

THE CAMBRIA

Episode one – The trick box

❖ About the characters

Vincent Vincent is a middle-aged ex-civil servant who together with his daughter Colette, decides to record the story of Frederick Douglass's journey to Ireland in 1845 for Leanna, a little Nigerian girl they had got to know when she and her mother were living in Globe House, an asylum-seeker reception centre in Sligo, northwest Ireland.

Colette Vincent's daughter, had got to know Leanna's Nigerian mother in Sligo, and concocts the plan with her father Vincent to relate Frederick Douglass's story to Leanna.

Frederick Protagonist of the series. Born on a Maryland slave plantation in 1817, Frederick Douglass taught himself to read and write, and in 1838 he escaped to Pennsylvania. There he wrote his life story, *The Narrative of the Life of an American Slave*, which became a bestseller, and he was a marked man with a price on his head. He fled the United States on the paddle steamer *Cambria* out of Boston in August 1845, travelling under a false identity. He went on to become what Abraham Lincoln called "the most impressive man I ever met", and later became, until he resigned the post in protest against US policy, US ambassador to Haiti. His famous motto "**power concedes nothing without demand; it never did, and it never will**" gives an indication of the depth of his conviction, and how he earned his wisdom the hard way.

Matilda Matilda is the daughter of a slave-owner. A little girl who, in spite of being spoilt and precocious, still has the virtue of innocence and irresistible curiosity. She hasn't fully absorbed her father's indoctrination, and she forms a strong bond with Frederick. Mirabelle, the little spinning ballerina in her music box, is the only way she can personalise her muddled views on what she knows of slavery.





Discuss before listening:

- What do you know about the slavery in America? Why were there slaves in America? Who brought them there? From where? Where was slavery most common? What happened with slavery? When did it stop?
- What do you know about Ireland in the mid 1800's? What was life like there? Were people poor? Did they have good homes? Did they go to school? Who were the leaders of the country?

Discuss after listening:

- Why do you think it is important for Vincent and Colette to record a story for Leanna? Why do you think they have chosen to tell her the story of Frederick Douglass?
- Why do you think Matilda assumes Mr. Douglass is a minstrel? And why is Mr. Douglass offended so by it, do you think? Do you think minstrels still exist in society today? Explain your thoughts!
- How common was it, do you think, that a slave learned how to read and write? Do you think anyone could learn how to or was it just privileged slaves that would have a chance to learn?

Exercises after listening:

- Study and research: the life of Frederick Douglass. Find out everything you can about him and his life and how he has impacted today's society. Divide into small groups of three or four. Focus on one part of his life and make your own radio programme about it. Put together all the parts into your own radio series about Frederick Douglass.
- What was it like making a trans-Atlantic journey in the 1800's? How long did it take? What were the ships like? How much did a ticket cost? How cold was it? Pretend you are a person travelling either from Europe to America or from America to Europe in the mid-1800's. Write a journal from your travel.
- Study and research: the life of Falmouth Kearney. Did you know that president Obama's forefather emigrated from Ireland to the U.S. in the mid-1800's? Find out what you can about the president's ancestry.
- What was the Blue Riband? Who got it and what did it consist of? Did the Cunard line ever win it? How many ships were in the Cunard line?
- What was a minstrel? What were minstrel shows? Who were in the audience and what usually happened during such a show? What examples in literature, movies and music can you find that are based on minstrels? How do you think this has affected the perception of blacks in today's society?
- Check the facts: the author of this radio play has used some artistic freedom in terms of descriptions of the Cambria and the Blue Riband. Try to research and find facts about the ship and the award. Then compare them with the facts in the play and see what is true and what is not.



Useful links:

- About Frederick Douglass:

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/frederick-douglass#>

<http://www.biography.com/people/frederick-douglass-9278324#freedom-and-abolitionism>
(includes a short video biography of him)

<http://www.nps.gov/frdo/learn/historyculture/people.htm>

<http://global.britannica.com/biography/Frederick-Douglass>

<http://www.docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass55/douglass55.html>
(his book "My bondage and freedom")

- About the trans-Atlantic journey in the 1800's:

http://www.mattivfamily.com/immigration/journey_to_america/journey_to_america.html

<http://www.familyhistoryuncovered.com/sea-travel-in-the-1800s/>

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/passage.htm>

- About the slave-trade:

<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/slavetrade.htm>

- About Falmouth Kearney:

<http://www.thedunhamhouse.com/falmouthkearney.html>

<http://www.moneygall.com/trace-obamas-roots/obama-family-tree>

- About the Blue Riband:

https://youtu.be/O_YijpHgleg

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Riband

- About minstrels:

<http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/jackson/minstrel/minstrel.html>

<http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/huckfinn/minstrl.html>



Did you know?

"The Jazz singer" from 1927 is the world's first full-length sound feature film. It is about a Jewish man who performs as a blackface jazz singer

The main character was played by Al Jolson (real name Asa Yoelson) who was one of the best paid performers in Hollywood in the 1930's, specialized in Jewish and African-American music.

Jolson often performed in so called blackface makeup, a tradition from the minstrel shows.

Even though he often performed in blackface, Jolson fought racial discrimination and often worked really hard to make sure his African-American co-workers got equal treatment and same payment as him. He also brought many African-American performers to Hollywood and employed them in his shows.

Jolson was seen as one of the first to bring African-American music into the homes of whites.