



Curriculum Guide for

Momma Kemba as Sojourner Truth

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY
MOMMA KEMBA - ANNA M. JOHNSON-WEBB

Table of Contents

About Wild Swan Theater	3
About American Sign Language	4
About Momma Kemba	5
About Sojourner Truth: Historical Profile	6 - 7
Ain't I a Woman?	8
A History of Slavery in North America	9
About the Underground Railroad	10
Underground Railroad Code Words and Phrases	11
Pre-Performance Activities	
Vocabulary	12
Post Performance Activities	
Sequencing Activity	13
Discussion Topics	14
Related Activities	15
Amazing Maze: A Game of Trust	16
Miscellaneous Activities	17
Sources	18

The study guide was compiled using information contributed by Momma Kemba Anna M. Johnson-Webb, and the Wild Swan Theater staff.

About Wild Swan Theater

MISSION STATEMENT:

Wild Swan Theater is dedicated to producing professional theater of the highest artistic quality for families and to making that theater accessible to low income, minority and disabled children through low ticket prices and innovative outreach programs.

HISTORY AND ACTIVITIES:

Wild Swan Theater was founded in 1980. Since its inception, the company of professional adult actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, and American Sign Language interpreters has performed for hundreds of thousands of children. As well as many public performances in its home base of Ann Arbor, the company tours regularly to theaters, museums and public libraries as well as offering residencies and workshops at schools and hospitals serving disabled children statewide. This year the company will give 175 performances for an audience of over 50,000 children and their families.

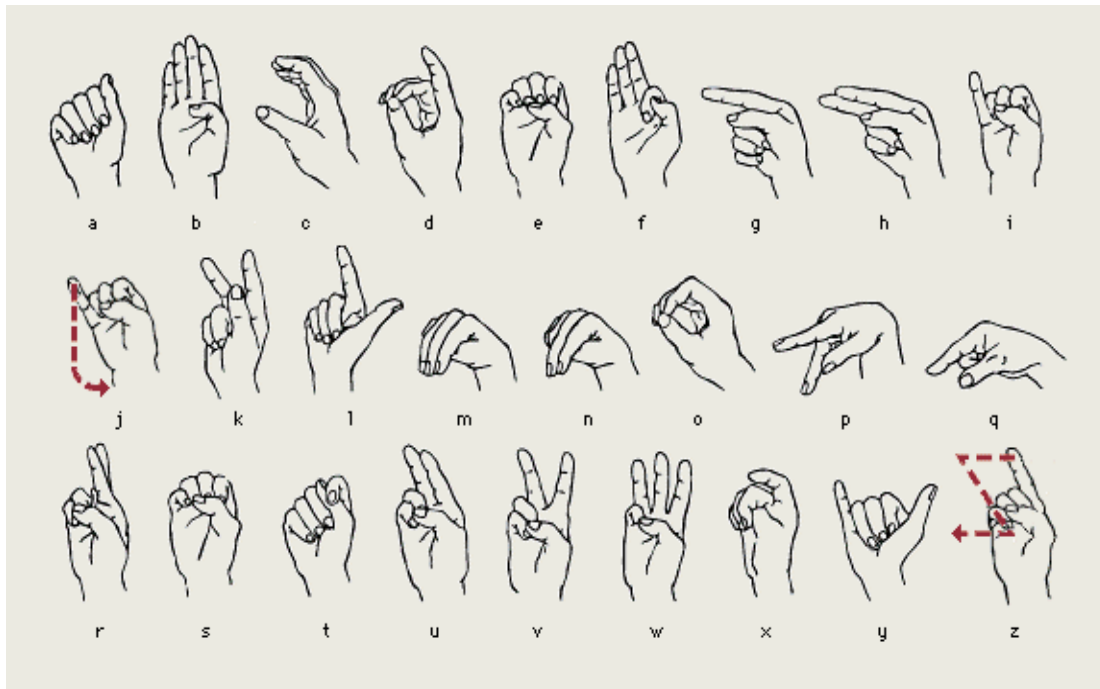
Wild Swan's performance style, which incorporates storytelling and live action with puppets, masks, music, and dance, has received critical acclaim as well as an enthusiastic following. The Detroit News has praised the work as "professional children's theater at its very best," and the Flint Museum of Art has described it as "superb theater that enhances life and its joys." Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village has called Wild Swan "one of the finest theaters for families in the nation."

Wild Swan has pioneered a number of audience accessibility measures for disabled individuals that are models in the state and have earned the praise of educators and health specialists across the country. All productions are performed in American Sign Language as well as spoken English with the signing completely integrated into the productions. Thus deaf children and adults not only have complete access to the productions but hearing children are exposed to this beautiful and poetic language. A program for blind individuals includes pre-performance backstage "touch tours". Participants have the opportunity to feel specially constructed props and masks, explore the set, and meet actors and hear the voices their characters will use. Audio-description, a simultaneous description of staging, lights, and costumes, transmitted electronically to participating audience members during pauses in the dialogue, permits audience members who are blind or visually impaired to have access to all the visual elements of the production. As a leader of disabled access in the state, Wild Swan has been a recipient of the Governor's Service Award in 1998 in the Arts in Service category and a grant recipient of Very Special Arts/Michigan for ten years.

American Sign Language Alphabet

When you come to see *Momma Kemba as Sojourner Truth* you will notice that an American Sign Language Interpreter is part of the play. She is signing the dialogue of the show for audience members who may have difficulty hearing. American Sign Language is a language used by the deaf and hearing impaired community. Using sign language in Wild Swan Theater shows enables more people to enjoy a theatrical production.

Below is the basic sign language alphabet. Can you make the letters of the alphabet using the chart below?



Classroom Activities:

Try spelling your name using sign language or try spelling words and phrases.

Use the ASL sign language alphabet to spell code words used to help guide the way on the Underground Railroad.

About Momma Kemba

Born in Mississippi in 1940 and performing since she was five years old, Momma Kemba travels the U.S. and abroad, keeping the spirit of strong black women in American History alive through dramatic storytelling and song. Extensive research is evident in each of her presentations described as "spiritual, riveting, dynamic, fine-tuned, motivational, inspirational and educational." The stories of several African-American female icons including Harriet Tubman, Mary McLeod-Bethune, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Aunt Clara

Brown and Fannie Lou Hamer are done in full costume. Kemba has conducted workshops instructing teachers/students how to teach/learn through drama/storytelling. Venues have included colleges, schools, museums, churches, Job Corp., prisons, Kentucky State Fair, Barbados W.I., Hamilton Bermuda, and West Africa.



Anna Johnson-Webb

Historical Profile: Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth was born in 1797 in Ulster County, New York as Isabella Baumfree (after her father's owner, Baumfree). She and her parents and 12 brothers and sisters were slaves. They were treated like property instead of like people. She spoke only Dutch until she was sold from her family around the age of nine. Because of the cruel treatment she suffered at the hands of a later master, she learned to speak English quickly, but had a Dutch accent for the rest of her life.

Sojourner fell in love with a slave named Robert, whose owner forbade the relationship because he did not want his slave having children with a slave he did not own, because he would not own their children. After getting caught and severely beaten trying to visit her, he never returned.

She was sold several times and with each new master she was given a new name. While owned by the John Dumont family in Ulster County, she married Thomas, another of Dumont's slaves. She had five children: Diana (1817), Peter (1822), James (who died young), Elizabeth (1825), and Sophia (1826).

Sojourner left the Dumont family and took refuge with the Van Wageners who paid John Dumont \$20 for her to stay with them. Soon after, she began searching for her son Peter who had been sold to a different master in Alabama. The state of New York began the gradual emancipation of slaves and, because of this new law, Sojourner was able to make an official complaint in court and was successful in winning the court case to get her son back.

Sojourner was inspired by God to begin preaching and moved to New York City. This was when she decided to be called "Sojourner Truth" because she wanted to travel around preaching about God and the evils of slavery. She listened carefully to the problems set forth at a women's rights convention, then decided, "wimmen rights, black n' white wurth fightin fo.'"

She joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Massachusetts, a group of 210 members who lived on 500 acres of farmland, raising livestock, running saw mills, and operating a silk factory. This Association was founded by abolitionists to promote cooperative and productive labor. They were anti-slavery, religiously tolerant, and women's rights supporters. While there, Sojourner met and worked with abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and David Ruggles.

Though unable to read or write, Sojourner had an extraordinary gift of speech, and was a much sought after speaker for women's rights and

abolitionist programs, often giving personal testimony about her experiences as a slave. In 1850 she, with the help of friends, published a book entitled The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave. Selling the book gave her an income and increased her speaking engagements, where she sold copies of the book. Profits from the book were also used in the fight against slavery.

Sojourner gave her most famous speech at the Ohio Woman's Rights Covention in Akron, Ohio with the legendary phrase, "Ain't I a Woman?"

During the Civil War, she spoke on the Union's behalf, as well as for enlisting black troops for the cause and freeing slaves. She also met President Abraham Lincoln.

Sojourner never stopped fighting to free her people, as the South stubbornly fought to maintain slavery, a vital institution to their way of life. When a mob threatened to burn down the meeting hall where she was scheduled to speak she said, "den I speak on de ashes, nothing 'n no body gon stop me from speaking on de evil of slavery."

Sojourner died on November 26, 1883 in Battle Creek, Michigan and was buried near her family. She cherished liberty and spent her entire life working so that African Americans could experience the natural right of freedom that many of us take for granted.

Modern History Sourcebook:
Sojourner Truth:

Sojourner Truth's Famous Speech: *Ain't I A Woman?*
Delivered December, 1851
Women's Convention, Akron, Ohio

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

The first cargo of American slaves arrived at Jamestown Virginia in 1619. The number of slaves increased steadily; by 1763, the colonial population included about 230,000 blacks, most of them slaves. Of these, 16,000 lived in New England; 29,000 in the Middle Colonies (New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania), and the rest in the South.

The first known slave in Canada was a young boy named Olivier Le Jeune. He was brought into Canada in 1628. Slaves were held in Canada only by the wealthy to do housework, livery work, barbering, and laundry. Large-scale plantations did not exist in the country, so there were fewer slaves.

Great Britain outlawed the slave trade in 1807, the United States a year later. But these moves only barred the importing of slaves; those already enslaved remained in bondage, as would their descendants. The British Empire, which included Canada, finally abolished slavery altogether in 1834. In the southern United States, however the institution continued to flourish. Its strength rested largely on cotton. The 1793 invention of the Cotton Gin increased the need for slaves.

Black slaves had to work constantly under the watchful eye of an overseer who whipped slow workers. They had no rights whatsoever under the law. They could not legally marry and raise a family, attend school or learn to read and write, live where they wished, follow their interests or move about in society as they wished. African slaves were slaves for life. Any child born to a slave was automatically property of the owner and could be sold away from the parents at a moments' notice.

Slaves rebelled through acts of passive resistance (intentionally working extra slowly, pretending not to understand commands, discreetly contaminating or poisoning food), and many slave revolts are documented. However, trying to run away was extremely difficult and men with guns and dogs would track them down like animals. If caught alive, they would be returned to their master and face harsh punishment.

Activities for your classroom: Create a timeline of escape. Begin with leaving a plantation and end with arriving at a safe haven. Track a route from Maryland to Canada using foot travel, wagon, or boat. Use a map to find the safest and shortest route. How many miles would be traveled? How many days would the trip require?

Using the above information follow up with a re-enactment activity. Divide your students into several groups. Have each group create short skits for each portion of the escape route. Have them take roles such as runaway slaves, conductors, abolitionists, slave owners and slave catchers. Show a short scene that presents each section of the journey.

Underground Railroad:

Underground Railroad – The Underground Railroad was named unofficially in 1833 when a slave escaped across the Ohio River. The slave’s owner said he “must’ve escaped across on some kind of underground railroad.” The Underground Railroad was neither “underground” nor a “railroad,” but was a loose network of aid and assistance given to fugitives from bondage. Perhaps as many as one hundred thousand enslaved persons may have escaped in the years between the American Revolution and the Civil War. Because escaping slaves and the people who helped them were technically breaking the law, they had to stay out of sight. They went “underground” in terms of concealing their actions. Sometimes they even hid in unusual places.

Ways to Escape from Slavery – There weren’t very many ways to travel in the 1800’s. You could only walk or catch a ride to the north on a wagon. It was relatively safer to ride on a wagon because the bounty hunters and masters wouldn’t always stop them. You could hide in coffins, boxes, or sacks and get carried to the north. Some people got covered in sacks to hide from masters or bounty hunters. It was dangerous to travel on foot because bounty hunters were everywhere and stations were sometimes hard to find. Even though it was dangerous, thousands of fugitives made it to Canada both on foot and by catching a ride.

Some examples of clever and creative ways slaves found to escape:

- When abolitionist John Fairfield needed to sneak 28 slaves over the roads near Cincinnati, he hired a hearse and disguised the group as a funeral procession.
- Henry “Box” Brown, a slave, had himself shipped from Richmond, VA to Philadelphia, PA in a wooden box.
- Ellen and William Craft made a dangerous journey from the South to the North by train, steamship, and coach, dressed up as an invalid white master and his slave.

Stations and Secret Hiding Places – Stations were safe houses for runaway slaves to stay on their journey north. How would you know a house was a station? Some stations had white bricks on the top of their chimney. Others would place a lantern outside the house. One station put a flag on a statue when it was safe. Some people would hide in secret compartments such as cupboards, trap doors, secret tunnels, and even indoor wells. One man slept under his friend’s floorboard for over a year. In one station of the Underground Railroad, there were trap doors that led to the attic that was in the side of the wall.

Underground Railroad Code Words:

Abolitionist – a person who demanded immediate emancipation of slaves
Agent – coordinator, one who plotted the course of escapes and made contacts
Drinking Gourd – Big Dipper and the North Star
Freedom Train or Gospel Train – code name for the Underground Railroad
Heaven or Promised Land – Canada
Preachers – leaders/speakers of the Underground Railroad
Shepherds – people who escorted the slaves
Station – place of safety and temporary refuge, a safe house
Station Master – the keeper of a safe house
Stockholder – donor of money, clothing, or food to the Underground Railroad

Underground Railroad Code Phrases

“The wind blows from the south today” – the warning of slave bounty hunters nearby
“A friend with friends” – A password used to signal the arrival of fugitives with an Underground Railroad conductor
“The friend of a friend sent me” – A password used by fugitives traveling alone to indicate they were sent by the Underground Railroad network
Load of potatoes, parcel, or bundles of wood – fugitives to be expected

In 1860, there were more free states than there were slave states. The following is a breakdown:

Free States:

California	Massachusetts	Ohio
Connecticut	Michigan	Oregon
Illinois	Minnesota	Pennsylvania
Indiana	New Hampshire	Rhode Island
Iowa	New Jersey	Vermont
Maine	New York	Wisconsin

Slave States:

Alabama	Kentucky	North Carolina
Arkansas	Louisiana	South Carolina
Delaware	Maryland	Tennessee
Florida	Mississippi	Texas
Georgia	Missouri	Virginia

Vocabulary

Slavery

Sojourner Truth described **slavery** as an “evil thing,” millions of Africans suffered under bondage during this time. The condition existed throughout colonial America, it developed mainly in the south as a labor system. Americans were brutally forced to work cotton and other fields in the south and north as slaves. “Slave holders” continuously reaped the profits of their labor.

Plantations

These were large farms of estates in the colonial south used for mass production of crops such as cotton or tobacco. Africans were the source of labor for these **plantations**. In the north where Sojourner Truth was born, Africans worked as slaves mostly on smaller farms.

Abolitionist

These were persons who disliked slavery. They did all in their power to eliminate the immoral practice and to help Africans escape to freedom in the North and Canada.

Pinxter

This was a Dutch Pentecost holiday celebrated in June. All Africans being held under slavery were allowed to freely eat, drink, and dance for seven days.

Suffrage

This means the right to vote. White women and all Africans did not have this right during this time.

“Gone to seed”

Means gone wild, or no longer in control.

“Scounds”

Ms. Truth’s way of saying scoundrel, a low life person, who commits immoral deeds.

The Underground Railroad

Was a system of providing assistance to Africans fleeing bondage before the Civil War. The legendary name is said to have originated from a story of a man named Tice Davids, who ran away from Kentucky and was pursued by his owner. When the owner could not find Davids, he exclaimed “he must have gotten away on some kind of underground railroad.”

The Civil War

Took place from 1861 to 1865, between the northern and southern United States and claimed more lives than any other wars in this country’s history. Many problems brought on this terrible war. The main issue was slavery, which the south economically depended on, and the north wanted to eliminate.

The Emancipation Proclamation

Was the historical document issued in September 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln freeing Africans being held in all territories at war with the Union, effective January 1, 1863. It was used as a military strategy and therefore did not free almost one million Africans being held as slaves in the Union territories at that time.

Sequencing Activity - Answer Sheet

Use the following sequencing activity after seeing the play and learning about Sojourner Truth's life.

___5___ The state of New York began the gradual emancipation of slaves, and because of this new law, Sojourner was able to make an official complaint in court and was successful in winning the court case to get her son back.

___1___ Sojourner Truth was born in 1797 in Ulster County, New York as Isabella Baumfree (after her father's owner, Baumfree). She and her parents and 12 brothers and sisters were slaves. That meant they were treated like property instead of like people.

___3___ She was sold several times, and while owned by the John Dumont family in Ulster County, she married Thomas, another of Dumont's slaves. She had five children: Diana(1817), Peter (1822), James (who died young), Elizabeth (1825), and Sophia (1826).

___6___ Sojourner was inspired by God to begin preaching and moved to New York City. This was when she decided to be called "Sojourner Truth" because she wanted to travel around preaching about God and the evils of slavery.

___4___ Sojourner left the Dumont family and took refuge with the Van Wageners who paid John Dumont \$20 for her to stay with them. Soon after, Sojourner began searching for her son Peter, who had been sold to a different master in Alabama.

___7___ She joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Massachusetts, a group of 210 members who lived on 500 acres of farmland, raising livestock, running saw mills, and operating a silk factory. This Association was founded by abolitionists to promote cooperative and productive labor. They were anti-slavery, religiously tolerant, and women's rights supporters. While there, Sojourner met and worked with abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and David Ruggles.

___10___ During the Civil War, she spoke on the Union's behalf, as well as for enlisting black troops for the cause and freeing slaves. She also met President Abraham Lincoln.

___8___ Sojourner published her book, The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave. Selling the book gave her an income and increased her speaking engagements, where she sold copies of the book. She spoke about anti-slavery and women's rights, often giving personal testimony about her experiences as a slave.

___9___ Sojourner gave her most famous speech at the Ohio Woman's Rights Covention in Akron, Ohio with the with the legendary phrase, "Ain't I a Woman?"

___11___ Sojourner died on November 26, 1883 in Battle Creek, Michigan and was buried near her family.

___2___ Sojourner fell in love with a slave named Robert, whose owner forbade the relationship because he did not want his slave having children with a slave he did not own (and therefore would not own the new 'property'). After getting caught and beaten trying to visit her, he never returned.

Discussion Topics

- Modes of transportation (stress UGRR was not an underground train- traveled by foot, boat, wagon, all under disguise or camouflage, with the North Star as a guide)
- Penalties for runaways, and conductors found helping runaways, when caught (branding, mutilation, sale to the deep south, death, imprisonment, crippling fines, destruction of property)
- Secret codes and signals (study guide vocabulary, spirituals)
- The major theme outside of Sojourner Truth's life is that one can accomplish whatever one wishes to as long as one believes (self-determination)
- Reiterate that all of Sojourner's accomplishments came despite the fact that she had been a slave and a woman with no formal education
- The importance of knowledge and of education to those who don't (didn't) have the opportunity to acquire it
- Equality issues still facing us in present day society (race, gender, religious differences, sexuality etc...).

Discussion Questions from the performance:

1. What did Sojourner Truth mean by "Ain't I a woman?" in her speech in Akron, Ohio? What was Sojourner Truth trying to tell her audience?
2. Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott were key women in the fight for women's rights. Why did these women want equal rights? How would your life be different today if you didn't have those rights?
3. Slave owners did not want their slaves educated. Why not? Discuss how education is relevant to "freedom" today. Make connections to current conditions of lack of education to poverty in the world today.
4. The happiest moments of Sojourner's early life were when she was with her loving family. What activities make you happy and who are the people who make you feel that way?
5. Think about Sojourner Truth's childhood. What would it be like to work all day with no time to play? Compare shelter, food and clothing condition from Sojourner's life to your own life. Sojourner grew up in fear of being sold away from her family. What are your fears?

Related Activities:

Have the students write about an incident where they had to defend himself or herself or stand up to something that was unfair or unjust.

The Fugitive Slave Act established laws that were broken willingly by large numbers of people. Discuss the implications of mass disobedience of laws and their validity under such circumstances and what constitutes a “good” or “bad” law. Make connections to the Civil Rights movement or to the Resistance to the Nazi Party.

Making Web Connections

http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/17_02/Civi172.shtml
(bringing the civil rights movement into the classroom)

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/SSBlackHistoryDiscriminationAndCivilRightsMovement712.htm>
(lesson plan demonstrating discrimination)

<http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/timeline/RESIST2.htm>
(resistance)

Amazing Maze—A Game of Trust

In this game, a blindfolded child has to choose whom to trust. It demonstrates how difficult it is to know whom to trust, relating the students to how slaves felt on a daily basis while traveling along the Underground Railroad.

Create a small obstacle course in the classroom with items found in the room.

Blindfold one student and have 2 other students waiting at the end of the maze—one trying to lead them to safety and the other child leading them to danger. Each “conductor” will try to make the player trust him or her. The blindfolded player must decide which directions they will take. The game is over when the blindfolded student touches an obstacle or when he/she reaches one of the two students calling out instructions.

Miscellaneous Activities

A. Writing Letters

Have students write a letter in which they discuss the achievements of this great heroine.

B. Performance

The performance of Sojourner Truth was a product of extensive research and tremendous creativity. Ask your students to research other famous African-Americans such as Mary McLeod Bethune, Harriet Tubman, Denmark Vessy, David Ruggles or Nat Turner. Then have them write their own biographical play, for presentation to classroom, assembly, parents, etc.

C. Artistic Tribute

Have your students draw or paint representations of the life of Sojourner Truth.

D. Speak Up

Have students discuss what they and all of us can do to continue the struggle for a better society. Promote the history of Africans born in America as American history, make it an integral part of the curriculum and study it all year round.

E. Time to Write

Sojourner Truth prized freedom, peace, and respect. Have students write poetry or prose, to describe what means most to them in life.

F. Sing Along

Find great songs or chants that African American slaves came up with to get them through the day. Dissect the meaning from the lyrics with your class.

**...I'm pleading for my people, a poor down-trodden race,
who dwell in freedom's boasted land, with no abiding grace.
I'm pleading that my people, will have their rights restored,
For they have long been toiling, and yet have no reward.
Whilst I bear upon my body, many scar and many gash,
I'm pleading for my people, who groan beneath the lash... Sojourner Truth**

Sources:

<http://storytelling.org/Kemba/>

<http://www.lkwdpl.org/wihohio/trut-soj.htm>