



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Related Works

Objective: Evaluating related works

Activity

Read the following descriptions of the life stories of other slaves. Consider the circumstances surrounding the writing of each of these works.

The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, by Ernest J. Gaines, is a carefully researched novel about a fictional former slave named Miss Jane Pittman. The story of the 110-year old woman begins with an account of her childhood as a slave on a southern plantation, continues through Reconstruction, and ends with the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. The novel is fictional, but it is written in the guise of an autobiography.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, a white abolitionist, wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 at the request of her sister-in-law, Isabella Jones Beecher. Isabella was outraged at the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, which required citizens in non-slaveholding states to return runaway slaves to the South. Harriet Beecher Stowe intended to write a story about the immorality of slavery for both the slaves and their owners. Immediately popular, this book was credited with helping many white people view slaves as feeling, intelligent people for the first time.

The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, is the life story of Sojourner Truth, a woman born into slavery in 1797. She is remembered as the first African-American woman to make public speeches calling for the abolition of slavery. Sojourner Truth was also a powerful speaker for the Women's Suffrage Movement. Because Truth could not write, Olive Gilbert, a white abolitionist, wrote this narrative. Gilbert frequently breaks away from Sojourner Truth's life story to sermonize to readers on the immorality of slavery.

Based on the information in these descriptions and what you learned about the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in Activity I, rank these works in order of reliability, beginning with the most reliable and ending with the one you believe may be the least reliable. Briefly state your reasons for the ranking you have given to each work.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter IV

Characterization

Objective: Interpreting the thoughts and language of a character

Activity

One way of getting inside characters to understand them better is by creating a reader's theatre dramatization from an appropriate selection of the text. A reader's theatre dramatization is made by turning a verbal exchange between characters into dramatic dialogue. For example, Mr. Auld explains to his wife why she must cease teaching Douglass how to read. A dramatic dialogue created from this sequence might begin as follows:

[Mr. Auld walks into the parlor and observes Mrs. Auld teaching young Frederick his letters.]

Mr. Auld: What are you doing? You can't teach him to read. Don't you understand how dangerous that is?

Mrs. Auld: *[Astonished]* Why ever not? He is certainly smart enough to learn.

Rewrite the rest of the scene as a dramatic dialogue. Be sure to include any necessary stage directions. Then, select parts and prepare for a dramatic reading. Dramatic readings can be done from your seat, but try to capture the appropriate tone for the character you are portraying.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter IV

Characterization and Inference

Objective: Inferring possible thoughts and feelings about a character from his or her actions or words

Activity

Mr. Bondly coldly kills one of Colonel Lloyd's slaves after the old slave inadvertently fishes on Bondly's property. The next morning, Bondly comes to see Colonel Lloyd to explain his actions. Write a conversation between Lloyd and Bondly discussing the incident. Based on the descriptions of Lloyd's overseer, Mr. Gore, what do you think Lloyd's reaction will be to Bondly's act? The dialogue might begin as follows:

Mr. Bondly: Colonel Lloyd, I had to kill one of your slaves last night, and I am mighty sorry for the loss of your property.

Colonel Lloyd: He deserved killing?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter V

Related Works

Objective: Comparing works of literature

Activity

A well-known narrative comic book from the 1990's is *Maus*, a satiric commentary on the Holocaust, in which Nazis are portrayed as cats and Jews as mice, symbolic of the relationship between predator and prey. In the book, the ruling Germans (cats) have dogs to help them control and kill the prisoners (mice) in concentration camps. In actuality, the Nazis did use dogs for control and did demonize Jews by depicting them as rats.

When the author, Art Spiegelman, himself a Jew, portrays the horrors of Hitler's Germany in a comic book style, it does not diminish the atrocities of World War II. Instead, he makes the War's evils more real and personal to the readers' lives through the medium of comics.

If you can, imagine the horrors of slavery depicted in comic strip or comic book format, with the slaves as a helpless type of animal and the slave owners as predators or enemies. Decide which animals you are going to use, what type of scene you will depict and the dialogue you want to convey. Remember that this is an exercise in satire, and is not meant to offend. It is intended to make a serious subject understandable to anyone through a comic strip and to make the actions of slaveholders seem cruel, ridiculous, and horrible at the same time.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter VIII

Obituary

Objective: Understanding a main idea of the book

Activity

In this chapter, Douglass describes the cruel treatment of his grandmother, a woman who “served [Douglass’] old master faithfully from youth to old age.” When she can no longer work, she is sent to live alone in the woods, away from her children or anyone who might help her.

Write the obituary of Douglass’ grandmother. Use details from the *Narrative* and from your own imagination. You might begin as follows:

GRANDMOTHER, aged 87, went to her Maker on the 4th day of July, 1845. She is survived by...

She will always be treasured by her family as a...

Grandmother was born in...

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter X

Research

Objective: Doing historical research

Activity

Using the Internet or your school's library, do some research on Connecticut, South Carolina, and the Nebraska Territory in 1858. Fill out the chart for each state/territory.

In Charleston, South Carolina, skilled slaves were often hired out to do work within the city. These slaves wore special badges that showed their trades. Even though Douglass would not have been issued a slave badge because he did not work in Charleston, Hugh Auld hired him out as a laborer. If Frederick did have a slave badge, what might it look like? Based on the information about Douglass' life in Chapter X, create a slave badge for Douglass.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter XI

Writing I

Objective: Interpreting the thoughts and feelings of the narrator

Activity

In Chapter XI, Douglass describes how he feels as a stranger living in the North and the terrible loneliness of not being able to tell anyone, even other African Americans, about his status as an escaped slave. He knew that, at any moment, he could be seized by his fellow men and mercilessly returned to slavery. He writes:

“I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land—a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders—whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers—where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellow-men, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey!”

Using your imagination, write a short story with the title *A Fugitive Slave in a Strange Land*. Your story can be set on another planet, in the future, or in any circumstance you want. Try to express the same type of feelings of loneliness and fear that Douglass describes in Chapter XI.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – XI

Irony

Objective: Recognizing ironic statements and situations in the text

Activity

Frederick Douglass uses irony in his narrative to help emphasize the immorality of slavery to both the slaves and the slaveholders. For each of the following passages from Chapters III through VIII, note on the Irony Chart why each passage is ironic and how this irony helps support Douglass' anti-slavery message. The first one is done for you.