

# A comparison of frederick douglass, benjamin franklin assignment

[History](#)



In our class, Survey of American Literature, we have read and analyzed the classic American works that have influenced and in some cases ingrained themselves into our country's identity and belief system. Among those studied has been Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, Ralph Wald Emerson essays, The American Scholar and Self-Reliance, and Frederick Douglass' Narrative. Each of these covers a vast amount of subjects that could be discussed, but one that proves most compelling is the topic of education.

These three men, who come from different life circumstances and have earned philosophies of life, each came to define the uses of education in their own ways. However, they do all seem to express the notion that education can be used to empower one's self. In Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography, comes through to me as a perfect example of the American dream, that being the idea that no matter where you come from, you can achieve almost anything with hard work and dedication. Coming from a lower-middle class Boston family to being one of the most famous Americans of all time is the classic rags to riches story that he himself lived out.

The way he achieved this as by being self-educated. When looking at Franklin's life, it could be said that he is a Renaissance man because he did so many things; he was a printer, a writer, an inventor, a scientist, and a statesman, and the only thing he had a formal education of was of printing. This American dream that is still deeply ingrained in our society today though, always seemed to be a bit of a myth to me. I don't think it is right to say that if you are willing to work hard enough, you will always achieve success. Things are not that simple.

Of course hard work can get you places, but some people work very hard their entire lives and still don't achieve success due to unfair circumstances. I would say that success is achieved not only by hard work, but also by the right circumstances and a bit of luck. It seems to me that Franklin did not view education as what is important in life. What is important to him is what you accomplish in life. He talks about success and how to achieve it, and education is only part of that. " I grew convinced that Truth, Sincerity and Integrity In Dealings between Man and Man, were of the utmost Importance to the Felicity of Life... Fig. 268, Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography (Part 1 The Norton Anthology of American Literature. Not that education could be seen as unimportant to him. He did create the flirts ever almost certainly felt that education was of great importance. It is just that I think he viewed education as a necessary means to get to the greater goal of being a successful person. Education was a way to prepare oneself for success. Ralph Wald Emerson was a Transcendentalist, and therefore had a somewhat different take on education. He believed that all people are inherently divine.

According to him, we all know truth in hearts but we often don't recognize it or express it. I think he wants people to listen more closely to themselves for answers to their questions. Education can be used to inspire us and help us realize our truths. In The American Scholar, Emerson says the true sources of education are nature, the mind of the past (most influential being books), and the action taken of the heroic mind. In nature he believes we see a visible representation of what is in your self, and that is ultimately divine.

And because true wisdom lies within, books can help bring it out. What is most interesting to me is that of taking action with the knowledge you have. I think here he relates to Franklin in the thought that an education is no good if you don't go and use it. His definition of action: " The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action. Only so much I know as I have lived... " Fig. 519, Ralph Wald Emerson, *The American Scholar*, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

Without action, a person would never experience the life issues that they studied. That would make it impossible to fully understand or form an opinion over almost anything. Gaining knowledge will only be important if it is applied through action, and validated by action. Emerson sees education as way to inspire your own mind, ND in turn, help you on a road of self-discovery in your own wisdom. Frederick Douglass comes from the most difficult circumstances (to put it lightly), being that he was enslaved and a black American in the 19th century.

His autobiography is a story of self-discovery; he details how his growing awareness of his condition, through his self-acquired education, propelled him to re-imagine himself. He had to learn to think of himself as a human being rather than as a beast of burden, as a free man rather than as a slave. This required him to educate himself at the risk of brutal punishment and then to take the even greater risk of an escape attempt. After one failed try that could easily have cost him his life, he succeeded the second time.

Douglass' story is one of self-reliance. To him, education was necessary to his survival because it offered him a first step to get out off life of slavery. " I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom... Though conscious of the difficulty of learning without a teacher, I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read... " Fig. 946, Frederick Douglass, Each of these men, Franklin, Emerson, and Douglass, viewed the need for education for seemingly different purposes.

Franklin, who focused on how to be a successful person understood that education, was an important step in preparing oneself for future accomplishments. Emerson felt we all had the answers within, but saw education as a way to prompt our understanding of those inner truths and convince us to express them. Douglass used education for survival and a small ray of hope that he would not remain a slave forever. But what is true of all these men is that education was used to better themselves, they're understanding of the world around them, and to then educate others through their literary works. To educate the self is to empower the self.