

## **Lesson 12: Listen and Learn**

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“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.” Donald H. McGannon, (American, broadcasting industry executive during the formative years of the television industry, 1920–1984)

### **I Can’t Read, But I Can Learn**

Now I never did learn to read or write, but I did learn to listen and to learn from what other folks knew and talked about. Learning from others helped me understand this world better. What I learned help me make my own decisions about what was wrong and right. Even though most of my white friends were well educated and I was not, they learned from me too.

After I got free, I spent a good part of the year traveling around to the abolitionists’ meetings in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts. I met lots of people.

One of my friends was Franklin B. Sanborn; he was a writer for a newspaper. Mr. Sanborn took me to the homes of his friends. I was introduced to well-known people; writers, businessmen, bankers, and politicians, they were all abolitionists. They spoke about ways to end slavery that I never even thought of. Some of the families were very rich and I stayed in their beautiful big homes. I was there as their guest, we became friends and I ate at their tables and slept in their guestrooms, not in servant rooms. They lived very different lives from me, but that didn’t stop us from being friends. I had some good discussions with some folks, smart folks like Mr. Amos Bronson Alcott, he was a teacher, his wife and their daughter, Louisa May Alcott. Miss Louisa was a writer herself. “Little Women” is the name of one of her books.

### 30 Lessons In Love, Leadership and Legacy from Harriet Tubman

Mr. Horace Mann was a Massachusetts US House Representative. Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson, another writer, was also in on the discussions around Boston.

Frederick Douglass would be at some of these meetings and he was the only one besides me who knew what it was like to be a slave.

I was sitting around folks that ran the newspapers, wrote books, taught in colleges, but I couldn't read to learn what they taught. I didn't have to, I just listened and I learned about how the government worked, how they made their money, and how they could change folk's minds about slavery by writing in newspapers.

When I told them my story, they would write it in the paper to let other folks know how slavery was bad for the country. In our discussions, we talked about how it could take a war to change this country. They talked and I listened about who should be the president and how the right person in that office could end slavery.

As I listened, I started to understand how I really did have a right to be free. It was in the paper called The Constitution. In that paper written long before I was born, it says "All men are created equal." My friend John Brown let me know that I should consider myself as equal as any man. He even called me General Tubman. I said to all these smart people who taught me about the Constitution, "If you all really believe in this U.S. Constitution, then you all have to continue the struggle and be willing to fight to end slavery." As Frederick always said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress. If that means war, then we need to get ready for war." Before meeting Frederick and me, those white folks had only read about slavery, or saw some actors play like slaves. Some of them had never even been in the South. Frederick and I compared life in the North with life in the South for a colored person. We told them about growing up as a slave. I taught them the dances we did in the camp meetings back in Maryland and had those folks dancing and singing "Go Down, Moses" and "Steal Away to Jesus".

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They learned by listening to us, and we helped them understand why what they did to help was important. I learned enough from my experiences and from listening to them to tell them what I thought. Now that they knew more about what slavery is like, I knew if they were truly good people, they couldn't stop their

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writing and speaking until there was no more slavery in this country. I was proud that I got to tell my story my way, and teach these smart folks something they couldn't learn in school.

We got to know, trust, and understand each other just by talking and listening to each other.

**Lesson Learned: Develop your listening skills.**

**Seek to increase the diversity and cultural exchange in your group of friends. This leads to more equality, respect, and informed decisions.**

Harriet Tubman was not formally educated, but she was smart.

She knew how to be an active listener.

Education is powerful and life changing. Listening and hearing are the same, but different. Hearing does not necessarily mean understanding what you hear. When you are listening, there is a process of interpretation in order to understand the message. Active listening involves questioning what you heard, getting more information, and being able to respond with an exchange of ideas.

**Listen and Learn**

**Discussion questions:**

1. Are you an active listener?
2. Have you learned to talk less and listen more?
3. How do you become a better, active listener?

For tips on listening skills, visit: [www.harriettubmanbooks.com](http://www.harriettubmanbooks.com)