Frederick Douglass is unique among American Slaves. Few slaves were given the opportunity to learn to read and write (Phillis Wheatley was another rare exception), and as Douglass discusses, the skill of reading was typically discouraged, which is to say that those caught engaging in education were verbally and physically abused.

Douglass was a great admirer of Franklin, and this admiration can be seen throughout his narrative. If Franklin's purpose was to teach others how Americans should live, Douglass's was to teach others about the plight of the slave and the necessity of abolition. But in making his argument for freedom, Douglass is making his argument for American values and what an American should be/represent.

Like Franklin, Douglass is a "self-made" man, coming to learn the importance of education, teaching himself how to read and write, beginning his life with very little and working his way toward being a prominent orator and leader.

As you begin reading his narrative, consider two things. First, the title, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. The emphasis here on the fact that he was a slave is significant, but not so much as the final emphasis on the narrative being written by himself. On one hand, we could consider this a matter of pride, which would parallel Franklin's vanity pretty well. The title, here, is more important, though, emphasizing his credibility. While many slave narratives were transcribed or edited by educated whites, Douglass's eloquence is surprising. These first hand accounts, then, take on a greater sense of sincerity and have a greater impact.

The second aspect is that it begins to set the tone of setting Douglass alone. Through his time of slavery, he is isolated from the other slaves, focusing on his own experience, and after he is free, feels isolated our of fear that he might be found and sent back south. The title builds this isolation into its structure. The Narrative is written by himself because he is by himself in this struggle, though it is the struggle of many.

The first four chapters pull us away from Douglass as he sets a tone and a historical background. They walk us through general violence, general information, the punishment of others, and build to brutal murder and violence, before moving back into his own experience in chapter 5. As you read, think about the effect this has on his own narrative when we get to it.