

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

*Narrative of the Life of
Frederick Douglass*

by Frederick Douglass

Copyright © 2003 by Prestwick House, Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938.
1-800-932-4593. www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for
classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her personal use. *This material,
in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.*

ISBN 978-1-60389-604-7

Item No. 302357

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Preface

1. The *Preface* is written by William Lloyd Garrison, who founded the American Anti-Slavery Society. Garrison writes that he was greatly impressed with Frederick Douglass when he first heard him speak at an anti-slavery convention in 1841.

As Garrison, write a letter to Douglass asking him to join the American Anti-Slavery Society. Imagine that you are writing just after having heard him speak. In the letter, give Douglass your opinion of his speech to the convention, and outline the reasons why you think he would be an asset to the society.

The letter might begin as follows:

Dear Douglass,

I was greatly moved by your speech, both by the content of your speech, and by your obviously high intelligence and moral character. One of the obstacles to abolishing slavery is the unreasonable believe that members of your race ...

2. As Douglass, write a letter to your wife telling her about the dangers you face by agreeing to speak at the anti-slavery convention and why you are willing to take the risk. Note that Douglass married Anna Murray in 1838.

Response Journal

3. The *Preface* also attempts to convince readers that the incidents Douglass relates are accurate and truthful. For example, Garrison writes:

DOUGLASS has frankly disclosed the place of his birth, the names of those who claimed ownership in his body and soul, and the names also of those who committed the crimes which he has alleged against them. His statements, therefore, may easily be disproved, if they are untrue.

Consider the reasons Garrison believed he must make this type of argument in the introduction. Also consider how Douglass might have felt about these kinds of statements. Then, as Douglass, write a letter to Garrison thanking him for writing the introduction. In the letter, tactfully relate to him your feelings about these kinds of comments.

Letter from Wendell Phillips, Esq.

4. The back cover of most modern books has a brief summary of the book. This summary is intended to peak the interest of the reader and to persuade the reader to purchase the book. Assume that you are a publisher in 1841. Based on the information contained in the *Preface* and the **Letter from Wendell Phillips, Esq.**, write a one- or two-paragraph summary designed to help promote the book.

The summary might begin as follows:

At the risk of his own freedom, Frederick Douglass tells the story...

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Chapter I.

5. In the following excerpt, Douglass writes about his mother's death. Because of slavery, she had little impact on his life.

Very little communication ever took place between us. Death soon ended what little we could have while she lived and with it her hardships and suffering. She died when I was about seven years old, on one of my master's farms, near Lee's Mill. I was not allowed to be present during her illness, at her death, or burial. She was gone long before I knew any thing about it. Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger

Write a letter to Douglass detailing the ways your parent or guardian influences your life.

6. At the end of this chapter, Douglass relates his first exposure to the physical brutality of slavery. He hides in a closet as his Aunt Hester was mercilessly whipped. Before this, he had been protected from this aspect of slavery because he had lived with his grandmother on the edge of the plantation.

In one or two paragraphs discuss an example of injustice or cruelty that has made an impression on you. Describe the injustice and your feelings about it.

Response Journal

Chapter II.

7. In this chapter, Douglass lists the yearly clothing allowance given to the adult slaves and the monthly food allowance. Imagine you are a young, adult slave who has recently escaped to the North. Write a letter to your former master berating him for failing to provide adequate food and clothing for his helpless slaves.
8. In this chapter, Douglass writes about the sadness he feels when he hears slaves singing:

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.

Slave songs reflect the misery of the slaves and their hope of finding happiness in heaven. However, slave songs were also a creative way for slaves to communicate with each other. Slaves could not directly speak about escaping to freedom, or about their harsh masters, without fear of punishment. Scholars believe that a slave song about traveling to the “big gourd” is really a song about following the constellation, the big dipper, to the North and freedom.

The following is an example of a slave song. Using it as a guide, add new lyrics describing how the slaves feel working for Mr. Severe.

We raise de wheat, Dey giv us de corn.
We bake de bread, Dey giv us de crust.
We sif de meal, Dey gib us de huss.
We peel de meat, Dey giv us de skin.
And dat's de way Dey take us in, , , ,

(The excerpt is taken from *My Bondage and My Freedom*, written by Frederick Douglas in 1853.)

Chapter III.

9. In this chapter, Douglass writes of the difficulties his master has in keeping the slaves out of his garden and away from the fruit. Assume you are a newspaper reporter of the era. Based on the information Douglass provides in this chapter, write a news article about one of Col. Lloyd's slaves who is caught with a rare southern orange. Give your article an appropriate headline.
10. Old Barney and young Barney are slaves whose only job is to care for Col. Lloyd's horses. Should a horse be too slow, or misbehave in any way, Lloyd punishes old and young Barney for not taking proper care of the animals.

Assume you are old Barney. You are preparing one of the colonel's horses, but the horse is misbehaving. You are alone in the barn with the animal. What do you think you might say to the animal? Write the speech old Barney might make to the horse.

The speech might begin as follows:

Come on now horse. Behave. You don't want to see old Barney ...