

# IN THE CLASSROOM

## THE THREE E'S:

*Bringing Good Fortune themes into the lives of 21<sup>st</sup> century young people*

### *Emancipation*

Examine what freedom means in our society today. Students may explore many different aspects of freedom, from personal freedoms to human rights. Specifically, personal freedom is a very important theme for young people when it comes to making “smart” decisions, avoiding peer pressure, and believing in oneself. Through emancipation, this generation will be able to confront the pressures and crisis of the world fluidly, creatively, and with confidence and love. We as young people are powerful, and have the opportunity to take charge of our lives, and make a change in this world.

### *Education*

Education implies academic excellence, something that I encourage *all* students to aim towards. Education is the arena in our lives where consistent effort will take us to the next height, where failure only means that we must find another angle, problem solve, keep working until we figure it out, keep digging until we uncover the answers. I push students to ponder the value and significance in education today. Why is it important? President Obama states, “No one’s written your destiny, you make your own future”. Have students explore what these words mean to them. (President Barack Obama’s *Back To School* speeches are good references for this “E”.)

### *Earnestness*

Earnestness is seriousness in intention, purpose, or effort; being sincerely zealous about what one loves to do. Help students find their passions, and find ways of letting them bring these out in healthy manners within the academic setting. Push the importance of perseverance, of determination, and of tackling daunting aspects of their dreams until these come into fruition. Emphasize the power of practice, practice, and more practice! Encourage students to be truly honest with themselves from schoolwork to personal matters. Provide platforms that will allow them to believe in themselves, and build self-confidence.

## **Projects:**

- *Drawing Connections.* Write an essay on how these three E’s represent certain aspects of your life as a young person today.
- *Camera, Action!* Act out certain scenes that represent one or more of the three E’s above.

- *Creative Touches.* Find two examples of how Anna represents each of the E's above. Accompany this with examples from your own life. This may be in writing or visually represented. (Example: make an E out of a folded poster board and write/draw your findings inside of it!)
- *Over and Above!* Research the history and progress of African American education in America (from slavery through Brown vs. Board through to education today). Create a picture-book that accompanies your researched facts.

### **Bonus: Two more E's!**

#### ***Expression***

Share with students the power of expression! Support creativity! We are not meant to be "cookie-cutters" of each other, losing ourselves in the influences and people around us. To students: there is no other out there that can do what you do, who can be who you are, who will make the unique impact you are destined to make. Believe in yourself, and you will find that from this belief in self, true expression emerges.

#### ***Excellence***

In striving towards excellence, I encourage students to recognize the power that they have within, acknowledge it in the hearts and minds of others, apply that power and inner intelligence in every circumstance in their lives, and use it to make this world a better place. To students: it is important not to run from challenges, to raise the bar and create high expectations inside of yourself whether or not the world around you is challenging and supporting you as you pursue your dreams. Excellence is not in doing things right all of the time; rather, excellence comes from knowing that you will put in your very best effort, regardless of if things go your way or not. Excellence is, as Mahatma Ghandi stated, about being the change we wish to see in the world. It lies, most importantly, in taking the gifts we have and giving back to the world. This is *power* and it lies, waiting, within us all!

### **GOOD FORTUNE THEMES**

#### **Family, Friendship, and Community:**

The presence of family and community underlies much of the experiences Anna has. From the presence of Mary and Daniel, her adopted family on the plantation, to Florence, Mama Bessie, and Mrs. Rosa in section three, Anna continually finds love, advice, and solace in the arms of this community and extended family. She is led to depend, on more than one occasion, on the family, friends, and community around her. Even further, the intuitive, comforting presence of her blood mother and her ancestors that appear are symbols of this

underlying theme. It is the imagined whispers of Mary that helps carry Anna through her escape, the spirit of her blood-mother who heals her sickness, the love and support of Daniel who helps keep her grounded.

### **Coming of Age**

Throughout the story, as Anna traverses nearly five years of her life, she faces many trials and tribulations that test her character. These all serve to teach her essential lessons in her young life. Though many of the experiences Anna goes through tests her will and resolve to maintain a sense of hope (being beaten by the whip, accosted by Master Jeffrey, and facing an extremely dangerous road of escape) she finds herself pulling through, perhaps shaken, but never broken. Also indicative of this theme are the emotions that carry her through the book: her fears, doubts, motives, excitement, and resolve that strengthen her character as she moves through her teen years.

### **A Place for Love**

In *Good Fortune*, Anna is faced with several different facets of love and through her “coming of age” she naturally watches the unfolding of love in its different forms. Through her relationship with John, she discovers a world, both sacred and forbidden, on the plantation that serves as a dangerous place to invest her heart. Subsequently, with her separation from John for several years, Anna learns how to place life in perspective, and teaches herself how to lean on her own heart, her aspirations and goals. Even after John miraculously finds Anna in the end, she has learned how to place her heart in different arenas- her schooling, her teaching, her community- understanding that all things have a time to come, and a time to go. At the same time, the love of *family* permeates nearly everything that Anna finds herself involved with. This universal love serves as a source of hope and certainly plays a large role in Anna’s perseverance.

To place this theme in a larger context, the concept of love is a strained and difficult ideal in the history of slavery, for how could one place their heart in anything that, at any moment, could suddenly be torn away? Anna experiences some of these tragic aspects of slavery what with her mother’s death, John’s beating, the auction block scene, etc. It is important to understand that love’s place on the grand scale of the African American family sat rightfully next to a constant, nearly deadening sense of dread. This is the reality slavery created.

### **Strength in the face of Injustice and Inhumanity:**

Anna and her loved ones constantly face some form of inhumanity and injustice, themes representative of the system she was sold into. Immediately from the scenes describing Anna’s secret where she taught herself how to read and write, readers get a sense of the strength in character Anna has. Such strength was essential, too, for her escape north was not a journey that would have been successful had Anna not found the resolve and the desire to ache for freedom as much as she does. Other characters represent this theme as well; Daniel, Mrs.

Rosa, Tucker, and others all face certain situations in which we find their strength bleeding through.

### **Education as Freedom**

The theme of education as freedom has a leading role in the story. Through Anna's strong desire to get educated, there is a deep sense of freedom as being something more than physical liberation. This desire Anna has is continually fed throughout the story through her secret studies on the plantation, through her use of it as one of several incentives to keep running when things get tough, and in her reckless pursuit of education in Ohio. This concept can be felt in Anna's persistent efforts to gain (sometimes by reckless means) what she feels in her heart is rightfully hers. The transformation of education into a freedom visibly arises when Anna confronts Mrs. Rosa about the true nature of freedom. As a reader, we are also positioned to take from Anna's story the true weight and significance of the power of dreams in shaping what is manifested in reality.

### **Role of Religion**

Religion plays several different roles throughout the book. Though on the plantation, many of the slaves do not know how to read, slaves turn to the bible and its ideals to gain a sense of "freedom" and equality they did not find on earth. Anna and her family attended what were equivalent to church services, and even in freedom, religion plays a subtle, but key role in Anna's life. The book also opens the door to view the use of religion in another light. On the plantation, the slave master felt it necessary to use the bible as a justification for his deeds, and what he called his "superiority" to the black race.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

### **Author's Note**

1. What inspired the author to write this story?

### **Part One**

1. Share ways in which slaves "secretly" communicated between themselves.
2. There were two brief scenes that examined what went on at an auction block. Explain the role of the auction block. How do you think this affected families overall?
3. What role do the flashbacks play in the story? What do they tell us about Anna's past?
4. Compare and contrast some of the differences between a field hand and a house slave. If time permits, research other types of roles slaves fulfilled on a plantation in the south.
5. Why was Master Jeffrey such a huge threat to Anna, and other females on the plantation? How do you think this legacy of "rape" plays into the psychological

state of mind of slaves- both males and females? For example, what affects did the haunting presence of Master Jeffrey play on John?

6. Critical thinking: We heard story Uncle tell a story about a woman who took benefits from her Master's wife. Talk about the different reactions slaves may have had towards their plight. (think of the stance of those who were made to believe they deserved to be slaves, or those who gave up hope, etc.)
7. Consider the role of Christianity in the book. How did slave masters utilize this religion? What role did it play in Anna's life?

### Part Two

1. What events and aspects of Anna's character kept her alive during her escape?
2. Examine the presence of Native Americans in the book. It would be interesting to look at what role they played in slavery (from those who helped slaves reach freedom to those who owned slaves themselves).
3. In a broader sense, research the likelihood of slaves reaching north. Anna and Daniel escaped prior to the birth of the Underground Railroad. What factors were involved with helping them reach freedom? For broader research, examine the number of slaves that ran north versus those that chose to run south!
4. What incentives did Anna have to keep going when she felt she could no longer move any further? How did the presence of "ancestors" and the thoughts of her family assist her as she ran? Cite sources.
5. Anna is both aided and turned away by several people on her journey North. Discuss the different interactions she has as she makes her way North.
6. Discuss Tucker's capture and contemplate what might have happened had he lived through this capture.
7. How was the theme of family, friendship, and community present in this part of the story?

### Part Three

1. In part three, Daniel and Anna reach Ohio. What were they required to do as free blacks in the state? What does this say about racial attitudes in the free state of Ohio during that time period? <http://www.slavenorth.com/ohio.htm>
2. What sorts of obstacles did Daniel and Anna face in freedom? (Examples: It was difficult for Daniel to find a job, etc.)
3. What dream continued to burn in Anna's heart? What upset her when she reached freedom? How did she go about trying to achieve that dream?
4. What is Mrs. Rosa's background? She mentions two African American poets, Phyllis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammond. What role did these poets play in African American history?
5. Caldwell, though he looks like a white man, is, by law, black. Discuss the one-drop-rule, and the role light skinned people of color played in society. Depending on level of class, you may want to look into concepts such as the notion of "passing", the brown paper bag rule, the "tragic mulatto", stories such as Charles Chestnutt's *the Wife of My Youth*, etc.

6. What kind of work does the book suggest Caldwell did, and why was he killed?
7. In receiving an education, Anna felt that it was important, or necessary to give back her gifts to the community. Why do you think this was so?

## PROSPECTIVE PROJECTS

### **Book-Related**

- *Storybook*: Using the different forms of figurative language, pick a scene in the book and retell it from the point of view of a secondary character.
- *Mock Trial*: After Rodney was killed in the book, Anna and the community briefly mention African Americans and injustice within the court system. Examine this by doing a classroom mock trial on the Dred Scott Case, having students argue on two different sides of the law. (For high school).
- *In her Shoes*: Have students write a sensory poem about Anna's experiences when escaping north. Let them draw images to accompany each stanza.
- *Creating Authors*: Have students write an alternative ending to the book.

### **Using Outside Resources:**

- Write responses to Frederick Douglas's *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July* speech, using instances in the book to support viewpoints.
- With the class, find the key points in Dr. Martin Luther King's *I Have A Dream Speech*. Discuss Anna's dream and how it ties in with some of Dr. King's key points. As a project, have students write their own *I Have A Dream* speeches.
- Trace early African American literary writers, and create a mini-biography book of them. And write a book of mini-biographies on each.
- Pick a theme or question such as "what is freedom?" and have students respond to the question in the words of historical black writers who tackled this particular theme or question. (Research involved- high school).
- Using knowledge and research of the slave trade, (the triangular trade), speculate or create a project on where Anna comes from. As a creative activity, trace her roots back to a country, the path she took across the middle passage, and share why you came up with this background. (This could be presented in paper form, as a poem, a short skit, or students may want to take on the role of "reporter".

### **Up for conversation!**

Certain passages may spark conversations that pull history into the mix.

*Examples:*

- The fate of black woman on the plantation and how this affected both black and white woman alike.
- The presence of the "mulatto" women and why lighter skin was historically seen as more desirable. Discuss the concept of passing. (Text to look at: James Weldon Johnson's *The Auto-biography of an Ex-Colored Man*)

- Reasons why such a system as slavery was sustained in the south. Look at the economic, political, and social basis. (It was the South's only economic source of profit; it provided the basis for their social hierarchy that constituted the heart and soul of social politics in the south; the involvement of poor whites, etc.)
- What led to slave revolts? Examine the history behind them.
- Examine how in many cases, education was like a double sided sword for African Americans who on the one hand wanted to be educated, but on the other, detested it in that an education made one more intellectually aware of the unjust system from which he could not escape. (Sources: Frederick Douglas' slave narrative and the trope of the "talking book" in other early Black slave narratives)

### **Stepping further:**

- Look at the psychological presence of slavery today.
- Examining different forms of slavery around the world both historically and the different types of "slaver" that exist today.

### **NOTES:**

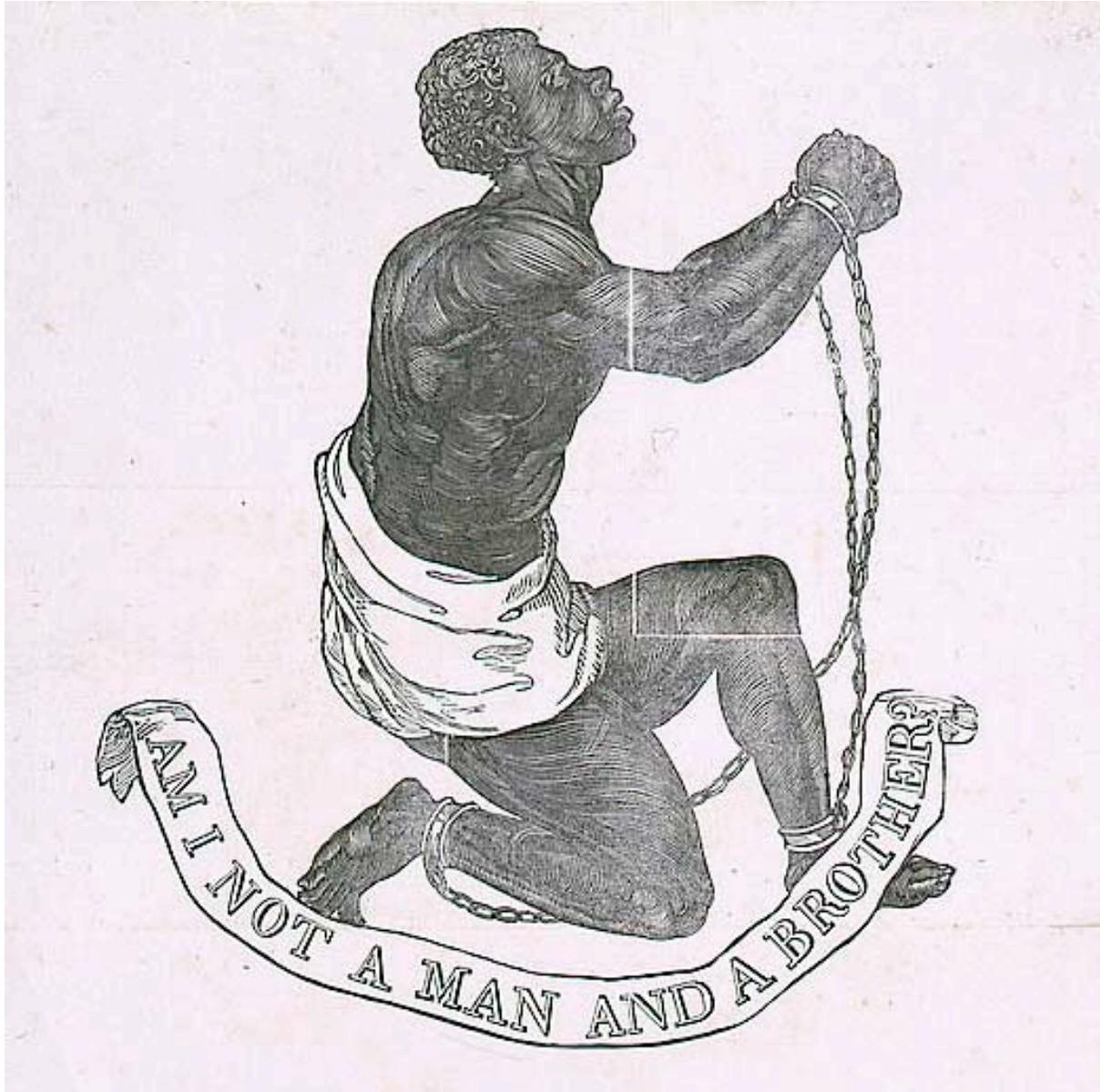
Be sure to glance over the Facts and Fiction section of Good Fortune. Have fun!

### **EXTRA LINKS**

[http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground\\_railroad/myths.htm](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground_railroad/myths.htm)

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/>

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/>



An image of a slave in chains appears on the 1837 publication of John Greenleaf Whittier's antislavery poem, "Our Countrymen in Chains."  
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