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Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*Narrative of the Life
of Frederick Douglass*
Frederick Douglass



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ISBN 978-1-60389-604-7

Item No. 302357

Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

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.

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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.

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13. In this chapter, Douglass describes the death of the slave Demby at the hands of Gore. Even though Gore murders Demby in front of many slave witnesses, Gore is not prosecuted in any way for the crime. Slaves are not permitted to testify against a white man.

Write a letter to Frederick Douglass discussing the extent to which an African American, or other minority, receives fair treatment in our justice system today. Cite specific examples from the news, or from your own knowledge, to illustrate your points.

14. Mr. Bondly kills one of Col. Lloyd's slaves because the slave inadvertently trespasses on Mr. Bondly's property. The next day, Bondly has a conversation with Lloyd about the killing. After the conversation, nothing more is ever said or done about the murder.

The conversation between Mr. Bondly and Col. Lloyd is held in private, so Douglass cannot relate the details.

Try to imagine how Bondly justifies his actions and how Lloyd responds to his explanation. Write a dialogue between the two men discussing the murder.

The dialogue might begin as follows:

Colonel Lloyd: I understand I have one less slave this morning.
Bondly: Had no choice, Colonel. He was...

Chapter VII.

21. In this chapter, Douglass discusses the ways slavery harmed Mrs. Auld. He writes, "Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me."

Assume that Mrs. Auld is elderly, sick, and facing death. Write a conversation she might have with her minister discussing the impact of owning slaves on her character and her soul. The dialogue might begin as follows:

Mrs. Auld: When I look back on my life, I realize that I was better off before we had any slaves.
Minister: How can owning slaves be harmful for you?
Mrs. Auld: Oh, the slaves didn't harm me, owning them did. Power like that, total power over another person, ...

22. Young Frederick was determined to get an education to aid him on his route to freedom. Think about the place education has in your life. To what extent do you think you will need a good education?

Write a dialogue between yourself and Douglass discussing your educational opportunities and the extent to which you desire an education.

The dialogue might begin as follows:

Douglass: Your principal gave me a tour of the school this morning. When I was a young boy, I could not even dream of a school as wonderful as this one. Even today, I want to read every book in your library.
You: To me the school is ...