



Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass Essay

Focus: Theme

Objective

The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is a powerful book imbued with a wealth of themes that apply to the human condition. Some possible themes may explore the effect of slavery on the enslaved people, the effect of slavery on the enslavers, the power of education to disrupt the status quo, the role of religion to support slavery, and the role of religion in supporting abolition, but there are many, many more possible themes as well. Write a five paragraph essay that explores a theme of your choice, supported with three quotes supplied below.

Quotes

Chapter 1

- “By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters to keep their slaves thus ignorant” [The intentional ignorance of slaves plays an important role in Frederick’s understanding of the system.] (Education)
- “He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding” [This is an important point that Frederick will continue to make throughout the narrative.] (History)
- “It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass”

Chapter 2

- “The same traits of character might be seen in Colonel Lloyd’s slaves, as are seen in the slaves of the political parties” (History) *
- “Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery” (p. 32).

Chapter 3

- Slave maxim: “a still tongue makes a wise head” (English)

Chapter 4

- Maxim laid down by slaveholders: “It is better that a dozen slaves suffer under the lash, than that the overseer should be convicted, in the presence of the slaves, of having been at fault”
- “To be accused was to be convicted, and to be convicted was to be punished” [Another important point that continues throughout the narrative.] (History)
- “He dealt sparingly with his words, and bountifully with his whip, never using the former where the latter would answer as well”

Chapter 5

- “I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor”

Chapter 6

- “If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master”
- “I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty—to wit, the white man’s power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom” (Education)
- “In learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both” (Education) *
- “A city slave is almost a freeman, compared with a slave on the plantation”

Chapter 7

- “Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her [Mrs. Auld] of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness”
- “The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell”
- “I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out” (Education) *
- “White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters”

Chapter 8

- “At this moment [valuation of the property], I saw more clearly than ever the brutalizing effects of slavery upon both slave and slaveholder”
- “The hearth is desolate. The children, the unconscious children, who once sang and danced in her presence, are gone. She gropes her way, in the darkness of age, for a drink of water. Instead of the voices of her children, she hears by day the moans of the dove, and by night the screams of the hideous owl. All is gloom. The grave is at the door”

Chapter 9

- “After his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty” [This is an important point that Frederick continues to make throughout the rest of the narrative.]
- “He would quote this passage of Scripture—’He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes’”
- “He resolved to put me out, as he said, to be broken”
- “Master Thomas was one of the many pious slaveholders who hold slaves for the very charitable purpose of taking care of them”

Chapter 10

- “I do verily believe that he sometimes deceived himself into the solemn belief, that he was a sincere worshipper of the most high God; and this, too, at a time when he may be said to have been guilty of compelling his woman slave to commit the sin of adultery”
- “Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!”
- “Those beautiful [sailing] vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thought of my wretched condition” (English) *
- “You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man” (p. 77).
- “He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery” (English)
- “I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact” (English)
- “The mode here adopted [is] to disgust the slave with freedom, by allowing him to see only the abuse of it” (Education) *
- “I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,-a justifier of the most appalling barbarity,-a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds,-and a dark shelter under, which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection” (
- “In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and almost certain death if we failed” (History)
- “All at once, the white carpenters knocked off, and said they would not work with free colored workmen. Their reason for this, as alleged, was, that if free colored carpenters were encouraged, they would soon take the trade into their own hands and poor white men would be thrown out of employment” (History)
- “I have observed this in my experience of slavery,-that whenever my condition was improved, instead of its increasing my contentment, it only increased my desire to be free, and set me to thinking of plans to gain my freedom. I have found that, to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one” (Education) *

Chapter 11

- “I have never approved of the very public manner in which some of our western friends have conducted what they call the underground railroad, but which I think, by their open declarations, has been made most emphatically the upperground railroad” (History)
- “He [Master Thomas, Frederick’s owner] told me, if I would be happy, I must lay out no plans for the future. He said, if I behaved myself properly, he would take care of me. Indeed, he advised me to complete thoughtlessness of the future, and taught me to depend solely upon him for happiness” (Education)
- “He [Master Hugh] received all the benefits of slaveholding without its evils; while I endured all the evils of a slave, and suffered all the care and anxiety of a freeman. I found it a hard bargain”
- “My object in working steadily was to remove any suspicion he might entertain of my intent to run away; and in this I succeeded admirably”
- “The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this- ‘Trust no man!’”
- “The name given me by my mother was, ‘Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey.’ I, however, had dispensed with the two middle names long before I left Maryland so that I was generally known by the name of ‘Frederick Bailey.’ I started from Baltimore bearing the name of ‘Stanley.’ When I got to New York, I again changed my name to ‘Frederick Johnson,’ and thought that would be the last change. But when I got to New Bedford, I found it necessary again to change my name. The reason of this necessity was, that there were so many Johnsons in New Bedford, it was already quite difficult to distinguish between them. I gave Mr. Johnson the privilege of choosing me a name”
- “I had very strangely supposed, while in slavery, that few of the comforts, and scarcely any of the luxuries, of life were enjoyed at the north, compared with what were enjoyed by slaveholders of the south. I probably came to this conclusion from the fact that northern people owned no slaves. I supposed that they were about upon a level with the nonslaveholding population of the south. I knew they were exceedingly poor, and I had been accustomed to regard their poverty as the necessary consequence of their being non-slaveholders. I had somehow imbibed the opinion that, in the absence of slaves, there could be no wealth, and very little refinement”
- “I found many [‘colored people’], who had not been seven years out of their chains, living in finer houses, and evidently enjoying more of the comforts of life, than the average of slaveholders in Maryland”
- “I went in pursuit of a job of calking; but such was the strength of prejudice against color, among the white calkers, that they refused to work with, and of course I could get no employment”
- “There was no work too hard-none too dirty. I was ready to saw wood, shovel coal, carry wood, sweep the chimney, or roll oil casks,-all of which I did for nearly three years in New Bedford, before I became known to the anti-slavery world” (Education)
- “It [speaking publicly against slavery] was a severe cross, and I took it up reluctantly. The truth was, I felt myself a slave, and the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down. I spoke but a few moments, when I felt a degree of freedom and said what I desired with considerable ease” (p. 119).

Procedures

1. The paper will be submitted electronically. This will affect the MLA style format.
2. Please use MLA standard format: **Calibri font, size 11**, double-spaced.
3. Use standard heading, not a cover page.
4. Each paragraph should be about 4-6 sentences long, not counting the quote.
5. Do not start the paragraph with a quote, unless it is the essay’s hook.
6. Paragraph one: include TAG (Title, Author, Genre) and a strong thesis statement. The thesis statement will discuss your chosen theme.
7. Paragraphs two, three, and four: support your thesis with one quote per paragraph. Explain the situation surrounding the quote and how it supports your theme. Use in-paragraph citation.
8. Paragraph five: conclusion. Discuss briefly how the situations explored in paragraphs two through four support your thesis.

9. Include a Works Cited page.

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