-and-rail fence by which the yard was enclosed, hoping to find relief by getting out of the sun. He then asked where I was. He was told by one of the hands.

He came to the spot, and, after looking at me awhile, asked me what was the matter. I told him as well as I could, for I scarce had strength to speak. He then gave me a savage kick in the side, and told me to get up. I tried to do so, but fell back in the attempt. He gave me another kick, and again told me to rise. I again tried, and succeeded in gaining my feet; but, stooping to get the tub with which I was feeding the fan, I again staggered and fell. While down in this situation, Mr. Covey took up the hickory slat with which Hughes had been striking off the half-bushel measure, and with it gave me a heavy blow upon the head, making a large wound, and the blood ran freely; and with this again told me to get up. I made no effort to comply, having now made up my mind to let him do his worst. In a short time after receiving this blow, my head grew better. Mr. Covey had now left me to my fate.

Author’s Purpose: In lines 2-7, Douglass describes his purpose for writing. Describe this purpose in your own words.

Clarify: What happens to Douglass while he is fanning wheat (lines 14-20)?

Word Study: A treading yard (line 25) was an area where wheat was separated into usable grain. The name comes from the verb tread, which means “step on” or “walk over.” After the wheat was spread, horses walked over it to separate the usable grains.

Interpret: Underline the main events Douglass narrates in lines 33-47. Would you describe Douglass’s tone as angry or emotional?

1. epoch (\textsuperscript{ep\textbackslash nk}) n.: noteworthy period of time.
2. fanning wheat: separating out usable grain.
At this moment I resolved, for the first time, to go to my master, enter a complaint, and ask his protection. In order to do this, I must that afternoon walk seven miles; and this, under the circumstances, was truly a severe undertaking. I was exceedingly feeble; made so as much by the kicks and blows which I received, as by the severe fit of sickness to which I had been subjected. I, however, watched my chance, while Covey was looking in an opposite direction, and started for St. Michael’s. I succeeded in getting a considerable distance on my way to the woods, when Covey discovered me, and called after me to come back, threatening what he would do if I did not come. I disregarded both his calls and his threats, and made my way to the woods as fast as my feeble state would allow; and thinking I might be overhauled by him if I kept the road, I walked through the woods, keeping far enough from the road to avoid detection, and near enough to prevent losing my way.

I had not gone far before my little strength again failed me. I could go no farther. I fell down, and lay for a considerable time. The blood was yet oozing from the wound on my head. For a time I thought I should bleed to death; and think now that I should have done so, but that the blood so matted my hair as to stop the wound. After lying there about three quarters of an hour, I nerved myself up again, and started on my way, through bogs and briers, barefooted and bareheaded, tearing my feet sometimes at nearly every step; and after a journey of about seven miles, occupying some five hours to perform it, I arrived at master’s store. I then presented an appearance enough to affect any but a heart of iron. From the crown of my head to my feet, I was covered with blood. My hair was all clotted with dust and blood; my shirt was stiff with blood. I suppose I looked like a man who had escaped a den of wild beasts, and barely escaped them.

In this state I appeared before my master, humbly entreating him to interpose his authority for my protection. I told him all the circumstances as well as I could, and it seemed, as I spoke, at times to affect him. He would then walk the floor, and seek to justify Covey by saying he expected I deserved it. He asked me what I wanted. I told him, to let me get a new home; that as sure as I lived with Mr. Covey again, I should live with but to die with him; that Covey would surely kill me; he was in a fair way for it. Master Thomas ridiculed the idea that there was any danger of Mr. Covey’s killing me, and said that he knew Mr. Covey; that he was a good man, and that he could not think of taking me from him; that, should he do so, he would lose the whole year’s wages; that I belonged to Mr. Covey for one year, and that I must go back to him, come what might; and that I must not trouble him with any more stories, or that he would

Pause at line 48. What does Douglass decide to do for the first time in his life? Circle the answer.

Infer: Why does Douglass ignore Covey’s calls and threats (lines 57-63)?

Interpret: Re-read lines 74-79. What does Douglass mean when he says his appearance would move anyone but someone with a “heart of iron” (line 75)?
himself get hold of me. After threatening me thus, he gave me a very large dose of salts, telling me that I might remain in St. Michael’s that night, (it being quite late,) but that I must be off back to Mr. Covey’s early in the morning; and that if I did not, he would get hold of me, which meant that he would whip me.

I remained all night, and, according to his orders, I started off to Covey’s in the morning, (Saturday morning,) wearied in body and broken in spirit. I got no supper that night, or breakfast that morning. I reached Covey’s about nine o’clock; and just as I was getting over the fence that divided Mrs. Kemp’s fields from ours, outran Covey with his cow skin, to give me another whipping. Before he could reach me, I succeeded in getting to the cornfield; and as the corn was very high, it afforded me the means of hiding. He seemed very angry, and searched for me a long time. My behavior was altogether unaccountable. He finally gave up the chase, thinking, I suppose, that I must come home for something to eat; he would give himself no further trouble in looking for me. I spent that day mostly in the woods, having the alternative before me,—to go home and be whipped to death, or stay in the woods and be starved to death.

That night, I fell in with Sandy Jenkins, a slave with whom I was somewhat acquainted. Sandy had a free wife who lived about four miles from Mr. Covey’s; and it being Saturday, he was on his way to see her. I told him my circumstances, and he very kindly invited me to go home with him. I went home with him, and talked this whole matter over, and got his advice as to what course it was best for me to pursue. I found Sandy an old adviser. He told me, with great solemnity, I must go back to Covey; but that before I went, I must go with him into another part of the woods, where there was a certain root, which, if I would take some of it with me, carrying it always on my right side, would render it impossible for Mr. Covey, or any other white man, to whip me. He said he had carried it for years; and since he had done so, he had never received a blow, and never expected to while he carried it. I at first rejected the idea, that the simple carrying of a root in my pocket would have any such effect as he had said, and was not disposed to take it; but Sandy impressed the necessity with much earnestness, telling me it could do no harm, if it did no good. To please him, I at length took the root, and, according to his direction, carried it upon my right side. This was Sunday morning.

I immediately started for home; and upon entering the yard gate, out came Mr. Covey on his way to meeting. He spoke to me very kindly, bade me drive the pigs from a lot near by, and passed on towards the church. Now, this singular conduct of Mr. Covey really made me begin to think that there was

3. an old adviser: someone who can offer good advice.
something in the root which Sandy had given me; and had it been on any other day than Sunday, I could have attributed the conduct to no other cause than the influence of that root; and as it was, I was half inclined to think the root to be something more than I at first had taken it to be. All went well till Monday morning. On this morning, the virtue of the root was fully tested.

Long before daylight, I was called to go and rub, curry, and feed, the horses. I obeyed, and was glad to obey. But whilst thus engaged, whilst in the act of throwing down some blades from the loft, Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope; and just as I was half out of the loft, he caught hold of my legs, and was about tying me. As soon as I found what he was up to, I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, he holding to my legs, I was brought sprawling on the stable floor. 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, suitting 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. This gave me assurance, and I held him uneasy, causing the blood to run where I touched him with the ends of my fingers. Mr. Covey soon called out to Hughes for help. Hughes came, and, while Covey held me, attempted to tie my right hand. While he was in the act of doing so, I watched my chance, and gave him a heavy kick close under the ribs.

This kick fairly sickened Hughes, so that he left me in the hands of Mr. Covey. This kick had the effect of not only weakening Hughes, but Covey also. When he saw Hughes bending over with pain, his courage quailed. He asked me if I meant to persist in my resistance. I told him I did, come what might; that he had used me like a brute for six months, and that I was determined to be used so no longer. With that, he strove to drag me to a stick that was lying just out of the stable door. He meant to knock me down. But just as he was leaning over to get the stick, I seized him with both hands by his collar, and brought him by a sudden snatch to the ground. By this time, Bill came. Covey called upon him for assistance. Bill wanted to know what he could do. Covey said, “Take hold of him, take hold of him!” Bill said his master hired him out to work, and not to help to whip me; so he left Covey and myself to fight our own battle out. We were at it for nearly two hours. Covey at length let me go, puffing and blowing at a great rate, saying that if I had not resisted, he would not have whipped me half so much. The truth was, that he had not whipped me at all. I considered him as getting entirely the worst end of the bargain;

---

Analyze: Circle the figure of speech

Douglass uses to describe Covey’s reaction to his resistance (line 163). Is this comparison a metaphor or a simile? Explain. Then explain the effect of this figure of speech.

Identify: Pause at line 175. Underline the reason Douglass gives for his determination to resist Mr. Covey.

Identify: For how long did Covey and Douglass fight? Underline the words that tell you.

4. quailed v.: faltered.
for he had drawn no blood from me, but I had from him. The whole six months afterwards, that I spent with Mr. Covey, he never laid the weight of his finger upon me in anger. He would occasionally say, he didn’t want to get hold of me again. “No,” thought I, “you need not; for you will come off worse than you did before.”

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 a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me.

Interpret: Circle the metaphor Douglass uses to describe freedom (Line 196). What truth does the comparison reveal?

Compare & Contrast: How does the tone of the final paragraph differ from the tone of the rest of the story?

Identify: Locate and circle another metaphor, in lines 203-204. What three comparisons does Douglass make in it?

5. resurrection n.: coming back to life.
**Reading Skills: Analyzing a Writer’s Purpose** Complete this chart to show how Douglass supports his purpose, which is stated in the first paragraph of the text. First, state Douglass’s purpose, using his own words. Then, find examples of description and narration that support his purpose. Also, find at least one strong metaphor that supports his purpose.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author’s Purpose</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of Narration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Strong Metaphors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CONTEXT CLUES**
Underline the context clue that helps you guess at the meaning of each boldface word below. Then, write the word’s meaning in the space provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTEXT</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As I watched the trees <strong>expiring</strong>, I realized I could not let them die.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The <strong>solemnity</strong> of the occasion was evident: Everyone was quiet and serious.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She <strong>intimated</strong> that Sam lied, a hint that would cause her trouble later.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The boy tried to <strong>comply</strong> with the order, but his mother refused to let him obey it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A metaphor is a figure of speech that makes a comparison between two seemingly unlike things without using a connective word such as like, as, than, or resembles.

DIRECTIONS: The chart below lists some of the types of metaphor. List examples of each type that you find in the selection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Metaphor</th>
<th>Example from Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit metaphors</td>
<td>Maria is the sunshine of my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implied metaphors</td>
<td>Maria shines upon all who meet her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended metaphors</td>
<td>Maria arises each morning, bringing light into the world and warming all who meet her.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>