

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Uncle Tom's Cabin

by Harriet Beecher Stowe

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ISBN: 978-1-58049-983-5

Item No. 201716

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Chapter 1 – In Which the Reader Is Introduced to a Man of Humanity

1. Critics believe that the title of this chapter is an example of irony. Write a dialogue between two students discussing this idea. One of the students is explaining the irony to the other student, who does not understand. The dialogue might begin as follows:

Student One: OK, do you understand the definition of irony?

Student Two: I think so. It is like sarcasm, isn't it?

Student One: Yes...like the title of this chapter. It says a "Man of Humanity..."

2. This chapter makes the case that even good humored masters cannot protect their slaves from harm because of the *law*, which defines them as *things* instead of people. Write a letter to the editor of a pro-slavery newspaper explaining this idea.

Chapter 2 – The Mother

3. As the owner of the factory where George Harris works, write a letter to Mr. Harris outlining the reasons why you want George to continue in your employ.
4. The last paragraph of this chapter reads:

A very humane jurist once said, The worst use you can put a man to is to hang him. No; there is another use that a man can be put to that is WORSE!

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the above statement? Write about something that, in your opinion, might be worse than death for you.

Response Journal

Chapter 3 – The Husband and Father

5. Mr. Harris unjustly ties George to a tree and permits his son to whip him. Write about a time in your life when you were unjustly punished. How did the experience make you feel?
6. At one point, Eliza encourages George to trust in God. George replies,

“I an’t a Christian like you, Eliza: my heart’s full of bitterness; I can’t trust in God. Why does he let things be so?”

In your experience, why do you think bad things sometimes happen to innocent people? What is God’s role in preventing this kind of injustice? Write a letter to George explaining to him your beliefs on this subject.

7. In this chapter, why do you think the author compares George and Eliza’s situation to a spider’s web? Write a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe giving her your opinion of this metaphor.

Chapter 4 – An Evening in Uncle Tom’s Cabin

8. Uncle Tom, Aunt Cloe, and the others all are enjoying a fun family dinner in Uncle Tom’s cabin. Write about a fun family dinner in your home. In what ways is a dinner at your house similar to the dinner described in this chapter?
9. In modern times, an African-American who embraces the white world and rejects his or her African-American heritage is sometimes referred to as an *Uncle Tom*. After reading descriptions of Tom’s physical appearance and his character, do you think Uncle Tom in this story fits the profile of a modern *Uncle Tom*? Write a two-paragraph editorial for your local newspaper presenting your opinion on this subject.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

10. Uncle Tom and his family enjoy listening to young George read from the Bible. George also enjoys the experience. "George very readily consented, for your boy is always ready for anything that makes him of importance."

Write about a person you know or have read about who, like George, needs to feel a sense of importance.

Chapter 5 – Showing the Feelings of Living Property on Changing Owners

11. In the following excerpt, Mr. Shelby tries to justify to his wife his decision to sell his slaves to recoup his financial losses. He says,

"Well, since you must know all, it is so. I have agreed to sell Tom and Harry both; and I don't know why I am to be rated, as if I were a monster, for doing what every one does every day."

Have you or someone you know ever used the argument that "everyone else is doing it, so why can't I?" Write a letter to Mr. Shelby explaining to him why he deserves to be rated a monster. Use incidents from your own life experience or knowledge to illustrate your points.

12. In the following passage, Mrs. Shelby summarizes her views on slavery. As Eliza, write a letter to Mrs. Shelby letting her know that "kindness, and care, and instruction" cannot make up for the immorality of slavery.

"This is God's curse on slavery! – a bitter, bitter, most accursed thing! – a curse to the master and a curse to the slave! I was a fool to think I could make anything good out of such a deadly evil. It is a sin to hold a slave under laws like ours, - I always felt it was, - I always thought so when I was a girl, - I thought so still more after I joined the church; but I thought I could gild it over, - I thought by kindness, and care, and instruction, I could make the condition of mine better than freedom – fool that I was!"

Response Journal

13. In this chapter, Tom expresses his reason for deciding not to run away with Eliza. He says, "If I must be sold, or all the people on the place, and everything go to rack, why, let me be sold." To what extent do you agree with Tom's thinking? Write a letter to Tom giving him your opinion. Include in the letter any life experiences you may have, or incidents you may have read about, that deal with the idea of a person sacrificing themselves for others.

Chapter 6 – Discovery

14. In this chapter, Mr. Shelby is upset that Eliza has run away because it touches his honor. Write a letter to Mr. Shelby expressing to him how you feel about his honor and why it is ironic that he thinks he has any honor to be touched.
15. Comic relief is defined as the intrusion of humor immediately following a scene of heightened excitement. In this chapter, the antics of Sam and Andy create comic relief, but Sam and Andy are also very brave. To what degree are you worried about Sam and Andy, should Haley discover they are deliberately sabotaging his effort to find Eliza and her son? Write a newspaper article for an all African-American newspaper, describing Sam and Andy as brave heroes.

Uncle Tom's Cabin

16. This novel, first published in 1851, is written in the dialect of the mostly uneducated slaves. The following paragraph is an example of the dialect in this chapter.

Sam is talking to Andy.

“Tse ‘quired what yer may call a habit o’ *bob*servation, Andy. It’s a very ‘portant habit, Andy; and I ‘commend yer to be cultivatin’ it, now yer young. Hist up that hind foot, Andy. Yer see, Andy, it’s *bob*servation makes all de difference in niggers. Didn’t I see which way the wind blew dis yer mornin’? Didn’t I see what Missis wanted, though she never let on? Dat ar’s bobobservation, Andy. I ‘spects it’s what you may call a faculty. Faculties is different in different poeples, but cultivation of ‘em goes a great way.”

The same paragraph without the dialect.

I have acquired what you may call the habit of observation, Andy. It’s a very important habit, Andy; and I recommend that you cultivate it, now while you are young. List up that hind foot, Andy. You see, Andy, it’s observation that makes all of the difference in slaves. Didn’t I see which way the wind blew this morning? Didn’t I see what Mrs. Shelby wanted, though she never let on? That is observation, Andy. I expects it’s what you may call a faculty. Faculties are different in different people, but cultivation of them goes a great way.

Which of the above two paragraphs do you think is better? In one or two paragraphs, express your opinion on the value or lack of value of dialect in this novel.