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Frederick Douglass High School Summer Project Grade Level-English 9

Text: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.



Overview

In 1845 Frederick Douglass published what was to be the first of his three autobiographies: the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. As the title suggests, Douglass wished not only to highlight the irony that a land founded on freedom would permit slavery to exist within its midst, but also to establish that he, an American slave with no formal education, was the sole author of the work. Written in the years following his 1838 escape from his Maryland slaveholder, the narrative reveals numerous instances of Douglass's courage on his journey from slave to free man. Douglass himself punctuates this route by sharing with the reader his tenacious and ingenious efforts at learning how to read and write, his risky physical opposition to a "nigger-breaker," and his escape to New York. These courageous acts pale, however, beside his most overt and possibly dangerous act: the publishing of his autobiography before his freedom had been purchased. Indeed, in 1845 Douglass was still legally a slave; at any time he could have been betrayed, hunted down, captured and returned to his master who, more than likely, would have sold Douglass further down South as punishment. It was not until 1847, while Douglass was traveling and lecturing in England that friends bought his freedom. For Douglass, however, his personal declaration of freedom and independence occurred two years earlier with his *Narrative*.

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The *Narrative* in itself is remarkable for the views on slavery and slaveholders that Douglass bravely presents. First, Douglass asserts his humanity in the face of the dehumanizing institution of slavery. In doing so, he sets an example to other slaves to insist upon their humanity, and he persuades his reading audience to acknowledge this humanity, too. He claims as his intellectual birthright the opportunity to learn to read and write. He refuses to accept anything less than his own physical, spiritual, and intellectual freedom. Moreover, he never hesitates to criticize directly—often with withering irony—those who uphold slavery and those who prefer a romanticized version of it. Pitilessly, Douglass offers the reader a first-hand account of the pain, humiliation and brutality of the South's "peculiar institution." His is not an account of moonlight, magnolias, and happily singing workers. Instead, he points out the cruelty and the corrupting influence of power not only on the victim, but also on the perpetrator—the slave holder. Lastly, Douglass's *Narrative* is a courageous work because it confronts the misuse of Christianity in perpetuating the widely held belief in the slave owner's "God-given" right to own or sell other human beings.

Part one: Comprehension
Sequence of Events Graphic Organizer

Directions: As you read each chapter of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* keep track of the sequential events of the story on this graphic organizer. For each event write the chapter, use appropriate sequencing transitions, and write complete sentences.

Sequencing Transition Words	
Beginning Events-	Initially, First, to begin with, In the first place
Middle Events	Next, after, soon, then, next, later,
Final Events	Finally, subsequently, last

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Chapter _____	Chapter _____	Chapter _____
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Part Two: Analysis-200 points

Terms to Know

Persuasion- Persuasion is a literary technique that writers use to present their ideas through reasons and logic to influence the audience. It is an art of effective speaking and writing in which writers make their opinions believable to the audience through logic, invoking emotions and by proving their own credibility also called **Logos, Pathos and Ethos.**(Aristotle)

Logos-appeal to reason

Pathos-appeal to emotion

Ethos-the persuasive appeal to one's character

Although they can be analyzed separately, these three appeals work together in combination toward persuasive ends.

Other Terms

Imagery- Imagery is the author's use of words to help readers gain a visual depiction of his/her story. Imagery makes use of particular words that create visual representation of ideas in our minds. The word imagery is associated with mental pictures.

Irony- is a [figure of speech](#) in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that may end up in quite a different way than what is generally anticipated. In simple words, it is a difference between the appearance and the reality. Types of irony include Verbal, Dramatic and Situational

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Repetition- Repetition is a literary device that repeats the same words or phrases a few times to make an idea clearer.

Denotation – Denotation is the literal dictionary meaning of a word. For example, a bull is an animal.

Connotation – Connotation refers to a meaning that is implied by a word apart from the thing which it describes explicitly. Words carry cultural and emotional associations or meanings in addition to their literal meanings or denotations. For example if a person is called a bull it could mean he or she is stubborn.

Analogy- An analogy is a comparison in which an idea or a thing is compared to another thing that is quite different from it. It aims at explaining that idea or thing by comparing it to something that is familiar.

Tone- Tone, in written composition, is an attitude of a writer toward a subject or an audience. Tone is generally conveyed through the choice of words or the viewpoint of a writer on a particular subject.

Theme- Theme is the overall message that an author conveys in a piece of literature.

Author's purpose-

Point of View-The perspective from which a story is told. It is the angle of considering things, which shows us the opinion, or feelings of the individuals involved in a situation. POV could be first person, third person limited or third person omniscient.

Activity One-Read the passage below from chapter 2. As you read, note the underlined words in the passage and consider the following questions.

What effect does the repetition of certain words have on the reader?

Which words serve as strong images?

Which verbs seem particularly strong?

What rhetorical appeals—logos, ethos, pathos—is Douglass using? Is he effective?

Why?

He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an old aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped the longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he swing the blood-clotted cow skin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to

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pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it."

Now write a response to this passage. Explain the rhetorical appeals used in this passage. What do all of the details add up to? Is Douglass effective in this passage? Why or why not?

Activity Two- In chapter two of his narrative, Douglass notes the many deprivations slaves experienced. In the extract below he makes a comparison. As you read, underline the two things that are been compared in the extract. Then answer the question below.

Few privileges were esteemed higher, by the slaves of the out-farms, than that of being selected to do errands at the Great House Farm. It was associated in their minds with greatness. A representative could not be prouder of his election to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out-farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm."

Questions:

What comparison does Douglass make in the extract? What point is he trying to make and what is his tone?

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Activity Three: Read the paragraph below in which Douglass introduces the spirituals, or songs, that the slaves would sing on their way to the Great House: Underline the words that Douglass uses to describe the songs and then answer the questions below.

The slaves selected to go to the Great House Farm, for the monthly allowance for themselves and their fellow-slaves, were peculiarly enthusiastic. While on their way, they would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out-if not in the word, in the sound;--and as frequently in the one as in the other. They would sometimes sing the most pathetic sentiment in the most rapturous tone, and the most rapturous sentiment in the most pathetic tone. Into all of their songs they would manage to weave something of the Great House Farm. Especially would they do this, when leaving home. They would then sing most exultingly the following words:

"I am going away to the Great House Farm!

O, yea! O, yea! O!"This they would sing, as a chorus, to words which to many would seem unmeaning jargon, but which, nevertheless, were full of meaning to themselves. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery, than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject would do."

Questions

What seems to be the tone of the song "Great House Farm" and why?

What is the denotative meaning of the "Great House"?

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What is the connotative meaning of "Great House"?

Activity Four- Read the passage below. Underline key words and phrases that describe the meaning and feeling behind the slaves' singing of spirituals (songs). Circle words and phrases that describe how Douglass feels about slavery.

I did not, when (I was) a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle, so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit, and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. . . To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery. I can never get rid of that conception. Those songs still follow me, to deepen my hatred of slavery, and quicken my sympathies for my brethren in bonds. If any one wishes to be impressed with the soul-killing effects of slavery, let him go to Colonel Lloyd's plantation, and, on allowance-day, place himself in the deep pine woods, and there let him, in silence, analyze the sounds that shall pass through the chambers of his soul,—and if he is not thus impressed, it will only be because "there is no flesh in his obdurate heart."

Write an explanation telling what the spirituals meant to Douglass. How does he express his feelings to the reader? Which rhetorical appeals does he use and how effective is he?

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Activity Six-Choose THREE PASSAGES, one passage each from chapters Eight, Nine and Ten of Douglass's *Narrative*. Locate uses of ethos, pathos, or logos within the passages and write a brief response reviewing the effect of the persuasive appeal. Is it persuasive and why?

Passage	Rhetorical Appeal	Effect of persuasive appeal
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1. Justice for slaves is different from justice for whites.

1.1. _____

1.2. _____

2. No one can be enslaved if she or he has the ability to read, write, and think.

2.1. _____

2.2. _____

3. The way to enslave someone is to keep them from all learning.

3.1. _____

3.2. _____

4. Slaves were treated no better than, sometimes worse than, livestock.

4.1. _____

4.2. _____

5. Slaves were not granted basic humanity.

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5.1. _____

5.2. _____

6. Slavery harmed slave holders as well as slaves.

6.1. _____

6.2. _____

7. Slave holders use Christianity hypocritically to justify their actions.

7.1. _____

7.2. _____