

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Uncle Tom's Cabin

by Harriet Beecher Stowe

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Notes

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1851, 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-slave states to return runaway slaves to the south. Harriet Beecher Stowe intended to write a story about how the immorality of slavery ruined 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.

All references come from the Bantam Books edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published 1981.

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Objectives

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

1. infer meanings about characters and events when the meanings are not explicitly stated.
2. point out examples of racial stereotyping in this novel; discuss whether or not this stereotyping is intentional.
3. recognize the author's use of sarcasm in chapter titles, dialogue, and commentary.
4. define the following terms used in the novel to describe slaves and their lives: "quadroon," "mullato," and "Jim Crow."
5. recognize the author's use of irony when discussing the slaveholder's view of the morality of slavery.
6. find examples and comment on the use of asides in the novel in which the author breaks away from the action to speak directly to the reader
7. discuss the title of this novel and its possible relationship to "a Christian home."
8. relate the author's definition of Christianity and include the ideas of love and forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and prayer for all people.
9. list incidents which prove that Stowe believes slavery is wrong and must be abolished:
 - slaves can be sold at the whims of their masters, separating slaves from their families
 - there are no laws protecting slaves from the immoral behavior of their masters; they are at the mercy of the character of their master
 - slavery undermines the principles of Christianity, including the institution of marriage
 - slavery destroys the morality of the slaveholder
 - slaves are not educated, so they can not read the Bible
 - slaves quickly learn to be dishonest, cunning, and underhanded because there is no reason for them to be otherwise
 - slavery destroys souls because it is difficult for slaves to believe in God.
10. write a character sketch of Uncle Tom and comment on whether Uncle Tom is a hero or overly subservient. [Provide incidents to support your point of view.]
11. discuss how the comical characters of Black Sam and Topsy add both comic relief to the story and justify the perceived dishonest nature of slaves.

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Questions for Discussion and Essay

1. Who is the "Man of Humanity" referred to in the title of the first chapter? Find an example of sarcasm in this chapter.
2. How is the dialect in this book an example of racial stereotyping? What kind of racial stereotyping is implied by describing Eliza and Harry as "almost white"?
3. Despite the kindness of the Shelbys, why are their slaves in danger? What do you think the Shelbys could have done to protect Tom and Eliza?
4. Why do you think George Shelby likes to eat dinner in Uncle Tom's cabin? How is he treated differently than Uncle Tom's own children?
5. For what reason does Mrs. Shelby say that slavery a "curse to the master"?
6. Compare Uncle Tom and Mr. Shelby. Which man has the most courage? Who best adheres to the principle of Christianity of love and forgiveness for all?
7. Find an example of an aside where the author speaks directly to the reader in chapter 5.
8. How does Black Sam use Haley's own bigotry to delay the search for Eliza?
9. What is the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850? How do the Birds feel about this law?
10. What incidents in this story illustrate the depth of a slave mother's love for her children?
11. How does the gift George Shelby gives Uncle Tom help Cassy escape from Simon Legree?
12. Why does Mr. Wilson think it is wrong for George to run away from his master? What does George say to Mr. Wilson that makes Wilson agree not to turn George in to the authorities?
13. List three reasons Southern slave holders support the institution of slavery, even though they think it is morally wrong.
14. Why do the Quakers risk imprisonment by helping runaway slaves?
15. Relate three incidents from the story where Tom demonstrates the Christian doctrine of self-sacrifice.

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Chapter 1 - In Which the Reader is Introduced to a Man of Humanity

VOCABULARY

bedropped—spotted, covered
pious—religious
grotesque—fantastic
piquant—engaging
elucidations—explanations
prevalence—dominance
counterpoise—counterbalance
patriarchal—fatherly
adroitly—skillfully
magnanimity—generosity
incredulity—disbelief

1. Briefly describe Mr. Shelby and Mr. Haley. Why do you think Mr. Shelby is referred to as having "...the appearance of a gentleman..."?

2. How does Mr. Shelby describe Tom? Why does he think Tom is a valuable slave?

Chapter 7 - The Mother's Struggle

VOCABULARY

revered—adored
reproachfully—disgracefully
paroxysm—convulsion
sublime—splendid
constrained—hold back
turbulent—agitated
turbid—muddy
undulating—swinging
dignitary—person of dignity or honor
disobliged—inconvenienced
de novo—again, anew
artifice—trick

1. How does Eliza care for her son while they are traveling to the Ohio River?

2. Why does Eliza decide it is safe to stop at a farmhouse to buy some dinner?

4. How does Ophelia think slaveholders ought to treat their slaves? Why?

5. How does Augustine St. Clare, in the passage below, criticize the Northerners for their behavior toward blacks?

“Not that there is a particle of virtue in our not having it; but custom with us does what Christianity ought to do, - obliterates the felling of personal prejudice. I have often noticed, in my travels north, how much stronger this was with you than with us.”

6. What does the following passage from this chapter tell the reader about Augustine's opinion of Tom and Augustine's religious beliefs?

“...and he the most wonderful Tom that ever wore a black skin. This is one of the roses of Eden that the Lord has dropped down expressly for the poor and lowly, who get few enough of any other kind.”

Chapter 27 - "This is the Last of Earth."

1. How has Ophelia's attitude toward Topsy changed since Eva's death?

2. In what ways has Marie changed since her daughter's death?

3. How does St. Clare test Tom's faith? Why does Tom stay by St. Clare's side?

Chapter 38 - The Victory

VOCABULARY

exultant—triumphant

scanty—few; minimal

1. What is the "...true searching test of what there may be in man or woman"?

2. How does Legree, unwittingly, help Tom hold onto his faith? In what ways does Tom change after talking to Legree?

3. Why does Legree cry out and say "What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? - art thou come to torment us before the time"?

4. Cite incidents from the chapter to support or refute the following statement: Tom is a coward when he refuses to kill Legree when Cassy gives him the chance.

5. Why do you think Cassy is miraculously, after many years of captivity, able to think of a plan so that she and Emmeline can escape?

