



## Study Guide on Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

### QUESTIONS ON THE WHOLE WORK

1. The *Narrative* recounts how Douglass becomes a freeman, not only in body but also in soul. What does Douglass learn in each chapter? How is he educated?
2. The full title of the work is *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Why is it specifically a *Narrative*, not just an autobiography? How does pairing *American* with *Slave* in the subtitle emphasize the work's purpose?
3. To what emotions does Douglass appeal to most throughout the work?
4. Throughout the *Narrative*, Douglass says that he wishes and attempts to describe his true feelings for some person or in some event. Why does he have this difficulty?
5. He says several times that slavery dehumanizes. What humanizes, according to the *Narrative*?
6. Several events happen to Douglass that he attributes to Providence, and he uses biblical imagery throughout the work. What kind of faith does he have? Is it based in the Old Testament? The New? Is his faith Christian?
7. What are the similarities and differences between Douglass' particular story and the general American story?
8. What is Douglass' attitude toward the founding of America? Does he want to do away with the Constitution and restart? What does he want to do to America?

### QUESTIONS ON THE OUTLINED PARTS

#### Preface by Garrison

1. **First meeting between Garrison and Douglass:** *According to Garrison, what is Douglass' greatest virtue?*
2. Douglass' lectures abroad
3. On the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*
4. Direct address to reader: *What does Garrison aim to do in this preface?*

#### Chapter 1: The Power of the Visible to Educate

1. **Age:** *What themes does Douglass initiate in the beginning paragraph?*
2. Parents
3. Master
4. **Aunt Hester:** *To what emotion does Douglass appeal to most in this section?*



Chapter 2: The Power of the Audible to Educate

1. Life on a Plantation
2. Food, clothing, beds
3. The Great House Farm: *How does irony work in the Great House Farm song?*
4. **Slave songs:** *What power do songs have in expressing sentiment?*

Chapter 3: The Desire for Truth

1. Nice garden: *How does the description of the garden augment the paradoxes in the South?*
2. Nice horses: *How does the description of the horses augment the paradoxes in the South?*
3. Colonel Lloyd: *What is Colonel Lloyd's leadership strategy?*

Chapter 4: The Desire for Justice

1. Mr. Gore: *What does Douglass find morally disturbing about this murder?*
2. Mr. Giles Hick's wife: *What does Douglass find morally disturbing about this murder?*
3. Mr. Bandy: *What does Douglass find morally disturbing about this murder?*

Chapter 5: Acquiring Freedom of the Body

1. Food: *To what animal does Douglass compare slaves eating food?*
2. Departure to Baltimore: *What ties do slaves have to their plantation?*
3. **Meeting Sophia Auld:** *Why does this meeting with Sophia Auld give Douglass so much faith and hope?*

Chapter 6: Acquiring Freedom of the Soul

1. Sophia Auld's charity: *What gift does Sophia Auld give to Douglass?*
2. **Mr. Auld's cruelty:** *What scares Mr. Auld about teaching a slave to read?*
3. **Reading:** *What is the white man's greatest achievement?*
4. Baltimore life: *What makes the life of a slave better in Baltimore than in the South?*

Chapter 7: Pursuing the Truth

1. **Sophia's downfall:** *How does slavery damage the slave and the slaveholder?*
2. **Learning to read:** *What are Douglass' first words and how do they express the work's rhetorical purpose?*
3. **The Columbian Orator:** *How do these readings bless and curse Douglass?*
4. **Hope for Freedom:** *What keeps Douglass from killing himself?*
5. Learning to write: *How does he teach himself to write?*

Chapter 8: Pursuing Justice

1. Departing Baltimore: *What helps Douglass to see the brutalizing effects of slavery on the slave and slaveholder?*
2. Reentering slavery: *How is this experience of slavery different from his first experience?*
3. Grandmother: *How does Douglass arouse compassion for his grandmother through the art of narrative?*
4. Return to Master Hugh and the desire to escape: *What attaches Douglass to Baltimore?*

Chapter 9

1. Hunger: *At what hypocrisy does Douglass exclaim?*
2. Master Auld: *How is Captain Auld conflicted?*



Chapter 10

1. Mr. Covey's form: *For what purpose is Mr. Covey religious and learned?*
2. Douglass' time at Mr. Covey's: *How does Mr. Covey break Douglass? What does he break?*
3. **Douglass' Soul's Complaint:** *What kind of freedom does Douglass want?*
4. Escaping Mr. Covey: *What emotions does Douglass appeal to in the narrative?*
5. **Returning to Mr. Covey:** *What is the "turning point" in his career as a slave?*
6. **Christmas:** *What effect do holidays have on slaves, according to Douglass?*
7. Hopkins: *What role does religion play in maintaining slavery?*
8. **Freeland:** *Who is the best master Douglass had? Why?*
9. **Vision of Escape and Failed attempt** *How does Douglass give the other slaves hope for liberty?*
10. Sent to Fell's Point: *What does Douglass communicate in the long paragraph of speakerless commands? He calls Fell's Point a "school." What does he learn in this school?*
11. Mchugh takes Douglass into his house: *What do Douglass' thoughts turn to during his leisure time?*

Chapter 11

1. Introduction: *What virtue does Douglass exercise in not telling all the facts of his escape?*
2. First steps to freedom: *What thoughts tie Douglass to the South and slavery that make escape more difficult?*
3. **Freedom:** *Why is Douglass not happy when he gets to a free state?*
4. Mr. Ruggles: *What virtues does Douglass admire in Mr. Ruggles?*
5. New Bedford: *Does Douglass achieve what he wanted? What does he achieve?*
6. Conclusion: *Why is this a fitting conclusion? What emotions does he appeal to? How does he reestablish his ethos?*

Appendix

1. **Clarifying his thoughts on Christianity:** *What is Douglass' view of Christianity?*

***Suggested use:*** This study guide includes a few questions and observations about Frederick Douglass' *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.