

# Fast Facts as Information Statements



Teachers often respond to students with information statements intended to clarify, explore, redirect, challenge, or synthesize student thinking. Fast facts may be used to prompt student thinking when making meaning of student responses following the Zoom-In activity.

## Fast Facts Sojourner Truth (1797–1883)

### Who was Sojourner Truth?

- A Black woman born into slavery as Isabella Bomfree in Ulster County, NY in 1797.
- After running away and buying her freedom in 1827, she became a famous speaker and activist.
- In 1843, she renamed herself Sojourner Truth in honor of her religious calling to preach the truth.
- Truth never learned to read or write, but she dictated her autobiography, [The Narrative of Sojourner Truth](#), copies of which she sold to support herself and her speaking career.

### What did she believe?

- Truth spoke often and persuasively in favor of abolishing slavery, promoting greater rights for women, and limiting the sale of alcoholic beverages.
- Arguably her most famous speech, called "[Ain't I A Woman?](#)" spoke to the particular experience of Black women in the United States facing intersecting prejudices against their race and gender.

### When did she live?

- Sojourner Truth was born in 1797 and died in 1883, at the age of 86.
- When Truth was born in 1797, chattel slavery was legal in her home state of New York and in much of the young United States. At the time of her death, it was banned throughout the Union.

### Where did she travel?

- Truth was born in Ulster County, NY. Over the course of her life, she also lived in New Paltz, NY; New York City, NY; Northampton, MA; Harmonia, MI; and Battle Creek, MI.
- She traveled all across the country on speaking tours between the 1840s and her death in the 1880s.

### Why did she advocate?

- In the 1830s, Truth began participating in the religious revivals sweeping through the country during the [Second Great Awakening](#) and became a popular speaker preaching the Christian gospel and encouraging people to become more devout Christians.
- Through her religious awakening, Truth became involved in the abolition movement, the women's rights movement, and the temperance movement.

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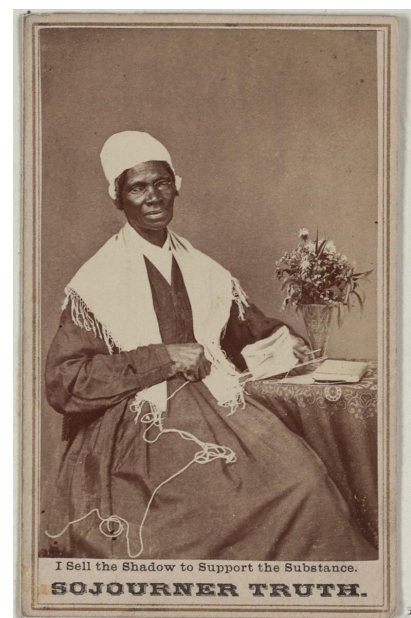
## Photography in the 19th Century

- Photography as a medium is only about 200 years old.
- The earliest photographic technologies were developed in the late 1820s and early 1830s by French scientists Joseph Nicéphore Niépce and Louis Daguerre.
- In 1839, Daguerre created a new method of photography that he named after himself: **the daguerreotype**. This process created vivid and detailed images by exposing light-sensitive silver plates to light and then bathing the plate in a solution of silver chloride, fixing an image in place and preventing it from changing with further light exposure.
- Daguerreotypes had a major flaw, however: They created images that were unique and could not be reproduced. They were also very expensive.
- Later technologies like the **albumen print** (made with egg whites) were cheaper and allowed for the creation of multiple photographic prints based on the negative of one image.
- Technologies like the albumen print allowed for the popularity of the **carte-de-visite**, a calling card with a person's portrait on it. These cards would commonly be exchanged on birthdays and holidays and during visits.
- Sojourner Truth sold these albumen print calling cards to support her activism.

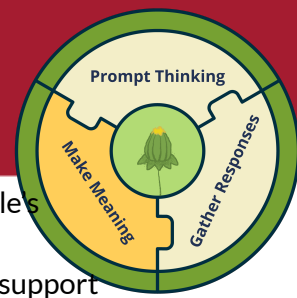


## “I sell the shadow...”

- Truth sold albumen printed calling cards (“cartes-de-visite”) with her portrait on them.
- These images were captioned with the phrase “**I sell the shadow to support the substance.**”
- The “shadow” refers to Truth’s reproduced image, which is an insubstantial version of who she is. The “substance” is Truth herself—and her religious and advocacy work.
- Truth is pictured seated in ¾ view in conservative clothing (a shawl and bonnet) and pictured with objects of domestic life: knitting, flowers, [a book](#). These objects send a message not only that Truth is respectable but that she is fully human and deserving of human treatment.
- This image and others like it respond to a brutal history of photographic images being used to dehumanize African Americans, especially the [Zealy Daguerreotypes](#), which



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were images taken of enslaved people in 1850 and used as evidence of Black people's supposed genetic inferiority to White people.

- Fellow abolitionist Frederick Douglass, like Sojourner Truth, used photography to support himself and to present his respectability and humanity as a Black man. Douglass was the [most photographed man](#) of the 19th century.

## Further Reading

- [Introduction - Sojourner Truth: A Resource Guide](#)
- [Sojourner Truth and the Power of a Portrait | Teaching with the Library of Congress](#)
- [Biography: Sojourner Truth](#)
- [Ain't I a Woman? A Suffrage Story for Black History Month | Teaching with the Library of Congress](#)
- [The History of Photography: Pinholes and Polaroids to Digital Images](#)
- [A Brief History of Photography: Part 11 – Early Portrait Photography](#)
- [The First Photos of Enslaved People Raise Many Questions About the Ethics of Viewing - The New York Times](#)

## References

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