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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

*Narrative of the Life of  
Frederick Douglass*

by Frederick Douglass

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# Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

## Terms and Definitions

*Allusion* - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize. **Example:** In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

*Autobiography* - the relating of a person’s life by that person. **Example:** *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*.

*Parody* - a mocking piece of literature that is designed to ridicule the subject in an exaggerated, often sarcastic way. **Example:** Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* poked fun at chivalry and its excesses.

*Personal Narrative* - events from the narrator’s life, characterized by personal comments, observations, and thoughts that reflect on the events.

*Persuasive Writing* - writing in which the author wants to convince readers to agree with the author’s opinions. To accomplish this, the writer must first make the issues clear to the reader and then provide incidents and facts to support his or her opinion. **Examples:** Campaign speeches, debates, TV programs like *Crossfire*.

*Pun* an expression that achieves emphasis or humor by utilizing:

- two distinctly different meanings for the same word. **Example:** “play” meaning “fun” and “play” meaning a performance on stage.  
or
- two similar sounding words. **Example:** close/clothes.  
**Example:** In *Romeo and Juliet*, one character, Mercutio, says after being fatally stabbed, “Ask for me tomorrow and you will find me a grave man.”

*Sarcasm* - the use of harsh words to deride and criticize. Sometimes, sarcasm is apparent only by the way something is said rather than the actual words that are used; other times the sarcasm is obvious. **Example:** In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden says about a taxi driver he dislikes that, “he certainly was good company. Terrific personality.”

*Superstition* - any belief or attitude based on fear or ignorance that is inconsistent with the known laws of science. **Example:** Breaking a mirror brings seven years bad luck.

## HISTORICAL TERMS AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*Underground Railroad* - Before the Civil War, the Underground Railroad helped an estimated 40,000 to 100,000 slaves escape to the Northern states and Canada. It was called the Underground Railroad because it was secret (underground) and covertly referred to in railway terms (escaping slaves were called freight). Northern abolitionists and former slaves like Harriet Tubman ran the Underground Railroad until it ceased operation at the start of the Civil War.

*Abolitionist Movement* - The Abolitionist Movement began in the 1780's in Western Europe and the United States with the goal to gradually eliminate slavery. In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison, founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, published the *Liberator* newspaper, calling for the immediate emancipation of all slaves. His platform included:

- speaking out against the immorality of slavery.
- urging Northern states to secede from the union.
- advocating the boycott of Southern goods.
- participating in the Underground Railroad.

## FREDERICK DOUGLASS - THE ABOLITIONIST

Frederick Douglass became an agent for the Anti-Slavery Society, lecturing about the wrongs of slavery. He traveled widely, facing discrimination and pro-slavery mobs. Many of his listeners were so impressed with his speaking skills that they could not believe he had been a slave.

To combat the criticism questioning whether he was really a former slave, Douglass wrote *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, revealing the details about his life as a slave. Shortly after the narrative's publication, Douglass traveled to Britain, where he remained while Quakers raised money to purchase his freedom in 1847, allowing for his safe return to the United States. Douglass believed in and worked for human rights in many ways, including:

- Political action, rather than moral persuasion, to end slavery
- The belief that blacks, rather than whites, should lead the movement
- His assistance with the Underground Railroad
- His efforts to end racial segregation in schools
- His support of women's suffrage

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Time Sequence Presented in the Narrative

Frederick Douglass is born, approximately 1818, in Tuckahoe, Maryland. It is thought that his slave master, Captain Anthony, may have been his father.

- Douglass lives and works for Colonel Lloyd on the Lloyd Plantation.
- At age seven or eight, he leaves Lloyd Plantation to travel to Baltimore. His master is still Anthony, but he now works for Hugh Auld. Mrs. Auld teaches Douglass the alphabet.
- In March, 1832, he leaves Baltimore to live with Thomas Auld at St. Michael's, Maryland.
- January 1, 1833, he goes to work for Edward Covey, a man who is famous for "handling" slaves.
- By January 1, 1834, he goes to work for Mr. William Freeland, three miles from St. Michael's.
- In 1836, he returns to Thomas Auld in Baltimore after an unsuccessful escape attempt.
- On September 3, 1838, he escapes to New York.
- On September 15, 1838, he and Anna Murray marry in New York and travel to New Bedford, Massachusetts, hoping to find work.
- On August 11, 1841, he speaks at the Anti-Slavery convention at Nantucket, Massachusetts.

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. define the vocabulary words listed at the beginning of each chapter of the study guide and comment on the significance of Douglass' accomplishment at overcoming illiteracy to develop his substantial vocabulary.
2. trace Douglass' thirst for knowledge and discuss how the development of his mind impacts his quest for freedom.
3. relate events in the narrative demonstrating Douglass' personal growth in the following areas:
  - self respect
  - aggressiveness
  - courage
  - intelligence
  - racial pride
4. define persuasive writing and demonstrate how this autobiographical narrative is an example of persuasive writing intended to gain support for the abolitionist movement.
5. identify examples of allusion used in Douglass' arguments against slavery.
6. support or refute that Douglass believes in destiny or fate and that he credits "kind providence" with his successful escape to freedom as a result.
7. identify the author's use of sarcasm and puns to add humor and interest to the narrative.
8. comment on the dramatic descriptions of slavery and point out how these descriptions manipulate the reader's feelings to gain support for the anti-slavery movement.
9. cite and discuss the events in the story describing the hardships endured by a slave in the following areas:
  - punishment - both physical beatings and whippings as well as psychological deceit and trickery
  - deprivation - lack of food, clothes, adequate shelter, and mental stimulation
  - familial disconnection - Douglass' loss of his mother and grandmother and his lack of family feelings for his siblings
  - injustice in the legal system - whites not being prosecuted for killing slaves and testimony from blacks being insufficient to convict a white man of a crime
  - moral disintegration - slaveholders forcing slaves to breed and encouraging drunkenness among slaves

10. support or refute the idea that slavery can continue only if slaves are kept illiterate, citing incidents in the narrative.
11. contrast the lives of slaves on plantations with the lives of slaves in the city.
12. distinguish between the author's negative opinion of religion as practiced by slaveholders and his positive opinion of Christianity as a religion.
13. define parody and point out examples of how the parody in the Appendix ridicules the "slave holding religion" of the South.
14. comment on the author's belief in superstition and its relationship to the prevention of beatings.
15. define the Underground Railroad and state the author's opinion concerning its effectiveness in helping slaves escape to freedom.
16. compare the author's assumptions about the quality of life in the North and how these assumptions differ from his firsthand observations.

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Test

### Vocabulary

1. not easily moved to pity or sympathy; hardhearted
  - A. imbibe
  - B. odium
  - C. obdurate
  - D. epoch
  - E. fester
2. very cruel, evil, brutal
  - A. homage
  - B. imbue
  - C. vestige
  - D. ineffable
  - E. atrocious
3. to free from blame
  - A. profligate
  - B. exculpate
  - C. lineal
  - D. lacerate
  - E. cudgel
4. to break apart, separate
  - A. sunder
  - B. joist
  - C. ascertain
  - D. defile
  - E. turbid
5. commandment or direction meant as a rule
  - A. offal
  - B. fetter
  - C. precept
  - D. chattel
  - E. languish



## Multiple Choice

6. Douglass learns to read because
  - A. Mr. Auld inadvertently tells him reading is his path to freedom.
  - B. Mrs. Auld teaches him his letters and how to read simple words.
  - C. the white street boys in Baltimore help him with his reading in exchange for food.
  - D. Both A and B
  - E. A, B, and C
  
7. At age sixteen, Douglass manages to avoid further whippings by
  - A. wearing a root on his right side, which enables him to hold his own against Mr. Covey in a fight.
  - B. going to live with Mr. Freeman, who treats slaves better than most other slaveholders.
  - C. learning to steal the extra food he needs without getting caught.
  - D. learning not to be aggressive and submitting meekly to Mr. Covey.
  - E. Both C and D
  
8. Of what is the following quotation an example?  
“You are loosed from your mooring, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip!”  
(Pg. 59)
  - A. sarcasm, comparing a ship to a slave
  - B. a pun, showing the humor in Douglass’ situation
  - C. a dramatic description designed to gain the support of readers by appealing to their feelings
  - D. an allusion, referring to ships which helps highlight the slaves’ lack of freedom
  - E. Both C and D
  
9. Douglass gives the following as a reason for not feeling a strong family connection:
  - A. His mother was sent away when he was young, to another farm twelve miles away, and Douglass had to live with his grandmother.
  - B. He never learns the identity of his father.
  - C. His mother resents him because he is the product of rape.
  - D. His grandmother is not really his grandmother but an elderly slave given the job of raising the children.
  - E. Both B and C
  
10. The slaves in the city have a better life than those on plantations because
  - A. the white city owners feel a sense of shame if they are cruel to their slaves.
  - B. they have better food and clothes.
  - C. they get two days off each week instead of just the Sabbath.
  - D. the officials arrest white people who unjustly beat a slave.
  - E. Both A and B

11. Douglass believes the religious slaveholders are the worst kind of masters because
  - A. they force the slaves to attend Sunday services.
  - B. they justify their cruel behavior with passages from the Bible, absolving themselves of any guilt for their immoral behavior.
  - C. they make the slaves find their own food and clothes, believing it is God's will that slaves should fend for themselves.
  - D. Both A and B
  - E. A, B, and C
12. Douglass believes that the Underground Railroad is
  - A. too well known to be really effective because the methods of escape are not kept secret.
  - B. a secret organization of abolitionists who help slaves escape to the Northern states and Canada.
  - C. Good propaganda but ineffective in helping slaves escape.
  - D. Both A and B
13. Douglass is surprised at the quality of life in New Bedford because
  - A. everyone lives in poverty, including the whites.
  - B. the free black people are so poor they turn in escaped slaves for money.
  - C. many black families have nice homes.
  - D. there is very little work, but the people are kind and offer him their hospitality.
  - E. Both A and B
14. At one point in his life, Douglass contemplates suicide because
  - A. he understands the horror of his life as a slave but does not know how to change his situation.
  - B. he cannot stand working for Mr. Covey.
  - C. he is disgusted with the treatment of his grandmother when she is too old to work.
  - D. he is terrified of what will happen after the death of Master Anthony.
  - E. Both C and D
15. Douglass learns to write
  - A. so he can write his own pass when he tries to escape to the North.
  - B. after he reaches freedom in New Bedford.
  - C. by watching Mrs. Auld write letters to her family.
  - D. with the help of his friend Sandy and Sandy's free wife.
  - E. Both C and D

16. The masters encourage slaves to drink whiskey during the holiday because
- A. they think any slave who does not save enough whiskey to get drunk on a holiday is lazy.
  - B. they believe any slave who chooses to work on the holiday does not deserve the time off.
  - C. they know the slaves must have the holiday or they will eventually revolt; the masters encourage them to waste time drinking.
  - D. Both A and B
  - E. A, B, and C
17. The privilege of hiring out his own time helps Douglass by
- A. letting him earn more money to save for his escape.
  - B. making it possible for him to learn the calking trade.
  - C. getting him away from the crazy, power-hungry Mrs. Auld.
  - D. giving him the opportunity to learn how to fight the white shipbuilders, a skill he desperately needs when he tries to escape.
  - E. Both C and D
18. The following quotation contains an example of what literary term?
- “There was nothing done, and probably nothing would have been done if I had been killed. Such was and such remains, the state of things in the Christian city of Baltimore.”
- A. parody
  - B. allusion
  - C. pun
  - D. simile
  - E. sarcasm
19. Douglass’ purpose for writing this narrative is to
- A. help the abolitionists by educating people about the horrors of slavery.
  - B. persuade his master to grant his freedom now that he is a famous orator and writer in the North.
  - C. document the details of his life before he forgets them.
  - D. encourage other slaves to escape to freedom.
  - E. Both A and B
20. Which of the following statements about the life of a slave is false?
- A. Slaves sing when they are content with their lives. For example, the men who are chosen to go to the Great House Farm for their allotments traditionally sing all the way through the woods.
  - B. A good overseer is a man who does not enjoy whipping the slaves and does not swear too much.
  - C. Slave children run around almost naked; they wear only a knee-length shirt with no pants or shoes.
  - D. The slaves generally praise their masters because the punishment for saying anything unkind about their masters is to be sold.

## Essays (*Answer any two.*)

1. Cite incidents from the story to illustrate Douglass' personal growth in the following areas:

- courage
- intelligence
- racial pride

Then, discuss how growth in these areas affected his life.

2. Discuss the points Douglass make about the evils of slavery when he relates the following incidents:

- Denby's death
- Mr. Covey's conversion to Christianity
- his grandmother's hut in the woods

Do you think he is convincing in his arguments? Explain.

3. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from the story:  
Literacy is Douglass' ticket to freedom from the enslavement of his mind and body.

4. Some details from this autobiography are deliberately withheld. State the author's reasons for omitting the following story elements and then speculate on the content of these details if he had included them in the narrative:

- Douglass never reveals how he becomes aware that the first escape attempt is "betrayed."
- Douglass does not give any details about how he ultimately reaches New York.

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Test Answer Key

1.	C	6.	E	11.	B	16.	E
2.	E	7.	A	12.	D	17.	A
3.	B	8.	E	13.	C	18.	E
4.	A	9.	A	14.	A	19.	A
5.	C	10.	E	15.	A	20.	A

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Questions for Discussion and Essay

1. Review the vocabulary words at the beginning of each chapter. List the words whose meanings suggest they are used by Douglass in his narrative to describe the horrors of slavery. For example: abhorrence means loathing, detestation, and disgust. It can be linked to the abolitionist's hatred of slavery. However, barouche is a four-wheeled carriage, and does not describe the horrors of slavery.
2. How does Douglass learn the meaning of the word "abolitionist"?
3. In what way does Douglass' career as an orator influence the way he has written this narrative?
4. How does Mr. Covey succeed in turning Douglass into a "brute"? How does a "root" help Douglass develop the aggressiveness necessary to resist Mr. Covey?
5. Why does Douglass' first escape attempt fail?
6. List the qualities of a good overseer and give an example of an overseer Douglass defines as good.
7. Why does Douglass not know the date of his birth? What evidence is there that his mother cares about him even though they are separated early in his life?
8. How is the quality of Douglass' life in Baltimore different from his life on the plantation?
9. What surprises Douglass about life in New Bedford?
10. Why do the masters give slaves a whole week off at the holidays? What do the slaves do with their free time?
11. Briefly identify the following men: David Ruggles, Rev. J.W.C. Pennington, William C. Coffin, Nathan Johnson.
12. Why do the slaves sing in the forest on their way to the Big Farm to collect their rations? How is their singing often misinterpreted by white people?
13. Discuss the following statement: A religious master is the worst kind of slaveholder.
14. Which do you think is worse for Douglass, the physical imprisonment or the mental deprivation imposed by slavery?

15. Why do more slaves, particularly those living in Baltimore, not try to escape?
16. What does it mean when a slave “hires out his own time”? Why does Douglass accuse Mr. Auld of robbing him?
17. Why does Mrs. Auld stop teaching Douglass to read? How does the “exercise of irresponsible power” change Mrs. Auld?
18. Define persuasive writing. List four points Douglass makes for the abolition of slavery while relating the circumstances of his life as a slave.
19. What does Douglass think of the Underground Railroad? Why does he not include the details of his successful escape plan in the narrative?
20. Support or refute the following statement: Douglass believes in the principles of Christianity but despises the hypocrisy of the southern churches.
21. Find a passage in the text of the narrative demonstrating Douglass’ use of dramatic description to touch the emotions of the reader and gain their support for the anti-slavery movement.
22. From the narrative of Douglass’ involvement with his fellow slaves, cite three examples showing that he has a strong racial pride.
23. Why does Douglass add the “Parody” to the appendix of this narrative?
24. How do the little white boys in Baltimore help Douglass? What does he do for them?
25. What proof is there of Douglass’ intelligence and courage?
26. Find an example of allusion in this narrative. How does it add support to Douglass’ anti-slavery platform?
27. Support the idea that Douglass believes his success is due, at least in part, to “kind providence.”
28. How do the slaveholders contribute to the moral disintegration of their slaves?

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Notes

Written in 1845, the narrative autobiography of Frederick Douglass details his life as a slave, his escape to freedom, and the importance of literacy in his life. It serves as a record of Douglass' personal growth in self-respect, courage, intelligence, and racial pride.

Douglass' escape from slavery – a feat that came from his ability to learn to read and develop his mind – reinforces the importance of education as a tool to better one's life.

Note: All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Edition of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, copyright 2004.



# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Study Guide Teacher's Copy

### Chapter 1

#### Vocabulary

**cudgel** – a club with a rounded head

**gratification** – getting pleasure or satisfaction

**impertinent** – not showing proper respect or manners

**intimation** – a hint or indirect suggestion

**joists** – the parallel beams that hold up the planks of a floor

**lineal** – in the direct line of descent

**mulatto** – a person of mixed black and white ancestry

**overseer** – one who watches over and directs the work of others

1. Why does Frederick Douglass not know his true age or date of birth?

*There are no records of his birth or that of the other slave children. He is not permitted to ask his master because to do so is considered impertinent.*

2. What is Douglass' relationship with his mother? Who is his father? Who raises Douglass?

*Douglass and his mother are separated when he is an infant. She is sent to work for Mr. Stewart twelve miles away from Douglass. He sees her rarely and only at night. His father is most likely his master, Anthony. Douglass is raised on the outskirts of the plantation by his grandmother.*

3. Why do the slaves who are also the illegitimate children of the slaveholder suffer more than other slaves?

*The master's wife does not like them because they remind her of her husband's misconduct. These children are frequently sold to pacify the slave owner's wife.*

4. What kind of overseer is Mr. Plummer? In what way does Mr. Plummer show Douglass "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery"? (Pg. 12) What offense does Aunt Hester commit?

*Plummer is very cruel and enjoys whipping slaves. Douglass learns the horrors of slavery by watching Plummer whip Douglass' Aunt Hester. She is whipped for going out in the evening to spend time with another slave from the Lloyd Plantation.*

## Chapter 2

### Vocabulary

anguish – great suffering from worry, grief, or pain

betides – to happen, befall

coopering – making or repairing barrels or casks

ineffable – too overwhelming to be expressed

obdurate – not easily moved to pity or sympathy

pathetic – expressing or arousing pity, sorrow, or sympathy

privation – depriving or being deprived

providence – the care or benevolent guidance of God or nature

1. What is the purpose of the sloop Captain Auld commands?

*It is used to transport great quantities of wheat, tobacco, and corn from the Lloyd plantation to Baltimore.*

2. What is the monthly food and clothing allowance for an adult slave? What do the children receive?

*An adult slave receives eight pounds of pork or fish and one bushel of corn meal each month. Each year slaves receive two shirts, one pair of trousers, one jacket, one pair of winter trousers, one pair of stockings, and one pair of shoes. The children too young to work in the field receive two linen shirts per year.*

3. Why do the slaves consider Mr. Hopkins to be a good overseer?

*He is not very cruel, does not swear much, or enjoy whipping the slaves.*

4. Why do the slaves consider it a great honor to be asked to run an errand to the Great House Farm?

*It is a sign of confidence from their overseer, and they get to leave the field.*

5. Why does Douglass think the songs the slaves sing on their way to the Great House Farm “would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do”? (Pg. 18)

*He writes, “Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains.”*

6. What mistaken conclusion do many white people make when they hear slaves sing?

*They think slaves sing out of contentment. Slaves actually sing because they are very unhappy.*

## Chapter 3

### Vocabulary

**ascertain** – to find out with certainty

**barouche** – a four-wheeled carriage with a collapsible hood

**defile** – to make filthy or dirty, dishonor, desecrate

**equipage** – equipment; a carriage with servants

**execrate** – to call down evil upon; to curse or speak abusively

**imbibe** – to drink

**stratagem** – a trick or scheme

**sunder** – to break apart, separate

1. How does the Colonel keep the slaves from stealing fruit from his garden? Why is this system both greedy and unjust?

*He puts tar on the fence surrounding the garden and punishes any slaves who have tar on them. It is greedy to keep the fruit away from hungry people and unjust because slaves can be punished for getting tar on themselves from a source other than the garden fence.*

2. How is the Colonel cruel to Old Barney and Young Barney, the caretakers of his stable?

*They are held accountable for the conduct and appearance of the animals. They are frequently whipped for problems beyond their control and completely unable to defend themselves. A slave must never answer back to his master.*

3. Find an example of allusion in this chapter.

*The wealth of the Colonel is compared to Job from the Bible.*

4. Why do the slaves either say nothing at all about their masters or praise them?

*The slaves do not say anything negative about their masters because they will be sold if they are caught saying anything unkind. The slaves do brag to each other about their respective masters. They think “the greatness of their masters was transferable to themselves.” (Pg. 24)*

## Chapter 4

### Vocabulary

**debasing** – lowering in character, quality, or value

**homage** – anything done to show respect, reverence

**immutable** – never changing or varying

1. What characteristics make Mr. Gore, “of all the overseers, the most dreaded by the slaves”? (Pg. 26)

*He is cruel and without a conscience. He is always right and never listens to a slave: “To be accused was to be convicted, and to be convicted was to be punished.” (Pg. 25) Mr. Gore is tricky and ambitious, never witty, and prefers to use the whip instead of words.*

2. How does Mr. Gore benefit from killing Demby rather than facing murder charges?

*He explains to Colonel Lloyd that it is necessary to kill Demby because the white population will become the slaves if one slave is permitted to defy white authority. Gore becomes famous as a great overseer and, though a murderer, gains high esteem and respect in the white community.*

3. Cite three incidents from the chapter (other than Demby’s murder) which validate the common saying at the time among white children “that it was worth a half-cent to kill a ‘nigger,’ and a half-cent to bury one.” (Pg. 28)

*Mr. Thomas Lanman kills two slaves, one with a hatchet, and brags about it. Mrs. Hicks kills Douglass’ fifteen-year-old cousin with a stick. The coroner declares the death an act of murder, but the warrant issued for Mrs. Hicks’ arrest is never served. Finally, Mr. Bondly kills an old man for fishing for oysters on his premises.*

## Chapter 5

### Vocabulary

**scurf** – little dry scales shed by the skin

**manifestation** – clear or evident formation; shown plainly

**egotistical** – an exaggerated sense of self-importance; conceited

**interposition** – an intervention

**abhorrence** – loathing; detestation, causing fear, or disgust

1. Briefly describe Frederick's life on the plantation. What does he wear and eat? How does he spend his time?

*Frederick wears a knee-length linen shirt. He has no trousers or shoes. He eats corn mush and sleeps in an old sack on the floor. He does small jobs like tending the cows, keeping the birds out of the garden, running errands, and helping Master Daniel Lloyd.*

2. What does Frederick think about leaving the Lloyd plantation to live in Baltimore?

*Frederick is happy to go because he will get to wear trousers. He is also very interested in seeing Baltimore because of the descriptions of the city he has heard from Cousin Tom. Frederick thinks Baltimore might be better than the Lloyd plantation, but he does not think it can be worse.*

3. Why is Mrs. Auld, his new mistress, a pleasant surprise for Douglass?

*He is surprised to discover his new, white mistress is actually glad to see him and looks at him with kindness. He has never experienced a look of kindness from a white person before meeting Sophia Auld.*

4. Support Douglass' belief in destiny or what he refers to as the "manifestation of that kind providence which has ever since attended me." (Pg. 32)

*Ever since childhood, Douglass never believed that he would always be a slave. He writes, "From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me." (Pg. 32)*

5. Some critics think this narrative is as much a story of personal discovery as it is an account of Douglass' life. Douglass "discovers" the following qualities in himself, enabling him to rise out of the bonds of slavery: self-respect, aggressiveness, courage, intelligence, and racial pride. Cite incidents described in Chapter Five to show that young Douglass already possesses the qualities of courage and intelligence before he leaves for Baltimore.

*Answers will vary. Example: He possesses courage because, despite the lack of normal family ties, it is an act of courage to leave the only home he has known to travel to a new city and uncertain fate. His intelligence is demonstrated by the details he recalls about the trip and by his ability to gain favor with Master Daniel to be selected from all of the other slaves to travel to Baltimore.*

## Chapter 6

### Vocabulary

vestige – trace of something that once existed but has disappeared or passed away

atrocious – very cruel, evil, brutal

lacerated – torn jaggedly, mangled

odium – an object of loathing

festering – growing embittered

offal – waste parts, entrails

1. List two ways Sophia Auld demonstrates her inexperience with owning a slave.

*She is uncomfortable with “crouching servility” and thinks it is acceptable for a slave to look her in the eye.*

2. Why does Douglass credit both Mr. and Mrs. Auld with helping him learn to read?

*Mrs. Auld teaches Douglass his letters and how to read three- and four-letter words. Mr. Auld teaches Douglass that learning to read is his avenue out of slavery.*

3. What does Douglass learn about the white man’s power to enslave the black man? How do you think this knowledge contributes to Douglass’ feelings of self respect and racial pride?

*Douglass learns that the white man can keep the black race as slaves only if the slaves are kept illiterate. Mr. Auld says, “If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him.” (Pg. 34) In other words, blacks are as capable of learning as whites; slaves simply lack the opportunity to learn.*

4. How are the lives of the slaves in the city better than those of the slaves on the plantations?

*The slaves in the city have better food and clothes. Also, most white people feel a sense of shame, making cruelty toward slaves less commonplace.*

5. Some critics believe Douglass manipulates the feelings of the reader with his descriptions of slavery. Douglass presents two examples of cruelty side by side in this chapter. First, Mr. Auld denies Douglass the opportunity to learn to read. Next, Douglass describes Mrs. Hamilton’s physical cruelty to her female slaves. What emotions do you think Douglass tries to evoke from readers by presenting these incidents together? Is his technique effective?

*Answers will vary. Example: Douglass wants to emphasize the diversity of the types of cruelty, from the lack of mental stimulation to severe physical punishment. The reader sympathizes with the slaves in both incidents and comes to understand that slavery is inhuman even if the slave is well treated.*

## Chapter 7

### Vocabulary

**chattel** – a moveable item such as a piece of furniture; also used to describe a slave

**depravity** – corruption, wickedness

**precepts** – commandments or directions meant as rules

**bestow** – to give or present as a gift

**emancipation** – the release from bondage or servitude

**denunciation** – a public accusal, strong condemnation

1. What training does Sophia Auld receive in “irresponsible power,” changing her naturally kind disposition?

*First, she stops teaching Douglass to read and takes every opportunity to deny him access to books and newspapers. She quickly adopts her husband's belief that reading is not good for slaves or slaveholders.*

2. What moral does Douglass learn from reading about the conversation between the slave and his master in the book *The Columbian Orator*? What does he learn from Sheridan's speech?

*From the dialogue between the slave and his master, Douglass learns “the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder.” (Pg. 39)*

*Sheridan's speech gives a “denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights.” (Pg. 39)*

3. At this point in his life, why does Douglass find himself “regretting” his own existence?

*He is tormented because he now understands his life as a slave but does not know how to remedy his situation.*

4. How does hearing about the abolitionists confuse Douglass? How do the Irishmen help him begin to formulate an escape plan?

*At first, Douglass does not understand the words abolition and abolitionist. Once he realizes it is a group trying to eliminate slavery, he becomes very interested. The Irishmen suggest Douglass try to escape to the North.*

5. Why does Douglass learn how to write?

*He wants to be able to write his own pass so he can escape to the North.*

## Chapter 8

### Vocabulary

**valuation** – the act of determining the value or price

**profligate** – extremely wasteful; recklessly extravagant

**dissipation** – indulgence in pleasure to the point of harming oneself

**callous** – lacking pity or mercy

1. Why does Douglass suffer more anxiety than other slaves during the division of the state?

*Douglass has known kindness, so it is more difficult for him to endure the possibility of belonging to a cruel master.*

2. How are Douglass' memories of the plantation an indication of his intelligence?

*Douglas left the plantation when he was a child and did not return for five years, yet he remembers it very well. His good memory is one indicator of intelligence.*

3. Why does Douglass acknowledge his grandmother as the source of all of his old master's wealth?

*She peopled the plantation with slaves, enabling the master to work his farms.*

4. What happens to his grandmother that fills Douglass with “unutterable loathing of slaveholders”? (Pg. 45)

*She is taken to the woods and made to live alone in a hut because she is too old to work. Denied the comfort of her children and grandchildren, she lives “in perfect loneliness.” (Pg. 45)*

5. Why does Douglass regret not trying to escape while living with the Aulds?

*It is much more difficult to escape from the country than from the city. He is sent to live at St. Michael's, away from Baltimore, before he can attempt to escape.*



## Chapter 9

### Vocabulary

**sufficiency** – adequate means, ability, or resources

**subsist** – to continue to be or exist; to stay alive

**copyist** – a person who makes written copies; a person who imitates

**pretensions** – pretexts or allegations; claims

**pernicious** – causing great injury or destruction

1. Support the following statement: Captain Auld “was a slaveholder without the ability to hold slaves.” (Pg. 50)

*Answers will vary. Example: Captain Auld does not understand how to treat slaves. He is mean and cruel. He will not give them enough to eat. Captain Auld is not born to slaveholding; he acquires his slaves through marriage. He fails to gain the respect of the slaves because he lacks the authoritative characteristics of an effective master.*

2. Cite an example from the story of how Captain Auld gives “religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty.” (Pg. 51)

*He repeatedly beats a crippled young woman and justifies his behavior by quoting the passage of Scripture, “He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.” (Pg. 52)*

3. What does Douglass do that angers Captain Auld enough to send him to live with Mr. Covey, who is known for “breaking” slaves?

*Douglass deliberately lets Captain Auld’s horse escapes because the horse always runs to his father-in-law’s farm, where slaves are well fed. When Douglass goes to the farm to retrieve the horse, he gets food.*

4. Despite Mr. Covey’s reputation as a hard master, why does Douglass willingly go to work on his farm?

*Douglass is not getting enough food, and he thinks he will at least be fed on the Covey farm.*

## Chapter 10

### Vocabulary

brute – an unreasoning person

languished – became slack or dull; dispirited

ague – a fever with chills; a fit of shivering

turbid – muddy, cloudy; confused or perplexed

epoch – the beginning of a new and important period of history

quailed – lost heart; grew feeble

imbue – to permeate or inspire

1. Why does Covey whip Douglass almost every week for the first six months he works for him?

*Douglass is new at doing field-hand work and often makes mistakes. Covey uses a whip to punish him for his mistakes.*

2. Why do the slaves on the Covey farm continue to do their work even if Mr. Covey is absent?

*He surprises the workers, sometimes crawling on his hands and knees to catch them not working. The slaves never know when or where Mr. Covey will turn up, so they continue to work all of the time.*

3. Support the following statement by citing incidents from the story: Covey believes himself to be a very religious man, but he is deceiving himself and trying to deceive God.

*Answers will vary. Example: Mr. Covey conducts prayer services and appears devotional, while forcing his slave, Caroline, to commit adultery. He makes her conceive a child so he can populate his farm with slaves.*

4. Why does Douglass believe Covey is successful in breaking him and turning him into a brute?

*After six months, Douglass' "natural elasticity was crushed, [his] intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about [his] eye died and behold a man transformed into a brute!" (Pg. 58)*

5. What do the ships on the Chesapeake represent to Douglass?

*The ships represent freedom.*

6. Why do you think Douglass' writing changes from a narrative of his life to a dramatic "apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships" in the following excerpt?

"O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! Betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll."  
(Pg. 59)

*Answers will vary. Example: Douglass is trying to engage the emotions of the reader in the same way a speaker might move an audience with a dramatic reading.*

7. Who is Sandy Jenkins? What does he give to Douglass to help him prevent any future beatings by Mr. Covey?

*Sandy Jenkins is an older slave with a free wife. He gives Douglass a root, believed to have the power to prevent beatings, to carry on the right side of his body.*

8. Why does Douglass come to believe in the superstition that the root has the power to protect him from beatings? Why is his battle with Mr. Covey a turning point in his life as a slave?

*Mr. Covey speaks kindly to Douglass the next time they meet, instead of beating him for running away. Douglass wins his battle with Covey. It restores Douglass' sense of manhood, self-confidence, and determination to be free.*

9. Why does Mr. Covey not take Douglass to the constable to be whipped?

*Mr. Covey does not want anyone to think he cannot handle a slave.*

10. Why do the masters want their slaves to drink whiskey during the holidays?

*The masters think a slave who chooses to work during his time off does not deserve the time off. The slave who does not save enough whiskey all year so he can get drunk during the holidays is considered lazy by the masters.*

11. In what way are the holidays given to the slaves "part and parcel of the gross fraud, wrong, and inhumanity of slavery"? (Pg. 65)

*Without the holidays, the slaves would revolt. The masters give slaves the holiday because it is unsafe for them to deny it, not because they think the slaves deserve a break.*

12. Why does Douglass think "of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst"? (Pg. 67)

*He believes the South uses religion as a means to justify the barbaric treatment of slaves.*

13. Cite examples from this chapter to show that Douglass possesses a strong sense of racial pride.

*Answers will vary. Example: He runs a school on the Sabbath for other slaves and teaches them how to read. He describes them, "They were noble souls; they not only possessed loving hearts, but brave ones.... I never loved any or confided in any people more than my fellow-slaves." (Pg. 70)*

14. Find an example of a pun in this chapter demonstrating Douglass' sense of humor.

*"I began to want to live upon free land as well as with Freeland." (Pg. 70)*

15. Find an example of allusion in this chapter.

*Answers will vary. Example: Douglass quotes Shakespeare's Hamlet: "rather bear those ills we have, than fly to others that we knew not of" to explain why the slaves are reluctant to try to escape. (Pg. 71)*

16. Support the following statement by citing incidents from this chapter: Douglass is a courageous man who has learned the value of aggressive behavior.

*Answers will vary. Example: Douglass learns to be aggressive by resisting Covey, who backs down. Douglass lets it be known that to whip him is to kill him because he will no longer tolerate abuse. Douglass is a courageous man because he plans an escape to freedom.*

17. How do Douglass and Sandy know their plan to escape has been "betrayed"? Support the idea that Douglass knows who betrayed the plan but does not reveal his name in the narrative.

*Douglass and then Sandy has a strong feeling that their plan is betrayed, even though they have no evidence. Douglass writes, "We found the evidence against us to be the testimony of one person; our master would not tell who it was; but we came to a unanimous decision among ourselves as to who their informant was." (Pg. 75) Douglass does not reveal the identity of the informant.*

18. Why does Captain Auld send Douglass back to Baltimore?

*Auld fears that the community will kill Douglass because of its great prejudice toward any slaves who try to escape.*

19. Why are there no arrests when Douglass is assaulted by the white workmen at the shipyard?

*White witnesses will not testify, and the testimony of black witnesses is unacceptable in a court of law.*

20. Find an example of sarcasm in this chapter.

*Answers may vary. Example: "There was nothing done, and probably nothing would have been done if I had been killed. Such was and such remains, the state of things in the Christian city of Baltimore." (Pg. 79) This quote is sarcastic because it calls Baltimore a "Christian" city, but the people are guilty of "unchristian" behavior toward the black population.*

21. What kind of freedom does Douglass have over his own employment after learning to calk ships?

*He now earns as much as nine dollars a week, all of which he must give to his master. He is permitted to find his own employment, make his own contracts, and collect his own wages. When there is no work, he is permitted to do nothing.*

## Chapter 11

### Vocabulary

exculpate – to free from blame

fetters – shackles or chains

refinement – cultivation; education

habiliments – clothing, dress, attire

1. List two reasons Douglass decides not to acquaint the reader with the details of his successful escape to freedom.

*First, he does not want to cause problems for people who helped him escape. Second, he does not want to help slaveholders by revealing the details of his successful escape.*

2. Support or refute the following statement: Douglass thinks the Underground Railroad is sometimes harmful to slaves (See *Historical Terms and Background Information* for a definition of Underground Railroad.)

*Answers will vary. Example: While Douglass approves of helping slaves to escape, he feels that the escape methods of the Underground Railroad are too public. The Underground Railroad does “nothing towards enlightening the slave,” but does much “towards enlightening the master.” (Pg. 82)*

3. Support the following statement: Douglass believes people must be responsible for their own happiness and provide for their own future.

*Answers will vary. Example: Master Hugh tells Douglass to stop thinking and let his master worry about his future. Douglass does not accept Hugh’s advice; instead he plans to make extra money so he can eventually escape.*

4. Why does the privilege of hiring his own time help Douglass?

*By paying Master Hugh three dollars each week, Douglass may choose his own employment. Douglass also pays for his own food, clothing, and tools, but he gets to keep any extra money that he makes.*

5. Why does Douglass believe that more slaves do not try to escape?

*They find it difficult to leave their friends and loved ones behind.*

6. Why does Douglass adopt the motto “Trust no man!” during his escape for freedom?

*He can trust no one, white or black, with the knowledge that he is an escaped slave, because they might turn him in to the authorities.*

7. Briefly identify the following people and how they help Douglass after he escapes to freedom:

Mr. David Ruggles - *He takes Douglass to his boarding house and helps him get to New Bedford, where he can get work as a calker.*

Rev. J.W.C. Pennington - *He performs the marriage ceremony between Douglass and Anna.*

Mr. Nathan Johnson - *He is an abolitionist who helps Douglass and his wife by offering them hospitality in New Bedford and by paying their debt to the stagecoach line. Mr. Johnson helps Douglass select the name of Douglass.*

8. Why is Douglass surprised by the appearance of New Bedford? What surprises him about the other free blacks he meets in New Bedford?

*He is surprised that the North prospers without slaves. Before seeing New Bedford, Douglass assumes anyone who does not have slaves must be poor. The other free blacks are living in finer houses and have more comforts of life than many of the slaveholders in the South.*

9. How does the anti-slavery convention in Nantucket change Douglass' life?

*For the first time, with the encouragement of Mr. William C. Coffin, Douglass speaks at an anti-slavery meeting.*

# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## Study Guide Student Copy

### Chapter 1

#### Vocabulary

**cudgel** – a club with a rounded head

**gratification** – getting pleasure or satisfaction

**impertinent** – not showing proper respect or manners

**intimation** – a hint or indirect suggestion

**joists** – the parallel beams that hold up the planks of a floor

**lineal** – in the direct line of descent

**mulatto** – a person of mixed black and white ancestry

**overseer** – one who watches over and directs the work of others

1. Why does Frederick Douglass not know his true age or date of birth?
2. What is Douglass' relationship with his mother? Who is his father? Who raises Douglass?
3. Why do the slaves who are also the illegitimate children of the slaveholder suffer more than other slaves?
4. What kind of overseer is Mr. Plummer? In what way does Mr. Plummer show Douglass "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery"? (Pg. 12) What offense does Aunt Hester commit?



## Chapter 2

### Vocabulary

**anguish** – great suffering from worry, grief, or pain

**betides** – to happen, befall

**coopering** – making or repairing barrels or casks

**ineffable** – too overwhelming to be expressed

**obdurate** – not easily moved to pity or sympathy

**pathetic** – expressing or arousing pity, sorrow, or sympathy

**privation** – depriving or being deprived

**providence** – the care or benevolent guidance of God or nature

1. What is the purpose of the sloop Captain Auld commands?
2. What is the monthly food and clothing allowance for an adult slave? What do the children receive?
3. Why do the slaves consider Mr. Hopkins to be a good overseer?
4. Why do the slaves consider it a great honor to be asked to run an errand to the Great House Farm?
5. Why does Douglass think the songs the slaves sing on their way to the Great House Farm “would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject could do”? (Pg. 18)
6. What mistaken conclusion do many white people make when they hear slaves sing?

## Chapter 3

## Vocabulary

**ascertain** – to find out with certainty

**barouche** – a four-wheeled carriage with a collapsible hood

**defile** – to make filthy or dirty, dishonor, desecrate

equipage – equipment; a carriage with servants

**execrate** – to call down evil upon; to curse or speak abusively

imbibe – to drink

stratagem – a trick or scheme

**sunder** – to break apart, separate

1. How does the Colonel keep the slaves from stealing fruit from his garden? Why is this system both greedy and unjust?
2. How is the Colonel cruel to Old Barney and Young Barney, the caretakers of his stable?
3. Find an example of allusion in this chapter.
4. Why do the slaves either say nothing at all about their masters or praise them?

## Chapter 4

## Vocabulary

**debasing** – lowering in character, quality, or value

**homage** – anything done to show respect, reverence

**immutable** – never changing or varying

1. What characteristics make Mr. Gore, “of all the overseers, the most dreaded by the slaves”? (Pg. 26)
2. How does Mr. Gore benefit from killing Demby rather than facing murder charges?
3. Cite three incidents from the chapter (other than Demby’s murder) which validate the common saying at the time among white children “that it was worth a half-cent to kill a ‘nigger,’ and a half-cent to bury one.” (Pg. 28)

## Chapter 5

### Vocabulary

**scurf** – little dry scales shed by the skin

**manifestation** – clear or evident formation; shown plainly

**egotistical** – an exaggerated sense of self-importance; conceited

**interposition** – an intervention

**abhorrence** – loathing; detestation, causing fear, or disgust

1. Briefly describe Frederick's life on the plantation. What does he wear and eat? How does he spend his time?
2. What does Frederick think about leaving the Lloyd plantation to live in Baltimore?
3. Why is Mrs. Auld, his new mistress, a pleasant surprise for Douglass?
4. Support Douglass' belief in destiny or what he refers to as the "manifestation of that kind providence which has ever since attended me." (Pg. 32)
5. Some critics think this narrative is as much a story of personal discovery as it is an account of Douglass' life. Douglass "discovers" the following qualities in himself, enabling him to rise out of the bonds of slavery: self-respect, aggressiveness, courage, intelligence, and racial pride. Cite incidents described in Chapter Five to show that young Douglass already possesses the qualities of courage and intelligence before he leaves for Baltimore.

## Chapter 6

### Vocabulary

**vestige** – trace of something that once existed but has disappeared or passed away

**atrocious** – very cruel, evil, brutal

**lacerated** – torn jaggedly, mangled

**odium** – an object of loathing

**fester** – growing embittered

**offal** – waste parts, entrails

1. List two ways Sophia Auld demonstrates her inexperience with owning a slave.
2. Why does Douglass credit both Mr. and Mrs. Auld with helping him learn to read?
3. What does Douglass learn about the white man's power to enslave the black man? How do you think this knowledge contributes to Douglass' feelings of self respect and racial pride?
4. How are the lives of the slaves in the city better than those of the slaves on the plantations?
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12. Why does Douglass think “of all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst”? (Pg. 67)
13. Cite examples from this chapter to show that Douglass possesses a strong sense of racial pride.
14. Find an example of a pun in this chapter demonstrating Douglass’ sense of humor.
15. Find an example of allusion in this chapter.
16. Support the following statement by citing incidents from this chapter: Douglass is a courageous man who has learned the value of aggressive behavior.
17. How do Douglass and Sandy know their plan to escape has been “betrayed”? Support the idea that Douglass knows who betrayed the plan but does not reveal his name in the narrative.

18. Why does Captain Auld send Douglass back to Baltimore?
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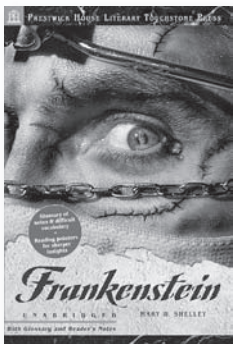
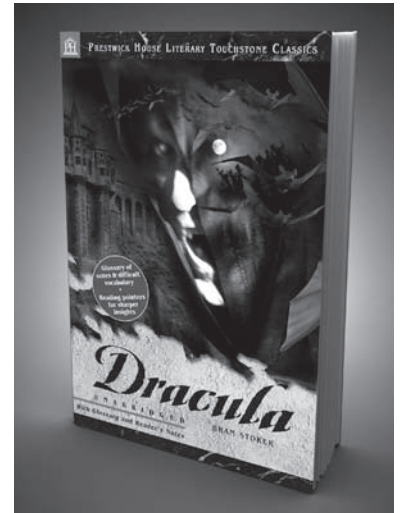
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