

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

**Narrative of the Life
of Frederick Douglass**

by Frederick Douglass

written by Rita Truschel

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Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Objectives

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

1. identify the writing conventions of autobiography, memoir and journalism.
2. trace the development of Frederick Douglass's character from childhood to manhood, noting how and why he reached his life crisis and chose to act.
3. analyze antagonists and their role in Douglass's life and narrative.
4. identify and analyze the effective use of literary elements such as impressions, understatement, sarcasm, analogy, allusion, symbols, personification, irony, paradox, parallel structure, antithesis, persona and internal monologue.
5. identify and analyze techniques and examples of logic and argument, including logical fallacies.
6. analyze the effect of word choice and sentence structure to express meaning, tone and theme.
7. analyze the depiction of women in the book.
8. analyze the development of religion in the book.
9. analyze the relationship between Douglass's purpose and audience and his narrative's elements and structure.
10. offer a close reading of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and support interpretations and assertions using evidence from the text and knowledge of his biography, literary allusions, and period history.
11. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
12. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. To what extent can a reader accept the *Narrative* as a historical account?
2. To what extent must a reader evaluate the personal, subjective aspects of the account?
3. How much of his own personality does Douglass reveal in his narrative? To what extent do his personal revelations affect the impact of his *Narrative*?

Introductory Lecture

I. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Autobiography is the story of a person's life, written by that person. Since ancient times, autobiography has been the purview of people with important and lasting accomplishments, for the purposes of explanation, self-justification, public instruction, moral example, and entertainment. With the rise of the popular press in the 17th century, autobiography expanded to include popular celebrities and lesser persons with significant or scandalous experiences.

Memoir is a form of autobiography, typically focused on meaningful incidents within a related timespan. Memoir relies heavily on the author's memories, feelings, and interpretations of events' significance.

Confession is a subgenre of autobiography in which private, secret, or shocking details of an author's life are revealed. In 2006, author James Frey drew heavy criticism when it was revealed that his *Million Little Pieces*, which had been published and acclaimed as a memoir, turned out to have been largely fabricated. The book is now marketed as "semi-fictional."

Autobiography has value as a record of an author's direct and intimate knowledge and perceptions as well as an admittedly non-objective record of the *milieu* and ambience of a historical period or foreign culture.

However, the autobiographer's necessary need of the first person point of view limits content to that one person's perspective. Authors writing about themselves may be unreliable narrators who withhold or misjudge information out of ignorance, faulty memory, bias, or self-protection. Pay attention to the author's *persona*, the image of the writer projected to readers.

II. JOURNALISM

Journalism is the recording of news reports and opinion essays in publications and broadcasts. News writing is judged by the standards of factual accuracy, completeness of reports and impartial perspective. Opinion writing, such as editorials and columns, relies on interpretation, analysis and persuasive argument.

Frederick Douglass's career as an abolition advocate, newspaper editor, political commentator, and author encompassed several literary genres.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Chapter 1

1. Why would Frederick Douglass begin his life story by admitting what he doesn't know?

2. What is known about Douglass's family?

3. What is the argument concerning Noah's cursing Ham to which Douglass refers?

Chapter 3

1. What is the significance of the garden?

2. What was Douglass's opinion of Colonel Lloyd, his master?

3. The chapter concludes with the assertion that slaves don't tell the truth about their condition. How has Douglass supported that conclusion?

4. Why does Douglass state this conclusion explicitly?

Chapter 5

1. How does Douglass contrast his childhood on Colonel Lloyd's plantation with his arrival in Baltimore?

2. How does Douglass react to this turning point in his life? How does he explain a change in some of his core values?

Chapter 7

1. Summarize what happens in the Baltimore household over seven years to Frederick, Sophia Auld, Hugh Auld, and Tommy Auld.

2. What was the significance of *The Columbian Orator*? What entries on the book had the greatest impact on Douglass?

3. Why does Douglass confess to feeling “cursed” by his reading and thinking?

Chapter 9

1. Frederick meets his new master in St. Michaels. Describe Thomas Auld and Frederick at this point.

2. Contrast the religious rituals and values of the household with the aspirations of Christianity.

Chapter 11

1. Compare the beginnings of the first and final chapters.

2. Why is Douglass disappointed after finally arriving in New Bedford, Mass.?

3. What is the significance of the quotation: “I was hungry, and he gave me meat; I was thirsty, and he gave me drink; I was a stranger, and he took me in”?

4. How does Douglass end his narrative?
