

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave



Setting a Purpose

As you read, consider why Frederick Douglass chose these particular events to write about. Think about what his focus on these events reveals about his character and his struggle for freedom.

Take down these considerations in the notes section of your Cornell notes.

NOTES

**THE WORDS IN BLUE
ARE NOTES FOR YOU.**

Analyze Text:

- An **autobiography** is an account of the writer's own life.
 - The text is written in first person point of view (uses the pronouns *I*, *me*, and *my*)
- Douglas is writing about himself and about real people and actual events.
- What is the author's purpose? Why is he writing this piece?
 - The author's purpose in writing this piece to inform the readers about his experience as an American slave.
- How does this point of view help Douglass achieve this purpose?

Analyze Language

- Douglass uses the words “master” and “mistress” to refer to the people to whom he was enslaved. These were the terms typical of slaves in reference to their owners.
- What impact do these words have on the text?
 - Douglass had been a free man for seven years when he wrote this. The use of these words, *master* and *mistress* helps to put readers into Douglass’s shoes at the time of the events he is recounting.
 - His word choices imply that his comments and feelings are directed to all who owned slaves.

Analyze Text: Autobiography

- Douglass writes a long paragraph about his mistress. He begins by praising her, but then he describes how her behavior changed because of her husband’s influence and because of slavery itself.
- Re-read lines 14-41 and explain Douglass’s purpose in devoting so much space in his autobiography to describing his connection to this woman.
 - Douglass’s mistress had a big influence on him; she was one of the two people who were completely in control of his life. Describing the change in her behavior helps readers understand the effects that slavery had on slave owners, as well as on the enslaved people themselves.

Analyze Structure

- Writers of autobiographies often tell events in order, but they may also show how events cause other events (cause and effect structure).
- Recognizing such causes and effects helps readers understand why and how events occur and how those events are connected.
- Look at lines 26-29 and identify changes slavery brought about in Douglass's mistress.
 - This mistress's "tender heart became stone," and her gentle nature "gave way to one of tigerlike fierceness."

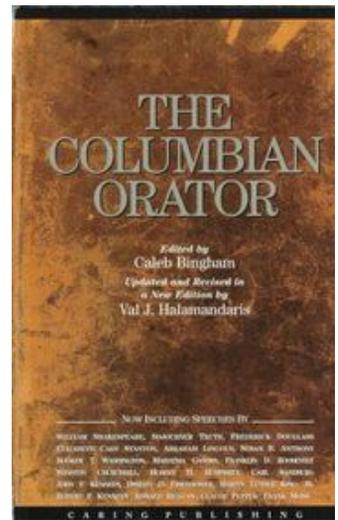


Analyze Text: Autobiography

- In this part of his autobiography, Douglass describes how he furthered his education after the mistress ceased to teach him. How was he able to do this?
- Re-read lines 49-76. Cite evidence that shows the attitudes of the little white boys. How are these attitudes similar to or different from the attitudes of the master and mistress.
 - The boys provided "kindly aid," and they expressed "the liveliest sympathy" when Douglass talked about slavery. Their attitudes toward Douglass is very different from the harsh treatment he is used to receiving from his master and mistress. The boys are willing to help him read because, as children, they don't share the fear that many slave owners had about the education of slaves.

Analyze Structure

- Douglass describes a book he read at age twelve that had a great influence on him. It included dialogue between a master and slave.
- Re-read lines 84-92 and explain what happens as a result of the dialogue in this dialogue. Why was this dialogue so interesting to Douglass? What effect did it have on him?
 - As a result of the dialogue, in which the slave argues successfully against slavery, the master frees the slave. This text awakened Douglass to the idea that there was a way out of slavery and that freedom was possible; it gave him hope.

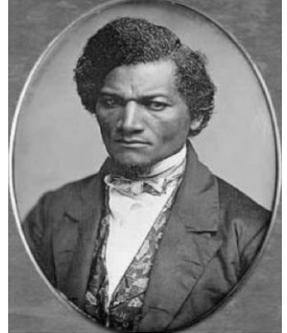


Analyze Text: Autobiography

- Beginning in line 112, Douglass describes the result of his having learned to read.
- Go back to lines 112-120 and cite evidence to explain what Douglass believed his ability to read caused him to feel and believe.
- Cite evidence to show why he felt this way.
 - Douglass says that his ability to read exposed him to ideas that made his life unbearable because those ideas confirmed what he already knew to be the truth but offered no solution.

Analyze Text: Autobiography

- Douglass escaped to freedom at age 20 and wrote this autobiography about seven years later.
- Look at lines 120-134. Why would Douglass, as a free man writing his autobiography, include these anguished thoughts that he had as a teenager.
 - These thoughts help the readers understand his despair and also his determination to gain freedom.



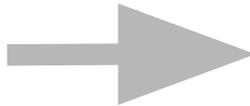
Analyze Text: Autobiography Review

- The characteristics of an autobiography are:
 - Text is written from the first person point of view.
 - The focus is on significant events and/or people who influenced or had an impact on the writer.
- While reading autobiographies, ask yourself, “Why was this included?” when thinking about events and details in the text.
- Asking and answering that question will help you understand the author’s purpose for writing.
- What connection does Douglass make between education and freedom? Which events did he include in his autobiography to show this connection to the reader?

Analyze Structure- Review

- Cause and Effect text structure: a text that is organized in a way that shows the causes of certain effects.
- Remember, the cause is not always an event.
- In Douglass's autobiography, some of the causes he addresses are ideas or institutions, like slavery.
- For example, slavery makes it possible for Douglass's mistress to mistreat him.

Cause: Slavery



Effect: A kind woman turns angry and cruel.

- Later in the text, Douglass calls his ability to read the cause of his discontentment with life. Why?

Analyze Structure: You Try

- Re-read lines 102-115. Find the cause and the effect in the paragraph.

CAUSE:



EFFECT: