

Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl**

by Harriet Jacobs

written by Frank Hering

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# Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to*

1. explain the function of an autobiographical narrator.
2. discuss the novel in relation to historical and literary-historical contexts.
3. identify rhetorical strategies and explain how they are used to persuade an intended audience.
4. examine the issue of gender roles in the development of characters and their relationships.
5. identify, examine, and discuss the use of imagery and figurative language (simile, metaphor, and symbolism).
6. analyze the author's use of tone, diction, voice, and perspective in the narration and in the dialogue.
7. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

## Introductory Lecture

### HISTORY OF THE TEXT

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* appeared in 1861, after the Civil War had already begun. Since abolitionists assumed that the only use of a slave narrative was to arouse sympathy among whites, the book was seen as being published too late to have any social or political impact. Therefore, it received little public acclaim until it was rediscovered more than 100 years later, in the 1970s, as a result of the successes of the Civil Rights Movement and feminist scholarship in the universities.

Jacobs had tried to have her narrative published earlier. With her brother, Jacobs had already run an anti-slavery reading room in Rochester, New York, in the same building that housed the offices of Frederick Douglass's newspaper *The North Star*. There, she met and became friends with the important abolitionist Amy Post, who urged Jacobs to publish her story. Reluctant to reveal her painful private life to the public, Jacobs nevertheless began compiling her narrative in 1853, completing it in 1858. Jacobs had already tried to gain support for the publication of her manuscript from Harriet Beecher Stowe, who had become famous with her book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Instead of agreeing to support the publication of the slave narrative, Stowe agreed only to include Jacobs's story in her upcoming book, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Determined to tell her own story, Jacobs went to England with letters from her abolitionist friends, but returned home unsuccessful. She then found a Boston publisher, but he went bankrupt.

Another Boston publisher agreed to publish the book if it included a preface by Lydia Maria Child, a famous abolitionist, women's rights activist, opponent of American expansionism, Indian rights activist, novelist, and journalist. Perhaps best known for her authorship of "Over the River and Through the Woods," Child was a conspicuous anti-slavery activist, particularly in her 1833 book *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, which argued for the immediate emancipation of all slaves without compensation to slaveholders. She also explored the complex issues of slavery in fiction, such as "The Quadroons" (1842) and "Slavery's Pleasant Homes" (1843). Despite being a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society's executive committee and the editor of its newspaper, *The Standard*, Child left the Society because of the abolitionists' inability to work together as a cohesive unit and their constant arguing over the role of women in the Society. Child continued to write for many newspapers and periodicals promoting anti-slavery goals and equality for women. Child agreed to write the preface and to act as Jacobs's editor.

When this second publisher went bankrupt, Jacobs decided to purchase the plates of her book and publish it herself. It was finally published in 1861 by a third Boston printer, and in 1862, the English edition, *The Deeper Wrong*, was published in London. While her book may have been too late to incite the Civil War, Jacobs's was the first book-length narrative by an ex-slave that revealed the unique brutalities faced by enslaved women. While male narratives highlight their own daring escapes and heroic actions, Jacobs's narrative focuses on the "incidents" in her family life and addresses such social and political issues as the role of the church in slavery, the slaves' New Year's Day, what slaves were taught to think of the North, the impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on runaways, and the repercussions faced by slaves after Nat Turner's failed insurrection.

### AUTHENTICITY OF THE TEXT

Slave narratives provide psychological portraits of slaves who are determined to be free. Readers expect slave narratives to be true and written by the slave him- or herself. Until the 1970s, critics dismissed *Incidents*, calling it a fictional slave narrative, most likely written by the famous author, women's rights activist, and abolitionist Lydia Maria Child. They raised several objections:

- Unlike conventional slave narratives, *Incidents* was published under a pseudonym.
- The account of a woman spending seven years in her grandmother's tiny attic to escape a sexual relationship with her master seemed far-fetched.
- The language and writing style seemed too sophisticated for a slave.

These criticisms have been addressed most successfully by Pace University professor Jean Fagin Yellin, Jacobs's biographer and the editor of the 1987 reprint of *Incidents*. In her research, Yellin identified the real-life counterpart to each pseudonymous character. Her discovery of Jacobs's correspondence with Amy Post, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Lydia Maria Child has established the authenticity of *Incidents*. Yellin also discovered a narrative written by Jacobs's brother, John, which corroborates his sister's experiences. Child had always claimed that she herself did very little editing; Yellin cites numerous letters written by Jacobs that exemplify a style identical to *Incidents*.

### SEDUCTION NOVELS

Today's readers take issue with other aspects of *Incidents*:

- It often engages in the melodramatic style of 18<sup>th</sup>-century sentimental novels of seduction.
- Rather than trying to escape, Linda chooses to have two children by Mr. Sands.
- Dr. Flint acts more like a suitor or persistent lover than like a slave owner determined to exert control over his "property."

One important influence on *Incidents* may be Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), the most popular novel of its day. In this story, fifteen-year-old Pamela Andrews is sexually harassed by her employer, Mr. B., a nobleman who believes he cannot marry a servant because he is a nobleman. Pamela refuses Mr. B.'s advances, and Mr. B. locks her away in retaliation. As the story progresses, Pamela gradually becomes aware that she is falling in love with her captor. Eventually, Mr. B. realizes that he has treated Pamela poorly, and he releases her from her captivity. After an exchange of letters, however, Pamela returns to Mr. B. willingly, and they marry.

Without having female-authored slave narratives that she could look to as models for conveying her experiences as a slave woman and mother, Jacobs seems to have adapted (rather than adopted) the seduction novel for her purposes. Like Pamela, Linda Brent is a young, beautiful, intelligent, and

innocent servant who is sexually harassed by her employer. Like Mr. B, Dr. Flint alternates between acting like a suitor and acting like a tyrant. As Lauren Berlant has written about *Incidents*,

For dark-skinned “black” women this form of exploitation involved rape and forced reproduction. These conditions applied to mulatta women too, but the lightness of these women also provided material for white men’s parodic and perverse fantasies of masking domination as love and conjugal decorum. Theatrically, they set up a parallel universe of sexual and racial domestic bliss and heterosexual entitlement: this involved dressing up the beautiful mulatta and playing white-lady-of-the-house with her, building her a little house that parodied the big one, giving her the kinds of things that white married ladies received, only in this instance without the protections of law. Jacobs herself was constantly threatened with this fancy life, if only she would consent to it.<sup>1</sup>

In eighteenth-century America, the sentimental novel of seduction also flourished, particularly with the best-selling *Charlotte Temple* (1794) by Susanna Rowson and *The Coquette* (1797) by Hannah Webster Foster. Like *Pamela*, *The Coquette*; or, *The History of Eliza Wharton* was written in epistolary form (a novel written as a series of letters), which allows the reader to enter the minds of the characters and the writer to create more complex characters. Similarly, Jacobs structures her book not in the strictly chronological format used in slave narratives by men, but as a series of incidents in her life, interrupting her narrative to address relevant social and political issues. The epistolary form allows an author to write in the first person; “Linda Brent’s” memoir is also in the first person, which allows Jacobs to give readers access to her motivations, allowing for a reading of “Linda” as both “victim” and “transgressor” of society’s norms. What Cathy Davidson has said about *The Coquette* can be applied to *Incidents*:

Eliza Wharton sins and dies. Her death can convey the conservative moral that many critics of the time demanded. Yet the circumstances of that death seem designed to tease the reader into thought. It is in precisely these interstices—the disjunctions between the conventional and the radical readings of the plot—that the early American sentimental novel flourishes.<sup>2</sup>

By both criticizing and justifying her decision to have children with Mr. Sands, Jacobs creates a book that is situated in the “disjunctions between the conventional and the radical readings of the plot” of the seduction novel and challenges her white female readers to question whether middle-class Christian morality should apply to black women held in bondage.

## SLAVE NARRATIVES

Between 1820 and 1860, ex-slaves produced many written accounts of slavery. They told of their experiences in bondage, their heroic journeys to freedom, and their subsequent dedication to the abolitionist movement. They explored the psychology and social relationships of masters and slaves and demanded the emancipation of all the enslaved. Many of these works sold by the thousands.

<sup>1</sup> Lauren Berlant, “The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper, and Anita Hill” in *Subjects & Citizens: Nation, Race, and Gender from Oroonoko to Anita Hill*, eds. Michael Moon and Cathy N. Davidson (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1995) 460 – 461.

<sup>2</sup> Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004) 230.

While documenting the cruelties of slavery, these narratives also gave proof that African-Americans possessed the higher intellectual powers of all human beings. Their authors were both readers and writers, and their autobiographical narratives were intended not only to serve abolitionist goals, but also to present literary art to posterity. As these writers explored how one can most effectively narrate one's own experiences, they turned to such popular nineteenth-century modes of writing as sentimental romances, plantation novels, biographies of great men, lectures on self-improvement, frontier travel accounts, Sunday-school morality tales, Puritan confessions, and Methodist conversion narratives.

### AMERICAN JEREMIADS

Slave narratives also employed one of America's oldest literary traditions: the jeremiad. Named for the Book of Jeremiah, the American jeremiad was a type of political sermon. It both condemned Americans for betraying the nation's sacred covenant as history's (or God's) chosen nation and optimistically asserted the realization of an American utopia if only its citizens would recommit themselves to its founding principles. The paradigmatic American Jeremiad is John Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity" (1630), a sermon that sought to unify the Puritans onboard the *Arbella* by creating tension between their ideal of social life and its flawed manifestation. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* is a jeremiad, as is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. President Barack Obama's inaugural address was a jeremiad, as are many political speeches. Unlike its European cousin, the American jeremiad holds out the hope for social change and public progress.<sup>3</sup>

Mid-nineteenth-century readers were very familiar with jeremiads that reminded them of America's betrayal, in allowing slavery to continue, of its divinely appointed mission. In her slave narrative, Harriet Jacobs focuses most of her criticism of America's betrayal of its principles on the Fugitive Slave Law: "The judges of Massachusetts had not then stooped under chains to enter her courts of justice, so called. I knew my old master was rather skittish of Massachusetts. I relied on her love of freedom, and felt safe on her soil. I am now aware that I honored the old Commonwealth beyond her deserts." Despite her just condemnations, Jacobs remains hopeful that change can occur: "I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is. Only by experience can any one realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations."

### LIFE AFTER INCIDENTS

In 1853, Jacobs began writing her narrative and saw it published in 1861. Though her book received little attention, chiefly because the Civil War had already started, Jacobs continued her life as an activist while supporting herself as a seamstress. During the war, Harriet performed relief work, nursing black troops and black refugees. She and her daughter founded a school in Alexandria, Virginia in 1863. Then mother and daughter engaged in further relief work,

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<sup>3</sup> See Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

this time among the freedmen and freedwomen in Savannah, Georgia and her former home, Edenton, NC. Racist violence drove mother and daughter back north. By the mid-1880s, Harriet and her daughter were settled in Washington, D.C., where Louisa Matilda participated in organizing meetings of the National Association of Colored Women. Little is known about the last decade of Jacobs's life.

Harriet died in Washington on March 7, 1897, and she was buried next to her brother in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## FEMINISM AND LITERATURE

Feminism is an evolving social movement that promotes a woman's bodily autonomy and seeks equal political, economic, and social rights and opportunities for women. It challenges centuries-old cultural images of women as incompetent, petty, unintelligent, or weak. Its various branches explore the origins of inequality and, in most cases, the social construction of gender. Some feminists argue that in order to achieve gender equality, the movement must also address how men are harmed by sexism and gender roles. Liberal feminism seeks the equality of individuals (men and women) without the altering of society's structure, while radical, socialist, and Marxist feminists see a male-controlled capitalist hierarchy as what creates women's oppression and believe that a total uprooting and reconstruction of society is necessary.

Often, the Anglo-American feminist movement is thought of as having progressed in three "waves." The first wave occurred in from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries and focused on establishing equal rights in marriage, parenting, contracts, voting, and property ownership. During this time, some feminists sought sexual and reproductive rights. The crowning moment of the first wave was when women in England and the U.S. gained the right to vote in 1928 and 1920, respectively.

The second wave is thought of as existing from the 1960s to the present. This phase focused on ending discrimination and on attaining equality in more areas than just the legal sphere, and on securing reproductive rights. Arguing that the "personal is political," this wave also encouraged women to think about how their personal lives reflected sexist power structures. In the late 1970s, feminist criticism started to establish itself in Western literary studies. French feminist criticism analyzed the ways in which language represents the world from the male point of view. Drawing their inspiration from Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), they saw language as a tool of male domination and sought to develop a feminine language and writing. North American feminist critics focused on close textual readings and historical scholarship that examined how female characters are portrayed, that exposed the patriarchal ideology in the so-called "classics," and that expanded the literary canon to include works by and about women.

Overlapping with the second wave, the third wave is thought of as existing from the 1990s to the present. In this wave, feminists challenge essentialist definitions of femininity, which, many argue, over-emphasize the experiences of upper-middle-class white women and need to take into account the experiences of women in developing countries and former colonies and

of “women of color.” For example, black feminism argues that sexism, class oppression, and racism are inextricably bound together. The third wave includes both feminists who believe there are important inherent differences between the sexes and those who do not, who argue that gender is due to social conditioning.

A feminist approach to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* would consider questions such as the following:

- What are the differences between the slavery experiences of male characters and those of female characters? How do female characters’ runs-for-freedom differ from those of male characters?
- What are the power dynamics between Dr. Flint and Linda Brent? How do class, race, and sex combine to give Dr. Flint his power? How does Linda Brent exert power?
- Where does Jacobs’s use of language reproduce patriarchal power? Where does she use language to contest it?
- How does the inclusion of *Incidents* in the canon of slave narratives enhance our understanding of the slave experience? Of the struggle for equal rights and opportunities? Of the struggle against discrimination? Of the hero’s quest? Of human relationships?
- What are the differences between Harriet Jacobs’s narrative and her brother John’s?
- How are the concerns that first-wave feminists were addressing in the mid-nineteenth century echoed in *Incidents*?



## **Practice Free Response Questions**

### **PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #1**

Carefully read the following passage from Chapter I of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, in a well-organized, well-supported essay, analyze how Jacobs's diction creates tone and conveys her attitude toward slavery.

I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away. My father was a carpenter, and considered so intelligent and skilful in his trade, that, when buildings out of the common line were to be erected, he was sent for from long distances, to be head workman. On condition of paying his mistress two hundred dollars a year, and supporting himself, he was allowed to work at his trade, and manage his own affairs. His strongest wish was to purchase his children; but, though he several times offered his hard earnings for that purpose, he never succeeded. In complexion my parents were a light shade of brownish yellow, and were termed mulattoes. They lived together in a comfortable home; and, though we were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment. I had one brother, William, who was two years younger than myself—a bright, affectionate child. I had also a great treasure in my maternal grandmother, who was a remarkable woman in many respects. She was the daughter of a planter in South Carolina, who, at his death, left her mother and his three children free, with money to go to St. Augustine, where they had relatives. It was during the Revolutionary War; and they were captured on their passage, carried back, and sold to different purchasers. Such was the story my grandmother used to tell me; but I do not remember all the particulars. She was a little girl when she was captured and sold to the keeper of a large hotel. I have often heard her tell how hard she fared during childhood. But as she grew older she evinced so much intelligence, and was so faithful, that her master and mistress could not help seeing it was for their interest to take care of such a valuable piece of property. She became an indispensable personage in the household, officiating in all capacities, from cook and wet nurse to seamstress. She was much praised for her cooking; and her nice crackers became so famous in the neighborhood that many people were desirous of obtaining them. In consequence of numerous requests of this kind, she asked permission of her mistress to bake crackers at night, after all the household work was done; and she obtained leave to do it, provided she would clothe herself and her children from the profits. Upon these terms, after working hard all day for her mistress, she began her midnight bakings, assisted by her two oldest children. The business proved profitable; and each year she laid by a little, which was saved for a fund to purchase her children. Her master died, and the property was divided among his heirs. The widow had her dower in the hotel which she continued to keep open. My grandmother remained in her service as a slave; but her children were divided among her master's children. As she had five, Benjamin, the youngest one, was sold, in order that each heir might have an equal portion of dollars and cents. There was so little difference in our ages that he seemed more like my brother than my uncle. He was a bright, handsome lad, nearly white; for he inherited the complexion my grandmother had derived from Anglo-Saxon ancestors. Though only ten years old, seven hundred and twenty dollars were paid for him. His sale was a terrible blow to my grandmother, but she was naturally hopeful, and she went to work with renewed energy, trusting in time to be able to purchase some of her children. She had laid up three hundred dollars, which her mistress one day begged as a loan, promising to pay her soon. The reader probably knows that no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding; for, according to Southern laws, a slave, *being* property, can *hold* no property. When my grandmother lent her hard earnings to her mistress, she trusted solely to her honor. The honor of a slaveholder to a slave!

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #2

Carefully read the following passage from Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, in a well-organized, well-supported essay, analyze how Jacobs creates a narrator who can mediate between the experiences of black slaves in the South and the experiences of white women in the North.

Dr. Flint owned a fine residence in town, several farms, and about fifty slaves, besides hiring a number by the year.

Hiring-day at the south takes place on the 1st of January. On the 2d, the slaves are expected to go to their new masters. On a farm, they work until the corn and cotton are laid. They then have two holidays. Some masters give them a good dinner under the trees. This over, they work until Christmas Eve. If no heavy charges are meantime brought against them, they are given four or five holidays, whichever the master or overseer may think proper. Then comes New Year's eve; and they gather together their little alls, or more properly speaking, their little nothings, and wait anxiously for the dawning of day. At the appointed hour the grounds are thronged with men, women, and children, waiting, like criminals, to hear their doom pronounced. The slave is sure to know who is the most humane, or cruel master, within forty miles of him.

It is easy to find out, on that day, who clothes and feeds his slaves well; for he is surrounded by a crowd, begging, "Please, massa, hire me this year. I will work very hard, massa."

If a slave is unwilling to go with his new master, he is whipped, or locked up in jail, until he consents to go, and promises not to run away during the year. Should he chance to change his mind, thinking it justifiable to violate an extorted promise, woe unto him if he is caught! The whip is used till the blood flows at his feet; and his stiffened limbs are put in chains, to be dragged in the field for days and days!

If he lives until the next year, perhaps the same man will hire him again, without even giving him an opportunity of going to the hiring-ground. After those for hire are disposed of, those for sale are called up. O, you happy free women, contrast *your* New Year's day with that of the poor bond-woman! With you it is a pleasant season, and the light of the day is blessed. Friendly wishes meet you every where, and gifts are showered upon you. Even hearts that have been estranged from you soften at this season, and lips that have been silent echo back, "I wish you a happy New Year." Children bring their little offerings, and raise their rosy lips for a caress. They are your own, and no hand but that of death can take them from you.

But to the slave mother New Year's day comes laden with peculiar sorrows. She sits on her cold cabin floor, watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning; and often does she wish that she and they might die before the day dawns. She may be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from childhood; but she has a mother's instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother's agonies.

On one of these sale days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction-block. She knew that *some* of them would be taken from her; but they took *all*. The children were sold to a slave-trader, and their mother was bought by a man in her own town. Before night her children were all far away. She begged the trader to tell her where he intended to take them; this he refused to do. How *could* he, when he knew he would sell them, one by one, wherever he could command the highest price? I met that mother in the street, and her wild, haggard face lives to-day in my mind. She wrung her hands in anguish, and exclaimed, "Gone! All gone! Why *don't* God kill me?" I had no words wherewith to comfort her. Instances of this kind are of daily, yea, of hourly occurrence.

Slaveholders have a method, peculiar to their institution, of getting rid of *old* slaves, whose lives have been worn out in their service. I knew an old woman, who for seventy years faithfully served her master. She had become almost helpless, from hard labor and disease. Her owners moved to Alabama, and the old black woman was left to be sold to any body who would give twenty dollars for her.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #3

Carefully read the following passage from Chapter IV of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, in a well-organized, well-supported essay, analyze how Jacobs's use of gendered language and imagery conveys her attitude toward the gender roles traditionally accepted by her Northern middle-class readers. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Two years had passed since I entered Dr. Flint's family, and those years had brought much of the knowledge that comes from experience, though they had afforded little opportunity for any other kinds of knowledge.

My grandmother had, as much as possible, been a mother to her orphan grandchildren. By perseverance and unwearied industry, she was now mistress of a snug little home, surrounded with the necessities of life. She would have been happy could her children have shared them with her. There remained but three children and two grandchildren, all slaves. Most earnestly did she strive to make us feel that it was the will of God: that He had seen fit to place us under such circumstances; and though it seemed hard, we ought to pray for contentment.

It was a beautiful faith, coming from a mother who could not call her children her own. But I, and Benjamin, her youngest boy, condemned it. We reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated as she was. We longed for a home like hers. There we always found sweet balsam for our troubles. She was so loving, so sympathizing! She always met us with a smile, and listened with patience to all our sorrows. She spoke so hopefully, that unconsciously the clouds gave place to sunshine. There was a grand big oven there, too, that baked bread and nice things for the town, and we knew there was always a choice bit in store for us.

But, alas! Even the charms of the old oven failed to reconcile us to our hard lot. Benjamin was now a tall, handsome lad, strongly and gracefully made, and with a spirit too bold and daring for a slave. My brother William, now twelve years old, had the same aversion to the word master that he had when he was an urchin of seven years. I was his confidant. He came to me with all his troubles. I remember one instance in particular. It was on a lovely spring morning, and when I marked the sunlight dancing here and there, its beauty seemed to mock my sadness. For my master, whose restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom to devour, had just left me, with stinging, scorching words; words that scathed ear and brain like fire. O, how I despised him! I thought how glad I should be, if some day when he walked the earth, it would open and swallow him up, and disencumber the world of a plague.

When he told me that I was made for his use, made to obey his command in *every* thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt half so strong. So deeply was I absorbed in painful reflections afterwards, that I neither saw nor heard the entrance of any one, till the voice of William sounded close beside me. "Linda," said he, "what makes you look so sad? I love you. O, Linda, isn't this a bad world? Every body seems so cross and unhappy. I wish I had died when poor father did."

I told him that every body was *not* cross, or unhappy; that those who had pleasant homes, and kind friends, and who were not afraid to love them, were happy. But we, who were slave-children, without father or mother, could not expect to be happy. We must be good; perhaps that would bring us contentment.

"Yes," he said, "I try to be good; but what's the use? They are all the time troubling me." Then he proceeded to relate his afternoon's difficulty with young master Nicholas. It seemed that the brother of master Nicholas had pleased himself with making up stories about William. Master Nicholas said he should be flogged, and he would do it. Whereupon he went to work; but William fought bravely, and the young master, finding he was getting the better of him, undertook to tie his hands behind him. He failed in that likewise. By dint of kicking and fisting, William came out of the skirmish none the worse for a few scratches.

He continued to discourse, on his young master's *meanness*; how he whipped the *little* boys, but was a perfect coward when a tussle ensued between him and white boys of his own size. On such occasions he always took to his legs. William had other charges to make against him. One

was his rubbing up pennies with quicksilver, and passing them off for quarters of a dollar on an old man who kept a fruit stall. William was often sent to buy fruit, and he earnestly inquired of me what he ought to do under such circumstances. I told him it was certainly wrong to deceive the old man, and that it was his duty to tell him of the impositions practised by his young master. I assured him the old man would not be slow to comprehend the whole, and there the matter would end. William thought it might with the old man, but not with *him*. He said he did not mind the smart of the whip, but he did not like the *idea* of being whipped.

While I advised him to be good and forgiving I was not unconscious of the beam in my own eye. It was the very knowledge of my own shortcomings that urged me to retain, if possible, some sparks of my brother's God-given nature. I had not lived fourteen years in slavery for nothing. I had felt, seen, and heard enough, to read the characters, and question the motives, of those around me. The war of my life had begun; and though one of God's most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered. Alas, for me!

#### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #4

Carefully read the following passage from Chapter V of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, in a well-organized, well-supported essay, analyze how Jacobs develops suspense. Do not merely summarize the plot.

During the first years of my service in Dr. Flint's family, I was accustomed to share some indulgences with the children of my mistress. Though this seemed to me no more than right, I was grateful for it, and tried to merit the kindness by the faithful discharge of my duties. But I now entered on my fifteenth year—a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with indifference or contempt. The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. He was a crafty man, and resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes. Sometimes he had stormy, terrific ways, that made his victims tremble; sometimes he assumed a gentleness that he thought must surely subdue. Of the two, I preferred his stormy moods, although they left me trembling. He tried his utmost to corrupt the pure principles my grandmother had instilled. He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him—where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments of nature. He told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things. My soul revolted against the mean tyranny. But where could I turn for protection? No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men. The mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage. The degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe. Surely, if you credited one half the truths that are told you concerning the helpless millions suffering in this cruel bondage, you at the north would not help to tighten the yoke. You surely would refuse to do for the master, on your own soil, the mean and cruel work which trained bloodhounds and the lowest class of whites do for him at the south.

Every where the years bring to all enough of sin and sorrow; but in slavery the very dawn of life is darkened by these shadows. Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn, before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and such a one among the slaves. Perhaps the child's own mother is among those hated ones. She listens to violent outbreaks of jealous passion, and cannot help understanding what is the cause. She will become prematurely knowing in evil things. Soon she will learn to tremble when she hears her

master's footfall. She will be compelled to realize that she is no longer a child. If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave. I know that some are too much brutalized by slavery to feel the humiliation of their position; but many slaves feel it most acutely, and shrink from the memory of it. I cannot tell how much I suffered in the presence of these wrongs, nor how I am still pained by the retrospect. My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother's grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. The light heart which nature had given me became heavy with sad forebodings. The other slaves in my master's house noticed the change. Many of them pitied me; but none dared to ask the cause. They had no need to inquire. They knew too well the guilty practices under that roof; and they were aware that to speak of them was an offence that never went unpunished.

I longed for some one to confide in. I would have given the world to have laid my head on my grandmother's faithful bosom, and told her all my troubles. But Dr. Flint swore he would kill me, if I was not as silent as the grave. Then, although my grandmother was all in all to me, I feared her as well as loved her. I had been accustomed to look up to her with a respect bordering upon awe. I was very young, and felt shamefaced about telling her such impure things, especially as I knew her to be very strict on such subjects. Moreover, she was a woman of a high spirit. She was usually very quiet in her demeanor; but if her indignation was once roused, it was not very easily quelled. I had been told that she once chased a white gentleman with a loaded pistol, because he insulted one of her daughters. I dreaded the consequences of a violent outbreak; and both pride and fear kept me silent. But though I did not confide in my grandmother, and even evaded her vigilant watchfulness and inquiry, her presence in the neighborhood was some protection to me. Though she had been a slave, Dr. Flint was afraid of her. He dreaded her scorching rebukes. Moreover, she was known and patronized by many people; and he did not wish to have his villainy made public. It was lucky for me that I did not live on a distant plantation, but in a town not so large that the inhabitants were ignorant of each other's affairs. Bad as are the laws and customs in a slaveholding community, the doctor, as a professional man, deemed it prudent to keep up some outward show of decency.

O, what days and nights of fear and sorrow that man caused me! Reader, it is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you truthfully what I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered. I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight. I foresaw the inevitable blight that would fall on the little slave's heart. I knew how soon her laughter would be changed to sighs. The fair child grew up to be a still fairer woman. From childhood to womanhood her pathway was blooming with flowers, and overarched by a sunny sky. Scarcely one day of her life had been clouded when the sun rose on her happy bridal morning.

How had those years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood? She, also, was very beautiful; but the flowers and sunshine of love were not for her. She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink.

In view of these things, why are ye silent, ye free men and women of the north? Why do your tongues falter in maintenance of the right? Would that I had more ability! But my heart is so full, and my pen is so weak! There are noble men and women who plead for us, striving to help those who cannot help themselves. God bless them! God give them strength and courage to go on! God bless those, every where, who are laboring to advance the cause of humanity!



## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #5

Read the following passage from Chapter VI of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, in a well-organized, well-supported essay, analyze how Jacobs uses tone, diction, and imagery to convey a typical relationship between a mistress and a slave girl harassed by her master. Do not merely summarize the plot.

I had entered my sixteenth year, and every day it became more apparent that my presence was intolerable to Mrs. Flint. Angry words frequently passed between her and her husband. He had never punished me himself, and he would not allow any body else to punish me. In that respect, she was never satisfied; but, in her angry moods, no terms were too vile for her to bestow upon me. Yet I, whom she detested so bitterly, had far more pity for her than he had, whose duty it was to make her life happy. I never wronged her, or wished to wrong her, and one word of kindness from her would have brought me to her feet.

After repeated quarrels between the doctor and his wife, he announced his intention to take his youngest daughter, then four years old, to sleep in his apartment. It was necessary that a servant should sleep in the same room, to be on hand if the child stirred. I was selected for that office, and informed for what purpose that arrangement had been made. By managing to keep within sight of people, as much as possible, during the day time, I had hitherto succeeded in eluding my master, though a razor was often held to my throat to force me to change this line of policy. At night I slept by the side of my great aunt, where I felt safe. He was too prudent to come into her room. She was an old woman, and had been in the family many years. Moreover, as a married man, and a professional man, he deemed it necessary to save appearances in some degree. But he resolved to remove the obstacle in the way of his scheme; and he thought he had planned it so that he should evade suspicion. He was well aware how much I prized my refuge by the side of my old aunt, and he determined to dispossess me of it. The first night the doctor had the little child in his room alone. The next morning, I was ordered to take my station as nurse the following night. A kind Providence interposed in my favor. During the day Mrs. Flint heard of this new arrangement, and a storm followed. I rejoiced to hear it rage.

After a while my mistress sent for me to come to her room. Her first question was, "Did you know you were to sleep in the doctor's room?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Who told you?"

"My master."

"Will you answer truly all the questions I ask?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Tell me, then, as you hope to be forgiven, are you innocent of what I have accused you?"

"I am."

She handed me a Bible, and said, "Lay your hand on your heart, kiss this holy book, and swear before God that you tell me the truth."

I took the oath she required, and I did it with a clear conscience. "You have taken God's holy word to testify your innocence," said she. "If you have deceived me, beware! Now take this stool, sit down, look me directly in the face, and tell me all that has passed between your master and you."

I did as she ordered. As I went on with my account her color changed frequently, she wept, and sometimes groaned. She spoke in tones so sad, that I was touched by her grief. The tears came to my eyes; but I was soon convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed. Yet perhaps she had some touch of feeling for me; for when the conference was ended, she spoke kindly, and promised to protect me. I should have been much comforted by this assurance if I could have had confidence in it; but my experiences in slavery had filled me with distrust. She was not a very refined woman, and had not much control over her passions.

I was an object of her jealousy, and, consequently, of her hatred; and I knew I could not expect kindness or confidence from her under the circumstances in which I was placed. I could not blame her. Slaveholders' wives feel as other women would under similar circumstances. The fire of her temper kindled from small sparks, and now the flame became so intense that the doctor was obliged to give up his intended arrangement.

I knew I had ignited the torch, and I expected to suffer for it afterwards; but I felt too thankful to my mistress for the timely aid she rendered me to care much about that. She now took me to sleep in a room adjoining her own. There I was an object of her especial care, though not to her especial comfort, for she spent many a sleepless night to watch over me. Sometimes I woke up, and found her bending over me. At other times she whispered in my ear, as though it was her husband who was speaking to me, and listened to hear what I would answer. If she startled me, on such occasions, she would glide stealthily away; and the next morning she would tell me I had been talking in my sleep, and ask who I was talking to. At last, I began to be fearful for my life. It had been often threatened; and you can imagine, better than I can describe, what an unpleasant sensation it must produce to wake up in the dead of night and find a jealous woman bending over you. Terrible as this experience was, I had fears that it would give place to one more terrible.

My mistress grew weary of her vigils; they did not prove satisfactory. She changed her tactics. She now tried the trick of accusing my master of crime, in my presence, and gave my name as the author of the accusation. To my utter astonishment, he replied, "I don't believe it; but if she did acknowledge it, you tortured her into exposing me." Tortured into exposing him! Truly, Satan had no difficulty in distinguishing the color of his soul! I understood his object in making this false representation. It was to show me that I gained nothing by seeking the protection of my mistress; that the power was still all in his own hands. I pitied Mrs. Flint. She was a second wife, many years the junior of her husband; and the hoary-headed miscreant was enough to try the patience of a wiser and better woman. She was completely foiled, and knew not how to proceed. She would gladly have had me flogged for my supposed false oath; but, as I have already stated, the doctor never allowed any one to whip me. The old sinner was politic.

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #6

Read the following passage from Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, in a well-organized, well-supported essay, analyze how Jacobs organizes the chapter to convey her opinion of Northerners. Do not merely summarize the passage.

Slaveholders pride themselves upon being honorable men; but if you were to hear the enormous lies they tell their slaves, you would have small respect for their veracity. I have spoken plain English. Pardon me. I cannot use a milder term. When they visit the north, and return home, they tell their slaves of the runaways they have seen, and describe them to be in the most deplorable condition. A slaveholder once told me that he had seen a runaway friend of mine in New York, and that she besought him to take her back to her master, for she was literally dying of starvation; that many days she had only one cold potato to eat, and at other times could get nothing at all. He said he refused to take her, because he knew her master would not thank him for bringing such a miserable wretch to his house. He ended by saying to me, "This is the punishment she brought on herself for running away from a kind master."

This whole story was false. I afterwards staid with that friend in New York, and found her in comfortable circumstances. She had never thought of such a thing as wishing to go back to slavery. Many of the slaves believe such stories, and think it is not worth while to exchange slavery for such a hard kind of freedom. It is difficult to persuade such that freedom could make them useful men, and enable them to protect their wives and children. If those heathen in our Christian land had as much teaching as some Hindoos, they would think otherwise. They would know that liberty is more valuable than life. They would begin to understand their own capabilities, and exert themselves to become men and women.

But while the Free States sustain a law which hurls fugitives back into slavery, how can the slaves resolve to become men? There are some who strive to protect wives and daughters from the insults of their masters; but those who have such sentiments have had advantages above the general mass of slaves. They have been partially civilized and Christianized by favorable circumstances. Some are bold enough to *utter* such sentiments to their masters. O, that there were more of them!

Some poor creatures have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters. Do you think this proves the black man to belong to an inferior order of beings? What would *you* be, if you had been born and brought up a slave, with generations of slaves for ancestors? I admit that the black man is inferior. But what is it that makes him so? It is the ignorance in which white men compel him to live; it is the torturing whip that lashes manhood out of him; it is the fierce bloodhounds of the South, and the scarcely less cruel human bloodhounds of the north, who enforce the Fugitive Slave Law. *They* do the work.

Southern gentlemen indulge in the most contemptuous expressions about the Yankees, while they, on their part, consent to do the vilest work for them, such as the ferocious bloodhounds and the despised negro-hunters are employed to do at home. When southerners go to the north, they are proud to do them honor; but the northern man is not welcome south of Mason and Dixon's line, unless he suppresses every thought and feeling at variance with their "peculiar institution." Nor is it enough to be silent. The masters are not pleased, unless they obtain a greater degree of subservience than that; and they are generally accommodated. Do they respect the northerner for this? I trow not. Even the slaves despise "a northern man with southern principles"; and that is the class they generally see. When northerners go to the south to reside, they prove very apt scholars. They soon imbibe the sentiments and disposition of their neighbors, and generally go beyond their teachers. Of the two, they are proverbially the hardest masters.

They seem to satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves. What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who "made of one blood all nations of men!" And then who *are* Africans? Who can measure the amount of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing in the veins of American slaves?

I have spoken of the pains slaveholders take to give their slaves a bad opinion of the north; but, notwithstanding this, intelligent slaves are aware that they have many friends in the Free States. Even the most ignorant have some confused notions about it. They knew that I could read; and I was often asked if I had seen any thing in the newspapers about white folks over in the big north, who were trying to get their freedom for them. Some believe that the abolitionists have already made them free, and that it is established by law, but that their masters prevent the law from going into effect. One woman begged me to get a newspaper and read it over. She said her husband told her that the black people had sent word to the queen of 'Merica that they were all slaves; that she didn't believe it, and went to Washington city to see the president about it. They quarrelled; she drew her sword upon him, and swore that he should help her to make them all free. That poor, ignorant woman thought that America was governed by a Queen, to whom the President was subordinate. I wish the President was subordinate to Queen Justice.

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #7

Read the following passage from Chapter X of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then in a well-organized, well-supported essay, analyze how Jacobs uses imagery, tone, and diction to convey her attitude toward slave women being held to the same moral standards as Northern women.

After my lover went away, Dr. Flint contrived a new plan. He seemed to have an idea that my fear of my mistress was his greatest obstacle. In the blandest tones, he told me that he was going to build a small house for me, in a secluded place, four miles away from the town. I shuddered; but I was constrained to listen, while he talked of his intention to give me a home of my own, and



to make a lady of me. Hitherto, I had escaped my dreaded fate, by being in the midst of people. My grandmother had already had high words with my master about me. She had told him pretty plainly what she thought of his character, and there was considerable gossip in the neighborhood about our affairs, to which the open-mouthed jealousy of Mrs. Flint contributed not a little. When my master said he was going to build a house for me, and that he could do it with little trouble and expense, I was in hopes something would happen to frustrate his scheme; but I soon heard that the house was actually begun. I vowed before my Maker that I would never enter it. I had rather toil on the plantation from dawn till dark; I had rather live and die in jail, than drag on, from day to day, through such a living death. I was determined that the master, whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet. I would do any thing, every thing, for the sake of defeating him. What *could* I do? I thought and thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge into the abyss.

And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may. I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness. For years, my master had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images, and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my childhood. The influences of slavery had had the same effect on me that they had on other young girls; they had made me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation.

But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about to relate; but all my prospects had been blighted by slavery. I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse circumstances, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me. I felt as if I was forsaken by God and man; as if all my efforts must be frustrated; and I became reckless in my despair.

I have told you that Dr. Flint's persecutions and his wife's jealousy had given rise to some gossip in the neighborhood. Among others, it chanced that a white unmarried gentleman had obtained some knowledge of the circumstances in which I was placed. He knew my grandmother, and often spoke to me in the street. He became interested for me, and asked questions about my master, which I answered in part. He expressed a great deal of sympathy, and a wish to aid me. He constantly sought opportunities to see me, and wrote to me frequently. I was a poor slave girl, only fifteen years old.

So much attention from a superior person was, of course, flattering; for human nature is the same in all. I also felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words. It seemed to me a great thing to have such a friend. By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted in him. Of course I saw whither all this was tending. I knew the impassable gulf between us; but to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment. A master may treat you as rudely as he pleases, and you dare not speak; moreover, the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy. There may be sophistry in all this; but the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible.

When I found that my master had actually begun to build the lonely cottage, other feelings mixed with those I have described. Revenge, and calculations of interest, were added to flattered vanity and sincere gratitude for kindness. I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to

know that I favored another, and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small way. I thought he would revenge himself by selling me, and I was sure my friend, Mr. Sands, would buy me. He was a man of more generosity and feeling than my master, and I thought my freedom could be easily obtained from him. The crisis of my fate now came so near that I was desperate. I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my old tyrant. I knew that as soon as a new fancy took him, his victims were sold far off to get rid of them; especially if they had children. I had seen several women sold, with babies at the breast. He never allowed his offspring by slaves to remain long in sight of himself and his wife. Of a man who was not my master I could ask to have my children well supported; and in this case, I felt confident I should obtain the boon. I also felt quite sure that they would be made free. With all these thoughts revolving in my mind, and seeing no other way of escaping the doom I so much dreaded, I made a headlong plunge. Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, and eluding the power of a hated tyrant; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and trembled within hearing of his voice. I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others.

#### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #8

Some works of literature portray childhood and adolescence as times of innocence and wonder; other works depict childhood and adolescence as times of misery and terror. Choose a single work of literature and explain how its representation of childhood or adolescence shapes the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

*Note to the Students: For the purposes of this unit, you must choose Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

#### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #9

Exile can be both painfully sad and an enriching experience. Select a novel, play, or epic in which a character becomes cut off from “home,” which may be her or his birthplace, family, homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character’s experience with exile is both depressing and enriching. Be sure to demonstrate in your essay how this experience illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

*Note to the Students: For the purposes of this unit, you must choose Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

#### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #10

Written by a woman and focusing specifically on the female slave experience, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is often defined as a feminist work. In a well-written, well-organized essay, examine the contributions that this narrative makes to feminist literature.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #11

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) once asserted that “the general aspect of life is not hunger and distress, but rather wealth, luxury, even absurd prodigality—where there is a struggle it is a struggle for power.” Write an essay in which you discuss how a character in a novel or a drama struggles to free him- or herself from the power of others or seeks to gain power over others. Be sure to demonstrate in your essay how the author uses this power struggle to enhance the meaning of the work as a whole.

*Note to the Students: For the purposes of this unit, you must choose Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #12

Authors who write survivor narratives—authors such as ex-slaves, veterans of wars, and survivors of the Holocaust—are often motivated to write by their need to justify why they have escaped or survived while others have not. Choose a memoir or autobiography written by such a survivor. Then, in a well-written and well-organized essay, explain the techniques the author uses to justify the decisions that led to his or her survival or escape. Avoid plot summary.

*Note to the Students: For the purposes of this unit, you must choose Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #13

Narratives of upward mobility, such as stories of “rags to riches,” often show fortuitous individuals rising from the depths of despair to overcome seemingly impossible odds. Such works have been criticized for reducing class or race struggles to the concerns of individuals and the exercise of their own independent wills. Choose a work of literature in which upward mobility plays a prominent role. Then, in a well-written essay, examine the ways in which the work you have chosen may be susceptible to the above criticism and whether one can defend the work against such a charge.

*Note to the Students: For the purposes of this unit, you must choose Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION #14

Characters who are alienated from a given society because of gender, race, class, or creed often draw the reader’s attention to that society’s values. Select a novel or a play in which such alienation occurs. Then, in a thoughtful and well-written essay, explain how the author uses an alienated character or characters to comment on important societal issues. Avoid plot summary.

*Note to the Students: For the purposes of this unit, you must choose Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

## Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

### PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1 – 6

Carefully read the following selection from Chapter II of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, choose the best answer to each of the following multiple-choice questions.

Dr. Flint, a physician in the neighborhood, had married the sister of my mistress, and I was now the property of their little daughter. It was not without murmuring that I prepared for my new home; and what added to my unhappiness, was the fact that my brother William was purchased by the same family. My father, by his nature, as well as by the habit of transacting business as a skillful mechanic, had more of the feelings of a freeman than is common among slaves. My brother was a spirited boy; and being brought up under such influences, he daily detested the name of master and mistress. One day, when his father and his mistress both happened to call him at the same time, he hesitated between the two; being perplexed to know which had the strongest claim upon his obedience. He finally concluded to go to his mistress. When my father reproved him for it, he said, "You both called me, and I didn't know which I ought to go to first."

"You are *my* child," replied our father, "and when I call you, you should come immediately, if you have to pass through fire and water."

Poor Willie! He was now to learn his first lesson of obedience to a master. Grandmother tried to cheer us with hopeful words, and they found an echo in the credulous hearts of youth.

When we entered our new home we encountered cold looks, cold words, and cold treatment. We were glad when the night came. On my narrow bed I moaned and wept, I felt so desolate and alone.

I had been there nearly a year, when a dear little friend of mine was buried. I heard her mother sob, as the clods fell on the coffin of her only child, and I turned away from the grave, feeling thankful that I still had something left to love. I met my grandmother, who said, "Come with me, Linda;" and from her tone I knew that something sad had happened. She led me apart from the people, and then said, "My child, your father is dead." Dead! How could I believe it? He had died so suddenly I had not even heard that he was sick. I went home with my grandmother. My heart rebelled against God, who had taken from me mother, father, mistress, and friend. The good grandmother tried to comfort me. "Who knows the ways of God?" said she. "Perhaps they have been kindly taken from the evil days to come." Years afterwards I often thought of this. She promised to be a mother to her grandchildren, so far as she might be permitted to do so; and strengthened by her love, I returned to my master's. I thought I should be allowed to go to my father's house the next morning; but I was ordered to go for flowers, that my mistress's house might be decorated for an evening party. I spent the day gathering flowers and weaving them into festoons, while the dead body of my father was lying within a mile of me. What cared my owners for that? He was merely a piece of property. Moreover, they thought he had spoiled his children, by teaching them to feel that they were human beings. This was blasphemous doctrine for a slave to teach; presumptuous in him, and dangerous to the masters.

The next day I followed his remains to a humble grave beside that of my dear mother. There were those who knew my father's worth, and respected his memory.

My home now seemed more dreary than ever. The laugh of the little slave-children sounded harsh and cruel. It was selfish to feel so about the joy of others. My brother moved about with a very grave face. I tried to comfort him, by saying, "Take courage, Willie; brighter days will come by and by."

"You don't know any thing about it, Linda," he replied. "We shall have to stay here all our days; we shall never be free."

I argued that we were growing older and stronger, and that perhaps we might, before long, be allowed to hire our own time, and then we could earn money to buy our freedom. William declared this was much easier to say than to do; moreover, he did not intend to *buy* his freedom. We held daily controversies upon this subject.

1. Jacobs includes the incident when William is called for by both his father and his mistress in order to show that
  - A. William has a spirited nature.
  - B. Linda's father thought of himself as a freeman.
  - C. William detests the name of master and mistress.
  - D. Linda and William are miserable with their new owners.
  - E. Linda and William's grandmother is a great comfort.
2. The tone of the first three paragraphs of the quotation can best be described as
  - A. angry.
  - B. mournful.
  - C. reproachful.
  - D. disdainful.
  - E. critical.
3. Linda's grandmother's reaction to the news of Linda's father's death can best be described as
  - A. bereaved.
  - B. clichéd.
  - C. resigned.
  - D. bitter.
  - E. predictive.
4. The paragraph that begins "I had been there nearly a year" best counters the pro-slavery argument that slaves
  - A. do not care about their families as white people do about theirs.
  - B. need a patriarchal institution to take care of them.
  - C. are made into orderly and efficient laborers.
  - D. are content with being slaves.
  - E. cannot control their emotions.
5. The author juxtaposes Linda's friend's funeral with the news of her father's death in order to
  - A. compound Linda's loss to show the despair she could easily succumb to.
  - B. provide situational irony to show the absurdity of slavery.
  - C. foreshadow the frequent deaths of loved ones that Linda will suffer.
  - D. insinuate that Linda's father's death was due to murder.
  - E. show the high mortality rate African-Americans suffered in slavery.
6. The dialogue between William and Linda shows all of the following EXCEPT
  - A. William's frustration with his sister's optimism.
  - B. Linda's ability to perform a role similar to her grandmother's.
  - C. William's desire to protect his sister from slavery's evils.
  - D. Linda's worries over her brother's spirited nature.
  - E. Linda's willingness to argue with her brother.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 7 – 10

Read the following selection from Chapter IV of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, choose the best answer to each of the following multiple-choice questions.

Two years had passed since I entered Dr. Flint's family, and those years had brought much of the knowledge that comes from experience, though they had afforded little opportunity for any other kinds of knowledge.

My grandmother had, as much as possible, been a mother to her orphan grandchildren. By perseverance and unwearied industry, she was now mistress of a snug little home, surrounded with the necessities of life. She would have been happy could her children have shared them with her. There remained but three children and two grandchildren, all slaves. Most earnestly did she strive to make us feel that it was the will of God: that He had seen fit to place us under such circumstances; and though it seemed hard, we ought to pray for contentment.

It was a beautiful faith, coming from a mother who could not call her children her own. But I, and Benjamin, her youngest boy, condemned it. We reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated as she was. We longed for a home like hers. There we always found sweet balsam for our troubles. She was so loving, so sympathizing! She always met us with a smile, and listened with patience to all our sorrows. She spoke so hopefully, that unconsciously the clouds gave place to sunshine. There was a grand big oven there, too, that baked bread and nice things for the town, and we knew there was always a choice bit in store for us.

But, alas! Even the charms of the old oven failed to reconcile us to our hard lot. Benjamin was now a tall, handsome lad, strongly and gracefully made, and with a spirit too bold and daring for a slave. My brother William, now twelve years old, had the same aversion to the word master that he had when he was an urchin of seven years. I was his confidant. He came to me with all his troubles. I remember one instance in particular. It was on a lovely spring morning, and when I marked the sunlight dancing here and there, its beauty seemed to mock my sadness. For my master, whose restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom to devour, had just left me, with stinging, scorching words; words that scathed ear and brain like fire. O, how I despised him! I thought how glad I should be, if some day when he walked the earth, it would open and swallow him up, and disencumber the world of a plague.

When he told me that I was made for his use, made to obey his command in *every* thing; that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and should surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt half so strong.

So deeply was I absorbed in painful reflections afterwards, that I neither saw nor heard the entrance of any one, till the voice of William sounded close beside me. "Linda," said he, "what makes you look so sad? I love you. O, Linda, isn't this a bad world? Every body seems so cross and unhappy. I wish I had died when poor father did."

I told him that every body was *not* cross, or unhappy; that those who had pleasant homes, and kind friends, and who were not afraid to love them, were happy. But we, who were slave-children, without father or mother, could not expect to be happy. We must be good; perhaps that would bring us contentment.

7. The tone of the third paragraph of the passage can best be described as
- A. satirical.
  - B. nostalgic.
  - C. critical.
  - D. triumphant.
  - E. jealous.

8. Jacobs's use of synecdoche in paragraph five indicates
  - A. Dr. Flint's domineering nature.
  - B. Linda's determination.
  - C. Linda's physical strength.
  - D. Dr. Flint's relentlessness.
  - E. Dr. Flint's sexual proposition.
9. Jacobs writes, "For my master, whose restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom to devour, had just left me, with stinging, scorching words; words that scathed ear and brain like fire." In this passage, the author uses personification in order to
  - A. portray her master as a predatory animal.
  - B. represent herself as a helpless victim.
  - C. suggest her master's words cause physical pain.
  - D. picture her master as a devil.
  - E. communicate how much her master is hated.
10. In the last four paragraphs of the passage, Linda suggests that she
  - A. wishes she were dead like her father and mother.
  - B. will tell her brother what Dr. Flint has been saying to her.
  - C. is not in a position to support her brother through his troubles.
  - D. agrees with her grandmother's advice to pray for contentment.
  - E. has an independent spirit much like her brother's.



## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11 – 15

Read the following selection from Chapter X of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, choose the best answer to each of the following multiple-choice questions.

I vowed before my Maker that I would never enter it: I had rather toil on the plantation from dawn till dark; I had rather live and die in jail, than drag on, from day to day, through such a living death. I was determined that the master, whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet. I would do any thing, every thing, for the sake of defeating him. What *could* I do? I thought and thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge into the abyss.

And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may. I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness. For years, my master had done his utmost to pollute my mind with foul images, and to destroy the pure principles inculcated by my grandmother, and the good mistress of my childhood. The influences of slavery had had the same effect on me that they had on other young girls; they had made me prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world. I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation.

But, O, ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about to relate; but all my prospects had been blighted by slavery. I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse circumstances, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me. I felt as if I was forsaken by God and man; as if all my efforts must be frustrated; and I became reckless in my despair.

I have told you that Dr. Flint's persecutions and his wife's jealousy had given rise to some gossip in the neighborhood. Among others, it chanced that a white unmarried gentleman had obtained some knowledge of the circumstances in which I was placed. He knew my grandmother, and often spoke to me in the street. He became interested for me, and asked questions about my master, which I answered in part. He expressed a great deal of sympathy, and a wish to aid me.

He constantly sought opportunities to see me, and wrote to me frequently. I was a poor slave girl, only fifteen years old.

So much attention from a superior person was, of course, flattering; for human nature is the same in all. I also felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words. It seemed to me a great thing to have such a friend. By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted in him. Of course I saw whither all this was tending. I knew the impassable gulf between us; but to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment. A master may treat you as rudely as he pleases, and you dare not speak; moreover, the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy. There may be sophistry in all this; but the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible.



11. The first paragraph of the passage suggests that Linda is
  - A. powerless.
  - B. determined.
  - C. strong.
  - D. ashamed.
  - E. suicidal.
12. Based on how she addresses the reader, Jacobs's intended audience is
  - A. white Northerners.
  - B. black Northerners.
  - C. all white women.
  - D. black slave women.
  - E. black free women.
13. The author's *primary* purpose in the second paragraph is to
  - A. deny doing something that Dr. Flint says she did.
  - B. write about how something was not her fault.
  - C. convince her readers she is telling the truth.
  - D. describe her naivety when she did something.
  - E. reveal something she is ashamed of having done.
14. In the second paragraph, Jacobs writes that slavery "had made [her] prematurely knowing, concerning the evil ways of the world" in order to support her claim that she
  - A. triumphed over her master.
  - B. was seduced by Mr. Sands.
  - C. possessed knowledge about sex.
  - D. was still a young girl.
  - E. had previous experience with sex.
15. In paragraph 4, Jacobs insinuates that
  - A. her grandmother disapproved of Mr. Sands.
  - B. Mr. Sands took advantage of her.
  - C. Dr. Flint would have freed her.
  - D. Mr. Sands was indifferent to her.
  - E. Mr. Sands promised to buy Linda.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16 – 20

Read the following selection from Chapter XXI of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Then, choose the best answer to each of the following multiple-choice questions.

A small shed had been added to my grandmother's house years ago. Some boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by any thing but rats and mice. It was a pent roof, covered with nothing but shingles, according to the southern custom for such buildings. The garret was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air. My uncle Phillip, who was a carpenter, had very skillfully made a concealed trap-door, which communicated with the storeroom. He had been doing this while I was waiting in the swamp. The storeroom opened upon a piazza. To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air was stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that I could not turn on my other without hitting the roof. The rats and mice ran over my bed; but I was weary, and I slept such sleep as the wretched may, when a tempest has passed over them. Morning came. I knew it only by the noises I heard; for in my small den day and night were all the same. I suffered for air even more than for light. But I was not comfortless. I heard the voices of my children. There was joy and there was sadness in the sound. It made my tears flow. How I longed to speak to them! I was eager to look on their faces; but there was no hole, no crack, through which I could peep. This continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light. Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave, though white people considered it an easy one; and it was so compared with the fate of others. I was never cruelly overworked; I was never lacerated with the whip from head to foot; I was never so beaten and bruised that I could not turn from one side to the other; I never had my heel-strings cut to prevent my running away; I was never chained to a log and forced to drag it about, while I toiled in the fields from morning till night; I was never branded with hot iron, or torn by bloodhounds. On the contrary, I had always been kindly treated, and tenderly cared for, until I came into the hands of Dr. Flint. I had never wished for freedom till then. But though my life in slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships, God pity the woman who is compelled to lead such a life!

[...]

My condition was now a little improved. But for weeks I was tormented by hundreds of little red insects, fine as a needle's point, that pierced through my skin, and produced an intolerable burning. The good grandmother gave me herb teas and cooling medicines, and finally I got rid of them. The heat of my den was intense, for nothing but thin shingles protected me from the scorching summer's sun. But I had my consolations. Through my peeping-hole I could watch the children, and when they were near enough, I could hear their talk. Aunt Nancy brought me all the news she could hear at Dr. Flint's. From her I learned that the doctor had written to New York to a colored woman, who had been born and raised in our neighborhood, and had breathed his contaminating atmosphere. He offered her a reward if she could find out any thing about me. I know not what was the nature of her reply; but he soon after started for New York in haste, saying to his family that he had business of importance to transact. I peeped at him as he passed on his way to the steamboat. It was a satisfaction to have miles of land and water between us, even for a little while; and it was a still greater satisfaction to know that he believed me to be in the Free States. My little den seemed less dreary than it had done. He returned, as he did from his former journey to New York, without obtaining any satisfactory information. When he passed our house next morning, Benny was standing at the gate. He had heard them say that he had gone to find me, and he called out, "Dr. Flint, did you bring my mother home? I want to see her." The doctor stamped his foot at him in a rage, and exclaimed, "Get out of the way, you little damned rascal! If you don't, I'll cut off your head."

Benny ran terrified into the house, saying, "You can't put me in jail again. I don't belong to you now." It was well that the wind carried the words away from the doctor's ear. I told my grandmother of it, when we had our next conference at the trap-door, and begged of her not to allow the children to be impertinent to the irascible old man.

[...]

Dr. Flint and his family repeatedly tried to coax and bribe my children to tell something they had heard said about me. One day the doctor took them into a shop, and offered them some bright little silver pieces and gay handkerchiefs if they would tell where their mother was. Ellen shrank away from him, and would not speak; but Benny spoke up, and said, "Dr. Flint, I don't know where my mother is. I guess she's in New York; and when you go there again, I wish you'd ask her to come home, for I want to see her; but if you put her in jail, or tell her you'll cut her head off, I'll tell her to go right back."

16. The word "garret" in the first paragraph is synonymous with
  - A. basement.
  - B. shed.
  - C. attic.
  - D. room.
  - E. roof.
17. Jacobs writes, "This continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light" in order to
  - A. segue into the comparison to slavery.
  - B. show the garret's similarity to the swamp.
  - C. stress that she is still in captivity.
  - D. criticize her family for putting her here.
  - E. compare this situation to what other slaves endure.
18. After describing the space in which she is to live for an interminable amount of time, Jacobs states, "Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave, though white people considered it an easy one; and it was so compared with the fate of others." The *purpose* of this statement is to
  - A. stress how horrible any life without freedom is.
  - B. admit that she had an easier slavery than others did.
  - C. show that female slaves have it harder than male slaves do.
  - D. suggest that she would return if not for Dr. Flint's harassment.
  - E. counter the pro-slavery argument that slaves are content.
19. In the first paragraph, Jacobs uses anaphora primarily to
  - A. create parallel structure in her list.
  - B. emphasize how many tortures she avoided.
  - C. focus attention on her experiences.
  - D. demonstrate rhetorical skill.
  - E. increase the pace of the passage.

20. In contrast to Linda's feeling at the time, in the last paragraph the narrator's attitude toward the way Benny spoke to Dr. Flint is one of
- A. concern.
  - B. pride.
  - C. gratitude.
  - D. guilt.
  - E. happiness.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 21 – 25

Read the following selection, from Chapter XXXI of Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which recounts Jacobs's first days in the North with her supporters, the Durhams, and choose the best answer to each of the following multiple-choice questions.

After dinner Mr. Durham went with me in quest of the friends I had spoken of. They were from my native town, and I anticipated much pleasure in looking on familiar faces. They were not at home, and we retraced our steps through streets delightfully clean. On the way, Mr. Durham observed that I had spoken to him of a daughter I expected to meet; that he was surprised, for I looked so young he had taken me for a single woman. He was approaching a subject on which I was extremely sensitive. He would ask about my husband next, I thought, and if I answered him truly, what would he think of me? I told him I had two children, one in New York, the other at the south. He asked some further questions, and I frankly told him some of the most important events of my life. It was painful for me to do it; but I would not deceive him. If he was desirous of being my friend, I thought he ought to know how far I was worthy of it. "Excuse me, if I have tried your feelings," said he. "I did not question you from idle curiosity. I wanted to understand your situation, in order to know whether I could be of any service to you, or your little girl. Your straight-forward answers do you credit; but don't answer every body so openly. It might give some heartless people a pretext for treating you with contempt."

That word contempt burned me like coals of fire. I replied, "God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me. If I am permitted to have my children, I intend to be a good mother, and to live in such a manner that people cannot treat me with contempt."

"I respect your sentiments," said he. "Place your trust in God, and be governed by good principles, and you will not fail to find friends."

When we reached home, I went to my room, glad to shut out the world for a while. The words he had spoken made an indelible impression upon me. They brought up great shadows from the mournful past. In the midst of my meditations I was startled by a knock at the door. Mrs. Durham entered, her face all beaming with kindness, to say that there was an anti-slavery friend down stairs, who would like to see me. I overcame my dread of encountering strangers, and went with her. Many questions were asked concerning my experiences, and my escape from slavery; but I observed how careful they all were not to say any thing that might wound my feelings. How gratifying this was, can be fully understood only by those who have been accustomed to be treated as if they were not included within the pale of human beings.

[...]

That night I sought my pillow with feelings I had never carried to it before. I verily believed myself to be a free woman. I was wakeful for a long time, and I had no sooner fallen asleep, than I was roused by fire-bells. I jumped up, and hurried on my clothes. Where I came from, every body hastened to dress themselves on such occasions. The white people thought a great fire might be used as a good opportunity for insurrection, and that it was best to be in readiness; and the colored people were ordered out to labor in extinguishing the flames. There was but one engine in our town, and colored women and children were often required to drag it to the river's edge and fill it. Mrs. Durham's daughter slept in the same room with me, and seeing that she slept through all the din, I thought it was my duty to wake her. "What's the matter?" said she, rubbing her eyes.

"They're screaming fire in the streets, and the bells are ringing," I replied.

"What of that?" said she, drowsily. "We are used to it. We never get up, without the fire is very near. What good would it do?"

I was quite surprised that it was not necessary for us to go and help fill the engine. I was an ignorant child, just beginning to learn how things went on in great cities.

At daylight, I heard women crying fresh fish, berries, radishes, and various other things. All this was new to me. I dressed myself at an early hour, and sat at the window to watch that

unknown tide of life. Philadelphia seemed to me a wonderfully great place. At the breakfast table, my idea of going out to drag the engine was laughed over, and I joined in the mirth.

I went to see Fanny, and found her so well contented among her new friends that she was in no haste to leave. I was also very happy with my kind hostess. She had had advantages for education, and was vastly my superior. Every day, almost every hour, I was adding to my little stock of knowledge. She took me out to see the city as much as she deemed prudent. One day she took me to an artist's room, and showed me the portraits of some of her children. I had never seen any paintings of colored people before, and they seemed to be beautiful.

At the end of five days, one of Mrs. Durham's friends offered to accompany us to New York the following morning. As I held the hand of my good hostess in a parting clasp, I longed to know whether her husband had repeated to her what I had told him. I supposed he had, but she never made any allusion to it. I presume it was the delicate silence of womanly sympathy. When Mr. Durham handed us our tickets, he said, "I am afraid you will have a disagreeable ride; but I could not procure tickets for the first-class cars."

Supposing I had not given him money enough, I offered more. "O, no," said he, "they could not be had for any money. They don't allow colored people to go in the first-class cars."

This was the first chill to my enthusiasm about the Free States. Colored people were allowed to ride in a filthy box, behind white people, at the south, but there they were not required to pay for the privilege. It made me sad to find how the north aped the customs of slavery.

21. Jacobs writes,

He was approaching a subject on which I was extremely sensitive. He would ask about my husband next, I thought, and if I answered him truly, what would he think of me? ... I frankly told him some of the most important events of my life. It was painful for me to do it; but I would not deceive him. If he was desirous of being my friend, I thought he ought to know how far I was worthy of it.

This statement suggests that when speaking to Mr. Durham, she felt

- A. defiantly proud of her actions.
  - B. very protective of her privacy.
  - C. somewhat ashamed of her actions.
  - D. unworthy of having such a friend.
  - E. offended by his question.
22. Linda's reaction to the word "contempt" shows
- A. she is somewhat ashamed of her actions.
  - B. Mr. Durham has insulted her.
  - C. earthly opinions do not matter to her.
  - D. she believes her actions were justified.
  - E. she agrees with his advice.
23. Linda's reaction to the fire-bells *primarily* reveals
- A. Linda's ignorance of the North's customs.
  - B. Linda's instinct to serve a mistress.
  - C. Mrs. Durham's daughter's laziness.
  - D. the North's similarity to the South.
  - E. Linda's inability to feel as free as she believes she is.

24. Structurally, the antithesis of the scene with the fire-bells would be the scene in which
- A. Mr. Durham asks Linda about her past.
  - B. Mrs. Durham comes to Linda's room.
  - C. Linda is interviewed by someone from the Anti-Slavery Society.
  - D. everyone laughs at Linda's response to the fire-bells.
  - E. Linda's discovery that she cannot get first-class train tickets.
25. The scene that best follows up on the themes suggested in Linda's claim that "If I am permitted to have my children, I intend to be a good mother, and to live in such a manner that people cannot treat me with contempt" would be the scene in which Linda
- A. responds to the fire-bells.
  - B. laughs at her response to the fire-bells.
  - C. benefits from Mrs. Durham's companionship.
  - D. tries to buy first-class train tickets.
  - E. learns that there is racism in the North.

### **Answers with Explanations**

1. Jacobs includes this passage to show *from whom* William gets his spirited nature (A) and his hatred of the name of master and mistress (C). That Linda and William are miserable with their new owners (D) and that the grandmother is a great comfort (E) are shown after the passage where William is called for by both his father and his mistress. **The incident only shows (B) how her father thought of himself as a freeman. Since both he and his son are slaves, the father should not consider William his, nor should he believe that his son should obey his father before his mistress. That he does shows that he thinks of himself as a freeman more than he thinks of himself as a slave.**
2. In this quotation, Jacobs looks back at a sad time of considerable change: when she and her brother were first made to feel like property. Her tone in the first three paragraphs is not angry (A); that tone we see at the end of the fifth paragraph. Nor is her tone reproachful (C): she is not censorious or fault-finding of either her father or William. She does not look down upon William for having to learn what it means to be property; in fact, she herself learns that lesson at the end of paragraph 5; therefore, her tone is not disdainful (D). Likewise, she is not critical (E) of William or even of her father (because it is only right for a skillful mechanic who transacts business to feel proud and independent). **Instead, her tone can best be described as mournful (B): she is sad that William has to learn such an unjust lesson and mourns the loss of his innocence ("Poor Willie").**
3. Jacobs gives us the grandmother's reaction when she writes, "The good grandmother tried to comfort me. 'Who knows the ways of God?' said she. 'Perhaps they have been kindly taken from the evil days to come.' Years afterwards I often thought of this." Here, we do not see bereavement (A). Linda does not treat the grandmother's response as clichéd (B) because she concludes "Years afterwards I often thought of this." A cliché would be dismissed, but Linda was moved by her grandmother's words. "Resigned" (C) does not capture Linda's grandmother's feeling that perhaps his death is for the best. Her response is not bitter (D), especially since she says one cannot know the ways of God. **The grandmother saying that maybe the father is being spared from witnessing evil days to come is foreshadowing dark times ahead, especially since Jacobs says, "Years afterwards I often thought of this." Therefore, the best answer is "predictive" (E).**
4. While much of *Incidents* counters the argument that slaves need a patriarchal institution to take care of them (B) in that it shows how Linda's grandmother provides for and raises her children and grandchildren, such is not the subject of this paragraph. The paragraph does show Linda working, but does not show how she has been or is being made into an efficient and orderly laborer (C); instead, she is being made to feel like a demoralized, tyrannized, unappreciated worker. While the paragraph does show Linda's discontent with not being allowed to go to her grandmother's and the father's insistence on seeing himself as a human being, it does not counter the pro-slavery argument that slaves are content with being slaves (D) as clearly and effectively as it counters (A), which is the best answer. And while it shows Linda doing her assigned task even though she should be allowed to spend the period of mourning with her family, it does not clearly counter the



- argument that slaves cannot control their emotions (E) because of her friend's mother's irrepressible crying. **The given paragraph best counters the pro-slavery argument that slaves do not care about their families as white people do about theirs (A) because it portrays her friend's mother's crying at her daughter's grave, Linda's grief over losing her father, and the grandmother's care for her grieving granddaughter.**
5. Because the author does not say that slavery caused either the friend's or the father's death, the coincidence does not show the absurdity of slavery (B). The compounded grief seems to highlight how often Linda has experienced grief in the past rather than foreshadow deaths she will face in the future (C) since the narrator tells us that Linda suffers the loss of friend and father after having already lost her mother and her mistress. The passage may suggest that Linda's father was murdered (D) when it says that his death was sudden and that Linda had not heard he was ill; however, the fact that Linda learns of his death while at her friend's funeral does not make this insinuation. Since neither death is said to be the result of the conditions of slavery, it does not show a high mortality rate among slaves (E). **By showing Linda learning of her father's sudden death while already grieving for a lost friend, the author emphasizes how much loss the girl has suffered, especially since she has already lost her mother and her kind mistress before this; therefore the author shows the despair she could easily succumb to (A), as seen in her anger at God.**
6. When William says, " 'You don't know any thing about it, Linda,' " he vents his frustration with his sister's optimism (A). Just as Linda's grandmother tries to cheer her grandchildren with hopeful words as they head off to live with their new master and mistress, Linda tries to cheer William with the hope that they will eventually be able to hire their own time and buy their freedom (B). Like the opening of the selection, the close shows Linda's worries that her brother's spirited nature does not fit him for slavery any more than her father's pride did (D). Linda is willing to argue with her brother (E), as she continues to hold "daily controversies" with him on this subject. **The passage does not show William trying to protect his sister from slavery's evils (C); instead, he is saying that she is too optimistic about what slave owners will allow their slaves to do. Instead, it shows Linda trying to save William from slavery's attempts to instill despair. Therefore, (C) is the correct answer.**
7. While Jacobs begins the third paragraph with a recollection of her criticism of her grandmother's faith, the quoted passage is not satire (A) because it does not use wit to hold up the grandmother's homemaking to ridicule with the intent of shaming society into improvement. Nor does the criticism (C) that the paragraph begins with continue through the entire selection. And while the first half of the second paragraph may take on a tone of triumph (D), the third paragraph does not. Though Linda voices a desire to have a home like her grandmother's, her tone is more wistful than jealous (D); of particular importance here is that Linda *longs* for a home *like* her grandmother's, not her grandmother's home itself. **Instead, Jacobs recalls her grandmother's house with a tone of nostalgia, remembering the comfort, the special treats, and the "grand big oven." Therefore, (B) is the best answer.**
8. Jacobs uses synecdoche in this quotation, using a part of something (her arm) to refer to the whole thing (herself) to communicate that even though she is a powerless slave girl,

- her determination to resist Dr. Flint is very strong. The synecdoche does not refer to Dr. Flint; therefore (A) and (D) are wrong. Jacobs is not speaking literally here; therefore, (C) is incorrect. The euphemism, not the synecdoche, in the paragraph indicates Dr. Flint's sexual proposition (E). **The correct answer, then, is Linda's determination (B).**
9. Jacobs represents herself as the victim of her master's "stinging, scorching words" (B), but does not use personification to do so. She represents those words as causing physical pain (C) when she says they "scathed ear and brain like fire," but she uses a simile, not personification, to do so. The mention of fire might suggest her master is a devil (D), but personification is not used to do so. Jacobs says that she despised her master (E), but she is probably speaking literally when she says that she wished the earth would open and swallow him. **Jacobs personifies her master's "craving, vicious nature" as a predator that roves about for something to attack and "devour"; therefore, she portrays her master as a predatory animal (A).**
10. It is William, not Linda, who wishes he were dead (A). She will not tell her brother William about the harassment (B) because she does not want to provoke a young man who is "too bold and daring for a slave." While one would imagine that her troubles would preclude her from supporting her brother through his troubles (C), such is not the case; she supports him by agreeing that they have a right to be unhappy but must pray for contentment. However, she does not tell about the wrongs done to her in order to show that she agrees with her grandmother's advice (D); her story, in fact, suggests just the opposite. **Jacobs's interruption shows that she has an independent spirit much like her brother's, especially when she concludes it by saying "never before had my puny arm felt half so strong"; therefore, (E) is the best answer.**
11. Linda is nearly powerless, but she does come up with a plan to thwart Dr. Flint; therefore, (A) is incorrect. Later, Linda feels strong, but she does not at this point; therefore, (C) is incorrect. Likewise, Linda goes on to talk about feeling sinful, but she does not imply here that she feels ashamed (D). Linda says she would rather die than move into the house that her master built, but she is not suicidal (E). **Linda is determined: she has resolved not to enter the house Dr. Flint is making and thinks about what power she has to resist him until she realizes that there is one thing she can do; therefore, (B) is the best answer.**
12. Since Jacobs writes "O, ye happy women," (A) and (B) are too broad, as the category of Northerners includes men. Since she is speaking to those women "whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law," (D) cannot be the best answer. This lack of legal protection would be true for many free black women as well (E). **(C) is the best answer, as white women enjoyed the rights Jacobs mentions, and while she is most likely thinking of white Northern women, that is not reflected in the description she gives of the reader here.**
13. Jacobs is admitting to something she has done, so (A) is incorrect. She specifically says that she was not forced by her master to do what she did, so (B) is incorrect. Instead of trying to convince readers that she is telling the truth (C), Jacobs writes that she is telling her readers about this shameful action because she promised to tell the truth; she says she is fulfilling a previous promise. Jacobs specifically says that she did not do what she did out

of ignorance or thoughtlessness, so (D) is incorrect. Jacobs's second paragraph is intended to prepare the reader to hear something of which she is deeply ashamed, so (E) is the correct answer. She explains that the "remembrance fills [her] with sorrow and shame," and that it "pains [her] to tell [the reader] of it."

14. Jacobs later claims that she had triumphed over her master, and while she did use her premature knowledge to triumph over him, she does not use the statement quoted above to support that claim, so (A) is incorrect. At this point, she does not say or even imply that Mr. Sands had seduced her; instead, she says that she knew what she was doing; therefore (B) is incorrect. In the next paragraph, Jacobs compares herself with "other young girls," indicating that she is young as well. This helps the reader to understand why she can say her knowledge was premature, not the other way around, so (D) is incorrect. Jacobs makes it clear that Linda has knowledge of, but not experience with, sex (E); she is preparing to tell us about her first time having sex. **In the second paragraph, Jacobs stresses that she cannot plead ignorance, that she did not know where her interactions with Mr. Sands were leading; instead, Dr. Flint and slavery in general made her knowledgeable about sex and seduction; therefore, (C) is the best answer.**
15. Jacobs says that her grandmother knew Mr. Sands, but in paragraph 4, she does not say that her grandmother disapproved of him (A). The only thing we hear about Dr. Flint in this paragraph is that his persecutions of her were causing gossip (C). Jacobs suggests that she had a number of meetings with Mr. Sands when she writes, "He constantly sought opportunities to see me, and wrote to me frequently," so (D) cannot be correct. While Jacobs does say that Sands expressed sympathy for her, she does not suggest in this paragraph that Mr. Sands promised he would buy her (E). **The inclusion of the first sentence in paragraph 4, especially the phrase about her mistress's jealousy, begins the insinuation that Mr. Sands might have thought Linda would be likely to have sex with him. That insinuation becomes especially strong in the last sentence of the paragraph: "I was a poor slave girl, only fifteen years old"; therefore, (B) is the best answer.**
16. (A) is easily eliminated by the descriptions in the second through the fifth sentence of the first paragraph that set the garret clearly above the ground. These sentences make it clear that the garret is *part* of the shed, thus eliminating (B). It lies *under* the roof, thus eliminating (E). It is clearly some sort of room, but (D) is too general to be the best answer. **As the garret is above the storage room but *under* the roof, it must be some sort of attic. Thus, (C), which is the best answer.**
17. Jacobs says that Uncle Philip had built the trapdoor while she was hiding in the swamp (B), but she does not compare her new hiding place to that older one. By using the word "oppressive," Jacobs shows that she is still oppressed by the institution of slavery, but she does not portray staying in the garret to stress her captivity (C). The narrator does not criticize her family for not finding a better hiding place (D); she does not, for example, suggest another place they could have hidden her. Jacobs does compare her situation to what other slaves endure (E), but the quotation introduces this comparison; it is not part of the comparison itself. **Jacobs makes it clear that she is currently miserable, which segues**

into her statement that she prefers even this existence to her life as Dr. Flint's slave; therefore, (A) is the best answer.

18. Jacobs does admit that she had an easier situation than other slaves did (B), but this is a qualification of her statement, not the purpose of it. Jacobs goes on to say that she did not wish for freedom until Dr. Flint insisted that she become his mistress, a situation that many female slaves had to deal with, but she does not argue that female slaves have it harder than male slaves do (C), and regardless, such is not the purpose of her statement. In saying that "[she] had always been kindly treated, and tenderly cared for, until [she] came into the hands of Dr. Flint. [She] had never wished for freedom till then," Jacobs says she did not think of running away before Dr. Flint's harassment, but she does not say that she would return to slavery if she did not have to deal with him (D). Jacobs's statement might counter the pro-slavery argument that slaves are content (E), **but she does so by stressing how horrible any life without freedom is (A) and saying that a bad life of freedom is preferable to a comparatively good life of slavery. Thus (A) is the best answer.**
19. Anaphora is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses or lines. Here, the use of anaphora does create parallel structure (A), but that is not her primary reason for using it. The use of anaphora draws more attention to the experiences of others, rather than to her own experiences (C). Jacobs's use of this device does demonstrate her rhetorical skill (D), but that is not the purpose of its use here. Instead of increasing the pace of the passage (E), the anaphora slows it so to emphasize what comes after each use of the anaphora. **The purpose of the anaphora is to emphasize how many tortures she avoided (B) in her previous situation before declaring that even such a comparatively easy slavery experience was worse than living in the garret.**
20. At the time these events were taking place, Linda was concerned (A) about how her child was speaking to Dr. Flint, but the question asks about the narrator, not about Linda-as-character. While she is grateful Dr. Flint did not hear Benny's response to the slave master's threat, she is not grateful that Benny spoke this way (C). In this passage, Jacobs does not mention feeling guilty for putting her children in the position to be treated this way by Dr. Flint (D). "Happiness" (E) is too extreme a word to describe what the narrator is saying. **Instead, when she writes about these events years later, Jacobs (the narrator) seems proud of Benny (B). One sees this especially when she ends the paragraph by quoting Benny defiantly saying he will tell his mother to run away again if Dr. Flint wants to put her in jail. Therefore, (B) is the best answer.**
21. In this passage, Jacobs does not proudly justify her actions (A) as she does elsewhere in the book. Because she feels he has a right to know about her past, she is not being protective of her privacy (B), nor is she offended (E). In the final sentence of the quotation, she says that Mr. Durham had a right to know how far she has fallen before he decides whether she is worthy of his company; she does not say or imply that she is unworthy of it (D). **The first four sentences of this quotation show that she is aware that most people would hold a low opinion of her, and the final sentence suggests that she feels somewhat ashamed of her actions (C), as she is unsure whether she is worthy of his friendship rather than, say, feeling that she is worthy but wondering whether he is open-minded enough to recognize that.**

22. It is not clear from this reaction that she feels ashamed (A); in fact she seems to justify herself more in this response than she did earlier in the conversation with Mr. Durham. While Jacobs says Mr. Durham's comment "burned [her] like coals of fire," he has not insulted her, nor is it clear that she thinks he has insulted her (B). In her reply to Mr. Durham, Jacobs suggests that only God knows what she was going through and therefore only He has the right to judge her, but her intense feeling shows she does care about people's opinions (C). Clearly, she does not agree with his advice (E) about keeping certain parts of her past private; instead, she seems to say that her behavior now will not allow people to have contempt for what she did in the past. In saying "God alone knows how I have suffered; and He, I trust, will forgive me," Linda shows that she believes her actions have a justification; therefore (D) is the best answer.
23. While the passage does reveal that Linda is ignorant of the North's customs (A), Jacobs includes this incident to show that she does not feel as free as she believes she is. Just before the incident with the fire-bells, Linda informs the reader that she believes she is free. This statement, juxtaposed with her reaction, reveals the true purpose behind Jacobs' inclusion of this incident. While Linda does wake the host's daughter, she does so because she thinks they all need to respond to the fire-bells, not because she instinctively acts like a servant to a mistress (B). It is unclear from the passage whether Mrs. Durham's daughter is lazy (C); in any case, she is not being lazy in this passage because it is not necessary for her to help with the fire engine. Later in the selection, Linda finds that "the north ape[s] the customs of slavery," but she does not learn this from the experience with the fire bells; instead, she discovers the North does not imitate the South in this instance (D). Linda's almost instinctive reaction to the bells and her surprise when she learns that African-Americans are not expected to help put out the fire indicate that she does not feel as free as she thinks she is at the beginning of the quotation; therefore (E) is the best answer.
24. The antithesis of a scene would be one that is its opposite in terms of ideas. The key points of the scene with the fire-bells are Linda's quick assumption that the North has the same expectation for African-Americans that the South does and Linda's discovery that such is not the case. The scene that contains the opposites of those two things is the scene where Linda discovers that she cannot get first-class tickets because she is an African-American (E). When she hears of the difficulty, she assumes it is only a matter of money and then discovers that the tickets cannot be had for any price because "the north aped the customs of slavery." The antithesis of (A) would be (C); in the latter scene, people are very careful not to ask the kind of uncomfortable questions Mr. Durham asks in the former scene. (D) would be the anti-thesis to (C) because in the former scene people (good-naturedly) laugh at Linda while in the latter scene everyone is careful not to make Linda uncomfortable.
25. Neither Linda's response to the fire-bells (A) nor her laughing at herself the next morning (B) relate to her plan to be a good mother and to live above contempt. (D) may show Linda trying to live above contempt, but does not have any relationship to her desire to be a good mother. In (E), Linda learns something that may help her deal with contempt and be a good mother to African-American children, but the clearest and best relationship is in the scene that shows Linda benefitting from Mrs. Durham's companionship (C). With her hostess, Linda is able to "[add] to [her] little stock of knowledge" and to see portraits of the women's children ("I had never seen any paintings of colored people before, and they seemed to be beautiful"). In this scene, Linda gets her first glimpse of the African-American middle-class and the life that is possible for her and her children in the North.



# Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

## Prefatory Material

1. How do the two epigraphs prepare readers for Harriet Jacobs's stated purpose in writing the narrative?

*The first epigraph argues that if northerners knew how slavery degraded human beings, they would do everything they could to put an end to it. The second epigraph calls upon women to awaken from their apathy regarding the injustices happening around them. Jacobs is writing about her experiences in slavery, even though she would rather have kept them hidden, in order to bring knowledge to Northern women and to make them empathize with those people still in slavery.*

2. In the last paragraph of her Preface, why does Jacobs say she wants "to arouse" her readers to a "realizing sense" of the conditions of slavery, rather than say she wants "to inform" her readers so they will have "knowledge" of the conditions of slavery?

*Jacobs does not want her readers simply to know about slavery in the South; she wants her story to move her readers, to make them realize the slaves' sufferings at a level deeper than words like "inform" and "knowledge" would imply.*

3. Compare the "Introduction by the Editor" to the "Preface by the Author." How do Lydia Maria Child's reasons for editing this slave narrative differ from Jacobs's reasons for writing it? Why do they differ?

*While both want to enlighten Northern women, Child draws attention to the importance of the narrative documenting the "peculiar phase of Slavery [that] has generally been kept veiled," by which she means white male masters forcing their female slaves to have sex with them. Child is also more specific about what she wants readers to do in response to what they learn: to use their moral influence to fight slavery and never to aid in the return of a fugitive slave.*

*Child can write more forthrightly than Jacobs, not only because the former is a white middle-class woman, but also because she is a famous author of both fiction and largely intended for the audience that she is addressing: white middle-class women.*

4. What does Child mean when she says in her Introduction "some incidents in her story are more romantic than fiction"? Why does she make this statement?

*The word "romantic" refers to the literature of the Romantic period, particularly the Gothic romance, a type of novel (such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) that focused on what was stranger than reality and on emotions such as horror and terror. Child is saying that in this slave narrative some of the incidents will be so horrific and repulsive that readers may be tempted to believe that this is a work of the imagination or that Jacobs is exaggerating some things in order to make her readers feel the repulsion and terror that Linda Brent did, but that they should not make such a mistake: when it comes to slavery, truth is stranger than fiction.*

## Chapter I

1. Given that this text is an autobiography, what is the importance of the first five words? How do they differ from the way other autobiographies open? How does that difference grow out of this also being a slave narrative?

*Like most autobiographies, Jacobs begins with the phrase “I was born,” but because she was born a slave, she cannot follow that statement with the expected information of the year and place of her birth. Instead, she emphasizes a fact that is known and central to her life: she was born a slave. Furthermore, Jacobs does not begin by saying “I was a slave,” thus, refusing to let that condition define who she is.*

2. What theme is suggested by passages such as “[my maternal grandmother] was the daughter of a planter in South Carolina, who, at his death, left her mother and his three children free” and “My mother’s mistress was the daughter of my grandmother’s mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother’s breast”?

*Such passages address the theme of the impact of slavery upon families or slavery’s distortion of family bonds. Sexual practices (such as masters forcing their female slaves to have sex with them) and childrearing practices (such as female slaves having to breastfeed their mistress’s child) created what should have been familial relationships between blacks and whites on the plantation, but slavery distorted such bonds by having one half-sister be the slave of the other half-sister.*

3. Most of the first paragraph of Jacobs’s narration is taken up with the history of her grandmother. How does this paragraph begin to characterize her grandmother?

*Jacobs’s grandmother is the great maternal presence in her life, characterized as a “remarkable woman” and a “treasure” to Jacobs and her brother. Separated from her family and sold to the keeper of a large hotel when she was a little girl, Jacobs’s grandmother had a hard life when she was young, but was soon recognized as being very intelligent and loyal. As she grew older, she proved to be a respected baker and successful businesswoman, who saved the profits from her nighttime labor to buy her children out of slavery. The sale of her youngest child was a “terrible blow,” but since Jacobs’s grandmother “was naturally hopeful,” she went to work “with renewed energy, trusting in time to be able to purchase some of her children.” Her masters deal her another blow, however, when the mistress borrows all of her earnings, promising to pay her back soon, but never does. Jacobs’s grandmother emerges, then, as a skilled and intelligent woman, who remains determined to buy her children out of slavery, despite some crushing setbacks.*

4. Given the chapter’s plot, why is it important that Jacobs describes the years she spent with her mistress as being so idyllic?

*Despite having a close relationship with her kind mistress, a woman who “had been almost like a mother to [her],” Harriet Jacobs is bequeathed to her mistress’s niece as if Jacobs were nothing more than a piece of property. By describing her seemingly idyllic time with her mistress, Jacobs highlights the injustice of the mistress’s act and shows that slave owners do not act the way one would expect them to when it comes to relationships with their slaves.*

5. In the sentence “But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor,” how does Jacobs use understatement to communicate her opinion of her mistress’s religious teachings?

*Jacobs does not simply “suppose” that her mistress did not see “Linda Brent” as her neighbor; she knows that slave owners do not even see their slaves as human beings. Assuming her audience will recognize her as a fellow human being, Jacobs expects the understatement to reveal her conclusion that her mistress is a hypocrite. Moreover, her understatement suggests that when slave masters do teach Christian ethics to their slaves, they are doing so to inculcate the belief that blacks should sacrifice for and be submissive to whites.*

6. How do the incidents of the grandmother’s life that are narrated in this chapter form a lesson about the relationships between slaves and their masters?

*The grandmother’s owners continually take advantage of her powerlessness. When she asks to use her time after the chores are done to bake crackers she can then sell, her mistress says she may only if she uses the profits to clothe herself and her children, some of the very few items owners were expected to provide for their slaves. When the mistress wants to borrow the three hundred dollars that the grandmother has saved, she asks the grandmother to loan it to her, knowing a slave can neither refuse nor hold her to a promise of repayment. Finally, Jacobs notes that “[n]otwithstanding [her] grandmother’s long and faithful service to her owners, not one of her children escaped the auction block.”*

7. How might the conditions of Linda’s first six years of life contribute to her later resolve to escape to the North?

*Until she is six, Linda does not realize that she is a slave and enjoys conditions that few slaves would have been able to experience: living in a house with her parents and her siblings, seeing her father manage his own affairs, and enjoying treats such as crackers, cakes, and preserves from her grandmother. Linda experiences freedom without knowing that she is “a piece of merchandise, trusted to [her parents] for safe keeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment.” She therefore probably continues to feel that she has a right to be free.*

## **Chapter II**

1. How does Jacobs’s characterization of her brother also work as foreshadowing?

*Jacobs’s brother, William, is characterized as “spirited,” one who imbibed their father’s freeman-like feelings and who “detested the name of master and mistress.” Jacobs remembers her father telling her brother that he (William) should obey his father over his master. She then laments, “Poor Willie! He was now to learn his first lesson of obedience to a master.” When she suggests they may be able to hire their own time when they are older and, thus, save the money they earn to buy their freedom, Willie retorts that “he did not intend to buy his freedom.” Given Jacobs’s characterization of Willie, the reader expects him to try to escape from slavery.*



2. What does the linsey-woolsey dress symbolize to young Linda Brent? How might her grandmother's contributions to Linda's wardrobe be an important element in the formation of a girl who would go on to escape from slavery?

*To young Linda, the linsey-woolsey dress given to her by Mrs. Flint each year symbolizes the degrading condition in which slaves are forced to live. By giving Linda other dresses to wear, her grandmother prevents the young girl from feeling that form of degradation.*

3. How does Dr. and Mrs. Flint's last name correspond to the way they are characterized?

*Both characters are cold and hard like flint, and in this chapter, both perform a number of cruel deeds. Dr. Flint sells Linda's grandmother, even though she had been set free in her previous owner's will. He beats a slave husband when he hears that the husband had publically upbraided his wife for having a baby with Dr. Flint, and then shortly afterward, Dr. Flint sells the man, woman, and child to the slave trader. Mrs. Flint exults in the death of a woman in childbirth, who had been made pregnant by Dr. Flint. Despite claiming to have delicate nerves, Mrs. Flint is known to have watched a female slave whipped "till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash." Both Dr. and Mrs. Flint would cruelly punish the slaves who worked in the kitchen if the meal was not on time and up to an epicurean's standards.*

4. Why does Jacobs mention that Mrs. Flint is a member of a church?

*As she did in the previous chapter, Jacobs wants to show the hypocrisy of slave owners who claim to be Christians but do not follow Christ's teachings on the importance of treating those in the most humble of conditions with kindness.*

5. Why does Jacobs end the chapter by talking about female slaves who are sexually abused by Dr. Flint and, subsequently, treated cruelly by Mrs. Flint?

*Readers know that Linda is nearing the age of sexual maturity, and therefore, they are likely to read these closing paragraphs as foreshadowing her near future. Jacobs is providing the context in which readers should think about Linda Brent's future interactions with the Flints.*

### **Chapter III**

1. According to Jacobs, about how many days per year do hired-out slaves get time off?

*Slaves get about seven days off per year: two days off after the crop is planted and four to five days off for the Christmas holiday.*

2. How might Northern readers view the term “hiring-day” as ironic?

*Familiar with the free-labor system in the North, Northern readers would see the term “hiring-day” as ironic because the slaves are not hired; they are rented out by their owners. As Jacobs points out, if a hired-out slave stops working at a plantation by running away, “thinking it justifiable to violate an extorted promise,” then he or she is severely whipped and put in chains.*

3. How does Jacobs use diction to contrast the New Year’s Day experiences of Northern free women and Southern slave women?

*In describing the women of the North, Jacobs uses words and phrases that stress the good will among people: “friendly,” “showered” with gifts, “hearts” of even the “estranged” are softened, lips “echo back, ‘I wish you a happy New Year,’” “little offerings,” “caress,” and most importantly, “They are your own.”*

*In describing slave mothers, Jacobs uses words and phrases that emphasize the pain of broken ties: “laden with peculiar sorrows,” “torn from her,” “wish that she and they might die,” “brutalized,” and “a mother’s agonies.”*

4. How does Jacobs use imagery to contrast the New Year’s Day experiences of Northern free women and Southern slave women?

*The description of Northern women’s experiences focuses on the beauty of the holiday season: “It is a pleasant season, and the light of the day is blessed.” People wish each other “Happy New Year.” The most poignant image of familial bliss is of children who “bring their little offerings, and raise their rosy lips for a caress.”*

*In contrast, a slave woman sits in misery “on her cold cabin floor” on what is, for her, the eve of the worst day of the year, “watching the children who may all be torn from her the next morning.” Jacobs then turns to an image that continues to haunt her: a mother who has just had all of her children taken from her meets the young Linda Brent with “her wild, haggard face,” exclaiming “Why don’t God kill me?”*

5. Why does Jacobs use second-person narration in the paragraph about the Northern woman’s New Year’s Day? What tone does she use?

*Jacobs knows that most of her readers are Northern middle-class white women, and she wants to call upon them, in their roles as women and mothers, to become aware of how painful motherhood is to the slave woman. Many readers will find Jacobs’s tone accusatory, especially with the italicized emphasis she puts on the word “your” before “New Year’s day.” The effect of the accusatory tone would be to remind her readers that while they enjoy their relationships with family and friends, slave mothers suffer untold agony. Jacobs probably hopes that her second-person narration and her accusatory tone will make her readers feel guilty enough to act on behalf of their black sisters in slavery.*

## Chapter IV

1. What is Linda's attitude toward her grandmother's reliance on faith and on her own and Benjamin's inability to use faith to reconcile them to their lot?

*Linda is impressed by her grandmother's faith ("It was a beautiful faith, coming from a mother who could not call her children her own") and with how sincerely she tries to get Benjamin and Linda to rely on God for support ("Most earnestly did she strive to make us feel that it was the will of God"). While the children seem willing to turn to God for support, they do not believe that it is God's will for them to be in their present situations. Jacobs says, "We reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated as [grandmother] was." Therefore, they "condem[n]" Linda's grandmother's idea that they "ought to pray for contentment." Jacobs portrays the children's objections as rational ("We reasoned ..."). She is sad that she and her brother could not follow their grandmother's advice ("But, alas! Even the charms of the old oven failed to reconcile us to our hard lot"); however, she also seems proud of herself ("never before had my puny arm felt half so strong").*

2. What is Jacobs's attitude toward the home that her grandmother creates? How does Jacobs use imagery and diction to convey this attitude to the reader?

*Jacobs represents her grandmother's house as a "snug little home" that is humble ("surrounded with the necessities of life") but comforting, a place where they "always found sweet balsam for [their] troubles." Here, her grandmother takes in the suffering children, "sympathize[es]" with them, and gives them such hope "that unconsciously the clouds gave place to sunshine," an image that clearly communicates their changed outlook. Jacobs uses the image of the grand, big oven, where special treats are baked for Benjamin and Linda, to communicate how her grandmother creates an atmosphere where her children and grandchildren can feel loved, valued ("there was always a choice bit in store for us"), and comforted. However, "[e]ven the charms of the old oven [fail] to reconcile [them] to [their] hard lot." At Linda's grandmother's house, Linda and Benjamin may find the strength to carry on, but nothing can make them content with slavery.*

3. What was Linda's attitude toward contentment when she spoke with her brother William after he fought his young master?

*Linda tells William that while they cannot expect to be happy, they "must be good; perhaps that would bring [them] contentment." Linda gives this advice to her brother because she is worried that his spirit, "too bold and daring for a slave," will make him do something rash. Linda, however, does not completely believe what she says. She knows that she herself is putting up a fight and has "resolved never to be conquered." Linda believes that while humility and contentment might help a slave to survive temporarily, it is a bold and daring spirit that can lead a slave to freedom.*

4. When Jacobs first mentions her troubles with Dr. Flint, she does not make it clear that he is sexually harassing her. In the paragraph that begins “But, alas!” how does she use imagery and diction to prepare the reader for this later revelation?

*Jacobs portrays Dr. Flint as a predatory animal with a “restless, craving, vicious nature [that] roves[s] about day and night, seeking whom to devour.” By using words like “stinging,” “scorching,” and “scath[ing]” to describe how his statements affect her, she not only makes it clear that his words cause her pain, but also suggests that he is introducing her to an evil about which she had been ignorant. Her image of the earth opening up to swallow him communicates how much she despises her master, while also suggesting that he belongs in Hell so the world would be free from this “plague.”*

5. If Northern readers expected women to be submissive and demure, why would Jacobs portray herself during this time as having a spirit like her brother’s, “bold and daring,” using such statements as “never before had my puny arm felt half so strong” and “The war of my life had begun; and though one of God’s most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered”?

*Northern readers might be unwilling to accept a woman fighting in public for the right to vote. However, they would be willing to accept a woman fighting a man in order to protect her virginity. Furthermore, Jacobs’s portrayal of herself as rebelling against a tyrannical master and a social system that supported him would be in keeping with the ideals of the American Revolutionary War.*

6. One of the themes in this book is family loyalty versus family abandonment. How does this conflict appear in Jacobs’s parting words to her Uncle Benjamin upon his first attempt to escape from slavery: “He was right; but it was hard to give him up. ‘Go,’ said I, ‘and break your mother’s heart.’ ”

*Jacobs admits that her brother is right to run away from slavery, but knows she will miss him. She plays upon his feelings for his mother in order to get him to stay.*

7. When Benjamin is returned to slavery, Linda’s grandmother (Benjamin’s mother) visits him in jail. He apologizes for the suffering he caused her in running away. She says that “she had nothing to forgive; she could not blame his desire for freedom.” How does Linda’s grandmother’s relationship with her son give him the strength to make a stand against slavery and to escape from it? How does the relationship hinder him from doing the same?

*In addition to being a role model of strength and pride, Benjamin’s mother tells him he does not have to apologize for trying to escape slavery. Hearing that his apology is unnecessary may help eliminate the feelings of guilt that could hinder him from making another run for freedom. Thinking of her keeps Benjamin from attempting suicide, and thus, allows him to try to escape again.*

*However, Linda’s grandmother keeps encouraging Benjamin to seek his master’s forgiveness and to put his faith in God, who will lighten his burdens, rather than encouraging him to attempt to escape.*

8. When Benjamin is taken away by a slave trader, who is forbidden to sell him until he is out of the state, Linda's grandmother has a friend in New Orleans who offers to buy him on her behalf. Jacobs then writes, "When he saw Benjamin, and stated his business, he thanked him; but said he preferred to wait a while before making the trader an offer. He knew he had tried to obtain a high price for him, and had invariably failed. This encouraged him to make another effort for freedom." The ambiguous pronouns in this sentence make it hard to understand. What is happening in this interaction?

*Linda's grandmother's friend tells Benjamin about the plan to purchase him, but Benjamin asks the friend to wait awhile before making the trader an offer. Presumably, Benjamin thinks that the slave trader's recent frustrations in trying to sell Benjamin will make him inclined to accept the friend's offer, and Benjamin would rather try to escape again first.*

9. According to Jacobs, Benjamin's second attempt at escaping from slavery is successful in part because he can pass for white. How does this ability influence his announcing to Phil, " 'I part with all my kindred' "?

*Believing his best chance of escaping from slavery lies in taking advantage of his light skin color, Benjamin plans to join the world of whites and knows that, for a runaway slave to do so, he must not see or communicate with his family ever again.*

10. About Uncle Benjamin and his escape, Jacobs writes, "And so it proved. We never heard from him again." How does Jacobs communicate how Uncle Benjamin's example may affect her and her own thoughts of escaping from slavery?

*Jacobs' short and simple sentences, in their starkness, sound haunting, ominously suggesting that she realizes how permanent leaving her family could be if she decided to make a run for freedom, especially if she too tried to pass for white.*

11. Why does the chapter end with Linda's grandmother buying Phillip's freedom and with the two of them and Linda saying "He that is willing to be a slave, let him be a slave"?

*Phil's case is very different from Benjamin's. Phil declines Benjamin's offer to stay in the North and work to buy the other family members their freedom. Instead, Phil returns to his mother, and she buys him out of slavery. Phil is able to resolve the conflict between family ties and freedom in a different way than Benjamin does, and Jacobs wants to present Phil's way out of slavery as an equally respectable path to take. The tone of pride, pride in themselves and in each other, may suggest that, at the time, Linda felt Uncle Phil's example was preferable to Uncle Benjamin's.*

## Chapter V

1. How does this chapter advance the plot toward the climax in a future chapter?

*In this chapter, tensions dramatically increase as Linda tries to avoid Dr. Flint's increasingly insistent demands for her to become his mistress. Jacobs also increases the tension by showing that Linda has no one to turn to for protection. Furthermore, Mrs. Flint becomes increasingly jealous and suspicious.*

2. How does Jacobs use conventions of the seduction novel in this chapter?

*Jacobs portrays Linda Brent as a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girl who is struggling to resist the sexual propositions of an experienced and a wealthy man. The female villain, here Mrs. Flint, does nothing to protect Linda, and Linda is reluctant to turn to her grandmother for help because she feels ashamed ("I was very young, and felt shamefaced about telling her such impure things").*

3. How would using the conventions of the seduction novel help Jacobs to address her intended audience?

*The seduction novel continued to be popular among women readers during the antebellum period. Classic examples of the seduction novel, such as Charlotte Temple, used Europeans as the male and female villains, knowing Americans would readily accept the idea of aristocratic, irresponsible men spreading vice and taking advantage of young women. Jacobs likely knows that Northern middle-class readers would associate Southern slave owners with European aristocrats and, therefore, equate Linda Brent with the victims of those popular novels.*

4. Analyze Jacobs's use of second-person narration in the last part of the first paragraph in this chapter. How does she avoid criticizing her readers? How does she appeal to their identities as Northerners? As members of the middle class?

*Jacobs directly addresses her presumably Northern readers in order to call upon them to help the fugitive slave, instead of aiding in his or her capture, as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 requires them to do. Rather than directly criticize such readers for not already helping "the helpless millions suffering in this cruel bondage," she implicitly excuses them because they probably did not believe accounts of the "degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, [which] are more than [she] can describe." She states her confidence in them, however, by saying, "Surely, if you credited one half the truths that are told you concerning [slavery]... 'you at the north would not help to tighten the yoke.'" Jacobs appeals to her readers' identities as Northerners by reminding them that the Fugitive Slave Law unjustly requires them to help catch a slave "on your own soil," and she appeals to their class status by reminding them that they would not want to do the "mean and cruel work which trained bloodhounds and the lowest class of whites do for him at the south."*



5. In the first three sentences of the chapter's last paragraph, how does Jacobs rebuke her readers without blaming them for not doing more to end slavery?

*Jacobs uses the second-person to rebuke her readers for remaining silent on the degradations and vices caused by slavery, but by using an inflated "ye," she makes it sound less like an attack and more like a lament and a call for people to rise up and work for social change. Furthermore, she blames her inability to write in a way powerful enough to stir their feelings: "Would that I had more ability! But my heart is so full, and my pen is so weak!"*

6. In this chapter, what effect does Jacobs's characterization of her grandmother have on the reader?

*In Chapter V, Jacobs adds to the characterization of her grandmother by remarking that the woman was "very strict on such subjects" as "impure things." Jacobs even admits that she "feared her as well as loved her." Such additions to the characterization seem to foreshadow increasing tension between the girl and her grandmother and, perhaps, a break in their relationship when Linda can no longer resist Dr. Flint.*

*Jacobs also says that her grandmother had "a high spirit," and "if her indignation was once roused, it was not very easily quelled," as when "she once chased a white gentleman with a loaded pistol, because he insulted one of her daughters." Dr. Flint is afraid of her and dreads "her scorching rebukes." This addition to the characterization seems to foreshadow a confrontation between her grandmother and Dr. Flint.*

## Chapter VI

1. How might Jacobs's claim that a master's favorite female slave "is not allowed to have any pride of character" add to the characterization of Linda Brent?

*With this statement, Jacobs portrays Linda as a woman who wants to make decisions and to behave in a manner that will allow her to be proud of herself. She wants to be virtuous, and the context of that claim suggests that Linda does not want to have sex with Dr. Flint or even to listen to his licentious propositions. By saying that she was "not allowed to have any pride of character," Jacobs foreshadows Linda having to engage in behavior she otherwise would shun and prepares the reader to see Linda as being blameless for such decisions.*

2. In the paragraph that begins "I did as she ordered," how does Jacobs use diction to characterize Mrs. Flint in relation to Linda?

*Jacobs portrays Mrs. Flint as self-centered and concerned only with her own wounded pride. Instead of being concerned with "the poor victim of her husband's perfidy," Mrs. Flint considers her marriage vows "desecrated" and her "dignity insulted." Instead of pitying "her unfortunate, helpless slave," she sees herself as a "martyr." Finally, Jacobs portrays her mistress as being unrefined because she fails to exercise "control over her passions." Linda, however, is represented as refined because she has not vented her anger at either Dr. or Mrs. Flint.*



3. In the paragraph that begins, "I knew I had ignited the torch..." how does Jacobs use some of the conventions of the gothic romance to portray her situation with Mrs. Flint?

*With the first sentence, Jacobs foreshadows that she is to suffer for having been honest with Mrs. Flint, increasing the reader's feeling of suspense. She then draws upon the convention of awakening in the night to find someone hanging over you: "Sometimes I woke up, and found her bending over me." Jacobs also uses the convention of traps: "At other times she whispered in my ear, as though it was her husband who was speaking to me, and listened to hear what I would answer." Finally, she portrays her mistress as if the latter were a ghost: "If she startled me..., she would glide stealthily away."*

4. In the last four paragraphs of the novel, why does Jacobs give a first-hand report of plantation owners' marriages?

*Jacobs is warning Northerners against the practice of "giv[ing] their daughters in marriage to slaveholders." She criticizes the romantic notions that Northerners have of life in the South, letting them know that the "young wife soon learns that the husband in whose hands she has placed her happiness pays no regard to his marriage vows ... Jealousy and hatred enter the flowery home, and it is ravaged of its loveliness."*

*Knowing the importance of the wife and mother's role to middle-class Northerners, Jacobs goes on to describe the plantation owners' travesty of domesticity: "Southern women often marry a man knowing that he is the father of many little slaves. They do not trouble themselves about it. They regard such children as property, as marketable as the pigs on the plantation."*

## **Chapter VII**

1. How do the first two paragraphs of the chapter contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

*At this age, Linda Brent was a young woman in love. At first, she is swept up in romantic feelings for the free-born carpenter. After reflecting on her position as a slave, she feels despair, for she knows the law does not recognize slave marriages and Dr. Flint will never let the carpenter buy Linda's freedom.*

2. How does the inclusion of the quotation from Lord Byron's poem "The Lament of Tasso" contribute to the representation of the narrator?

*The narrator is well read, and she artfully uses the quotation to provide imagery for her representation of slavery.*

3. In response to Dr. Flint's note informing Linda that he intends for her to be one of the slaves he takes to Louisiana, she responds, "I am your daughter's property, and it is in your power to send me, or take me, wherever you please." How does the way she phrases her response contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

*Linda knows that at the moment, there is nothing to be gained by rejecting Dr. Flint's demand; she would only be punished for her defiance. However, she refuses to say that she will go with him. Instead, her response draws attention to the fact that because she is a slave, he is not really taking her will into account. Linda is able to see this situation as the travesty it is and is crafty enough to give a response that refuses to pretend otherwise while keeping herself from being punished in the present.*

4. Shortly after giving the above response to Dr. Flint's note, Jacobs lets the reader know that she "was determined that [she] would never go to Louisiana with him." How does this information contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

*Linda is a woman of determination. She has decided that while she will suffer through his attempts to get her to give in, she is determined to avoid a sexual relationship with Dr. Flint.*

## Chapter VIII

1. Analyze the organization of this chapter with respect to its title, "What Slaves Are Taught to Think of the North." Why is the order of things Jacobs addresses effective?

*Jacobs begins with the subject she announces in her title: an example of the kind of lies that masters tell their slaves about the condition of African-Americans in the North. Starting with the third paragraph, however, she begins to criticize Northerners before ending with an example of a slave's ignorance about the help slaves should expect from the federal government. One could argue that Jacobs's title, opening, and closing soften her criticism of her intended audience, which she places in the middle of the chapter. One could also argue that in criticizing the South in the beginning of the chapter, she cannot help but criticize the North in the next (middle) section because the North supports the institution of slavery in a number of ways.*

2. Analyze Jacobs's use of second-person address in the fourth paragraph of the chapter.

*Jacobs rather aggressively takes on those Northerners who see examples of degraded behavior among slaves and believe such examples prove that the black race is naturally inferior to the white. She asks the reader to consider his or her position on this issue: "Do you think this proves the black man to belong to an inferior order of beings?" She then pointedly asks, "What would you be, if you had been born and brought up a slave, with generations of slaves for ancestors?" She concludes by reminding her reader that the institution of slavery and those who support it (such as those Northerners who obey the Fugitive Slave Law) are to blame for degrading slaves.*

3. Why does Jacobs write in the fifth paragraph about how Southern gentlemen see “Yankees”?

*Jacobs points out that Southerners show little but contempt for Northerners and do not welcome them south of the Mason-Dixon Line unless they show respect for the institution of slavery. She points out that Southerners treat “Yankees” this way while Northerners are “consent[ing] to do the vilest work for them, such as the ferocious bloodhounds and the despised negro-hunters are employed to do at home.” She hopes that Northerners will see that they are foolish to treat white Southerners so well and will cease to follow the Fugitive Slave Law and will cease to show subservience to the institution of slavery when interacting with Southerners.*

4. For what purpose does Jacobs ask, “And then who are Africans?”

*Jacobs knows that many people ease their conscience by representing Africans as a separate and inferior race to whites, ordained by God to be slaves. She first scolds such people for such a “libel upon the heavenly Father, who ‘made of one blood all nations of men.’” She then asks how one can consider African-Americans as Africans given “the amount of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing in the veins of American slaves.” Her appeal to the Bible and to logic serves to undermine these pro-slavery arguments.*

5. Analyze the imagery in the final two paragraphs.

*The image of the Queen of America coming to Washington City to speak to the President inverts traditional nineteenth-century hierarchies, particularly gender hierarchies. Here, one finds monarchy superior to democracy, black people rather than white abolitionists working to free the slaves, a woman superior to a man, a woman drawing a sword upon a man to force him to swear an oath, and the President subordinate to a Queen. The inversions not only remind readers that the President should be subordinate to (Queen) Justice, but also imagines a world where women are superior to men and where a woman can force a man to do her bidding.*

6. Why might Jacobs include this imagery at this point of the book?

*In Chapters 5, 6, and 7, Jacobs introduced us to Dr. Flint’s harassment of Linda Brent. She ended Chapter 7 determined to resist Dr. Flint and to escape with her brother to the North. The imagery at the end of Chapter 8 suggests that Linda will try to invert the power Dr. Flint (a man) has over her (a woman).*

## **Chapter IX**

1. Analyze the importance of the chapter’s title to the voice of witness Jacobs uses throughout.

*Jacobs stresses her personal knowledge of the matters she reports in this chapter by emphasizing, as she does in the title, that these are “Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders.” Most of the events she reports here she did not witness herself, but she knew the people involved.*

2. Analyze how Jacobs narrates the punishments she witnesses. Focus on her use of techniques such as tone, descriptive details, and perspective.

*What she reports on are horrific cases of slaves being tortured—sometimes tortured to death—by their masters. Her tone is often one of objectivity, reporting the details without much commentary. For example her friend Charity's son, James, she says, "was then put into the cotton gin, which was screwed down, only allowing him room to turn on his side when he could not lie on his back ... When the press was unscrewed [four days and five nights later], the dead body was found partly eaten by rats and vermin." As seen in this quotation, she describes the methods of torture and the effects they had on the slaves' bodies in vivid detail. Occasionally, however, she will express with a word or two her sympathy with the victims, as she does when describing James's whipping: "This wretched creature was cut with the whip from his head to his feet, then washed with strong brine ..."*

3. Discuss the purpose that the following sentences might serve: "I could tell of more slaveholders as cruel as those I have described. They are not exceptions to the general rule."

*Afraid that some readers might think that these incidents are extreme cases that are exceptions to the rule, Jacobs pointedly states that they are not. Furthermore, she suggests that if readers do not believe her, they should go to a southern plantation and claim they are slave traders; then, nothing will be hidden from them.*

4. Jacobs frequently uses the phrase "he was called to no account." Why would this phrase be important to her in this chapter?

*Jacobs uses this phrase to mark the injustices in the South; no one in the community asks a master to account for his treatment of his slaves, even in cases of murder. Jacobs also implies that because masters are "called to no account," their methods of punishing slaves become horrific, worse than if they did have to answer to their neighbors and community leaders.*

5. In concluding one example of a slave punished for stealing food, Jacobs writes, "When his own labor was stolen from him, he had stolen food to appease his hunger. This was his crime." What purpose is served by this conclusion? Also, discuss the tone of this quotation.

*By reminding the reader that a slave is forced to work without compensation for his labor, sometimes without even enough food to survive, Jacobs ensures that one cannot easily say the slave is stealing from his master. The tone sounds completely objective, but the logic reveals the absurdity of calling this slave's action a crime.*

6. How might this chapter be an example of what Lydia Maria Child called “some incidents . . . more romantic than fiction”? What might Jacobs be suggesting by reporting such occurrences?

*Many of the incidents Jacobs reports on would be familiar to readers of Gothic Romance: horrific tortures, fear of avenging ghosts, grave robbery, infanticide, corruption of the young (“the sons [are] violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters”), and reference to seeing and hearing “things that will seem to you impossible among human beings with immortal souls.” Jacobs seems to suggest that slavery is real-life Gothic fiction, the Southern plantation a modern-day version of the castles and abbeys of Medieval Europe.*

## Chapter X

1. Analyze the effect created by the anaphora in the following quotation: “I had rather toil on the plantation from dawn till dark; I had rather live and die in jail, than drag on, from day to day, through such a living death.”

*Jacobs’s use of the anaphora (the repetition of “I had rather”) emphasizes how much she hates the thought of having sex with Dr. Flint and her resolve to find some way to avoid being trapped into doing so.*

2. What is the effect of the adjective clause in the sentence, “I was determined that the master, whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet”?

*The adjective clause, “whom I so hated and loathed . . . and made my life a desert,” modifies “the master.” It reminds us of why Linda so loathes him, which shows why she is so desperate to avoid being trapped into having sex with him. It also reminds the reader how much she has suffered so far in resisting his harassment, which shows why she is so determined not to let him win now.*

3. How does the following sentence add to the characterization of Linda Brent: “I would do any thing, every thing, for the sake of defeating him”?

*Not only does the sentence show Linda’s determination, but it also reveals that Linda thinks of her struggle as a battle of wills that one will lose and one will win.*

4. Analyze the effect of the imagery used in this sentence: “I thought and thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge into the abyss.”

*Linda has come up with a plan for resisting Dr. Flint, but the narrator has not told us of it yet. The imagery of taking the “plunge” foreshadows that the plan will be very risky. That she is “plunging into the abyss” implies that she cannot see how her plan will turn out and that she is not confident about it working out her way. Overall, the imagery shows just how desperate she is and how very few options she has.*

5. Instead of gaining her intended readers' sympathies by saying she was forced into sex or by claiming that her lover took advantage of her innocence or plight, Jacobs confesses, "I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness." What effect does such an admission have on characterization and on the reliability of the narrative?

*Jacobs portrays Linda as someone who looked squarely at her situation and calculated a way to get out of it, showing she is a person of self-determination and independence. Furthermore, Jacobs's whole narrative seems more reliable because of her willingness to admit to something she knows her intended readers (white middle-class women in the North) would disapprove of.*

6. In the chapter's third paragraph, what is Jacobs's attitude toward Northern white women's criticism of her action and how does she communicate it to the reader?

*Her attitude is that they should remember how fortunate they are to have their purity and marriages protected by law when they judge her, who had no protection. She reminds them of their fortunate circumstances and support while noting that she felt deserted even by God. She personifies slavery as a "demon" that has her in its "powerful grasp." Finally, she twice reminds her reader that they are protected by law and (by implication) that she was not.*

7. How can the following sentences be read as a positive portrayal of Mr. Sands?

I have told you that Dr. Flint's persecutions and his wife's jealousy had given rise to some gossip in the neighborhood. Among others, it chanced that a white unmarried gentleman had obtained some knowledge of the circumstances in which I was placed.

*Mr. Sands felt sympathy for Linda Brent having to put up with Dr. Flint's sexual harassment. He came to her offering friendship and kind words.*

8. How can the same sentences be read as a negative portrayal of Mr. Sands?

*Mrs. Flint's gossip surely portrayed Linda as a loose woman out to seduce her husband. When Mr. Sands heard this gossip, he approached Linda in order to enjoy her favors. That Jacobs is suggesting that Mr. Sands took advantage of her and/or the situation she was in is especially suggested by the way in which she ends the paragraph: "I was a poor slave girl, only fifteen years old."*

9. Discuss the meaningfulness of the phrase "something akin to freedom."

*Being a slave, Linda rarely experienced the sense of freedom that non-slaves take for granted. Such experiences are to be cherished. However, this feeling is not one of freedom, which she would have experienced in her childhood home; instead, it is "akin to freedom."*



10. How does the phrase “something akin to freedom” apply to Linda’s experience with Mr. Sands?

*Because she is not submitting to force, but instead choosing to be with Mr. Sands, who has been kind to her, her relationship feels something like freedom. However, the feeling is only “akin to freedom” because the relationship with Mr. Sands is one of the very few options Linda has.*

11. Discuss the rhetorical moves Jacobs makes in the sixth paragraph from “Pity me ...” to “...the same standard as others” by comparing the passage to a similar address to the reader in the chapter’s third paragraph.

*The latter passage is much more forceful than the earlier one, as she almost accusingly says “You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; ... You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares ...; you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps.” In the earlier passage, she only listed in several adjective clauses the fortunate circumstances of the “happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of [their] affection, whose homes are protected by law ...”*

*To placate readers who are still critical of her action, Jacobs goes on to admit that she did wrong and that she feels humiliated. However, she then respectfully suggests that she did not do anything wrong given the situation she was in: “Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others.”*

12. How do the following sentences contextualize Linda’s grandmother’s response? Do the sentences lead one to judge her grandmother’s response more or less negatively?

*The mother of slaves is very watchful. She knows there is no security for her children. After they have entered their teens she lives in daily expectation of trouble.*

*The sentences suggest that every mother of slave daughters should expect her girls to be harassed and abused by their masters. Furthermore, the sentences suggest that there is no protection, “no security” for the girls. Jacobs implies that her grandmother should not have expected her granddaughter to avoid this situation no matter how hard she tried. These sentences that come before her grandmother’s reaction should incline readers to judge the older woman’s words more negatively.*

13. How does the woman who had been a friend of Linda’s mother act as a foil for her grandmother?

*Upon hearing what brought Linda to her house, the woman tries to comfort her. This immediate kindness highlights how unjust her grandmother’s response was.*



## Chapter XI

1. What does the first paragraph contribute to the characterization of Linda's grandmother?

*Linda's grandmother is bold, even with white people. She criticizes Mr. Sands, asking him "why he could not have left her one ewe lamb,—whether there were not plenty of slaves who did not care about character." Not only does Linda's grandmother dare to criticize this powerful white man, but she dares to suggest that he is only interested in sex and that he too does not have a respectable character.*

2. What does the first paragraph contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands and his relationship with Linda?

*Interestingly, Mr. Sands does not answer Linda's grandmother's questions, accusations, and criticisms, which suggests that Jacobs wanted the reader to believe that her grandmother is correct: he is only interested in sex and thinks nothing of Linda's character or his own. He does, however, speak kindly to Linda's grandmother even though she is boldly criticizing him, and he does promise to care for the child and to buy Linda.*

3. Dr. Flint tells Linda, "your master was your best friend. My lenity towards you is a proof of it. I might have punished you in many ways. I might have whipped till you fell dead under the lash. But I wanted you to live; I would have bettered your condition." Why has Dr. Flint been so interested in getting Linda's consent, even while reminding her that he is her master and can do whatever he wants to with her? Why does he offer to improve her situation, building her a house in the woods, even while threatening her?

*Dr. Flint engages in a fantasy of courting Linda, masking domination as love and conjugal decorum. He wants to feel that she accepts him, but he still resorts to threats of violence when her consent is not forthcoming. He seems to want to set up a parallel universe of racial and sexual domestic bliss. In his own house, he needs to sneak around a wife who criticizes his affairs with slaves; with a consenting slave, however, he would enjoy patriarchal power that is unquestioned and unlimited. Finally, as the battle of wills between Linda and Dr. Flint intensifies, he would want her consent, as it would be, in his mind, a sign of her surrender and his victory.*

4. Linda's brother, William, is another one of Dr. Flint's slaves; he works as the doctor's office assistant. Why does Dr. Flint use him to deliver his notes to Linda and make him stand by while he yells at her?

*Dr. Flint wants to humiliate Linda, hoping her shame will cause her to consent to his offers. Even if Linda does not feel ashamed, he can enjoy the power he feels over her and her brother.*

## Chapter XII

1. How does Jacobs portray the men who search the houses of blacks during the muster?

*Jacobs portrays the men who search the houses as “low whites, who had no negroes of their own to scourge.” These men use the muster as an opportunity to play at being slave masters, and to do so, they plant evidence in order to torture black men, women, and children. She also portrays them as using the muster as an opportunity to get revenge on blacks who may have possessions that are nicer than their own. Finally, she portrays the men as uneducated and morally degraded. She contrasts their dialect with her own: “Don’t wonder de niggers want to kill all de white folks, when dey live on ‘sarves’ [meaning preserves]. I stretched out my hand to take the jar, saying, ‘You were not sent here to search for sweetmeats.’”*

2. How does this portrayal of “low whites” and their treatment of blacks offer an insightful analysis of how class differences play out as racial differences in the South?

*Jacobs draws attention to how the class differences between slave owners and “low whites” are played out in terms of racial differences between blacks (both slave and free) and “low whites.” The “low whites” envy the power over other human beings that rich whites possess and therefore use the muster as an occasion to act out their class fantasies (“an opportunity to play at being slave masters”). “Low whites” also use the muster as an occasion to vent their rage over being poor, not by retaliating against the rich whites who benefit from the institution of slavery, but by punishing those who cannot retaliate: blacks with nicer things than the “low whites” own.*

3. Why does Jacobs see these low-class whites as misguided in their attacks on black people?

*Jacobs states that the men misplace their anger over class differences, hurting those with whom they should be uniting and supporting those who oppress them: “They ... show their subserviency to the slaveholders; not reflecting that the power which trampled on the colored people also kept themselves in poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation.”*

4. How does Jacobs increase reader sympathy for the blacks whose houses are searched during the muster?

*Jacobs uses imagery and detail to vividly describe the tortures that the low-class whites inflict upon blacks: “Some received five hundred lashes; others were tied hands and feet, and tortured with a bucking paddle which blisters the skin terribly.” She includes the sounds of the muster, both the dialect of the low-class whites and the shrieks and cries of their black victims. To show how the men violate the privacy of the black homes, she notes how they find her letters and stick their fingers in the jars of preserves Linda’s grandmother had stored.*

### Chapter XIII

1. What is Jacobs's attitude toward Reverend Pike? How does she communicate this attitude to the reader?

*Jacobs sees this man as ridiculous. His preaching is so obviously motivated by the desire to accommodate blacks to their position as slaves that his audience finds him highly amusing. That Jacobs writes about the slaves' reaction in the first-person plural shows that her attitude is the same as theirs. Jacobs also portrays Reverend Pike as a lazy servant of God. He is too inconvenienced by having to meet at someone else's house and so invites them to meet in his kitchen. Then he takes so long to descend from "his comfortable parlor" that the slaves leave.*

2. What is Jacobs's attitude toward the slaves' religious feelings and practices?

*Jacobs sees the slaves as being sincere Christians, whether they are enjoying a Methodist shout or learning to read the Bible. She communicates this attitude to the reader by comparing the slaves to pro-slavery Christians who act serious and devoted but fail to follow Christ's example of loving your fellow man: "Many [slaves] are sincere, and nearer to the gate of heaven than sanctimonious Mr. Pike, and other long-faced Christians, who see wounded Samaritans, and pass by on the other side." Jacobs's touching portrayal of Uncle Fred, a fifty-three-year-old slave who learns how to read the Bible so he can be closer to God, shows just how sincere slaves can be in their religious feelings and practices.*

3. What is Jacobs's attitude toward American missionaries and how does she communicate this to the reader?

*While Jacobs approves of missionaries bringing Christianity to those who are ignorant of it, she criticizes them for ignoring their two nearest audiences: slaves who want to learn to read the Bible and slave owners who violate most principles of Christianity. She knows that many of her ideal readers are or know missionaries and tells them they need to recognize that there are barbaric practices in the United States that need to be reformed: "Talk to American slaveholders as you talk to savages in Africa. Tell them it is wrong to traffic in men. Tell them it is sinful to sell their own children, and atrocious to violate their own daughters." Jacobs's statement draws attention to the irony of slave owners seeing their slaves as savages.*

## Chapter XIV

1. In the chapter's first paragraph, what is Jacobs's attitude toward Dr. Flint's harassment? How does the author use tone and word choice to convey this attitude?

*Linda seems less afraid of Dr. Flint's harassment than she did when she was younger. She now seems tired of it. Her tone in the following sentence seems to indicate that his visits have become monotonous: "Then he would come and renew the old threadbare discourse about his forbearance and my ingratitude." Word choices such as "old threadbare discourse" especially highlight how she feels tired rather than frightened by his harassment.*

2. What portrait of Jacobs-as-author emerges from her diction in Chapter XIV?

*Jacobs uses an especially high level of vocabulary in this chapter. Words such as "venomous," "reprobate," "descanting," "licentiousness," "avarice," and "vituperations" create an image of a very learned writer.*

3. How does the announcement of Linda's second pregnancy contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

*Likely, the reader is surprised to hear that Linda has become pregnant again. Linda has said that Dr. Flint's harassment has again gotten to the point where she feels like she has to do something desperate. Instead, Linda seems bored by his visits and rather safe in her grandmother's house, now that Dr. Flint's wife is refusing to let Linda return to the plantation. She has reported that Mr. Sands visits her and the daughter he has had with her. Without dwelling on her feelings, probably because she does not want to offend her intended audience, Jacobs suggests that her relationship with Mr. Sands was not only designed to ward off Dr. Flint.*

4. How does this chapter contribute to the characterization of Dr. Flint?

*Dr. Flint seems particularly out of control in this chapter. He has become more desperate to reassert control over Linda after she becomes pregnant a second time, as seen when he cuts off all of her hair because she is so proud of it.*

5. Linda Brent worries about the day her children will be recognized as slaves; however, she is especially upset when her second child is a girl. Why?

*Linda knows that her daughter will likely suffer her own fate: sexually harassed and abused (maybe even raped) by her own master. She also knows that her daughter will likely become a mother who will have to worry about her children being slaves, ones who almost certainly will be sold away from her. These reflections lead the narrator to state: "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own."*

6. How does Jacobs's description of her feelings at her children's baptism contribute to the reader's understanding of her opinion of herself?

*Jacobs continues to portray herself as feeling humiliated. At her children's baptism, she feels ashamed as she thinks of her mother. Perhaps these judgments against herself are designed to placate her intended audience; perhaps they are sincerely felt. Jacobs does note that her mother lived in very different circumstances than her own: "Her master had died when she was a child; and she remained with her mistress till she married. She was never in the power of any master; and thus she escaped one class of evils that generally fall upon slaves." Jacobs wishes she could have been like her mother ("Why had my lot been so different from my mother's?"). She may have felt humiliated, especially when she was young, but as narrator, she repeatedly reminds us that slaves should not be held to the same moral standards as those who are free are held to, nor should a female slave's family expect that her lot will be an exception to the lives of most slave women.*

## **Chapter XV**

1. Jacobs notes that Dr. Flint exultingly proclaims, "These brats will bring me a handsome sum of money one of these days." Why does Linda then think "I would rather see them killed than have them given up to his power" when, by being sold, they would no longer be under his power?

*Linda knows that Dr. Flint will make her children's lives particularly hellish in order to get revenge upon her; therefore, she may be worried that he will sell them to a harsh master and so concludes that they would be better off dead. The reader may also sense the continuing battle of wills between Linda and Dr. Flint.*

2. How does this chapter contribute to the characterization of Dr. Flint?

*Dr. Flint is quicker to resort to violence: pitching Linda down the stairs, throwing her son up against a wall, grasping Linda's arm and preventing her from helping her unconscious son, and striking Linda in her grandmother's house. He is much less able to control his anger at Linda, perhaps because she has now had two children with another man.*

3. How does this chapter contribute to the characterization of Linda's grandmother?

*Linda's grandmother continues to speak boldly to the white men who hurt her granddaughter. After seeing Dr. Flint strike Linda and then try to justify his actions as a response to the girl's insolence, she tells him to get out of his house and to pay attention to his own dirty soul. When Dr. Flint threateningly asks, "Do you know whom you are talking to?" Linda's grandmother boldly replies, "Yes, I know very well whom I am talking to." Furthermore, despite being "weary of incessant strife," Linda's grandmother is kind and sympathetic towards her granddaughter.*

4. How do Jacobs's intimations of her plan to avoid Dr. Flint contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

*Linda is determined to avoid both accepting Dr. Flint's threat of "freedom" for her and her children and his threat of sending all of them to his son's plantation. She is willing to try something very risky, as seen in her unwillingness to tell anyone, even her grandmother, of her plan, for fear of being dissuaded from it. The chapter's final sentences suggest Linda feels some measure of confidence: "My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will. There is might in each."*

## Chapter XVI

1. What is Jacobs's attitude toward the following remark by Miss Fanny? How does Jacobs convey this attitude to the reader?

*She consoled with me in her own peculiar way; saying she wished that I and all my grandmother's family were at rest in our graves, for not until then should she feel any peace about us. The good old soul did not dream that I was planning to bestow peace upon her, with regard to myself and my children; not by death, but by securing our freedom.*

*While saying that Miss Fanny, a favorite of Linda's grandmother, meant well by her remark, Jacobs does not fail to draw attention to its inappropriateness. Not only does Miss Fanny wish for the deaths of Linda and her children, but she does so for her own peace of mind rather than for Linda's. Certain phrases that Jacobs uses communicate both her understanding of Miss Fanny and her criticism of the remark, phrases such as "in her own peculiar way" and "I was planning to bestow peace upon her ... not by death, but by securing our freedom."*

2. How does Linda's grandmother's response to Linda's preparations for running for freedom contribute to the reader's understanding of her character?

*When the grandmother guesses that Linda is going to run, she begins to make her granddaughter feel guilty, sometimes in particularly cruel ways: hugging Linda's children and saying, "She don't love you as I do." Jacobs believes that Linda's grandmother knew all the while that Linda loved the children better than her own life and implies that her grandmother's attempts to make her granddaughter feel guilty have to do with her own fears for the future. Nevertheless, readers have seen her grandmother have a similar reaction when she heard Linda was pregnant. While her grandmother sympathizes with the wrongs done to Linda and does whatever she can to lighten her granddaughter's burden, she can be quite cruel in her attempts to make Linda feel guilty when the girl does not do what her grandmother expects her to do.*

## Chapter XVII

1. Below is a transcription of the actual wanted notice for Harriet Jacobs. How does it differ from the one Jacobs includes for “Linda Brent” in her book? What is the significance of those differences?

### \$100 REWARD

Will be given for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl HARRIET. She is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address. Being a good seamstress, she has been accustomed to dress well, has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion, and will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery. As this girl absconded from the plantation of my son without any known cause or provocation, it is probable she designs to transport herself to the North.

The above reward, with all reasonable charges, will be given for apprehending her, or securing her in any prison or jail within the U. States.

All persons are hereby forewarned against harboring or entertaining her, or being in any way instrumental in her escape, under the most rigorous penalties of the law.

JAMES NORCOM

*Overall, Jacobs wants to highlight “Linda’s” intellectual abilities. The book’s notice says Linda is “an intelligent, bright, mulatto girl” who “can read and write.” Norcom, however, portrays Harriet as a slave who acts above her station: “she has been accustomed to dress well, has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion.” Norcom suggests that Harriet is so vain that she will be unable to resist dressing fine even while attempting to escape: she “will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery.” To complete his portrait of a slave who is too proud, Norcom says in his notice “this girl absconded from the plantation of my son without any known cause or provocation.”*

2. How might the change in Sally’s opinion of Linda’s plan foreshadow a change in her grandmother’s opinion?

*Like Linda’s grandmother, Sally at first tells Linda she should return to Mr. Flint’s plantation to prevent Brent’s grandmother from having more sorrow to bear. However, when Linda tells her that the Flints will never sell the children if they can be used to keep her from running, Sally changes her opinion and concludes that the Flints will want to be rid of the children if Linda is gone. Because Sally’s initial reaction is the same as Linda’s grandmother’s, the reader may predict that her grandmother will also change her opinion once she hears about the Flints’ plans for the children.*



## Chapter XVIII

1. What is the significance of the way Jacobs portrays Linda's response to her family's advice: "When I started upon this hazardous undertaking, I had resolved that, come what would, there should be no turning back. 'Give me liberty, or give me death,' was my motto"?

*By having Linda refuse to give in to her tyrant and by having her take Patrick Henry's bold claim "Give me liberty, or give me death" as her motto, Jacobs portrays her quest for freedom as part of America's Revolutionary War spirit.*

2. In what ways does Linda's family support her goal of seeing herself and her children free?

*After Linda's snake bite, the family no longer advises her to return to Dr. Flint; instead, they decide they must do something to aid her in her flight. When Dr. Flint puts all but her grandmother in jail, Linda's family members refuse to give any information about her whereabouts and send word to Linda that she must not turn herself in for their sakes. Knowing how she will want to spare them the suffering, William even tells her, "Take the advice of your friends; if not for the sake of me and your children, at least for the sake of those you would ruin."*

3. Given that both women are slave mistresses, how does Linda's grandmother's friend act as a foil to Mrs. Flint?

*Linda's grandmother's friend is sincerely interested in Linda and is trustworthy; she wants to help Linda, presumably because she now hears from Linda's grandmother how Dr. Flint has harassed the girl. These characteristics remind the reader of how untrustworthy and vindictive Mrs. Flint is towards the innocent victim of her husband's sexual tyranny. In this chapter, Mrs. Flint's only thoughts are for her own comfort, in sharp contrast to the friend who takes on a risk to help Linda. Also in this chapter, Mrs. Flint seems increasingly like her husband in wanting to see Linda humiliated and enslaved for life.*

4. How might Linda's grandmother's friend work as a role model for Jacobs's intended readers?

*Jacobs's intended readers are white middle-class Northerners, especially women. Just as the friend risks her own welfare in helping Linda, Northerners (after the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850) would be risking their welfare in aiding and abetting a fugitive slave's flight. Given the importance of Christianity to her intended audience, Jacobs's use of the following sentence should especially encourage her intended readers to follow this woman's example: "For that deed of Christian womanhood, may God forever bless her!"*

## Chapter XIX

1. How does Jacobs use the motif of disguises and subterfuge in this chapter?

*Mr. Sands hires a slave trader to buy William, as well as Linda's two children, knowing Dr. Flint would never sell to Linda's lover. Linda's grandmother knows of the arrangements, but goes to the jail to say good bye, pretending that she will never see her grandson and great-grandchildren again. The trader puts William in irons, as Dr. Flint requested, and leads the three out of town with the other slaves he has bought. After a few miles, the three are released and go to Linda's grandmother's house, where they reunite and celebrate behind closed curtains.*

2. Has Mr. Sands given Linda's brother and her two children their freedom?

*In this chapter, it is unclear whether he has given the three their freedom. The reader knows that he has bought them from the slave trader, but never hears that he has given them their free papers. However, Linda seems to believe they are free when she thinks, "Whatever slavery might do to me, it could not shackle my children."*

## Chapter XX

1. At the end of the chapter, Jacobs writes about Peter saying she may not take a walk for a long time, "I thought his voice sounded sad. It was kind of him to conceal from me what a dismal hole was to be my home for a long, long time." Given the chapter's conclusion, how might Betty hiding Linda under the kitchen's floorboards foreshadow the fugitive's future hiding place?

*Under the floorboards, Linda is hidden but can hear what goes on in the kitchen. Sometimes, Betty will talk to herself in a way that is intended for Linda to hear; at other times, Betty will get visitors to talk about gossip that Linda would find interesting. One might expect Linda's future hiding place to provide a similar advantage. Under the floorboards, Linda is in a tight place of confinement. When released from it, "[t]he fright [she] had undergone, the constrained posture, and the dampness of the ground, made [her] ill for several days." Given Peter's remark at the end of the chapter, one might expect Linda's future hiding place to be similarly taxing physically and mentally.*

2. How does Jacobs use the motif of disguises and subterfuge in this chapter?

*In addition to Betty hiding Linda under the floorboards, Linda dresses and walks like a sailor; even friends that she passes by do not recognize her.*

3. Why is it ironic that later, when wearing the sailor's clothes a second time, Linda "blackened [her] face with charcoal"? What might Jacobs be suggesting by this irony?

*Even though Linda is classified as an African-American, she is very light-skinned and darkens her face to look more like the stereotypical image of a black person. Here, Jacobs makes a point she has made many times in the novel: in America, the ancestries of black and whites, slaves and slave holders are entangled. She also undermines the system that classifies blacks as being different than whites because of their physical appearance.*

4. Snakes have appeared several times in the novel, most recently in the previous chapter, where Linda is bitten by a snake while hiding. In Chapter XX, she hides in Snaky Swamp, where she has to deal with large poisonous snakes. Given the associations that snakes may have for readers (the tempter in the Garden of Eden, a symbol of death and rebirth because they shed their skins), what might Snaky Swamp symbolize?

*Snaky Swamp is a place of transition for Linda; she moves from hiding in her grandmother's friend's house to hiding in her grandmother's house. Snaky Swamp then can be read as a place where Linda sheds her skin or her hiding place. Earlier, this symbolism figured in Linda's transition from her friend Sally's house to her grandmother's friend's house because Linda had become ill from a snake bite. Linda will need to shed many skins before she is reborn as a free woman.*

### **Chapters XXI – XXIII**

1. Discuss the implications of Jacobs's statement, "Yet I would have chosen this [hiding place], rather than my lot as a slave, though white people considered it an easy one; and it was so compared with the fate of others." How might this statement change the way some members of her intended audience think of slavery?

*Jacobs implies that living in a rat-infested 9'x7'x3' (max) space without light or fresh air is better than living as a slave, even a slave in comparatively good circumstances. Jacobs probably hopes to counter the representation of slavery, given often by pro-slavery forces, that the stories of slaves being whipped, beaten, branded, and overworked are extreme exceptions. Jacobs suggests that even the best conditions of slavery are worse than the worst conditions of freedom. "[B]ut though my life in slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships, God pity the woman who is compelled to lead such a life!"*

2. Compare the narrator's attitude towards the way Benny speaks to Dr. Flint to "Linda's" attitude toward the same.

*Linda (that is, Jacobs at the time these events were occurring) worries about the way Benny speaks to Dr. Flint. When he responds to the man "You can't put me in jail again. I don't belong to you now," Linda is grateful the doctor did not hear him and begs her grandmother "not to allow the children to be impertinent to the irascible old man." The narrator (that is, Jacobs when she is writing about these events) seems proud of Benny when he talks back: "Dr. Flint, I don't know where my mother is. I guess she's in New York; and when you go there again, I wish you'd ask her to come home for I want to see her; but if you put her in jail, or tell her you'll cut her head off, I'll tell her to go right back." Jacobs ends the chapter with Benny's statement and thus avoids having to show "Linda's" response to it.*

3. Analyze Jacobs's appeal to emotion in the first two paragraphs of Chapter XXII.

*Jacobs portrays how slave families in general and Linda in particular find Christmas full of heartbreak. Slave families cannot fully enjoy Christmas because hiring day is approaching, the day family members may be separated forever from each other. Linda makes clothes and presents for her children but cannot see their surprise when they open their gifts. She does, however, see Benny outside in his new clothes reply to a boy who says Santa Claus is really the children's mothers: "No, that can't be ... for Santa Claus brought Ellen and me these new clothes, and my mother has been gone this long time." Linda longs to shout out to her child that she did make the clothes and shed many tears while doing so. Readers, especially the white Northerners who are Jacobs's intended audience, are supposed to feel sympathy and pity.*

4. Analyze the metaphor Jacobs uses to discuss her hiding place in Chapter XXIII.

*Jacobs says her hiding place was a prison. She asks herself "how many more summers and winters [she] must be condemned to spend thus." She says for all she hates Dr. Flint, she "could hardly wish him a worse punishment." To show the injustice of her having to suffer confinement, Jacobs writes, "Yet the laws allowed him to be out in the free air, while I, guiltless of crime, was pent up here." Finally, she calls her hiding place "my little cell."*

5. Analyze the appeals to logic in the second and sixth paragraphs of Chapter XXIII.

*In the second paragraph, Jacobs shows how, logically speaking, Dr. Flint should be the one to suffer confinement since he was the one who harassed her. "Yet the laws allowed him to be out in the free air, while I, guiltless of crime, was pent up here." In the sixth paragraph, Jacobs debates whether God is just, given that he allows slavery to exist. She says this is still a mystery that troubles her.*

### **Chapters XXIV – XXVII**

1. Discuss the use of the following simile, found near the end of Chapter XXIV: “I was left with my own thoughts—starless as the midnight darkness around me.”

*Linda’s thoughts are dark ones. Because they are without light (“starless”), she is full of despair. She can be feeling this way for two reasons. First, she is still worried that Mr. Sands will not emancipate her children. Second, she is realizing how incapacitated she is by her confinement and illness, enough so that if not for her children, she would commit suicide.*

2. What explanation for why Mr. Sands has not already emancipated his children would cast a favorable light on his character?

*As long as the children are Mr. Sands’s slaves, the law protects them the way it would any piece of property. Dr. Flint cannot beat or kill them with impunity; he could if the children were free.*

3. How does Chapter XXV contribute to the representation of the relationship between Linda and Dr. Flint?

*The narrator continues to portray Linda and Dr. Flint as being in a battle of wills. The doctor continues to tell Linda’s grandmother that he knows where Linda is, but now instead of using this lie as a threat, he adds that when she returns, he will let her friends purchase her, thus setting a trap. Linda counters this move by writing letters to him and having someone take them to New York to be postmarked in order to trick Dr. Flint into believing she is no longer in the area. Linda positions herself where she can hear Dr. Flint during his visit to her grandmother’s house so she can witness his reaction to the letters she wrote. She discovers that Dr. Flint rewrote a letter Linda sent for her grandmother, making it sound as if Linda is miserable and wants to come home.*

4. Analyze the contradictory ways that Jacobs represents her family in the second and third paragraphs of Chapter XXV.

*When talking to her friend Peter about finding someone to postmark the letters in New York, Linda says, “I have not a relative who would dare to do it for me.” In the next paragraph, however, Aunt Nancy says, “I hope it will succeed. I shan’t mind being a slave all my life, if I can only see you and the children free.” It is unclear why Linda makes the first statement, given that her family is taking a huge risk by hiding her in the house for the last five years. Linda has made similar statements, which suggests Jacobs has contradictory feelings about her family’s involvement with her battle against slavery.*

5. What appeal to logic does Jacobs use in Chapter XXVI to argue for slaves' immediate emancipation? What effect on her intended readers does the appeal to logic likely have?

*Jacobs has William explain his reasoning for running off from a kind master: Mr. Sands could change his mind, go into debt, or die before giving William his free papers. Hopefully, readers see any slave's escape as reasonable and work for the abolition of all slaves instead of obeying the Fugitive Slave Law or appealing to masters to be kind to their slaves.*

6. In Chapter XXVII, why does Jacobs include the thoughts that she had when she returned to her old room before reuniting with her daughter?

*When Linda enters her old room, she is flooded with memories of feelings she had when she lived here after Mrs. Flint banished her. She remembers how each day her love for her children grew deeper and sadder, sadder because she knew the trials her relationship with them will be put through and the horrors her children, as slaves themselves, will have to go through. She also remembers how she had to bear Dr. Flint's curses and threats. Recounting this moment allows Jacobs to remind readers why she wanted to get herself and her children out of slavery. It also allows Jacobs to renew the reader's sympathy for Linda's plight.*

7. Read the passage, found about halfway through Chapter XXVII, which begins, "In the midst of these meditations..." and ends, "...O, do go, dear mother!" What would likely be the effect of this passage of Jacobs's intended audience?

*Jacobs's intended audience is white middle-class women in the North, and they valued domesticity, particularly the sentimental bond between mother and child. Jacobs includes a touching image of the mother-daughter reunion: "then, with sweet confidence, she laid her cheek against mine, and I folded her to the heart that had been so long desolated." Her intended audience would have seen this as an ideal moment. The appeal to pathos then turns to a scene where a troubled daughter appeals to her mother for advice and the mother dispenses her wisdom and support. Such a typical scene of the mother-child relationship would remind her intended audience of the importance of such domestic ties in the raising of children—including children in slave families—and that this daughter needs her mother as much as any white child would and that Linda is as able to fulfill this role as well as any white mother can with her own child.*



8. Read the passage, found just after the previous question's passage, which begins, "I told her I couldn't go now..." and ends, "...I am not asleep, dear mother." What would likely be the effect of this passage on Jacobs's intended audience?

*In this passage, Linda tells Ellen that her mother is still a slave and therefore still cannot be with her. Jacobs then portrays Ellen's reaction: "She wept, and I did not check her tears. Perhaps she would never again have a chance to pour her tears into a mother's bosom." Jacobs's use of the appeal to pathos in showing the daughter's heartbreak would appeal to the white middle-class Northern women because they value sentimental domestic scenes.*

*That Linda does not sleep that night so as not to miss a moment with her daughter is not surprising. That Ellen too does not fall asleep is surprising since she is such a young child, which shows her love for her mother and suggests that she too does not want to miss any of the little time she has with her mother. Most likely, Jacobs expects her intended audience to empathize with such a sentimental scene of idealized domesticity, pity the mother and daughter, and then work in whatever way they can to abolish slavery.*

9. What would you consider to be the climax of the appeal to emotion in this chapter?

*The climax of the appeal to emotion is when the mother and daughter must separate, when Linda must "take a last look at [her] child" and when "tears, too sad for such young eyes to shed, flowed down [Ellen's] cheeks, as she gave [her mother] her last kiss." The passages in questions 1 and 2 build up to this climax. The denouement includes Ellen's vow not to tell her mother's secret and Linda's weeping upon returning to her hiding place.*

### **Chapters XXVIII – XXX**

1. What is Jacobs's attitude towards Mrs. Flint's grief over the death of Aunt Nancy? How does Jacobs communicate this attitude to the reader?

*Jacobs strongly denounces Mrs. Flint for selfishly requiring Aunt Nancy to be available all night after working all day. As a result of such treatment, Aunt Nancy's health is ruined and all of her children are born prematurely and therefore die. Refusing to mince words, Jacobs relates how Mrs. Flint "slowly murdered" Aunt Nancy: "Mrs. Flint had rendered her poor foster-sister childless, apparently without any compunction; and with cruel selfishness had ruined her health by years of incessant, unrequited toil, and broken rest." Jacobs then uses a mocking and bitter tone to communicate to the reader her belief that Mrs. Flint's grief is hypocritical and insincere. When Mrs. Flint asks the minister if Aunt Nancy could be buried at the foot of her own future grave, he points out to her that Aunt Nancy's mother may object to it. "It had never occurred to Mrs. Flint that slaves could have any feelings," Jacobs writes. "[S]he said it was painful to her to have Nancy buried away from her. She might have added with touching pathos, 'I was so long used to sleep with her lying near me, on the entry floor.'" During the funeral, Mrs. Flint "dropped a tear, and returned to her carriage, probably thinking she had performed her duty nobly."*



2. What is Jacobs's attitude toward her grandmother's grieving? How does Jacobs communicate this attitude to the reader?

*Jacobs deeply respects her grandmother's way of grieving. Martha is not vengeful, as seen in her reply to Dr. Flint: "Your wife was my foster-child, Dr. Flint, the foster-sister of my poor Nancy, and you little know me if you think I can feel any thing but good will for her children." However, her grandmother is also proud, refusing to avoid the truth for the sake of politeness: "It was not I that drove Linda away. My grandchildren are gone; and of my nine children only one is left. God help me!" Jacobs respects her grandmother's amazing strength: "The poor old back was fitted to its burden. It bent under it, but did not break." But at the same time, Jacobs pities her grandmother and feels guilty for the additions she has made to her burden: "Ah, yes, that blessed old grandmother, who for seventy-three years had borne the pelting storms of a slave-mother's life. She did indeed need consolation!"*

3. How does Jacobs characterize Benny in Chapter XXIX?

*Jacobs emphasizes how clever Benny is. She is surprised to discover that he knew where she was hiding. He tells her, "I was standing under the eaves, one day, before Ellen went away, and I heard somebody cough up over the wood shed. I don't know what made me think it was you, but I did think so," a guess he later finds confirmed when Ellen comes back to their room after being away one night and he hears his grandmother tell her to "remember never to tell." She also focuses on Benny's protectiveness. She learns from him that "if he saw [Ellen] playing with other children on that side of the house, he always tried to coax her round to the other side, for fear they would hear [Linda] cough, too. He said he had kept a close lookout for Dr. Flint."*

4. Compare the way Jacobs characterizes Benny in XXIX to how she characterizes Ellen in Chapter XXVII. What seems to account for the differences?

*Jacobs characterizes her children's reactions to their private meetings with her in accord with the prevailing gender roles of antebellum America. Benny is clever, protective, and independent (he is glad that his mother is going somewhere safer), while Ellen is sweet ("with sweet confidence, she laid her cheek against mine"), loving ("All night she nestled in my arms"), and dependent (she begs her mother to go with her). Both, however, weep during their visits, and both keep their mother's secret.*

5. How does Jacobs characterize Linda's grandmother's responses to Linda's plan to escape?

*Linda knows that her grandmother will try to persuade her not to try to escape, so she wants to tell Martha at the last minute. Uncle Peter, however, decides that would be too hard on his mother and instead reasons with and finally persuades her to let Linda go. When Linda's grandmother hears of another runaway slave being captured and killed, she begs Linda not to go: "She sobbed, and groaned, and entreated me not to go. Her excessive fear was somewhat contagious." However, when Martha believes a visitor may have seen Linda, she quickly changes her mind and tells Linda to go. Overall, Jacobs continues to present Linda's grandmother as a hindrance to Linda's attempts to get out of slavery, but also as someone who will relent when things get so dangerous that Linda is left with no other choice.*

6. How does Jacobs characterize her friend Peter? What point is she able to make with this characterization? How does she use an appeal to logos and an appeal to pathos in making that point?

*Jacobs characterizes Peter as courageous, generous, and self-sacrificing. Even though he is a slave, he arranges hiding places and passages for other slaves who are running away. Peter seems to be the epitome of Christian manhood, yet the South treats him as chattel, liable to be sold with horses and pigs. With this characterization, Jacobs is able to appeal to logos (it is unreasonable that Peter is a slave) and to pathos (one is outraged that this kind man is enslaved).*

### **Chapters XXXI – XXXIII**

1. How does the following passage contribute to the reader's understanding of how Linda views herself?

He was approaching a subject on which I was extremely sensitive ... I frankly told him some of the most important events of my life. It was painful for me to do it; but I would not deceive him. If he was desirous of being my friend, I thought he ought to know how far I was worthy of it.

*The first three sentences of the quotation show that Linda is very worried that people will think less of her because she has had children out of wedlock. In these sentences, it is unclear whether Linda shares these people's opinion of her. The fourth sentence, however, suggests that she does agree with them and feels herself to be unworthy of the minister's friendship. The sentence seems to mean that Mr. Durham had a right to know how far she has fallen before he decides whether she is worthy of his company.*

2. In Chapter XXXI, how does Linda's reaction to the word "contempt" contribute to the reader's understanding of how she views herself?

*In her reply to Mr. Durham, Linda suggests that only God knows what she was going through and therefore only He has the right to judge her. In her response, Linda seems to defend her worthiness more than she did in the previous paragraph. Together, these two paragraphs suggest that Linda is still conflicted over how she feels about having had children out of wedlock. She seems to feel that she did not live up to her principles the way she wanted to, but that a female slave's situation is such that it is almost impossible to do so.*

3. Jacobs writes, in Chapter XXXI: "That night I sought my pillow with feelings I had never carried to it before. I verily believed myself to be a free woman." Then, the fire-bells ring. How might her reaction to the fire-bells foreshadow her future feelings about herself as a free woman?

*Linda responds to the fire-bells as she would have in the South. There, white people worried that a fire would provide an opportunity for a slave insurrection so they would require all "colored people" to help extinguish it. Linda's response suggests that she does not really feel as free as she thinks she does. Her wording in the quotation suggests this as well: "I verily believed myself to be a free woman." And in actuality, Linda is not yet free; slave catchers can still return her to Dr. Flint, though since it is 1842, it is not yet illegal for white people to aid in her escape.*

4. How does the following passage contribute to Jacobs's conflicted feelings about traditional, Christian morals?

*I like a straightforward course, and am always reluctant to resort to subterfuges. So far as my ways have been crooked, I charge them all upon slavery. It was that system of violence and wrong which now left me no alternative but to enact a falsehood.*

*Throughout the narrative, Jacobs has told us that she has always wanted to follow the Christian morality taught to her by her grandmother. However, she has also stressed how it is nearly impossible for a slave to follow such precepts and that slaves should not be judged by the same moral standard as those who are free. Here, Jacobs tells the reader that she always strives to be honest, but cannot always do so because of slavery; she must lie to Mrs. Hobbs by telling her that she has recently arrived from Canada so she does not endanger others who have helped her, namely her grandmother and uncle.*

5. How does Chapter XXXII contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands?

*Like Linda, the reader has been led to believe that Mr. Sands was a good man, one who would not cheat Linda or the children he has had with her. In this chapter, however, the reader learns that he has not kept his promise to emancipate Ellen and Benny when Mrs. Hobbs tells Linda that Mr. Sands has given Ellen to her eldest daughter to be a waiting-maid. Seeing how two-faced Mrs. Hobbs is in this chapter, the reader may question whether Mr. Sands has really done such a thing. Since this question is not answered in Chapter XXXII, Mr. Sands remains a mysterious character.*

6. How does Chapter XXXIII represent the relationship between Linda and Mrs. Bruce?

*Understandably, Linda is reluctant to trust white people. Mrs. Bruce, however, quickly shows herself to be "a true and sympathizing friend." Instead of continuing to make demands that tax Linda's health the way Mrs. Flint did with Aunt Grace, Mrs. Bruce arranges things to better suit Linda and employs a doctor to help her heal. Mrs. Bruce gives Linda the benefit of her intelligent conversation and gives her opportunities for reading. Overall, Mrs. Bruce treats Linda like an intelligent human being who is struggling with burdens that the Bruces are fortunate enough to be able to help her with.*

7. How does Chapter XXXIII contribute to the theme of powerlessness?

*Linda desperately wants to help her daughter but cannot do so for fear of upsetting Mrs. Hobbs, who believes that her daughter owns Ellen. Mrs. Bruce offers to let Ellen live with them, but Linda cannot take advantage of the offer. Mrs. Bruce also offers to employ a famous eye doctor for Ellen, but Mrs. Hobbs becomes angry when Linda asks her to let Ellen take advantage of the offer. Linda feels she cannot insist upon Ellen coming to New York to see the doctor as one would expect a mother to for her child.*

### **Chapters XXXIV – XXXVI**

1. How does Chapter XXXIV contribute to the characterization of the relationship between Dr. Flint and Linda?

*The two continue their battle of wills, each trying to outfox the other. Dr. Flint pretends to be his son when he writes a reply to Linda's letter to his daughter. Linda knows his handwriting well enough from his harassing notes in the past so she quickly perceives he is the author of the proposal that is really a trap. When she hears that Dr. Flint is coming to New York to look for her, Linda quickly leaves to stay with her brother in Boston. Dr. Flint still seems to be obsessed with foiling Linda's escape.*

2. How does Chapter XXXIV contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands?

*In this chapter, the reader learns that Linda's grandmother is the one who legally owns Ellen and Benny as Mr. Sands preferred to have the bill of sale drawn up in her name. That he entrusts the two slaves to Martha rather than, say, to a white friend suggests that he is uninterested in treating them as property. However, Jacobs does note that while a white man may father children with his female slaves without disgrace, he cannot free them without incurring slaveholding society's wrath because such an act is dangerous to the institution of slavery.*

3. What painful realization does Linda make in Chapter XXXV?

*Linda realizes there is still prejudice against African-Americans in the Northern States. She is told she cannot eat in certain places, regardless of serving the same role to white children and white women that white nurses do. "[E]very where I found the same manifestations of that cruel prejudice, which so discourages the feelings, and represses the energies of the colored people."*

4. Discuss how Linda's realization affects the plot structure of the book.

*Readers likely felt that the climax of the book was when Linda finally escaped from the South and that the denouement would tie up such loose ends as reuniting with her children and securing an arrangement with Dr. Flint that would keep him from re-enslaving her. Now, readers see that Linda's break with prejudice and oppression was not so clean. Old conflicts remain and new ones have been introduced.*

5. Analyze the rhetorical stance Jacobs takes in the last paragraph of Chapter XXXV.

*Linda calls upon other African-Americans in the North to remember that they are worth more than the treatment they are given by Northern racists and to refuse to submit to such treatment without a fight. She makes such statements after discussing her own example of fighting segregation: she refuses to submit to the request that she stand behind the child in her care and then eat in the kitchen after the white people are served ("I quietly took the child in my arms, went to our room, and refused to go to the table again").*

6. How does Chapter XXXVI contribute to the characterization of the relationship between Linda and Mrs. Bruce?

*Mrs. Bruce has been kind and sympathetic to Linda since employing her. When Linda tells her, in this chapter, about being a fugitive slave, Mrs. Bruce does not dismiss her; instead, she has her attorney advise Linda on what to do and then has Linda stay with one of the Bruces' friends for the time being. Jacobs represents Mrs. Bruce as having "true womanly sympathy" for Linda.*

7. How might the representation of this relationship be important to the message Jacobs wants to convey to her intended audience?

*Jacobs's intended audience is white middle-class women in the North. Mrs. Bruce, as a representative of such a demographic, is held up as an ideal and as a role model.*

### **Chapters XXXVII – XXXIX**

1. How might the representation of Mr. Bruce be important to the message Jacobs wants to convey to her intended audience?

*After Mrs. Bruce dies, Mr. Bruce continues the kind treatment Linda received from his wife and entrusts his child to Linda's care. The example of Mr. Bruce can show her intended readers (white middle-class women in the North) what they can inspire their husband, brothers, and sons to become.*

2. How might the inclusion of Linda's visit to England be important to the message Jacobs wants to convey to her intended audience?

*In England, Linda, "[f]or the first time in [her] life [is] in a place where [she is] treated according to [her] deportment, without reference to [her] complexion." America is supposedly the bastion of freedom, but in London, Linda experiences for the first time "pure, unadulterated freedom." By emphasizing this experience, Jacobs appeals to Americans' patriotism by portraying the country they rebelled against as being freer than their own.*

*Jacobs also writes about this experience to counter pro-slavery arguments that their institution of chattel slavery is more humane than the experiences of peasants in Europe and of Northern workers in factories. She notes that England's poor are in need of better wages, but even the poorest of the poor have their own thatched cottages where they can be with family and friends and know that their family members cannot be sold away from them.*

*Finally, Jacobs witnesses an example of true Christianity, rather than the hypocrisy she saw practiced in the South, and feels grace enter into her soul.*

3. Dr. Flint's daughter, now Mrs. Dodge, is officially the owner of Linda Brent. She professes her love for Linda and asks her to come live with her and her husband in Virginia and says that Linda may buy herself if she would rather do so. How does Linda's reaction to the offer to buy herself contribute to her characterization?

*Linda does not want to use the money she has saved to buy herself since she is planning to use that money for her children's education. But more than that, she feels it is unjust to have to pay for herself. "I could not possibly regard myself as a piece of property," she states. While paying Mrs. Dodge would ease her fears of capture, it would trouble her conscience because she would be participating in the system of slavery and honoring the laws that consider human beings to be chattel. "I regarded such laws," she says, "as the regulations of robbers, who had no rights that I was bound to respect." Linda's stance shows that she is a principled woman who can think for herself and defy a country that is unjust.*

4. How does Jacobs's last paragraph in Chapter XXXVIII qualify the statements she made in the paragraph previous to it?

*The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 required Northerners to aid in the capture of runaways. It not only made Northerners slave catchers for the South, but it also made all states Slave States; in no area of the country could a fugitive slave be considered free. Jacobs adds this final paragraph to recognize that the stance she took would be much more dangerous to take after 1850, as she could no longer count on friendly whites to aid her or even count on disinterested whites to ignore the fact that she is a fugitive. The last paragraph also allows Jacobs to criticize the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for honoring the Fugitive Slave Law, reminding white readers in that state that they should refuse to honor "the regulations of robbers" just as she did when refusing to buy herself.*



5. How does Chapter XXXIX contribute to the characterization of Linda's daughter, Ellen?

*In this chapter, we learn that Ellen had known her father was Mr. Sands and that she was hurt when he ignored her and treated his "white" daughter so well. Now, she says, all her love is for her mother. Ellen emerges as a loving and dedicated daughter, sensitive enough to avoid asking her mother about the past, understanding enough that her love for her mother did not decrease when she learned about the circumstances of her birth. Her presence has made Linda's house feel like a home, and while Ellen does not want to leave her mother alone, she does want to become more educated. Like her mother, Ellen is torn between family and self-improvement.*

6. How does Chapter XXXIX contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands?

*While Mr. Sands has shown more kindness towards Linda and their children than most slave masters would have, he is still a racist, treating his "white" daughter in a fatherly fashion while ignoring Ellen.*

7. The last paragraph of Chapter XXXIX briefly mentions Jacobs's involvement in the anti-slavery movement: how she and her brother opened an anti-slavery reading room (in the same building that housed Frederick Douglass's North Star offices) and her friendship with the famous abolitionist couple Isaac and Amy Post (their house was a stop on the Underground Railroad and Amy served as the Vice-President of the American Anti-Slavery Society in the 1850s and '60s). Why might Jacobs have decided to write so little about her involvement in abolitionist circles?

*Knowing that many would doubt the authenticity of her work, Jacobs may have written little about her associations with the antislavery movement to decrease the likelihood that readers would assume her abolitionist friends wrote or revised her book. She may also have said little about her time with abolitionists in Rochester to decrease the likelihood that readers would think that she had exaggerated or completely invented parts of her story in order to advance an anti-slavery agenda.*

### **Chapters XL – XLI**

1. How does Linda's response to the Fugitive Slave Law show her continuing commitment to the black community?

*Every morning Linda checks the newspapers carefully to see which Southerners had arrived in the city. She does this not only for her own sake, but also to inform others if necessary. Having noted the disruptions the law caused in the black community, Linda resolves that "knowledge should be increased."*

2. How does Jacobs's narration of Luke's story show her deep understanding of how slavery affects both blacks and whites?

*Jacobs ascribes Luke's master's vices to having grown up as the master's son in the "patriarchal institution"; in other words, she notes how the unquestioned power over human beings that he enjoyed encouraged him to all kinds of vices. When he returns to the South, he is unable to use his limbs as a result of his "excessive dissipation." The master is exasperated by his dependence on his slave Luke and tries to assuage his despotic ego by flogging Luke for the slightest offense. "The fact that he was entirely dependent on Luke's care, and was obliged to be tended like an infant, seemed only to increase his irritability and cruelty." The master's demands become more perverse as he tells Luke to perform "freaks ... of a nature too filthy to be repeated" and has Luke whipped by the constable for any refusal. When the master dies, Luke cleverly hides the master's money in a pair of the master's old pants, which he then requests the man's family to donate to him. Jacobs's narration and analysis show how absolute power corrupts absolutely and how the oppressed must resort to clever tricks in order to escape its effects.*

3. How does Linda's response to what she has learned from Luke about his current plans show her political consciousness?

*While Jacobs mourns how "the moral sense is educated by slavery," she also repeats her conviction that those who are enslaved should not be judged by the same moral standards as those who are free. "I agree," she states, "with poor, ignorant, much-abused Luke, in thinking he had a right to that money, as a portion of his unpaid wages."*

4. How does Chapter XL characterize the second Mrs. Bruce?

*The second Mrs. Bruce is a "generous, sympathizing lady" who makes great sacrifices for Linda. When Linda hears that Dr. Flint is coming to New York, the second Mrs. Bruce tells Linda to take the baby and go to a friend's house in New England. Linda is amazed by the sacrifice this woman is making, and the second Mrs. Bruce tells her that if Dr. Flint captures Linda, he will be obliged to return the baby, which will allow the Bruces to save her if there is any possibility of doing so. Jacobs also represents the second Mrs. Bruce as bold, courageous, and principled. When a proslavery relative warns her of the trouble she could get into by violating the Fugitive Slave Law, she tells him that she knows the penalty (imprisonment and a one-thousand-dollar fine) and that she is ready to incur it. "I will go to the state's prison, rather than have any poor victim torn from my house, to be carried back to slavery." Jacobs clearly hopes that her intended readers will follow the example of this friend to the fugitive slave.*

5. How does Jacobs's quotation from her grandmother's letter work as an appeal to emotion?

*Readers are moved to pity by the inability of Linda and her grandmother to ever meet again on earth. Because Linda would be captured by Dr. Flint if she were to visit her grandmother, Linda must refrain from seeing her.*

6. Read the paragraph, found about halfway through Chapter XLI, which begins, “Mrs. Bruce came to me....” How does this paragraph appeal to logic?

*Jacobs points out the absurdity of being imprisoned at Mrs. Bruce’s house, unable to go outside or go to church, even though she is guiltless of any crime.*

7. Analyze Jacobs’s conflicted feelings over being bought by Mrs. Bruce and how they contribute to her characterization.

*Given Linda’s troubles, one would expect her to feel relieved that Mrs. Bruce is going to purchase her freedom, but Jacobs says that she does not think of herself as anybody’s property and therefore finds the thought of being bought odious. Linda also feels that paying her oppressors for her freedom takes away the glory she feels in having escaped. However, when the sale is completed, Jacobs is relieved and is very grateful to Mrs. Bruce. Linda’s conflicted feelings show her to be a proud woman who values herself and her endurance, a determined abolitionist who does not want to participate in the institution of slavery, a lover of freedom who wants to be able to walk the streets of New York without fear, and a loving mother who wants to protect her children from having to go back into slavery.*

8. How does Jacobs use the following sentence to distinguish her narrative from the genre of the sentimental novel?

Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage.

*Sentimental novels usually end with the heroine’s marriage and happiness. While Incidents shares features with sentimental novels, Jacobs’s story ends with what is the ultimate goal for a woman born into slavery—freedom—rather than with the ultimate goal for a (white) heroine of sentimental fiction—marriage. So long as people are enslaved, marriage must be considered a privilege enjoyed by the free. Furthermore, Jacobs has not yet realized her goal of having a house of her own with her children near in a country where slavery is no longer allowed. While Jacobs has achieved freedom, she has not yet achieved political, social, and economic equality.*

9. What literary devices does Jacobs use in the final paragraph of Chapter XLI? What do these techniques convey to the reader?

*Jacobs uses a simile comparing the memories of her grandmother’s help that come along with the memories of her own sufferings to “light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea.” Jacobs also uses visual imagery to picture the memories of her sufferings as a “dark and troubled sea” and the memories of her grandmother’s friendship as “light, fleecy clouds” hovering over it. Both of these devices communicate how the author is still troubled by her memories of Dr. Flint and her escape from slavery and that memories of her grandmother’s support and kindness continue to make her feel better about her past. Gone is any criticism of her grandmother’s initial response to her granddaughter’s pregnancy and her attempts to keep her granddaughter in slavery.*

## Appendix

1. Why does the book include a statement from Amy Post?

*Publishers and editors (L.M.C. is Lydia Maria Child, the editor) included testaments by whites in order to vouch for the authenticity of the ex-slave's story. Amy Post also counters readers who may claim that Jacobs is seeking fame, by saying that the author's "sensitive spirit shrank from publicity" and that Post had to "urge upon her the duty of publishing her experience, for the sake of the good it might do." To counter readers who may criticize Jacobs for having had sex outside of marriage, Post states that Jacobs's "deportment indicated remarkable delicacy of feeling and purity of thought." Finally, Post's inclusion of a passage from a letter by Jacobs displays a style very similar to that of the narrative, showing that the author who calls herself "Linda Brent" wrote this book.*

# Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

## Prefatory Material

1. How do the two epigraphs prepare readers for Harriet Jacobs's stated purpose in writing the narrative?

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2. In the last paragraph of her Preface, why does Jacobs say she wants "to arouse" her readers to a "realizing sense" of the conditions of slavery, rather than say she wants "to inform" her readers so they will have "knowledge" of the conditions of slavery?

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3. Compare the "Introduction by the Editor" to the "Preface by the Author." How do Lydia Maria Child's reasons for editing this slave narrative differ from Jacobs's reasons for writing it? Why do they differ?

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4. What does Child mean when she says in her Introduction "some incidents in her story are more romantic than fiction"? Why does she make this statement?

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## Chapter I

1. Given that this text is an autobiography, what is the importance of the first five words? How do they differ from the way other autobiographies open? How does that difference grow out of this also being a slave narrative?

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2. What theme is suggested by passages such as “[my maternal grandmother] was the daughter of a planter in South Carolina, who, at his death, left her mother and his three children free” and “My mother’s mistress was the daughter of my grandmother’s mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother’s breast”?

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3. Most of the first paragraph of Jacobs’s narration is taken up with the history of her grandmother. How does this paragraph begin to characterize her grandmother?

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4. Given the chapter’s plot, why is it important that Jacobs describes the years she spent with her mistress as being so idyllic?

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5. In the sentence “But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor,” how does Jacobs use understatement to communicate her opinion of her mistress’s religious teachings?

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6. How do the incidents of the grandmother’s life that are narrated in this chapter form a lesson about the relationships between slaves and their masters?

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7. How might the conditions of Linda’s first six years of life contribute to her later resolve to escape to the North?

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## Chapter II

1. How does Jacobs's characterization of her brother also work as foreshadowing?

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2. What does the linsey-woolsey dress symbolize to young Linda Brent? How might her grandmother's contributions to Linda's wardrobe be an important element in the formation of a girl who would go on to escape from slavery?

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3. How does Dr. and Mrs. Flint's last name correspond to the way they are characterized?

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4. Why does Jacobs mention that Mrs. Flint is a member of a church?

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5. Why does Jacobs end the chapter by talking about female slaves who are sexually abused by Dr. Flint and, subsequently, treated cruelly by Mrs. Flint?

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### **Chapter III**

1. According to Jacobs, about how many days per year do hired-out slaves get time off?

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2. How might Northern readers view the term “hiring-day” as ironic?

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3. How does Jacobs use diction to contrast the New Year’s Day experiences of Northern free women and Southern slave women?

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4. How does Jacobs use imagery to contrast the New Year’s Day experiences of Northern free women and Southern slave women?

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5. Why does Jacobs use second-person narration in the paragraph about the Northern woman’s New Year’s Day? What tone does she use?

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## **Chapter IV**

1. What is Linda's attitude toward her grandmother's reliance on faith and on her own and Benjamin's inability to use faith to reconcile them to their lot?

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2. What is Jacobs's attitude toward the home that her grandmother creates? How does Jacobs use imagery and diction to convey this attitude to the reader?

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3. What was Linda's attitude toward contentment when she spoke with her brother William after he fought his young master?

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4. When Jacobs first mentions her troubles with Dr. Flint, she does not make it clear that he is sexually harassing her. In the paragraph that begins "But, alas!" how does she use imagery and diction to prepare the reader for this later revelation?

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5. If Northern readers expected women to be submissive and demure, why would Jacobs portray herself during this time as having a spirit like her brother's, "bold and daring," using such statements as "never before had my puny arm felt half so strong" and "The war of my life had begun; and though one of God's most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered"?

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6. One of the themes in this book is family loyalty versus family abandonment. How does this conflict appear in Jacobs's parting words to her Uncle Benjamin upon his first attempt to escape from slavery: "He was right; but it was hard to give him up. 'Go,' said I, 'and break your mother's heart.' "

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7. When Benjamin is returned to slavery, Linda's grandmother (Benjamin's mother) visits him in jail. He apologizes for the suffering he caused her in running away. She says that "she had nothing to forgive; she could not blame his desire for freedom." How does Linda's grandmother's relationship with her son give him the strength to make a stand against slavery and to escape from it? How does the relationship hinder him from doing the same?

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8. When Benjamin is taken away by a slave trader, who is forbidden to sell him until he is out of the state, Linda's grandmother has a friend in New Orleans who offers to buy him on her behalf. Jacobs then writes, "When he saw Benjamin, and stated his business, he thanked him; but said he preferred to wait a while before making the trader an offer. He knew he had tried to obtain a high price for him, and had invariably failed. This encouraged him to make another effort for freedom." The ambiguous pronouns in this sentence make it hard to understand. What is happening in this interaction?

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9. According to Jacobs, Benjamin's second attempt at escaping from slavery is successful in part because he can pass for white. How does this ability influence his announcing to Phil, "I part with all my kindred"?

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10. About Uncle Benjamin and his escape, Jacobs writes, "And so it proved. We never heard from him again." How does Jacobs communicate how Uncle Benjamin's example may affect her and her own thoughts of escaping from slavery?

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11. Why does the chapter end with Linda's grandmother buying Phillip's freedom and with the two of them and Linda saying "He that is willing to be a slave, let him be a slave"?

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## Chapter V

1. How does this chapter advance the plot toward the climax in a future chapter?

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2. How does Jacobs use conventions of the seduction novel in this chapter?

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3. How would using the conventions of the seduction novel help Jacobs to address her intended audience?

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4. Analyze Jacobs's use of second-person narration in the last part of the first paragraph in this chapter. How does she avoid criticizing her readers? How does she appeal to their identities as Northerners? As members of the middle class?

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5. In the first three sentences of the chapter's last paragraph, how does Jacobs rebuke her readers without blaming them for not doing more to end slavery?

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6. In this chapter, what effect does Jacobs's characterization of her grandmother have on the reader?

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## Chapter VI

1. How might Jacobs's claim that a master's favorite female slave "is not allowed to have any pride of character" add to the characterization of Linda Brent?

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2. In the paragraph that begins "I did as she ordered," how does Jacobs use diction to characterize Mrs. Flint in relation to Linda?

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3. In the paragraph that begins, "I knew I had ignited the torch..." how does Jacobs use some of the conventions of the gothic romance to portray her situation with Mrs. Flint?

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4. In the last four paragraphs of the novel, why does Jacobs give a first-hand report of plantation owners' marriages?

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## **Chapter VII**

1. How do the first two paragraphs of the chapter contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

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2. How does the inclusion of the quotation from Lord Byron's poem "The Lament of Tasso" contribute to the representation of the narrator?

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3. In response to Dr. Flint's note informing Linda that he intends for her to be one of the slaves he takes to Louisiana, she responds, "I am your daughter's property, and it is in your power to send me, or take me, wherever you please." How does the way she phrases her response contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

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4. Shortly after giving the above response to Dr. Flint's note, Jacobs lets the reader know that she "was determined that [she] would never go to Louisiana with him." How does this information contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

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### Chapter VIII

1. Analyze the organization of this chapter with respect to its title, “What Slaves Are Taught to Think of the North.” Why is the order of things Jacobs addresses effective?

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2. Analyze Jacobs’s use of second-person address in the fourth paragraph of the chapter.

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3. Why does Jacobs write in the fifth paragraph about how Southern gentlemen see “Yankees”?

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4. For what purpose does Jacobs ask, “And then who *are* Africans?”

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5. Analyze the imagery in the final two paragraphs.

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6. Why might Jacobs include this imagery at this point of the book?

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## Chapter IX

1. Analyze the importance of the chapter's title to the voice of witness Jacobs uses throughout.

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2. Analyze how Jacobs narrates the punishments she witnesses. Focus on her use of techniques such as tone, descriptive details, and perspective.

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3. Discuss the purpose that the following sentences might serve: "I could tell of more slaveholders as cruel as those I have described. They are not exceptions to the general rule."

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4. Jacobs frequently uses the phrase "he was called to no account." Why would this phrase be important to her in this chapter?

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5. In concluding one example of a slave punished for stealing food, Jacobs writes, "When his own labor was stolen from him, he had stolen food to appease his hunger. This was his crime." What purpose is served by this conclusion? Also, discuss the tone of this quotation.

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6. How might this chapter be an example of what Lydia Maria Child called "some incidents ... more romantic than fiction"? What might Jacobs be suggesting by reporting such occurrences?

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## Chapter X

1. Analyze the effect created by the anaphora in the following quotation: "I had rather toil on the plantation from dawn till dark; I had rather live and die in jail, than drag on, from day to day, through such a living death."

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2. What is the effect of the adjective clause in the sentence, "I was determined that the master, whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet"?

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3. How does the following sentence add to the characterization of Linda Brent: "I would do any thing, every thing, for the sake of defeating him"?

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4. Analyze the effect of the imagery used in this sentence: "I thought and thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge into the abyss."

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5. Instead of gaining her intended readers' sympathies by saying she was forced into sex or by claiming that her lover took advantage of her innocence or plight, Jacobs confesses, "I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion from a master; for it was not so. Neither can I plead ignorance or thoughtlessness." What effect does such an admission have on characterization and on the reliability of the narrative?

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6. In the chapter's third paragraph, what is Jacobs's attitude toward Northern white women's criticism of her action and how does she communicate it to the reader?

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7. How can the following sentences be read as a positive portrayal of Mr. Sands?

I have told you that Dr. Flint's persecutions and his wife's jealousy had given rise to some gossip in the neighborhood. Among others, it chanced that a white unmarried gentleman had obtained some knowledge of the circumstances in which I was placed.

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8. How can the same sentences be read as a negative portrayal of Mr. Sands?

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9. Discuss the meaningfulness of the phrase "something akin to freedom."

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10. How does the phrase "something akin to freedom" apply to Linda's experience with Mr. Sands?

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11. Discuss the rhetorical moves Jacobs makes in the sixth paragraph from "Pity me ..." to "... the same standard as others" by comparing the passage to a similar address to the reader in the chapter's third paragraph.

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12. How do the following sentences contextualize Linda's grandmother's response? Do the sentences lead one to judge her grandmother's response more or less negatively?

The mother of slaves is very watchful. She knows there is no security for her children. After they have entered their teens she lives in daily expectation of trouble.

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13. How does the woman who had been a friend of Linda's mother act as a foil for her grandmother?

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## **Chapter XI**

1. What does the first paragraph contribute to the characterization of Linda's grandmother?

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2. What does the first paragraph contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands and his relationship with Linda?

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3. Dr. Flint tells Linda, "your master was your best friend. My lenity towards you is a proof of it. I might have punished you in many ways. I might have whipped till you fell dead under the lash. But I wanted you to live; I would have bettered your condition." Why has Dr. Flint been so interested in getting Linda's consent, even while reminding her that he is her master and can do whatever he wants to with her? Why does he offer to improve her situation, building her a house in the woods, even while threatening her?

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4. Linda's brother, William, is another one of Dr. Flint's slaves; he works as the doctor's office assistant. Why does Dr. Flint use him to deliver his notes to Linda and make him stand by while he yells at her?

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## **Chapter XII**

1. How does Jacobs portray the men who search the houses of blacks during the muster?

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2. How does this portrayal of “low whites” and their treatment of blacks offer an insightful analysis of how class differences play out as racial differences in the South?

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3. Why does Jacobs see these low-class whites as misguided in their attacks on black people?

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4. How does Jacobs increase reader sympathy for the blacks whose houses are searched during the muster?

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### **Chapter XIII**

1. What is Jacobs's attitude toward Reverend Pike? How does she communicate this attitude to the reader?

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2. What is Jacobs's attitude toward the slaves' religious feelings and practices?

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3. What is Jacobs's attitude toward American missionaries and how does she communicate this to the reader?

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### **Chapter XIV**

1. In the chapter's first paragraph, what is Jacobs's attitude toward Dr. Flint's harassment? How does the author use tone and word choice to convey this attitude?

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2. What portrait of Jacobs-as-author emerges from her diction in Chapter XIV?

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3. How does the announcement of Linda's second pregnancy contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

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4. How does this chapter contribute to the characterization of Dr. Flint?

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5. Linda Brent worries about the day her children will be recognized as slaves; however, she is especially upset when her second child is a girl. Why?

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6. How does Jacobs's description of her feelings at her children's baptism contribute to the reader's understanding of her opinion of herself?

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## **Chapter XV**

1. Jacobs notes that Dr. Flint exultingly proclaims, “These brats will bring me a handsome sum of money one of these days.” Why does Linda then think “I would rather see them killed than have them given up to his power” when, by being sold, they would no longer be under his power?

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2. How does this chapter contribute to the characterization of Dr. Flint?

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3. How does this chapter contribute to the characterization of Linda’s grandmother?

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4. How do Jacobs’s intimations of her plan to avoid Dr. Flint contribute to the characterization of Linda Brent?

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## Chapter XVI

1. What is Jacobs's attitude toward the following remark by Miss Fanny? How does Jacobs convey this attitude to the reader?

She condoled with me in her own peculiar way; saying she wished that I and all my grandmother's family were at rest in our graves, for not until then should she feel any peace about us. The good old soul did not dream that I was planning to bestow peace upon her, with regard to myself and my children; not by death, but by securing our freedom.

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2. How does Linda's grandmother's response to Linda's preparations for running for freedom contribute to the reader's understanding of her character?

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## Chapter XVII

1. Below is a transcription of the actual wanted notice for Harriet Jacobs. How does it differ from the one Jacobs includes for “Linda Brent” in her book? What is the significance of those differences?

### **\$100 REWARD**

Will be given for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl HARRIET. She is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address. Being a good seamstress, she has been accustomed to dress well, has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion, and will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery. As this girl absconded from the plantation of my son without any known cause or provocation, it is probable she designs to transport herself to the North.

The above reward, with all reasonable charges, will be given for apprehending her, or securing her in any prison or jail within the U. States.

All persons are hereby forewarned against harboring or entertaining her, or being in any way instrumental in her escape, under the most rigorous penalties of the law.

JAMES NORCOM

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2. How might the change in Sally’s opinion of Linda’s plan foreshadow a change in her grandmother’s opinion?

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## **Chapter XVIII**

1. What is the significance of the way Jacobs portrays Linda's response to her family's advice: "When I started upon this hazardous undertaking, I had resolved that, come what would, there should be no turning back. 'Give me liberty, or give me death,' was my motto"?

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2. In what ways does Linda's family support her goal of seeing herself and her children free?

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3. Given that both women are slave mistresses, how does Linda's grandmother's friend act as a foil to Mrs. Flint?

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4. How might Linda's grandmother's friend work as a role model for Jacobs's intended readers?

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## **Chapter XIX**

1. How does Jacobs use the motif of disguises and subterfuge in this chapter?

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2. Has Mr. Sands given Linda's brother and her two children their freedom?

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## **Chapter XX**

1. At the end of the chapter, Jacobs writes about Peter saying she may not take a walk for a long time, “I thought his voice sounded sad. It was kind of him to conceal from me what a dismal hole was to be my home for a long, long time.” Given the chapter’s conclusion, how might Betty hiding Linda under the kitchen’s floorboards foreshadow the fugitive’s future hiding place?

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2. How does Jacobs use the motif of disguises and subterfuge in this chapter?

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3. Why is it ironic that later, when wearing the sailor’s clothes a second time, Linda “blackened [her] face with charcoal”? What might Jacobs be suggesting by this irony?

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4. Snakes have appeared several times in the novel, most recently in the previous chapter, where Linda is bitten by a snake while hiding. In Chapter XX, she hides in Snaky Swamp, where she has to deal with large poisonous snakes. Given the associations that snakes may have for readers (the tempter in the Garden of Eden, a symbol of death and rebirth because they shed their skins), what might Snaky Swamp symbolize?

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**Chapters XXI – XXIII**

1. Discuss the implications of Jacobs's statement, "Yet I would have chosen this [hiding place], rather than my lot as a slave, though white people considered it an easy one; and it was so compared with the fate of others." How might this statement change the way some members of her intended audience think of slavery?

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2. Compare the narrator's attitude towards the way Benny speaks to Dr. Flint to "Linda's" attitude toward the same.

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3. Analyze Jacobs's appeal to emotion in the first two paragraphs of Chapter XXII.

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4. Analyze the metaphor Jacobs uses to discuss her hiding place in Chapter XXIII.

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5. Analyze the appeals to logic in the second and sixth paragraphs of Chapter XXIII.

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**Chapters XXIV – XXVII**

1. Discuss the use of the following simile, found near the end of Chapter XXIV: “I was left with my own thoughts—starless as the midnight darkness around me.”

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2. What explanation for why Mr. Sands has not already emancipated his children would cast a favorable light on his character?

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3. How does Chapter XXV contribute to the representation of the relationship between Linda and Dr. Flint?

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4. Analyze the contradictory ways that Jacobs represents her family in the second and third paragraphs of Chapter XXV.

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5. What appeal to logic does Jacobs use in Chapter XXVI to argue for slaves' immediate emancipation? What effect on her intended readers does the appeal to logic likely have?

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6. In Chapter XXVII, why does Jacobs include the thoughts that she had when she returned to her old room before reuniting with her daughter?

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7. Read the passage, found about halfway through Chapter XXVII, which begins, "In the midst of these meditations..." and ends, "...O, *do* go, dear mother!" What would likely be the effect of this passage of Jacobs's intended audience?

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8. Read the passage, found just after the previous question's passage, which begins, "I told her I couldn't go now..." and ends, "...I am not asleep, dear mother.'" What would likely be the effect of this passage on Jacobs's intended audience?

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9. What would you consider to be the climax of the appeal to emotion in this chapter?

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**Chapters XXVIII – XXX**

1. What is Jacobs's attitude towards Mrs. Flint's grief over the death of Aunt Nancy? How does Jacobs communicate this attitude to the reader?

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2. What is Jacobs's attitude toward her grandmother's grieving? How does Jacobs communicate this attitude to the reader?

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3. How does Jacobs characterize Benny in Chapter XXIX?

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4. Compare the way Jacobs characterizes Benny in XXIX to how she characterizes Ellen in Chapter XXVII. What seems to account for the differences?

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5. How does Jacobs characterize Linda's grandmother's responses to Linda's plan to escape?

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6. How does Jacobs characterize her friend Peter? What point is she able to make with this characterization? How does she use an appeal to logos and an appeal to pathos in making that point?

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**Chapters XXXI – XXXIII**

1. How does the following passage contribute to the reader's understanding of how Linda views herself?

He was approaching a subject on which I was extremely sensitive ... I frankly told him some of the most important events of my life. It was painful for me to do it; but I would not deceive him. If he was desirous of being my friend, I thought he ought to know how far I was worthy of it.

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2. In Chapter XXXI, how does Linda's reaction to the word "contempt" contribute to the reader's understanding of how she views herself?

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3. Jacobs writes, in Chapter XXXI: "That night I sought my pillow with feelings I had never carried to it before. I verily believed myself to be a free woman." Then, the fire-bells ring. How might her reaction to the fire-bells foreshadow her future feelings about herself as a free woman?

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4. How does the following passage contribute to Jacobs's conflicted feelings about traditional, Christian morals?

I like a straightforward course, and am always reluctant to resort to subterfuges. So far as my ways have been crooked, I charge them all upon slavery. It was that system of violence and wrong which now left me no alternative but to enact a falsehood.

5. How does Chapter XXXII contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands?

6. How does Chapter XXXIII represent the relationship between Linda and Mrs. Bruce?

7. How does Chapter XXXIII contribute to the theme of powerlessness?

**Chapters XXXIV – XXXVI**

1. How does Chapter XXXIV contribute to the characterization of the relationship between Dr. Flint and Linda?  
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2. How does Chapter XXXIV contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands?  
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3. What painful realization does Linda make in Chapter XXXV?  
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4. Discuss how Linda's realization affects the plot structure of the book.  
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5. Analyze the rhetorical stance Jacobs takes in the last paragraph of Chapter XXXV.  
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6. How does Chapter XXXVI contribute to the characterization of the relationship between Linda and Mrs. Bruce?  
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7. How might the representation of this relationship be important to the message Jacobs wants to convey to her intended audience?  
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**Chapters XXXVII – XXXIX**

1. How might the representation of Mr. Bruce be important to the message Jacobs wants to convey to her intended audience?

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2. How might the inclusion of Linda's visit to England be important to the message Jacobs wants to convey to her intended audience?

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3. Dr. Flint's daughter, now Mrs. Dodge, is officially the owner of Linda Brent. She professes her love for Linda and asks her to come live with her and her husband in Virginia and says that Linda may buy herself if she would rather do so. How does Linda's reaction to the offer to buy herself contribute to her characterization?

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4. How does Jacobs's last paragraph in Chapter XXXVIII qualify the statements she made in the paragraph previous to it?

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5. How does Chapter XXXIX contribute to the characterization of Linda's daughter, Ellen?

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6. How does Chapter XXXIX contribute to the characterization of Mr. Sands?

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7. The last paragraph of Chapter XXXIX briefly mentions Jacobs's involvement in the anti-slavery movement: how she and her brother opened an anti-slavery reading room (in the same building that housed Frederick Douglass's North Star offices) and her friendship with the famous abolitionist couple Isaac and Amy Post (their house was a stop on the Underground Railroad and Amy served as the Vice-President of the American Anti-Slavery Society in the 1850s and '60s). Why might Jacobs have decided to write so little about her involvement in abolitionist circles?

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**Chapters XL – XLI**

1. How does Linda's response to the Fugitive Slave Law show her continuing commitment to the black community?

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2. How does Jacobs's narration of Luke's story show her deep understanding of how slavery affects both blacks and whites?

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3. How does Linda's response to what she has learned from Luke about his current plans show her political consciousness?

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4. How does Chapter XL characterize the second Mrs. Bruce?

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5. How does Jacobs's quotation from her grandmother's letter work as an appeal to emotion?

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6. Read the paragraph, found about halfway through Chapter XLI, which begins, “Mrs. Bruce came to me....” How does this paragraph appeal to logic?

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7. Analyze Jacobs’s conflicted feelings over being bought by Mrs. Bruce and how they contribute to her characterization.

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8. How does Jacobs use the following sentence to distinguish her narrative from the genre of the sentimental novel?

Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage.

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9. What literary devices does Jacobs use in the final paragraph of Chapter XLI? What do these techniques convey to the reader?

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## **Appendix**

1. Why does the book include a statement from Amy Post?

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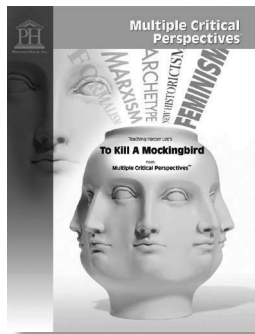
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## Romeo and Juliet

### Activity One

#### Examining Juliet's Role as Wife and Daughter in A Patriarchal Society

- Have students (independently, in pairs, or in small groups) examine the following scenes:
  - Act I, Scene III
  - Act III, Scene V
  - Act IV, Scene II
- Ask students to take detailed notes on the following ideas:
  - Juliet's attitude and behavior toward her parents before and after meeting Romeo
  - Juliet's attitude toward filial obedience, marriage, honor, and virtue
  - The Capulets' expectations with regard to their daughter
- Use the following questions to generate a classroom discussion:
  - Before meeting Romeo, how does Juliet view the prospect of marriage?
  - Before meeting Romeo, how does Juliet evaluate the right of her parents to choose her husband?
  - How does Capulet expect Juliet will respond upon hearing that her wedding day has been set? Why does he expect this particular response?
  - What language does Capulet use to address Juliet when she expresses her refusal to marry Paris? What does this language indicate about Capulet's attitude toward Juliet? Toward women in general?
  - What is the relationship between disobedience and death as expressed by Capulet and Lady Capulet? What does the connection between disobedience and death as expressed by Juliet's parents reveal about the importance or power of the patriarchal state?
  - Why does Juliet say she would choose death—suicide—over marriage to Paris? What does Juliet's decision to die in case no other solution becomes available reveal about a woman's status in her society? About a woman's power or lack of power?
  - Why does Juliet profess to regret her "disobedient opposition" (IV, II) after visiting Friar Lawrence?
  - Why does Juliet turn to Friar Lawrence for help?

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## The Great Gatsby

### Mythological/Archetypal Criticism Applied to *The Great Gatsby*

#### Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Approach

MYTHOLOGICAL, ARCHETYPAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM are all closely related. This is because Freud formulated many theories around the idea of the social archetype, and his pupil, Carl Jung, expanded and refined Freud's theories into a more cross-cultural philosophy.

Critics who examine texts from a mythological/archetypal standpoint are looking for symbols. Jung said that an archetype is "a figure...that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested." He believed that human beings were born innately knowing certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lies in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology have counterparts in Chinese and Celtic mythology, created long before the Greek and Roman Empires spread to Asia and northern Europe. Most of the myths and symbols represent ideas that human beings could not otherwise explain (the origins of life, what happens after death, etc.). Every culture has a creation story, a life-after-death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories—when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different.

When reading a work looking for archetypes or myths, critics look for very general recurring themes, characters, and situations. In modern times, the same types of archetypes are used in film, which is why it has been so easy for filmmakers to take a work like Jane Austen's *Emma* and adapt it into the typical Hollywood film *Clueless*. By drawing on those feelings, thoughts, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, modern authors allow readers to know the characters in a work with little or no explanation. Imagine how cluttered stories would be if the author had to give every detail about every single minor character that entered the work!

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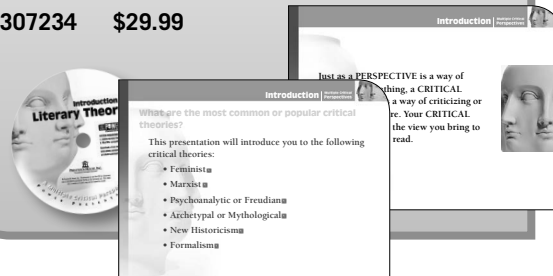
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