

## Student # 1

Lately, there has been a lot of talk about Afrofuturism, particularly in the intersection of arts and music videos that delve into culture and the future. An artist, Martine Syms, offers a unique perspective on Afrofuturism by urging us to consider its "ordinary" and extraordinary aspects. When I reflect on this concept, Harriet Tubman immediately comes to mind. While renowned for her role in the Underground Railroad, her story goes beyond that. Exemplifies proto-Afrofuturism.

Harriet Tubman's life was far from ordinary; however, her actions were firmly rooted in reality. Born into slavery, she escaped and became a conductor" on the Underground Railroad. Her unwavering courage and determination led to the liberation of hundreds of enslaved individuals as she guided them toward safety. This real-life endeavor to create change represents what Syms might call the "facet of Afrofuturism."

Nevertheless, Tubman's narrative extends beyond practicality. She often spoke about visions and dreams that served as guiding forces in her journey. For instance, she recounted seeing a procession of black men marching, towards heaven—a sign she interpreted as an encouragement to persist in her work. Some believe she possessed insights that aided her in navigating terrains while evading capture. These extraordinary visions bring a touch of magic to her life as if she has a connection to something beyond our comprehension that guides her on her mission.

So how does Harriet Tubman fit into the concept of Afrofuturism? Syms discusses reshaping and redefining Afrofuturism to include space exploration and the real-life advancements Black people make here on Earth. Tubman's life encompasses this duality. Her tangible actions to liberate slaves embody Afrofuturism's pragmatic side. Meanwhile, her mystical visions add an element of enigma and awe, linking her to something.

Harriet Tubman's life serves as an illustration of what Afrofuturism can represent. It goes beyond envisioning futures in distant galaxies. It is about acknowledging the strength, bravery, and foresight of individuals who have shaped our history. Tubman's fusion of deeds and spiritual insight makes her a pioneer in Afrofuturism—a reflection of its vibrant tapestry defined by Martine Syms.

## Student # 2

According to Martine Syms, Afrofuturism is more than space adventures and otherworldly phenomena. It encompasses the real and the fantastical, the ordinary and the extraordinary. Within this framework, Frederick Douglass, a known abolitionist, writer, and speaker, emerges as a figure who embodies the essence of Afrofuturism. His life and works exemplify this movement's grounded reality and visionary elements.

Born into slavery but managing to escape, Frederick Douglass became one of the voices against slavery. Through his autobiographies, speeches, and writings – including his piece "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" – he vividly depicted the realities of slavery while chronicling his journey to freedom. Douglass's tireless efforts in fighting for abolition and American rights were firmly rooted in the challenges faced during that time. He utilized his words and actions as catalysts for change—a reflection of Afrofuturism's "mundane" aspects as described by Syms.

However, beyond his activism, in reality, Douglass possessed a spirit. He envisioned a future where freedom and equality would prevail regardless of race or background. His writings often transcended the constraints of his era; for instance, "My Bondage and My Freedom" painted a picture of a world where all achieved liberation and equality. This ability to envision a better future and dream beyond his era's constraints adds a fantastical dimension to his legacy.

Frederick Douglass's ability to envision a future and transcend the limitations of his time adds a touch of fantasy to his lasting impact. His real-life activism aligns with the side of Afrofuturism, while his visionary writings tap into its imaginative and fantastical elements. Douglass didn't react passively to the world around him; he worked to forge a tomorrow. One example is his involvement in recruiting soldiers during the Civil War showcasing his dedication to tangible transformation. He was ahead of his time, effortlessly bridging the gap between reality and imagination future.

In summary, Frederick Douglass embodies how Afrofuturism harmoniously blends realities with fantasies. His activism and thinking mindset position him as a pioneer of Afrofuturism, showcasing its nature. Douglass's enduring legacy reminds us that the future isn't a concept; it's something we shape through our actions and dreams.

### **Student # 3**

Before taking this course, I never considered Afrofuturism, but now I can see its influence everywhere. It's not just about robots and spaceships; it encompasses the hopes and aspirations of real individuals. Harriet Tubman is a perfect example of this. She's more than just a historical figure; she represents freedom and is an early embodiment of Afrofuturistic ideals.

Let's delve deeper into Tubman's story. Despite being born into slavery, she refused to let that define her. Instead, she escaped and tirelessly worked to liberate others as well. Throughout 19 journeys, she helped free approximately 300 slaves – an extraordinary feat akin to a true superhero. This reality-based aspect is integral to Afrofuturism, capturing genuine events that unfolded.

However, Tubman's contributions extended beyond the realms of reality. She possessed visions that guided her actions. Some attribute these visions to a head injury, but regardless of origin, they significantly lead people toward freedom. On one occasion, her vision prompted her to take an alternate route, saving them from slave catchers. This fantastical element further enriches the essence of Afrofuturism.

So why does Tubman deserve recognition as a proto-Afrofuturist? It lies in her tangible efforts towards changing the world – aiding enslaved individuals in their quest for liberty. However, she also had grand aspirations, envisioning a future that guided her actions. It seemed she existed in both the tangible world and the realm of dreams. A remarkable illustration of this is seen in the Combahee River Raid. Tubman led Union soldiers to liberate more than 700 enslaved individuals in South Carolina. She meticulously strategized for the raid's success through her wisdom and prophetic visions. It's almost as if she utilized her dreams to shape reality.

To summarize, Harriet Tubman's life is a prime example of Afrofuturism. While firmly grounded in the realities of slavery and inequality, she possessed an imaginative spirit that envisioned a future where

everyone could experience freedom. Her fusion of proactive efforts and visionary thinking positions her as an early pioneer of Afrofuturism—an incredibly fascinating aspect. This course has imparted valuable knowledge to me, with Tubman's story leaving a lasting impact. It emphasizes that Afrofuturism isn't solely concerned with present circumstances but also explores possibilities for what lies ahead—an ideology impeccably exemplified by Tubman's life.

## Student # 4

Afrofuturism is an intriguing fusion of science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy and Afrocentrism. It goes beyond merely envisioning futuristic realms; it involves connecting the past and present to imagine a brighter future. One historical figure who embodies Afrofuturism is Arnold Gragston, a former enslaved person who became a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Let's explore how his life and actions exemplify Afrofuturism's ordinary and extraordinary aspects.

Gragston's life was marked by brave endeavors to assist others in escaping slavery. He put everything at stake by helping runaway slaves to cross the difficult Ohio River. This wasn't some fictional escapade but an actual and treacherous undertaking. One striking example is his collaboration with Reverend John Rankin, who jointly aided hundreds of enslaved individuals across the river to attain freedom. Gragston's deeds were firmly rooted in the harsh realities of that era, representing the everyday facet of Afrofuturism. It's as though he was a real-life superhero minus the cape.

However, Gragston's narrative extends beyond his real-world heroism. His journey across the river can be seen as a metaphor for entering a new realm—a fantastical domain where the shackles of slavery are shattered. It sounds like something out of a fantasy book but rooted in real history. This symbolic interpretation connects Gragston to the imaginative side of Afrofuturism. It's not just about what he accomplished; it's about the deeper meaning it holds.

Gragston's legacy inspires modern thinkers and artists in the Afrofuturist movement. His blend of bravery, determination, and symbolism provides a model for those who delve into Afrofuturism today. Take Martine Syms, for instance, who advocates for a more "every day" Afrofuturism that focuses on tangible progress. This aligns with Gragston's approach as both figures emphasize the importance of grounded activism while embracing visionary thinking. They're bridging the gap between reality and imagination, which I find fascinating.

Arnold Gragston's life and legacy are a testament to courage, determination, and forward-thinking vision. His real-life efforts to help others escape slavery and his symbolic journey across the river establish him as a pioneer in Afrofuturism. Gragston's story continues to inspire us, guiding us toward a future where freedom, equality, and imagination are not merely fantasies but tangible realities.

## Student # 5

Martin Delany, a well-known African American abolitionist, journalist, physician, and writer, embodies the core principles of Afrofuturism. Through his life and works, he seamlessly blends Afrofuturism's everyday and extraordinary elements, positioning him as a precursor to this movement in the 19th century. Delany's activism against slavery and pursuit of medical knowledge significantly shaped his life. He was pivotal in co-founding the North Star newspaper alongside Frederick Douglass and became one of Harvard Medical School's earliest African American students. His practical endeavors to uplift African Americans' lives exemplify Afrofuturism's down-to-earth aspect.

One notable work by Delany is his novel "Blake or the Huts of America," a fictional exploration centered around a slave rebellion. This novel not only delves into the harsh realities of slavery but also ventures into realms of imagination. It envisions a world where slaves rise to establish their society—a testament to the imaginative facet of Afrofuturism. Martin Delany's life and literary contributions resonate deeply with the core principles that define Afrofuturism. His tireless activism and commitment to medical progress align with its practical side, while his visionary thinking and writing embrace its imaginative aspects. Delany's enduring legacy continues to inspire contemporary thinkers and artists within Afrofuturism.

The combination of activism, medical expertise, and forward-thinking that Martin Delany embodies is an exemplary model for those interested in exploring the intricacies of Afrofuturism in today's world. His narrative reminds us that Afrofuturism entails envisioning and actively working towards a better future through practical actions and imaginative ideas.

Martine Syms's endorsement of a "mundane" approach to Afrofuturism aligns with Delany's perspective. Both individuals emphasize the significance of tangible progress while also embracing visionary thinking. Their shared viewpoint provides a nuanced comprehension of Afrofuturism by bridging the gap between reality and imagination.

Martin Delany's life and legacy indicate the influence that activism, medical knowledge, and visionary thinking can have. His real-world endeavors to combat slavery and promote medical education, coupled with his imaginative writings, establish him as a precursor to Afrofuturist ideals. Delany's story remains a source of inspiration, guiding us toward a future where freedom, equality, and imagination become tangible realities.