

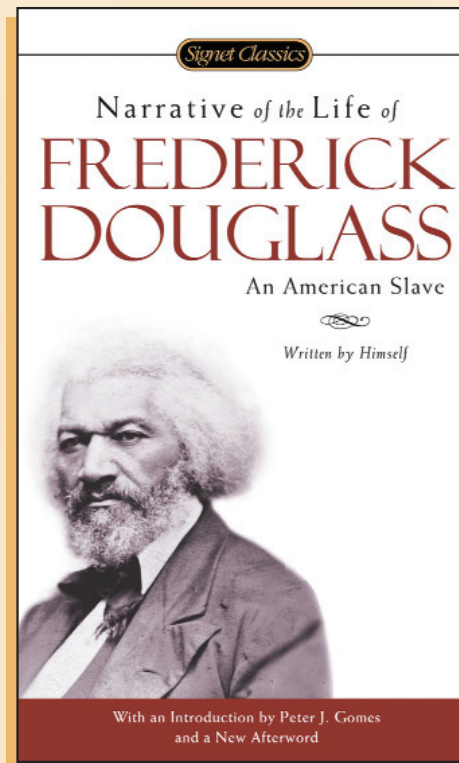
Signet Classic

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S

A NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AN AMERICAN SLAVE

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S E R I E S E D I T O R S :

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INTRODUCTION

Frederick Douglass's slave narrative is readily accessible to high school students. It is short (slightly more than 120 pages), easy to read and understand, and filled with warmth and wisdom. In addition it presents a vivid picture of a horrifying period of American history that far too few students understand. Students may read about the institution of slavery in history textbooks, some of which attempt to show the cruel inhumanity of many slave owners, but no textbook allows students to see and feel the fear, pain, and hate. Douglass's narrative of his life as a slave lets readers feel the fear he has as a small child separated from his mother, allows us to experience with him the pain inflicted by undeserved whippings and weakness caused by too little food and too much physical exertion, and helps us understand not only the hate of the slave for the master but the sickness of hate that allowed human beings to keep other human beings as chattel.

Frederick Douglass not only provides students with an understanding of the horrors of slavery but also helps students understand how they can overcome adversity. Although a slave, Douglass's mind was never enslaved. He who was denied any formal education and deprived of books and paper writes eloquently about the importance of knowledge. He tells readers that the only way men can be enslaved is by remaining ignorant. He also writes that learning is "the pathway from slavery to freedom" (p. 49). Perhaps, it takes someone who was denied the right to learn to teach today's students the importance of the education they take for granted.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass is appropriate reading for many grade levels and subjects. Although it can be read and understood as early as middle school, the values examined in the book may be too mature for most middle school students. However, it is certainly appropriate to share parts of the book, perhaps reading it aloud, to students as early as seventh grade. By high school the majority of students will be able to read and understand the narrative. One of the wonderful elements of the work is that its content is mature, making it appropriate for the most able students, while its easy-reading level makes it accessible to students who have difficulty reading. In addition to the wide range of students for whom it is appropriate, it can be taught in many subject areas. In United States history it allows students to study a primary source. In English it can be studied as an autobiographical work. It is also appropriate in courses such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. At the college level it can be analyzed in the above classes and also successfully used in education courses as well as general seminar courses in which students examine and discuss important issues.

Because this small book is appropriate in so many classes, this guide will attempt to show how it can be utilized in U.S. history, English, and education courses. When questions and activities are appropriate for other subject areas as well, these will be listed parenthetically. As with the other study guides in this series, prereading, during reading, and after reading questions and activities are suggested. Those questions and activities which are only appropriate for mature students are starred (*). In addition, a bibliography suggests how this narrative can be incorporated with other books in units on such topics as the Civil War, African Americans from slavery to the 20th century, and slavery and freedom.

OVERVIEW

TIMELINE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

(All dates are approximate since slaves were kept ignorant of the concept of time or dates.)

1818	Frederick Bailey (Douglass) born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, Maryland. Mother—Harriet Bailey, a slave; father—a white man, perhaps the master. Separated from mother in infancy.
1824	Harriet Bailey dies; seen only by son four or five times when she'd travel twelve miles by foot at night.
1817-1825	Lived on the "Great House Farm" plantation of Colonel Edward Lloyd; master was Captain Anthony, Colonel Lloyd's clerk.
1825	Moved to Baltimore, Maryland, home of Mr. Hugh Auld, brother of Colonel Lloyd's son-in-law, Captain Thomas Auld.
1825	Mrs. Sophia Auld, new mistress, begins to teach Frederick to read; Mr. Auld finds out and forbids it, calling it "unlawful" and "unsafe."
1825-1832	Lives with Aulds; continues to learn to read and write, often bribing the poor white children to help him.

- 1828** Returns to Colonel Lloyd's plantation after death of Captain Anthony and his youngest son Richard so that property, including horses and slaves, can be divided between two surviving children, Mrs. Lucretia and Master Andrew; falls to the portion of Mrs. Lucretia and is returned to Baltimore.
- 1829** Reads "The Columbian Orator," giving words to his feelings about slavery; learns the meaning of the word "abolition"; meets two kind Irishmen who advise him to run away to the north; "from that time on I resolved to run away" (p. 57).

(The following dates are more accurate since Frederick has learned to read and understands dates.)

- March, 1832** Mrs. Lucretia and Master Andrew have both died; Master Thomas Auld, Lucretia's husband, remarries and has a misunderstanding with Master Hugh. As punishment of Hugh, Frederick goes to live with Master Thomas in St. Michael's, Maryland. Master Thomas is not as good a master; he feeds his slaves very little.
- Jan. 1, 1833** Sent to live with Mr. Covey who has the reputation "for breaking young slaves" (p. 70); Frederick is frequently whipped. He writes, "Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!" (p. 75).
- Aug. 1833** Frederick becomes ill in the fields; Mr. Covey whips him. Frederick runs away from Mr. Covey and files a complaint with Master Auld which is rejected. When Frederick returns to Mr. Covey's he vows to fight which he does; Mr. Covey's treatment toward him begins to change; Frederick vows that he never will be whipped again. "This battle with Mr. Covey... rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood" (p. 82).
- Jan. 1, 1834** Moved to home of Mr. William Freeland, three miles from St. Michael's. Mr. Freeland was "an educated southern gentleman" and much kinder to the slaves. Frederick begins a Sabbath school for slaves; if they were caught they would be whipped, but they wanted to learn to read and write.
- Jan. 1835** Mr. Freeland again hires Frederick from his master. Frederick and several other slaves plot an escape but are discovered and sent to jail. For a reason unknown to Frederick, Master Thomas Auld decides to send him back to Baltimore to Hugh Auld.
- 1835** Sent to learn the trade of caulking at a shipyard; severely injured in fight with white carpenters; Mr. Hugh Auld takes Frederick to work in shipyard where he is foreman; Frederick learns quickly and is soon earning wages which he must turn over to Master Hugh Auld.
- Spring 1838** Frederick applies to Master Thomas to allow him to hire his time; Thomas refuses; however, later Hugh agrees making a deal which guarantees him more money. Frederick agrees to the plan since it is the only way he can earn money to escape. When Frederick goes out of the city on work without permission, Master Hugh tells him to "bring my tools and clothing home forthwith" (p. 109). This makes Frederick more committed to find a way to escape.
- Sept. 3, 1838** Frederick escapes to New York; he does not reveal the means in his narrative, stating that it could embarrass some and keep others from escaping; he is helped by Mr. David Ruggles who houses Frederick in his boarding house and helps him get Anna Murray, a free black woman, to New York.
- Sept. 15, 1838** Anna Murray and Frederick Johnson (name changed from Frederick Bailey) marry; this is particularly important since slaves were not permitted to marry; they leave for New Bedford. In New Bedford the couple is helped by Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Johnson. Frederick asks the Johnsons to help him pick a new name; Mr. Johnson who is reading "Lady of the Lake" selects Douglass.
- Aug. 11, 1841** At the anti-slavery convention at Nantucket Mr. William C. Coffin urges Frederick Douglass to speak. Douglass writes, "It was a severe cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down" (p. 119).

BEFORE READING**ENGLISH**

Be sure the students understand the terms nonfiction, autobiography, and narrative.

The narrative is basically chronological. However, he does digress in some chapters. Therefore, it might be helpful to duplicate the timeline above so students can refer to it as they read.

Throughout the narrative Douglass discusses many ironies. Discuss the meaning of the word irony and provide some examples.

Ask students to write about a time they were not allowed to do something and how it made them feel.

Have the students write in their journals their impressions about what life would be like as a slave.

Introduce and define the words: slavery, abolition, abolitionist, and chattel.

Read a fictional account of slavery such as Belinda Hurmence's *A Girl Called Boy and Tancy* or Barbara Smucker's *Runaway to Freedom: A Story of the Underground Railroad* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Read the first chapter aloud to the class. Discuss it.

HISTORY

Discuss the concept of "primary source." Read one or more secondary sources about slaves such as Virginia Hamilton's *Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave*, Arna Bontemps's *Great Slave Narratives*, *To Be a Slave* by Julius Lester or *Black Foremothers* by Dorothy Sterling.

Place the narrative in its historical context or ask the students to do so. Discuss what was occurring in the U.S. between 1818, the birth of Douglass, and 1845, the publication of his narrative. It might be useful to place it on a timeline along with other historical events occurring at the same time.

EDUCATION

Have the students write about and discuss how they would be different if they could not read or write.

Discuss the concept: "there can be no freedom without education."

Examine education during the colonial period prior to the Revolution. How did education differ by region in the colonies: New England, the middle Atlantic states, and the southern states?

WHILE READING

This section of the teacher's guide is divided by chapters, which parallel the chapters of the narrative. Further, it is subdivided by questions, quotations, and activities, many of which can be used across subject areas. Most of the questions, quotations, and activities can be used in English, history, and/or education classes. However, when one is more appropriate for one subject area than another, the subject area is indicated parenthetically. Questions are designed to help students comprehend the narrative and move beyond comprehension to analysis and evaluation. Quotations can be used as discussion starters or as writing prompts for response journals. Activities are designed for small groups to help students deal with the concepts in a more personal way.

The response journal technique is appropriate for all three subject areas. In it students respond to the quotations in writing. Teachers should encourage them to respond in a variety of increasingly complex ways. This will allow students to develop thinking and writing skills at the analytical and evaluative levels.

LEVELS OF STUDENT RESPONSE

- A. **Engaging:** The articulation of the reader's emotional reaction or level of involvement, from "This is BOR-ING," to "I couldn't put it down," are called engaging. The first is called lack of engagement; the second engagement. However, the reader's articulation of her or his level of engagement with the text may be the first step in responding to it. For example, tell students, "Write about how the chapter makes you feel."
- B. **Describing:** Restating or reproducing information that is provided in the text requires selecting some important aspect of the text and is often the next level of response. For example, tell students, "Select any quotation from this chapter, write about what you think it means."
- C. **Conceiving:** Making statements about meaning or inferring from important aspects of the text. For example, tell students, "Write about this quote, discuss not only what it means to you, but what it means in relationship to Frederick's life as a slave."
- D. **Explaining:** Explaining why the characters do what they do; examining their motivation. For example, ask students to explain why learning to read was so important to Frederick. Ask them, "What did he believe the ability to read would give him?"
- E. **Connecting:** The reader connects her or his own experiences with the text. As in all responding to text, connecting is a recurrent movement between the text and one's experiences, knowledge, and attitudes. The reader may first recall a similar experience, next elaborate on that experience, next apply the experience to the text, later use the text to reflect on her or his own experience, and finally, interpret the text and the experience. For example, ask the students to write about a time when they felt like they were trapped. Now, they might write or discuss how this experience would have been different if they saw little hope of escaping. Next, they might write or discuss what they would try to do to escape. Finally, they might put themselves in Frederick's place: what would they do to attempt to become free?
- F. **Interpreting:** The reader uses all the reactions above to interpret an overall theme or meaning of the text. For example, ask questions such as: "Why did Frederick write this narrative? What was the danger in writing it? When did Frederick conceive that freedom was a possibility?"
- G. **Judging:** The reader makes judgments about the text: the truth of the text, the importance of the text, the quality of the text, etc. For example, ask student questions such as: "Why is this narrative still read today? Are there any lessons in it for you? Any lessons for the country?"

CHAPTERS 1-5

CHAPTER I

Sets the scene; Frederick tells us some of his early life and begins to explain life on the plantation.

QUESTIONS

Why is Frederick not sure when he was born?

What is Frederick's last name at birth?

Why would slaveholders want to keep a slave ignorant of such a simple thing as the date of his birth? (Education)

Who were Frederick's mother and father?

Why does Frederick make the point that a slaveholder who has fathered a child is likely to be tougher on that child?

Why does Frederick only rarely see his mother?

Is Frederick's relationship with his mother typical of other slave children?

What is the role of the overseer on the plantation?

What is the relationship of the slaveholder to the overseer to the slave on the plantation? (History)

What do we learn about Plummer, the overseer?

Who is Frederick's first master?

Why does Frederick tell the story of Lloyd's Ned?

QUOTATIONS

"By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters to keep their slaves thus ignorant" (p. 21). [The intentional ignorance of slaves plays an important role in Frederick's understanding of the system.] (Education)

"He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding" (p. 24). [This is an important point that Frederick will continue to make throughout the narrative.] (History)

"It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass" (p. 25).

ACTIVITIES

Chart the relationship of slaveholder to overseer to slave on chart paper. (History/Anthropology)

Discuss life on the plantation for slaveholder, overseer, and slave.

CHAPTER II

Describes the plantation system of Colonel Lloyd; discusses the daily existence of slaves on the plantation.

QUESTIONS

Who were the family members of Frederick's master Colonel Edward Lloyd?

What is the relationship of Colonel Lloyd to Frederick's master?

Was there a pecking order among slaves? Explain.

Why would a slave whose life on a plantation was very bad fear being sold to a slave-trader?

Why was Severe an appropriate name for the overseer? (English)

Why is it difficult to find copies of slave songs?

Why does Frederick suggest that slaves sing out of sorrow rather than out of joy?

QUOTES

"The same traits of character might be seen in Colonel Lloyd's slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties" (p. 30). (History) *

"Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery" (p. 32).

ACTIVITIES

Draw a diagram of the holdings (including plantations and slaves) of Colonel Lloyd. (History/Sociology)

Discuss with your group what you would likely possess if you were an adult slave on Colonel Lloyd's plantation. Now discuss what you would possess if you were a child slave. (Anthropology)

Write a diary and then make a chart of a day in the life of a slave. (Anthropology/Sociology)

Go to the library and find some songs sung by slaves. Discuss the meaning of these songs and examine if they were likely to be sung because of sorrow as suggested by Frederick. (English)

CHAPTER III

Relates several anecdotes that tell readers more about plantation life and the thinking of slaves.

QUESTIONS

How did Colonel Lloyd keep the slave boys from taking his fruit?

Why was it particularly difficult to be the slaves in charge of Colonel Lloyd's horses?

What is ironic about Colonel Lloyd's treatment of his horses compared to the treatment of his slaves? (English) *

What happened to the slave who told Colonel Lloyd the truth about his master?

What is a maxim? (English)

QUOTES

Slave maxim: "a still tongue makes a wise head" (p. 36). (English)

ACTIVITIES

Add to your diagram of Colonel Lloyd's plantation holdings. (History/Anthropology)

Discuss the prejudice that existed among slaves from different plantations. Examine the irony of this prejudice. (English)

CHAPTER IV

Tells readers more about overseers and relates incidents of slave murders.

QUESTIONS

Why is Mr. Austin Gore a "first-rate overseer"? What is the irony of this description of him? What is ironic about his name? (English)

What reason does Mr. Gore give for killing Demby the slave?

What other examples does Frederick give of his statement "that killing a slave, or any colored person,... is not treated as a crime, either by the courts or the community" (p. 41)? (History)*

QUOTES

Maxim laid down by slaveholders: "It is better that a dozen slaves suffer under the lash, than that the overseer should be convicted, in the presence of the slaves, of having been at fault" (p. 38).

"To be accused was to be convicted, and to be convicted was to be punished" (pp. 38-39). [Another important point that continues throughout the narrative.] (History)

"He dealt sparingly with his words, and bountifully with his whip, never using the former where the latter would answer as well" (p. 39).

ACTIVITIES

Discuss the system of justice on the plantation. How does this system differ from the system developed in the early days of the Union? (History)

Go to the library and do research on the U.S. justice system and people of color. Present your findings to the class. (History) *

Read *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee) or *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (Gaines); discuss if and how the U.S. justice system changed in its treatment of people of color. (English) *

CHAPTER V

Examines Frederick's life as a slave child and discusses his leaving the plantation.

QUESTIONS

What was life like for Frederick on the plantation?

Why was Frederick so happy to be leaving the plantation?

Why did he particularly want to go to Baltimore?

What relationship did his new master have to his old master?

Why did Frederick, who was seven or eight, not know the month or year of his sailing?

What were Frederick's initial impressions of his new mistress, Mrs. Sophia Auld?

QUOTES

"I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor" (p. 47).

ACTIVITIES

Draw pictures of slave children in summer and in winter. (Anthropology)

On a map plot the route that Frederick followed to get to Baltimore. (History/Geography)

CHAPTERS 6-10

CHAPTER VI

Discusses learning to read and explains its importance.

QUESTIONS

To what does Frederick attribute the kindness of Mrs. Auld?

What, according to Frederick, changes her?

Why is Mr. Auld angry when he finds that Mrs. Auld is teaching Frederick his letters?

Why does Frederick call Mr. Auld's forbidding his learning how to read "invaluable instruction" (p. 49)? (Education) *

Why does inability to read keep men enslaved according to Frederick and to Mr. Auld? (Education)

What does Frederick hope to gain by learning how to read?

Who teaches Frederick why black men are not taught to read?

Why is this lesson so important to him?

Why is the life of a city slave so much better than the life of a plantation slave?

Why does Frederick relate the story of the slaves Henrietta and Mary? (English)

QUOTES

"If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master" (p. 49).

"I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom" (p. 49). (Education)

"In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both" (p. 50). (Education) *

"A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation" (p. 50).

ACTIVITIES

Discuss the irony of what Mr. Auld taught Frederick when he forbid Mrs. Auld to teach him to read. (English)

Conduct a role play of Master Auld, Mistress Auld, and Frederick discussing Frederick's learning how to read.

Go to the library and investigate the education of slaves in the United States. Discuss: Was Frederick's situation typical? Why? Why not? (History/Education) *

Discuss: In education we refer to the school's 'hidden curriculum,' that which is not intentionally taught but is learned by the students. What are some of the 'hidden curricula' in the schools you attended? How does Mr. Auld's lesson to Frederick relate to the concept of the 'hidden curriculum?' (Education) *

Examine the concept of reading as equivalent to freedom. (Education) *

Discuss how you might use this chapter with a class of middle or high school reluctant readers. (Education) *

CHAPTER VII

Relates what Mrs. Auld learned from keeping slaves; how Frederick came to hate slavery and how he learned to write.

QUESTIONS

How did Mrs. Auld change and why did she change?

What plan did Frederick adopt to learn how to read now that Mrs. Auld was no longer teaching him?

Why is it ironic that he bribed the little white boys to teach him to read? (English)

What irony does Frederick find in this statement: "It is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country." (p. 54)? *

What did Frederick learn from the book "The Columbian Orator"?

How does Master Auld's prediction about Frederick and learning come true?

How does Frederick learn the meanings of the words abolition and abolitionist?

What do the two Irishmen encourage him to do? Why does he not trust them?

How does Frederick learn to write?

How does he trick the white boys into teaching him new letters?

QUOTES

“Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her [Mrs. Auld] of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness” (pp. 52-53).

“The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell” (p. 53).

“I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out” (p. 55). (Education) *

“White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters” (p. 57).

ACTIVITIES

Discuss the concept of learning as a curse rather than a blessing. Frederick makes this comment on page 55. Is it possible that he is correct? Readdress this issue after you finish reading the book. (Education) *

Write a diary entry of a memory you have about an early reading experience. Discuss how your experience differed from Frederick's.

Write about why learning to read is so important to practicing freedom. Discuss your writing in a small group. Examine the question: Did the slave owners understand that learning to read was important to practicing freedom? (English/History)

Discuss how you learned how to read and write. How did it differ from the methods used by Frederick? (English/Education)

Go to the library to find out how the colonists felt about education. Compare this to how slaveholders felt about the education of slaves. Why was education considered essential for white children in New England and illegal for slave children in the south? (History/Education) *

CHAPTER VIII

Discussion of slaves as property; plight of old slaves; return to Baltimore.

QUESTIONS

Why was Frederick forced to return to the plantation after the death of his master?

How was the value of the master's property determined? How were the slaves valued?

Why was the division of property between Mistress Lucretia and Master Andrew so horrifying to the slaves?

What happened to Frederick's grandmother after the deaths of Lucretia and Andrew? How does this anecdote help explain the value of slaves? How are slaves valued when compared to livestock? [The ironic comparison of slaves to livestock is a continuous theme of the narrative.]

Who owns Frederick by the end of chapter eight?

Why is Frederick forced to leave Baltimore?

QUOTES

“At this moment [valuation of the property], I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder” (p. 60).

“The hearth is desolate. The children, the unconscious children, who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children, she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom. The grave is at the door” (p. 62).

ACTIVITIES

Discuss John Greenleaf Whittier's poem (p. 62). Why does Frederick put this poem in his narrative immediately following the anecdote about his grandmother? (English) *

Go to the library and find other poems by Whittier. What other poems has he written about slavery? Why does Frederick call him the slave poet? (English) *

Trace the ownership of Frederick from the beginning of the narrative through chapter eight. Explain why he is owned by so many different people. (History/Sociology)

CHAPTER IX

Moves to St. Michael's, Maryland, with Master Thomas Auld; the irony of the Christian slaveholder is discussed.

QUESTIONS

Why does Frederick now know the date?

Who is Frederick's newest Master?

What rule of slaveholding does Master Thomas Auld violate?

How did the slaves get food?

Why does Frederick say that "adopted slaveholders are the worst"?

What, according to Frederick, happens to Master Thomas Auld after his conversion to Christianity? Why?

Why does Frederick find irony in the fact that the slaves sabbath school is discontinued? (English/Education) *

Why does Frederick let Master Thomas's horse run away?

Again, Frederick compares the treatment of slaves to the treatment of horses. How?

How does Master Thomas propose to 'break' Frederick?

Why is the use of the verb 'to break' ironic? *

Why was Mr. Covey's reputation for breaking slaves of great value to him?

Why does Frederick suggest that Mr. Covey's "pious soul" (p.70) adds to "his reputation as a 'nigger-breaker'" (p. 70)? *

QUOTES

"After his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty" (p. 67). [This is an important point that Frederick continues to make throughout the rest of the narrative.]

"He would quote this passage of Scripture—'He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes'" (p. 68).

"He resolved to put me out, as he said, to be broken" (p. 69).

"Master Thomas was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them" (p. 69). *

ACTIVITIES

Frederick's contention that men use religion to justify cruelty is not new. Look for examples of this throughout history. (History) *

Frederick points out many ironies in this chapter. Discuss two of them. (English)

CHAPTER X

How a man is made a slave; a slave made a man.

QUESTIONS

Why does Mr. Covey whip Frederick?

Why are the slaves so fearful of Mr. Covey? Why does their work go on in his absence?

Why is it “never safe to stop a single minute” (p. 73)?

What does Frederick mean by “Mr. Covey’s forte consisted in his power to deceive” (p. 74)?

Why does Mr. Covey buy a slave to use as a breeder?

Why does he hire Mr. Samuel Harrison, a married man? What irony does Frederick find in this?

How does Mr. Covey succeed in breaking Frederick?

How does Frederick succeed in again becoming a man?

Why does Frederick go to Master Thomas Auld?

Why does he return to Covey? Who convinces him to do so? What does Sandy Jenkins suggest that Frederick do?

How does Frederick win the fight with Mr. Covey?

Why does Frederick contend that Mr. Covey does not turn him in?

What would have happened to Frederick had Mr. Covey turned him in? *

Why is Frederick’s battle with Mr. Covey “the turning-point in my career as a slave” (p. 82)?

How are the holidays used to “disgust the slave with freedom” (p. 85)?

Where does Frederick go after leaving Mr. Covey’s on January 1, 1834?

Who is his new master and how does he treat Frederick?

Why does Frederick include the anecdotes about the two religious slave holders Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Weeden? What point is he attempting to make? *

Why and where does Frederick begin a Sabbath school? Why is it essential that the slaves tell no one about it?

What would the slaveholders like the slaves to do on the sabbath? Why is this ironic?

Why does Frederick decide to include the slaves in his Sabbath school in his plans to obtain his freedom? Why is this dangerous?

Frederick makes the point that many slaves would “rather bear those ills we had, than fly to others, that we knew not of” (p. 93). How does this help explain why so few slaves escaped?

How do the slaves plan to run away?

What is the purpose of the “protections” written by Frederick?

What happens to their plan, and how do the “protections” nearly cause their deaths?

What happens to each of the slaves who attempted to run away?

When Frederick returns to Baltimore, what does he do?

Frederick again decides to fight when he is attacked. What happens to him? What does Master Hugh attempt to do for Frederick?

What must Frederick do with the wages he earns each week as a caulker? Why?

QUOTES

"I do verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God; and this, too, at a time when he may be said to have been guilty of compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery" (p.74)

"Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!" (p. 75).

"Those beautiful [sailing] vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thought of my wretched condition" (p. 76) (English) *

"You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man" (p. 77).

"He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery" (p. 83). (English)

"I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact" (p. 83) (English)

"The mode here adopted [is] to disgust the slave with freedom, by allowing him to see only the abuse of it" (p. 85). (Education) *

"I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,-a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,-a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,-and a dark shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection" (p. 86).

"In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed" (p. 93). (History)

"All at once, the white carpenters knocked off, and said they would not work with free colored workmen. Their reason for this, as alleged, was, that if free colored carpenters were encouraged, they would soon take the trade into their own hands and poor white men would be thrown out of employment" (p. 100). (History)

"I have observed this in my experience of slavery,-that whenever my condition was improved, instead of its increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one" (p. 103). (Education) *

ACTIVITIES

Read aloud and discuss Frederick's discussion of sailing vessels beginning with the last line on page 75 and continuing through the end of the first paragraph on page 77. Why does Frederick find the sailing vessels so abhorrent to watch? What do they symbolize for him? At the same time he finds hope in them. What is his hope? What are the sailing vessels a metaphor of? (English) *

Frederick talks about the superstition of slaves when Sandy Jenkins gives him the root to place in his right pocket. Go to the library and see what other slave superstitions you can find. What were the reasons for these superstitions? (Anthropology)

Discuss: Who beside slaves have superstitions? What are some superstitions you, your family, or your friends hold? Where do they come from?

Read sections of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to find the superstitions of the slave Jim. Discuss why slaves are superstitious. Why would slaves attribute their deaths to trickery? (English)

Frederick makes the point that although he is still a slave "in form," he is no long a slave "in fact" (p. 83). Discuss how this is possible.

Beginning with the final paragraph on page 83 and continuing to the end of the first paragraph on page 86, Frederick provides his readers with an anecdote about the purpose of the Christmas holiday for slaveholders. Read this section orally. Discuss why slaves are given the Christmas holiday.

Frederick becomes an apprentice caulker. Research the apprentice system of education in the middle Atlantic states. Was it common for slaves or free African Americans to be apprentices? (Education/History)

Several times in this chapter Frederick refers to free colored men and women. Research the free African Americans of the South. Why were some free and most slaves? (History)

Again in the chapter we hear about the legal system and slaves. Research cases in which slaves were tried. What occurred? (History)

CHAPTER 11 & APPENDIX

CHAPTER XI

Escape from slavery; becoming a free man; involvement in the anti-slavery movement.

QUESTIONS

For what two reasons does Frederick tell us that he cannot relate the means of his escape?

Why does he not approve of the underground railroad?

What does Master Hugh do to attempt to encourage Frederick to continue to earn money? What effect does his encouragement have?

What does Frederick ask of Master Thomas? What is he told?

What arrangement does Frederick eventually make with Master Hugh? Why is this arrangement to Master Hugh's advantage? Why does Frederick agree to it?

What does Master Hugh do when he discovers that Frederick has left town to find work?

Why does Frederick decide to work hard despite the dissolution of their agreement?

When and to where does Frederick run away?

Why does he feel so lonely?

Who helps Frederick in New York? How?

How is it possible for Frederick and Anna to marry? Why is their marriage such an important event?

Why does Mr. Ruggles suggest that Frederick not stay in New York and go to New Bedford, Massachusetts?

Who helps Frederick and Anna in New Bedford? What does he do for them?

Why did Frederick change his name so many times? Who chooses Douglass? Why?

What had Douglass believed about life in the North? Was he correct? What does he find about life in the North?

How were the wharves in New Bedford different from those in Baltimore?

What conditions did he find for "colored people"?

What does Douglass discover about prejudice against color in New Bedford?

How does Douglass make a living when he can't find work as a caulker?

How does Douglass become known to the "anti-slavery world"?

Why is Douglass at first reluctant to speak out against slavery?

QUOTES

"I have never approved of the very public manner in which some of our western friends have conducted what they call the underground railroad, but which I think, by their open declarations, has been made most emphatically the upperground railroad" (p. 106). (History)

“He [Master Thomas, Frederick's owner] told me, if I would be happy, I must lay out no plans for the future. He said, if I behaved myself properly, he would take care of me. Indeed, he advised me to complete thoughtlessness of the future, and taught me to depend solely upon him for happiness” (p. 107). (Education)

“He [Master Hugh] received all the benefits of slaveholding without its evils; while I endured all the evils of a slave, and suffered all the care and anxiety of a freeman. I found it a hard bargain” (p. 108).

“My object in working steadily was to remove any suspicion he might entertain of my intent to run away; and in this I succeeded admirably” (p. 110).

“The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this- ‘Trust no man!’” (p. 111).

“The name given me by my mother was, ‘Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey.’ I, however, had dispensed with the two middle names long before I left Maryland so that I was generally known by the name of ‘Frederick Bailey.’ I started from Baltimore bearing the name of ‘Stanley.’ When I got to New York, I again changed my name to ‘Frederick Johnson,’ and thought that would be the last change. But when I got to New Bedford, I found it necessary again to change my name. The reason of this necessity was, that there were so many Johnsons in New Bedford, it was already quite difficult to distinguish between them. I gave Mr. Johnson the privilege of choosing me a name” (p. 114).

“I had very strangely supposed, while in slavery, that few of the comforts, and scarcely any of the luxuries, of life were enjoyed at the north, compared with what were enjoyed by slaveholders of the south. I probably came to this conclusion from the fact that northern people owned no slaves. I supposed that they were about upon a level with the non-slaveholding population of the south. I knew they were exceedingly poor, and I had been accustomed to regard their poverty as the necessary consequence of their being non-slaveholders. I had somehow imbibed the opinion that, in the absence of slaves, there could be no wealth, and very little refinement” (p. 115).

“I found many [‘colored people’], who had not been seven years out of their chains, living in finer houses, and evidently enjoying more of the comforts of life, than the average of slaveholders in Maryland” (p. 116).

“I went in pursuit of a job of calking; but such was the strength of prejudice against color, among the white calkers, that they refused to work with, and of course I could get no employment” (p. 117-118).

“There was no work too hard-none too dirty. I was ready to saw wood, shovel coal, carry wood, sweep the chimney, or roll oil casks,-all of which I did for nearly three years in New Bedford, before I became known to the anti-slavery world” (p. 118). (Education)

“It [speaking publicly against slavery] was a severe cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down. I spoke but a few moments, when I felt a degree of freedom and said what I desired with considerable ease” (p. 119).

ACTIVITIES

Often Frederick has more than one master (i.e.: Masters Thomas and Hugh Auld; Master Thomas and Mr. Covey). Explain how this is possible. Discuss who actually owned Frederick.

Research information about the underground railway. What did it do? Where and for how long? Is Frederick fair in his criticism of it? (History)

Harriet Tubman also came from the Eastern Shore of Maryland, specifically Cambridge, just a few miles from St. Michaels. Go to the library and research her role in the underground railway. (History)

Research documented slave escapes. How did many slaves escape? Where did they escape to? From this can you guess how Frederick might have escaped from Maryland to New York?

Research slaves and marriage. Did slaves marry? How were couples treated in slavery? (History)

This chapter deals with the names of slaves. Notice that Frederick Douglass changed names three times. Discuss why he changed names. See if you can find out any information about the names of slaves. (English)

Read “Lady of the Lake.” Why does Mr. Johnson who had just finished reading it choose the name Douglass for Frederick? (English) *

Douglass tells us of his attitudes about the north. Research attitudes about the north held by various southerners: slaveholders, slaves, free blacks, politicians, others. What made them believe these things about the north? How might these beliefs contribute to the Civil War? (History) *

Douglass makes the point that many of the ex-slaves in New Bedford lived better than average slaveholders in Maryland. Research the lives of ex-slaves in the North. Was his perception correct? Did they live comfortable lives? (History)

Douglass makes the point that he is initially uncomfortable speaking to a white audience because he still felt like a slave. However, with the encouragement of Mr. William C. Coffin he does speak and soon gains a new sense of freedom and ease. What do these points say to the teacher? There is a syndrome known as the Pygmalion syndrome. Look it up. What does it mean? How does it relate to Douglass's experience? (Education) *

APPENDIX

Defense of his speaking out against the Christianity of slave holders.

QUESTIONS

Why do you think Douglass added the appendix?

What does he mean by "slaveholding religion"?

Why does Douglass contend that the church turns the other cheek on the treatment of slaves?

How does he compare the slaveholding Christians to the Pharisees and ancient scribes?

How does he criticize the church of the north?

QUOTES

"Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognized the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of the one, is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land" (p. 120).

"The slave prison and the church stand near each other. The clanking of fetters and the rattling of chains in the prison, and the pious psalm and solemn prayer in the church, may be heard at the same time" (p. 121).

"The dealer gives his blood-stained gold to support the pulpit, and the pulpit, in return, covers his infernal business with the garb of Christianity" (p. 121).

"They would be shocked at the proposition of fellowshiping a sheep-stealer; and at the same time they hug to their communion a man-stealer" (p. 123).

"They attend with Pharisaical strictness to the outward forms of religion, and at the same time neglect the weightier matters of law, judgment, mercy, and faith" (p. 123).

"They are they who are represented as professing to love God whom they have not seen, whilst they hate their brother whom they have seen" (p. 123).

"They love the heathen on the other side of the globe. They can pray for him, pay money to have the Bible put into his hand, and missionaries to instruct him; while they despise and totally neglect the heathen at their own doors" (p. 123).

ACTIVITIES

Read orally the hymn/poem on page 122. What point is Douglass making by inserting this poem? (English)

Read and discuss the comparison Douglass makes of the slaveholding Christians of the South and the Pharisees and ancient scribes (pp. 122-123).

Douglass points to many ironies in how slaveholding Christians practice their religion (p. 123). Discuss these ironies.

Read aloud and discuss the parody Douglass “copies” on pp. 124-125. What is his intent of using it in his narrative? Why is the word “union” used throughout it? In this parody is he only criticizing the Christians of the south or is he also criticizing the Christians of the north? (English)

AFTER READING

Throughout the narrative Douglass makes several important points over and over. Review the narrative to find quotes related to these points. Either write about them in your response journal or talk about them with a small group. Select from one of these major points:

- justice for slaves (and all men of color) is different from justice for whites
- no one can be enslaved if she or he has the ability to read, write, and think
- the way to enslave someone is to keep them from all learning
- slaves were treated no better than, sometimes worse than, livestock
- by encouraging depravity men come to learn to hate freedom
- the Christianity of the slaveholders is hypocritical and used to justify their actions
- white men fear that men of color will steal their jobs if they are educated and learn how to perform the job

Do research on one of the points above. Find information to support or refute Douglass's opinion. Report your findings to the class.

Review the names of all Douglass's masters. Discuss: Were these really the names of his masters? Why? Why not? If not, why do you believe they are not the real names and why did he select the names he did?

Review and discuss the concept that learning can be a curse (p. 55). Would Douglass still contend learning is a curse at the end of the narrative? Is learning ever a curse? (Education)

Read the preface and the letter that is included before the narrative. Discuss with your small group: What point is each of these men making? Why are these included with the narrative? Does the inclusion of these tell us something about how African Americans were regarded in the north? *

Go to the library and see what other information you can find about Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison. You might also explore some of the other men named in chapter eleven. Can you find information about any of them? Report your findings to the class. (History) *

Research slavery in the south. Which were the slave states? What was the philosophic/economic rationale for slavery? How many slaves were in each state at the time Frederick was a slave? What did the slaves do in each state? How did their treatment differ? From which states did most slaves escape? How did slavery end? When? Report your findings to the class? (History)

Research the history of slavery. In what other cultures has it existed? What happened to those cultures? How did it get started in the colonies? When? By whom? Where does it exist today? Present your findings to the class. (History) *

Discuss with your small group the intended purpose and audience for Douglass's narrative. Notice the frontispiece prior to chapter one: “Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1845, By Frederick Douglass, In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts.” What does this mean? What is its significance? (English)

Read one or more other slave narratives (listed in the bibliography). Compare them to Douglass's. Were their lives as slaves similar? Do they make some of the same points about slavery? Report your comparisons to the class. (English)

Research the life of Frederick Douglass. What were his accomplishments after escaping from slavery? Present your findings to the class.

Place this narrative in the context of other historical events. Make a timeline and present it to the class. (History)

Write a poem, song, essay, play, or short story that dramatizes your feelings about one or more parts of the narrative. (English)

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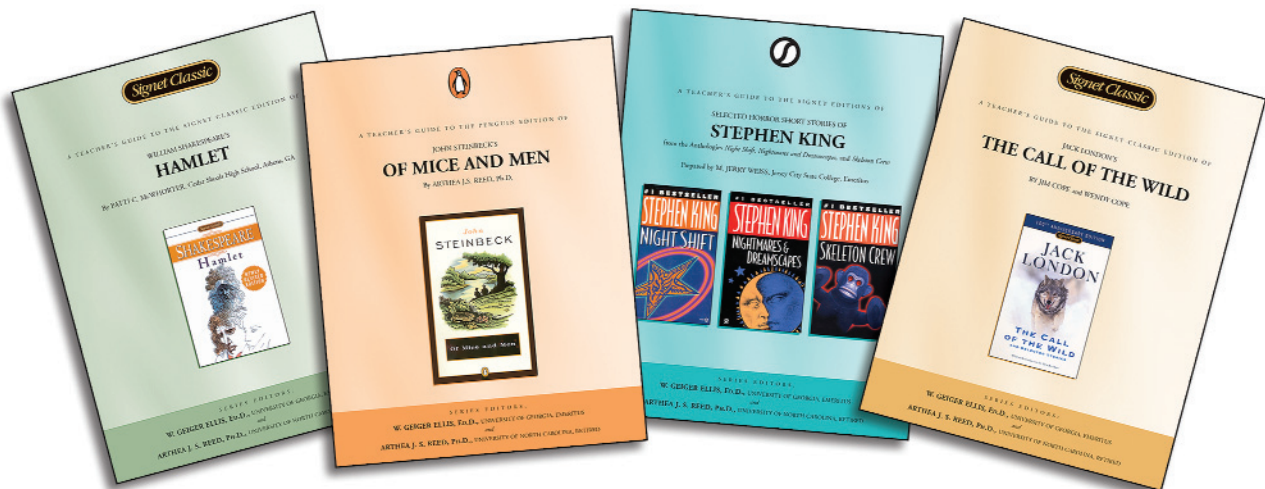
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