**Anne’s Teaching Notes 2-7-17**  
\* passages from Douglass to work with   
p. 43: pen in cracked feet  
p. 47: true to self  
**p. 49: "if you teach [him] how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave....it could do…a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy."   
p. 55: "I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. it had given me a  view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out....Anything, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me."**  
p. 73: ever-present thief  
p. 76f: apostrophe to ships  
p. 77: slave made a man  
p. 83: slave in form/fact (cf. p. 101, striking of white carpenters reaches him not in form, but in fact)  
p. 85: confusion of freedom/dissipation  
p. 86: religion of the south a covering for the most horrid crimes  
p. 89: Sabbath schools  
p. 89footnote: trickery  
p. 103: improved conditions--> increased desire to be free  
contented slave a thoughtless one  
p. 105: stating no facts about his escape  
 **Wendy Ryden, “Frederick Douglas’s Critical Model,” Journal of Basic Writing 24, 1 (2005): 4- :** [**http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ737690.pdf**](http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ737690.pdf)Douglass’s Narrative a major textual site of perpetuating ideology of the “literacy myth,” culturally conservative belief in unqualified developmental power of literacy; but a close reading reveals a more complicated, radical notion of literacy acquisition: “learning to read had been a curse: a view of my wretched condition, without remedy, pit without a ladder….”  
“the literacy myth” and the “romanticized power of education,” where “a flower girl can become a duchess through education”…“the easy and unfounded assumption that better literacy . . . leads to economic development, cultural progress, and individual improvement”….English studies is inspired by a certain  kind of disciplinary romance  
building on Deborah Brandt’s emphasis on literacy as a  communal, intersubjective activityà “the myth includes not only  the mistaken assumption that literacy begets economic freedom, but also  the fallacy that literate persons think better than do non-literate persons”  
and that literacy is largely a matter of individual development. Through the literacy myth, we place faith in the abstraction that language, like knowledge,  is empowering without asking how, for whom, and at whose expense this empowerment occurs.   
Douglass’s critical presentation of literacy acquisition is often obscured and absorbed by the larger prevailing cultural narrative of the literacy myth…  
Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates, who identified the paradoxical attempts of Douglass to author himself through appropriation of the Master’s language… “by seizing the white word, does Douglass become inscribed in it?”   
Douglass’s “definitions of literacy” shift as he demonstrates an “understanding of literacy as a system of self-representation . . . and as an avenue for political representation as he attempts to speak and write for an oppressed people without alienating his white readership”   
students tend to read the work transparently  
in classrooms, Douglass’s literacy narrative becomes a morality tale, a  way of shaming lackadaisical pupils, especially African American and other  minority students, into an appreciation for what they have, and at the same time reaffirming our cultural literacy myth…. “Too often, readers conceive literacy . . . as an emancipating skill which leverages the slave out of bondage and into freedom.”   
Douglass’s assumption of iconic status results in a conservative absorption of the depiction of his relationship to literacy.  
Douglass grants a significant role to literacy in helping him conceive of himself as a free man….”Commandeering American myths of self-reliance and heroic rebellion to describe his escape from slavery.”  
But Douglass’s relationship to literacy and freedomis far more complex: “that very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish” (42).   
On a psychological level, Douglass’s literacy acquisition is an embattled and bittersweet process and a far cry from the liberatory discourse… a sense of disempowerment ultimately leads him out of slavery…. the realization of the limitations of literacy spurs Douglass on to his quest for both psychological and material emancipation.  
literacy is, without doubt, essential to ending Douglass’s mentality of enslavement…But not everyone who is literate in the text experiences the enlightenment that Douglass does. For example, literacy, paralleling religion, brings no enlightenment to the slave owners. And neither does it to the poor white children whom Douglass bribes and tricks into teaching him his letters. Perhaps more importantly, knowledge does not bring these young people power….. actual bread is more valuable to the urchins than the knowledge they possess: they have knowledge but no food to eat… Knowledge does not improve their condition… education in and of itself will not lead to psychological or material remedy.  
Quite in opposition to a literacy myth that values words over violence, Douglass declares the importance of physical resistance…Unequivocally, Douglass announces that “This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as a slave….”  
education helped prime Douglass for this pivotal moment…. But the progressive act of literacy instruction offered by the benevolently intended mistress would not have been enough to inspire the dramatic change of consciousness… the outcome of Douglass’s literacy is intrinsically connected to the conflicted conditions under which it was acquired…. for Douglass the desire for literacy does not become connected to critical consciousness until he hears Master Auld’s “inch/ell” pronouncement …. he “comes to understand . . . that he is not expelled from the social system . . . but rather inside it and oppressed. “  
this text is not assimilationist but rather [what Pratt calls] auto-ethnographic, involving “a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms"  
cf. Shoshana Felman: “if teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerability or the explosiveness of an (explicit or implicit)  critical and unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps not truly taught” (!)  
Without the crisis of interdiction, the embattled conditions under which the slave encounters education, Douglass might have acquired information from Mistress Auld, but without knowing how to read…in the critical sense  
literacy cannot be given…it must be taken if it is to produce the critical consciousness that leads to emancipation.  
the paradigm of oppositional, crisis-based learning is not one that can be easily transferred to the classroom  
We should be careful not to overstate the claims for the critical awareness engendered through this classroom genre and, more importantly, to be wary of the power of the literacy myth to absorb and appropriate critical models in a way that does disservice to the potential of critical literacy.