

In 1869, Sarah
Hopkins

Bradford published an authorized biography called *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*. Harriet Tubman was an abolitionist who helped slaves escape through the Underground Railroad. She often worked with fellow abolitionist Frederick Douglass, a public speaker and author. When Harriet Tubman reached out to Frederick Douglass requesting he speak to her accomplishments, he responded with this letter.

As you read, take notes on how Frederick Douglass defines private and public accomplishments.

Rochester, August 29, 1868

Dear Harriet:

I am glad to know that the story of your eventful life has been written by a kind lady, and that the same is soon to be published. **1** You ask for what you do not need when you call upon me for a word of commendation. **2** I need such words from you far more than you can need them from me, especially where your superior labors and devotion to the cause of the lately enslaved of our land are known as I know them. **Q1** The difference between us is very marked. **3** Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought **4** in the day – you in the night. I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes of being approved by the multitude, **5** while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scarred, and foot-sore bondmen **6** and women, whom you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt, “God bless you,” has been your only reward. The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism. **Q2** Excepting John Brown **7** – of sacred memory – I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you have. Much that you have done would seem improbable to those who do not know you as I know you. It is to me a great pleasure and a great privilege to bear testimony for your character and your works, and to say to those to whom you may come, that I regard you in every way truthful and trustworthy.

Your friend,

Frederick Douglass. **Q3**



"Harriet Tubman, nurse, spy, and scout" by IIP Photo Archive is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

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Notes All Definitions Footnotes

1. A reference to the biography written by Sarah Hopkins Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, to be published in 1869.

2. **Commendation** (*noun*)

:praise

3. noticeable

4. worked

5. **Multitude** (*noun*): a great number of people

6. "Bondman" is an archaic term for "slave."

7. John Brown was an American abolitionist who Harriet Tubman was working with to start a liberation movement among enslaved African Americans in Virginia. The plan failed and Brown was hanged after being found guilty of treason, the murder of five men, and instigating a slave revol