

# **The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass Book Notes**

**The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass**

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## Author/Context

Frederick Douglass was born in Talbot County, Maryland. The date of his birth is estimated to be around the year 1818. His mother was a slave named Harriet Bailey. His father was generally acknowledged to be a white man, quite possibly his master, Captain Anthony. As a young boy, Douglass lived the typical life of a slave on a Southern plantation. He suffered through constant hunger and cold. He was also exposed to the extreme barbarity of slavery.

In 1826, at the age of seven or eight, Douglass was sent to live in Baltimore with Captain Thomas Auld's brother, Hugh Auld and his wife, Sophia. Douglass was overjoyed at the prospect of moving to the city. The move to Baltimore was considered to be the first major turning point in Douglass's life. There, Douglass learned how to read and write. At the age of twelve, Douglass was able to get a copy of Caleb Bingham's book, *The Columbian Orator*. In it, Douglass found the short piece entitled "Dialogue Between a Master and Slave" by John Aikin to be the most instrumental in fueling his desire for freedom. Another noteworthy experience in Baltimore-not mentioned in the narrative-is his religious awakening. During the dispirited times of his adolescent age, he found great support from quite a number of religious people.

Because of a dispute between the two brothers, in 1833, at the age of fifteen, Douglass was sent back to Talbot County to live with his old master, Captain Thomas Auld. Douglass and Captain Thomas did not get along, mainly because Douglass had no respect for him as a slaveholder. Wanting to break him, Captain Thomas sent Douglass to work for a reputed "nigger-breaker," Mr. Edward Covey. After six months of constant work and beatings, Douglass decided that he would fight back or die. After engaging Mr. Covey in a fight for two hours, Douglass was never harmed again. This event is described as another major turning point for Douglass-the day he became a man. After a year working for Mr. Covey, Douglass worked for Mr. Freeland, whom Douglass described as the best master he ever had. In 1836, Douglass and some other slaves attempted an unsuccessful escape. Douglass was put in jail, but somehow, Captain Auld sent him once again to live with his brother in Baltimore. Back in Baltimore, Douglass learned how to calk (caulk) and was soon making money for Mr. Hugh Auld. He was involved with a group of free Negroes who called themselves the East Baltimore Improvement Society, where he first developed his oratory skills. He also met his future wife, Anna Murray, at a social gathering of a Methodist congregation. She was a free Black woman who provided Douglass with further motivation to escape. Finally, on Monday, September 3, 1838, Douglass escaped to his freedom, reaching New York by train.

Upon settling in New Bedford, Massachusetts, Douglass started his career as an abolitionist after speaking at a state Anti-Slavery Society meeting in Nantucket. Douglass wrote the story of his narrative and it was published in May 1845, instantly becoming a best seller. He wrote two more memoirs, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881). He became a sought-after speaker for the abolitionist movement in the states and abroad. He also took on various



journalistic responsibilities for the anti-slavery cause. Frederick Douglass served in many government positions, using his power to defend human rights, including slaves and woman. He died in Washington D.C. on February 20, 1895, at around the age of 77.

Frederick Douglass's narrative is considered to be the greatest among the rich genre of slave narratives. Houston Baker Jr. writes, "Douglass's work is an American classic that has only recently received the sophisticated scholarly exegesis (criticism) it so richly deserves."

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# Plot Summary

Frederick Douglass begins his narrative with his birth in Talbot county, Maryland. He estimates that at the time of his writing, in the early 1840's, he is twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. Little is known about the facts of his childhood. He remembers having met his mother a few times. Rumor has it that his father was a white man, possibly his master, Captain Anthony. At a young age, Douglass goes to live at the Great House Farm, the home plantation of Colonel Lloyd who is a rich landowner in Talbot county. Growing up at the Great House Farm, Douglass experiences the harshness of slavery. He is constantly cold and hungry. He even witnesses Captain Anthony whipping his Aunt Hester until she is bloodied. In Talbot county, a slave has no rights. In one instance, Mr. Austin Gore, the overseer of the Great House Farm, shoots a slave in cold-blood for refusing to obey his orders. His explanation that slavery will end if even one slave gets away with disobedience is accepted and he faces no punishment. There are many cases like these in Talbot county.

At the age of seven or eight, Douglass is sent to live with Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Auld in Baltimore. Douglass regards his move to Baltimore as the first major step toward freedom. At first, Mrs. Sophia Auld is generous and kind. But when Mr. Auld rebukes her for attempting to teach Douglass how to read, she becomes a different person. Slavery turns her from an angelic person to a cruel, bitter slaveholder. Because of Mr. Auld's condemnation of reading, Douglass sets upon the task of learning how to read. He succeeds by asking the white kids around the neighborhood. At around twelve years of age, Douglass reads *The Columbian Orator*, a book about ideas such as liberty, justice, and truth. In reading the book, Douglass realizes that knowledge brings forth both enlightenment and misery. Douglass makes the decision that someday he will attempt to escape to his freedom. Thinking that he might have to write his own pass one day, he teaches himself how to write. When Captain Anthony dies, Douglass returns to Talbot County to be evaluated for the division of property. Douglass is sent back to Baltimore but two years later, Mr. Hugh Auld has a falling out with his brother, Thomas Auld, and Douglass is sent back to live with his old master.

Having lived in the city, life in the country with Captain Thomas Auld is difficult for Douglass. Furthermore, Captain Auld finds religion and Douglass sees him as a religious hypocrite. Captain Auld, on the other hand, believes that city life has spoiled Douglass and has made him unfit to be a slave. To have him broken, Captain Auld sends Douglass to work for Mr. Edward Covey, a farm renter with a reputation for being a "nigger breaker." The first six months working for Mr. Covey is the darkest time of Douglass's life. He is overworked and constantly beaten. One day, after getting beaten badly by Mr. Covey, Douglass tries to get help from Master Thomas. When that fails, he decides to fight back or die trying. After a two-hour duel with Mr. Covey, Douglass comes out with the conviction that anyone who attempts to beat him again will face retaliation. After the fight, Mr. Covey does not touch him again. After working for Mr. Covey, Douglass is sent to work for Mr. Freeland. Douglass finds him to be a fair and respectable master. After a year, Douglass rounds up a group of slaves who are willing to escape with him. But on the day of their planned departure, they are betrayed and



eventually caught and thrown in jail. The others are soon released, but Douglass, having been the mastermind of the escape, is held longer. Captain Auld takes him home and sends him again to Baltimore.

In Baltimore, Douglass is sent to a shipyard to learn how to calk. The first shipyard that he goes to, he ends up in a fight with some of the white workers. Badly beaten, Douglass is sent to another shipyard. Finally, he learns to calk and begins earning good money. He convinces Mr. Hugh Auld to allow him to hire out his time, meanwhile planning his escape. On September 3, 1838, Douglass succeeds in reaching New York—finally a free man. Through the help of abolitionists, he is able to settle in New Bedford, Massachusetts with his wife, Anna. As a free man, Douglass involves himself in the abolitionist movement, eventually becoming one of the most influential speakers against slavery in American history.



## Major Characters

**Frederick Douglass:** Author of the narrative, he recounts the journey from his days in slavery to his eventual escape to freedom. Writing as an abolitionist, he decries the practice of slavery and depicts the dehumanizing effects of slavery on both the slaves and the slaveholders. His narrative is a first-hand, eyewitness account of his experiences as a slave. His father is rumored to be a white man, perhaps even his first master, Captain Anthony. Through many trials and ordeals, Douglass goes from a slave boy on a Southern plantation to the greatest ex-slave orator of the abolitionist movement.

**Captain Anthony:** Frederick Douglass's master and rumored to be his father, he is a small-time slaveholder with three farms and about thirty slaves. He is the superintendent for the rich landowner, Colonel Lloyd. Captain Anthony has two sons, Andrew and Richard and one daughter, Lucretia. Captain Anthony is a cruel man. Douglass's first horrifying experience of slavery is when Captain Anthony whips his Aunt Hester. When Captain Anthony passes away, Douglass is taken into the possession of Mrs. Lucretia Auld.

**Captain Thomas Auld:** Mrs. Lucretia's husband, young Douglass is sent to Baltimore to live with Captain Thomas Auld's brother, Hugh Auld. Two years after Mrs. Lucretia's death, Thomas has a falling out with his brother and takes Douglass back to live with him at St. Michael's. Captain Thomas Auld is an incompetent slaveholder who has neither the ability nor courage to hold slaves. At a religious meeting he 'finds religion' and becomes extremely religious. However, Douglass sees no change in his depraved nature and considers him a religious hypocrite. After Douglass's unsuccessful attempt to escape, Captain Auld sends him back to his brother Hugh in Baltimore.

**Colonel Lloyd:** A rich landowner in Talbot County, he owns about four hundred slaves in more than twenty farms. He lives in a place called the Great House Farm, where all transactions take place. Slaves from the surrounding farms consider it the highest honor to serve in the Great House Farm. Colonel Lloyd owns so many slaves that he does not know them all and they all do not know him. Douglass spends a part of his childhood at the Great House Farm running errands for Ms. Lucretia Auld and Master Daniel Lloyd, Colonel Lloyd's son.

**Mr. Austin Gore:** The man who replaces Mr. Hopkins, Gore has all the qualities of a first-rate overseer: ambition, discipline, and workmanlike severity. Mr. Gore shoots and kills a slave named Demby because he would not listen to his warnings. He defends himself by making the argument that if slaves are not punished for disobedience, it will be mean the end of slavery. His explanation is accepted and his reputation as a quality overseer spreads.

**Mr. Hugh Auld:** The brother of Thomas Auld, Douglass is sent to live with Hugh in Baltimore where he spends seven years before he is sent back because of a dispute between the brothers. After an unsuccessful escape attempt at St. Michael's, Douglass



is sent back to Hugh. When Douglass first arrives in Baltimore, Mr. Auld rebukes his wife for teaching Douglass how to read. On Douglass's second stay in Baltimore, Mr. Auld trains him in the calk trade. Douglass detests giving up his weekly pay to his owner.

**Mrs. Sophia Auld:** The wife of Mr. Hugh Auld. When she first meets Douglass, she greets him with a kind face and a smile. She treats him like a human being and even begins to teach him how to read. But after getting rebuked by her husband for teaching Douglass how to read, she turns from a gentle soul to a cruel slaveholder. Douglass uses her case to point out that slavery has a menacing effect on both the slaves and the slaveholders.

**Mr. Edward Covey:** A farm renter with a reputation for being a 'nigger breaker.' Captain Thomas Auld makes Douglass work for him so that he can be broken. Mr. Covey is known as 'the snake' because it is his nature to deceive. He is a hard worker and he makes his slaves work hard by sneaking up on them. For the first six months, Douglass suffers greatly under Mr. Covey. After one severe beating, Douglass tries to seek shelter from Master Thomas but to no avail. He decides then to fight back if attacked. After a two-hour battle with Mr. Covey, Douglass gets the better of him. As a result, Douglass becomes a true man, not fearing anyone. For the next six months, Douglass is not beaten again.

**Mr. William Freeland:** After his service to Mr. Covey, Douglass goes to work for Mr. Freeland, a fair and respectable slaveholder. Douglass considers Mr. Freeland the best master he had before becoming his own master. Unlike many slaveholders, Mr. Freeland has no religious pretensions. While working for Mr. Freeland, Douglass tries an unsuccessful escape with two of Mr. Freeland's slaves. Mr. Freeland's mother blames Douglass for corrupting the minds of her slaves.

### **Minor Characters**

**Harriet Bailey:** Frederick Douglass's mother, she is described as being dark. As was the custom, Douglass is separated from his mother as an infant. She makes several twelve-mile trips to see her son. She dies when Douglass is about seven years old, but he does not get to go to her burial.

**Isaac and Betsy Bailey:** Frederick Douglass's grandparents, they are described as being dark in color. Betsy Bailey raises Douglass until he is old enough to live at Colonel Lloyd's plantation. Douglass regards the treatment of his grandmother as one of the greatest injustices of slavery.

**mulatto:** Term for children of mixed races. There is a growing number of mulatto children from slave women and their white masters. White mistresses especially treat mulatto children harshly. They are sold by their masters who are, in many cases, also their fathers.

**Hester:** Douglass's aunt, she is a woman of few superiors in appearance. She is severely beaten by Captain Anthony for being with a slave named Ned Roberts, whom



he has forbidden her to see. Captain Anthony ties her up and whips her. For Douglass, it is the first time experiencing the barbarity of slavery.

**Ned Roberts:** A slave of Colonel Lloyd, he is referred to as Lloyd's Ned. Douglass's Aunt Hester is forbidden to see him. She is severely whipped for being found with him.

**Andrew:** Captain Anthony's eldest son, he is a cruel and heartless man. After his father's death, he beats Douglass's brother and warns Douglass that he will receive the same if he comes under his possession. He dies shortly after Douglass goes back to Baltimore.

**Richard:** Captain Anthony's youngest son, he dies before his father does, leaving the rest of the estate to his brother, Andrew, and his sister, Lucretia.

**Lucretia:** Captain Anthony's daughter, she is married to Captain Thomas Auld. As a young boy, Douglass runs errands for Mrs. Lucretia. After the death of her father, Douglass comes under her possession. She sends him back to Baltimore, to her brother-in-law, Mr. Hugh Auld. She dies shortly after Douglass goes to Baltimore.

**Mr. Severe:** An overseer at the Great House Farm, he dies shortly after young Douglass arrives. A cruel man known for constantly swearing, the slaves consider his death an act of merciful divine providence.

**Mr. Hopkins:** The overseer of the Great House Farm, he is the replacement for Mr. Severe. Mr. Hopkins is quiet, reserved, and fair; the slaves consider him a good overseer. Mr. Gore replaces him, perhaps because he lacks the severity Colonel Lloyd looks for in an overseer.

**Old and Young Barney:** Father and son slaves of Colonel Lloyd who are given the task of maintaining the prized stable of horses, they are constantly beaten for any reason, often at the whims of their white masters.

**Jacob Jepsen:** A slave owner whose slaves often get into arguments with the slaves of Colonel Lloyd over which master is better. Jacob Jepsen's slaves claim that their master can lick Colonel Lloyd and Colonel Lloyd's slaves argue that their master is richer than Jacob Jepsen is.

**Demby:** A slave that is shot to death by Mr. Austin Gore for trying to avoid getting whipped. There is no legal action taken for his death.

**Master Daniel Lloyd:** Colonel Lloyd's son, on the Great House Farm. Young Douglass spends most of his leisure time going hunting with Master Daniel Lloyd.

**Cousin Tom:** Douglass eagerly anticipates his arrival in Baltimore because of the good things he hears from Cousin Tom. Cousin Tom tells him that Baltimore is more splendid and majestic than anything he has seen in Talbot County.



**Thomas:** The son of Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Auld, he is of grammar school age when Douglass begins his quest to learn how to read. Douglass uses Thomas's copybook to also learn how to write.

**Henrietta:** Douglass acknowledges that in Baltimore, slaves are treated more humanely than in the country. Henrietta is an exception, as her mistress constantly whips her.

**Mary:** Along with Henrietta, Mary is another slave girl in Baltimore who is constantly whipped. She is so often mistreated that she is known as 'pecked' rather than by her name.

**white kids (in Baltimore):** Douglass befriends as many white kids around the neighborhood as he can so that he can receive reading and writing lessons from them. He develops many friendships and although he wants to acknowledge some of them by name, for their sake he refrains.

**two Irishmen:** Two Irishmen that Douglass helps at the wharf. When they find out that he is a slave, they urge him to escape. Douglass sets it upon his heart to do what these two Irishmen advise.

**Whittier :** Out of all the injustices of slavery, Douglass finds that the way his grandmother is treated toward the end of her life is the cruelest. He quotes Whittier's poem about slavery, relating the line 'Gone, gone, sold and gone...' to his grandmother's fate in seeing her children and grandchildren taken away from her.

**Mr. George Cookman:** After Captain Thomas Auld's religious conversion, he hosts many preachers at his house. The slaves are most fond of Rev. George Cookman who is known to have convinced a rich slaveholder to emancipate his slaves. When he is around, the slaves pray that he can do the same for them.

**Mr. Wilson:** A young white man, he sets up a Sabbath school for the slaves to learn about the New Testament. After a few meetings, religious folks wielding sticks and weapons forcefully shut down the school.

**Henny:** A lame slave girl that Captain Thomas Auld considers a burden, after unsuccessfully trying to give her away, he throws her out to fend for her self.

**Master William Hamilton:** Captain Thomas Auld's father-in-law. Douglass allows the horses to get lost so that he can make his way to Master William Hamilton's house to get something to eat.

**Caroline:** A slave woman whom Mr. Covey purchases as a breeder, she is forced to shack up with another slave for the purpose of getting her pregnant. She gives birth to twins and Mr. Covey considers them a welcome addition to his wealth.

**Sandy Jenkins:** A superstitious old slave who advises Douglass to carry a certain root by his side for protection against Mr. Covey. At Sandy's persistence, Douglass tries it



and it seemingly works that Sunday. However, the effect of the root does not last long as Mr. Covey attacks Douglass the next day.

**Mr. Rigby Hopkins:** A reverend, who Douglass considers the greatest religious hypocrite, Mr. Hopkins is known to beat his slaves any chance he gets and justifies it through religion.

**Henry Harris:** A slave of Mr. Freeland, Douglass finds him to be of noble spirit and integrity. When a betrayer foils their escape plan, Henry refuses to be tied up and it takes several men to subdue him. Meanwhile, Douglass is able to rid himself of the fake pass.

**John Harris:** Another slave of Mr. Freeland, he is part of the group that attempts an escape.

**Henry Bailey:** Douglass's uncle, he is one of the slaves Douglass recruits to escape with him.

**Charles Roberts:** Douglass's uncle-in-law, he is part of the group of slaves that attempts an escape.

**Betsy Freeland:** Mr. Freeland's mother, she hands Henry Harris and John Harris some biscuits as they are taken away to jail. She then blames Douglass for corrupting them into wanting to escape.

**Mr. David Ruggles:** An abolitionist, he helps Douglass during his uncertain time in New York. Ruggles advises Douglass to settle in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

**abolitionists:** People committed to the emancipation of slaves. After his escape to the North, Douglass receives assistance from many abolitionists. Douglass himself becomes a world-renowned abolitionist.

**Anna:** Douglass's wife, she is a free woman in Baltimore before they are married.

**Mr. and Mrs. Nathan:** Abolitionists who aid Douglass in settling down in New Bedford. Mr. Nathan gives Douglass, who is previously known as Frederick Johnson, the surname 'Douglass.'

**Mr. William C. Coffin:** An abolitionist who, at a meeting in Nantucket, encourages Douglass to speak in front of a white audience for the first time about his experiences as a slave.



## Objects/Places

**Talbot County:** Frederick Douglass is born in Talbot county, Maryland, where he grows up on the plantation of Colonel Lloyd, a rich landowner. In Talbot county, it is common for slaves to be mistreated. Even murderers of slaves go unpunished.

**Great House Farm:** The name of Colonel Lloyd's plantation. Douglass spends his early childhood on the Great House Farm. The slaves of the surrounding farms consider working at the Great House Farm a great privilege.

**slave songs:** Songs with seemingly incoherent words that slaves sing. Some think the songs are evidence of the slave's happiness, but Douglass sees in them a slave's deepest anguish.

**Baltimore:** When Douglass is six or seven years old, he is unexpectedly sent to live in Baltimore with Captain Thomas Auld's brother, Hugh Auld. Douglass considers the move to Baltimore one of the most significant times in his life. There, he learns how to read and write. Baltimore is the place where he makes his eventual escape to freedom.

**The Columbian Orator:** A book that Douglass obtains when he is twelve years old, it opens up for him a whole new world of ideas such as freedom, truth, and liberty. After reading the book, Douglass is tormented by the new knowledge of his enslaved condition. Douglass is first introduced to the abolitionist movement through this book.

**abolitionist movement:** Douglass first comes across this term in the book, The Columbian Orator. After his escape, he is helped by abolitionists and eventually Douglass himself becomes one of the most influential abolitionists of his time.

**St. Michael's:** When Captain Thomas Auld has a falling out with his brother, Hugh, he takes Douglass back to live with him at St. Michael's. Douglass has been away in Baltimore for over seven years and it is difficult for him to adjust to country life again.

**vessels (ships):** In working for Mr. Covey, Douglass goes through a low point where he wants to take his life. He looks longingly at the vessels on the Chesapeake Bay because for him, they are symbols of freedom. It instills in him a flicker of hope that keeps him going.

**Chesapeake Bay:** The ships on the Chesapeake Bay make Douglass long once again for freedom. When Douglass makes his first escape attempt, he plans a route on the Chesapeake Bay.

**root:** The old slave Sandy Jenkins advises Douglass to carry a root by his right side in order to avoid Mr. Covey's impending punishment. At Sandy's insistence Douglass tries it and it works that Sunday when Mr. Covey does not do anything on his way to church. However, the next day Mr. Covey attacks Douglass. In the footnotes, Douglass mentions that such superstitions are common among the more ignorant slaves.



**Sabbath school:** A secret meeting of slaves that Douglass organizes to teach slaves how to read. The school meets on Sundays, and grows to over forty slaves. Douglass regards the teaching of these slaves as the most rewarding time of his life.

**pass:** For the escape, Douglass provides each person with a fake pass he has written just in case they are questioned. When they are caught before their escape attempt, Douglass gets rid of the evidence when Henry Harris causes a commotion with his refusal to be tied. On the way to jail, Douglass tells the others to eat the pass.

**Easton jail:** Douglass and the other slaves attempting to escape are tied and taken to the Easton jail. Shortly after their imprisonment, slave traders arrive with the anticipation that the captives would be put on sale.

**underground railroad:** The famous escape passageway in the west. Douglass does not support those associated with the underground railroad who publicize the methods of escape.

**New York:** Douglass finally succeeds in escaping to the free North when he arrives in New York by train.

**New Bedford:** Not feeling safe in New York, Douglass settles down in New Bedford, Massachusetts with the help of many abolitionists, mainly Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Johnson.

**Lady of the Lake:** The title of the book that Mr. Nathan Johnson uses to name Douglass, who is previously known as Frederick Johnson.

**North:** The area where slaves are legally free, the North represents the land of freedom for the slaves in the South.

**The Liberator:** An abolitionist newspaper, Douglass is introduced to the issues of the abolitionist movement through 'The Liberator.'

**Nantucket:** The place where Douglass first shares his experiences as a slave before a white audience.

**A Parody:** The title of a poem about slavery, Douglass uses it to criticize religious hypocrisy in America.



## Quotes

Quote 1: "The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slave the double relation of master and father." Chapter 1, pg. 49

Quote 2: "It was considered as being bad enough to be a slave; but to be a poor man's slave was deemed a disgrace indeed!" Chapter 3, pg. 63

Quote 3: "'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.'" Chapter 4, pg. 65

Quote 4: "it was worth a half-cent to kill a 'nigger,' and a half-cent to bury one." Chapter 4, pg. 69

Quote 5: "From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise." Chapter 5, pg. 75

Quote 6: "But, alas! this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon." Chapter 6, pp. 77-78

Quote 7: "'If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master-to do as he is told to do.'" Chapter 6, pg. 78

Quote 8: "A single word from the white men was enough-against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties-to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings." Chapter 8, pg. 90

Quote 9: "Will not a righteous God visit for these things?" Chapter 8, pg. 93

Quote 10: "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!" Chapter 10, pg. 105



Quote 11: "My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and 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. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me." Chapter 10, pg. 113

Quote 12: "But, by this time, I began to want to live *upon free land* as well as *with Freeland*; and I was no longer content, therefore, to live with him or any other slaveholder." Chapter 10, pg. 122

Quote 13: "He 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." Chapter 11, pg. 140

Quote 14: "Sincerely and earnestly hoping that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system, and hastening the glad day of deliverance to the millions of my brethren in bonds-faithfully relying upon the power of truth, love, and justice, for success in my humble efforts-and solemnly pledging my self anew to the sacred cause,-I subscribe myself, FREDERICK DOUGLASS." Appendix, pg. 159



# Topic Tracking: Dehumanization

## Chapter 1

Dehumanization 1: Douglass points out that slaveholders have cunningly established as law the designation of the children of slave women to follow the condition of their mothers so as to legally protect themselves from becoming their fathers. This law gives them free reign to act upon their lusts. Slave women are helpless victims of their white master's lusts. The other victims are the mulatto children who are severely mistreated, especially by their white mistresses because they represent their husband's infidelity. Mulatto children are most often sold off by their own fathers.

Dehumanization 2: When Douglass is a young boy, he witnesses for the first time a slave getting whipped. It is his Aunt Hester, who is stripped to her waist, put up on a hook, and whipped till she is bloodied. Douglass hides in a closet, thinking that he would be the next victim. This is Douglass's first encounter with the extreme cruelty of slaveholders.

## Chapter 4

Dehumanization 3: In Talbot county, killing a slave is often not considered a criminal offense. Slaveholders have little regard for their slaves' lives. Douglass recounts several murders where the perpetrator receives little or no punishment. There are many murders that go unpunished. There is a common saying among the white little boys that it is worth a half-cent to kill a slave and a half-cent to bury one.

## Chapter 5

Dehumanization 4: On the Great House Farm, young Douglass suffers from constant hunger and cold. He has to steal a corn bag so that he can keep warm sleeping on the cold, damp floors. Slave children go half-naked all year long and are fed food in a trough like pigs.

## Chapter 6

Dehumanization 5: Not only is slavery dehumanizing for the slaves, but for the slaveholders as well. Douglass presents the case of Mrs. Sophia Auld. Before becoming a slaveholder, she is pure, kind, and full of generosity. After becoming a slaveholder, there is an obvious transformation in her disposition. The menacing effects of slavery rob her of all her good qualities.

## Chapter 8

Dehumanization 6: After the death of Captain Anthony, Douglass goes back to Talbot county to be evaluated as property to be divided between Mrs. Lucretia and Master Andrew. All the slaves are ranked along with the animals. Slaves are forced to abandon friends, family, and familiar ties on the whims of the white slaveholders.



## Chapter 10

Dehumanization 7: Douglass is sent to work for Mr. Covey, a man known to break unruly slaves. Douglass considers the first six months working for Mr. Covey the darkest time of his life. He is overworked and constantly beaten. Douglass hits a low point in his life when he no longer wishes to read, think, or even live. He describes himself as having been transformed from a man into a brute.



# Topic Tracking: Freedom

## Chapter 2

Freedom 1: When Douglass is young, he does not understand the meaning of the slave songs with their incoherent lyrics. But in reflecting back, he admits upon hearing the songs a sense of pain, sorrow, and the first pangs of hatred for his enslaved condition. The slaves sing the songs as an expression of their deepest sorrow and longing for freedom; they are not proof, as some think, of their happiness and contentment.

## Chapter 4

Freedom 2: Mr. Austin Gore, who replaces Mr. Hopkins as overseer, is considered an excellent overseer because he instills fear into the hearts of the slaves. Mr. Austin Gore does not tolerate any hint of unruliness. When a slave runs off into a lake to avoid his whip, Mr. Austin Gore cold-bloodedly shoots him dead. When asked why he did such a thing, he answers that if they allow slaves to get away with even minor acts of disobedience, then other slaves will follow-meaning eventual freedom for the slaves. The slaveholders accept Mr. Austin Gore's explanation and there is no further censure about the murder.

## Chapter 5

Freedom 3: Douglass attributes his move to Baltimore as a divine providence of God. For Douglass, it is a major turning point in his life because the move serves as a first major step toward freedom. It is in Baltimore where he learns how to read and write.

## Chapter 6

Freedom 4: Douglass overhears Mr. Hugh Auld chastising his wife for attempting to teach him how to read. Mr. Auld tells her that if a slave learns to read, it will make him discontent and unhappy because of his longing for freedom. Mr. Hugh Auld believes that a content slave is an ignorant slave. Douglass takes it upon himself to learn how to read at whatever cost. Learning to read is an important step to freedom. It opens up for Douglass a whole new world of knowledge, previously kept from him.

## Chapter 7

Freedom 5: After his encounter with the two Irishmen at the wharf, Douglass is determined to run away to the North. To prepare, Douglass decides to learn how to write, thinking that someday, he might have to write his own pass to freedom.

## Chapter 8

Freedom 6: As Douglass prepares to move from Baltimore back to Talbot county, he regrets not having made an attempt to run away. He realizes that running away will be



more difficult in the country than in the city. But as he sets sail to go to St. Michael's, Douglass is once again revived with the determination to run away.

### **Chapter 10**

Freedom 7: At the low point of his life, Douglass looks at the vessels on the Chesapeake Bay. The noble ships with their majestic sails seem to symbolize freedom. He contrasts his condition of bondage with the freedom of the ships and it provides him with a flicker of hope that helps him endure the worst.

Freedom 8: It is customary for the slaveholders to give their slaves the days between Christmas and New Year's day as a time for them to enjoy themselves to the full. The slaveholders actually encourage the slaves to have as much fun and as much alcohol as they can handle. Douglass sees this as the slaveholders' scheme to keep the slaves at bay. They want to let the slaves experience the excesses of freedom so that the notion of freedom itself will be disgusting for them.

### **Chapter 11**

Freedom 9: Douglass finally makes his escape to freedom on September 3, 1838. He does not present the details of his escape so as to allow other slaves the same opportunities. Douglass criticizes those involved in the underground railroad in the west for publicizing the escape routes, which jeopardizes other slaves' chances of escaping.



# Topic Tracking: Religion

## Chapter 1

Religion 1: Douglass writes about the growing population of mixed children. They are quite common, so much so that a law has to be established to designate them as legally colored. For Douglass, this new class of mixed children nullifies the argument that slavery is justified in the scriptures. Some religious people believe that God cursed the descendants of Ham, therefore, they are condemned to a life of slavery. But the presence of mulatto children brings up the question: what about the children of mixed parentage? Does God curse them too?

## Chapter 2

Religion 2: When Douglass first arrives at Colonel Lloyd's plantation, the overseer in charge is Mr. Severe, a cruel and bitter man whom the slaves loathe. Shortly after Douglass's arrival Mr. Severe passes away. The slaves disliked him so much that they consider his death a blessing from God. They attribute it to God's merciful providence because the slaves consider the one who replaces him, Mr. Hopkins, a good overseer.

## Chapter 5

Religion 3: Out of all the slave children on the Great House Farm, Douglass is chosen to go live in Baltimore. Douglass ponders on this fateful turn of events and confesses that he has always believed slavery would not take hold of him. He attributes this conviction to God, saying that even at the lowest points of his life as a slave, he would be urged on by his faith in God.

## Chapter 8

Religion 4: Douglass regards the treatment of his grandmother as a great tragedy. After years of faithful service to her master, her family is sold off and she is left to die alone. In quoting a poem from Whittier, Douglass can only ask, "Will not a righteous God visit for these things?" The unjust fate of his grandmother makes Douglass question if God is indeed righteous.

## Chapter 9

Religion 5: Master Thomas finds religion in a Methodist camp meeting. But he does not become a kinder master. Although there are some religious folks, like Reverend George Cookman, who advocates the emancipation of slaves, Douglass finds many more instances of religious hypocrisy at St. Michael's. When a young white man sets up a Sabbath school for the slaves, it is closed down after a few classes by religious folks wielding weapons. Master Thomas's cruelty to slaves, especially to a crippled girl named Henny, makes Douglass question how his master can believe he is justified religiously. Master Thomas claims to hold slaves for the sake of taking care of them.



## Chapter 10

Religion 6: Douglass compares Mr. Freeland with some of the other masters he has had before. Mr. Freeland is the best master he has had, partly because he is not a religious hypocrite. However, many extremely religious masters are often the cruelest slaveholders. Douglass regards one such reverend, Mr. Rigby Hopkins, the greatest religious hypocrite. Mr. Hopkins beats his slave for any and every reason, using piety as his justification.

## Appendix

Religion 7: Douglass makes many critical remarks about religious hypocrisy. But he takes the subject matter seriously-to the point that he feels he needs to clarify his views of religion in an appendix. Douglass makes the clear distinction between the Christianity practiced by the slaveholders in the South with the Christianity of Jesus Christ. He regards the former as a distorted version of the latter, which is pure, loving, and sacred. Douglass is strongly against the former, but embraces the latter. And he regards his work as an abolitionist to be a sacred cause.



# Chapter 1

Frederick Douglass begins his narrative by placing his birth in Tuckahoe, Talbot county, Maryland. He does not know how old he is because his masters have deliberately kept it from him. Growing up, this is a great source of unhappiness for young Douglass. At the time of his writing, he estimates that he is between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age from having heard his master say in 1835 that he is almost seventeen years old. His mother's name is Harriet Bailey, daughter of Isaac and Betsy Bailey. Although they are all quite dark, it is generally acknowledged that his father is a white man, even rumored to be his master, Captain Anthony. Douglass does not know if this is true or not. As is the general custom, he is separated from his mother early in infancy and put under the care of his grandmother. Douglass recalls having met his mother several times, but only during the night. She would make the trip from her farm twelve miles away just to spend a little time with her child. She dies when Douglass is about seven years old. He is withheld from seeing her in her illness, death, and burial. Having limited contact with her, the news of her death, at the time, is like a death of a stranger. Thus, he never finds out who his father is. Douglass points out that many slave children have their masters as their father.

*"The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slave the double relation of master and father."* Chapter 1, pg. 49

Topic Tracking: Dehumanization 1

These mulatto children are often treated more harshly because they are a source of shame for the white mistress. She often takes great pleasure in seeing them beaten. Usually, the master sells his mixed children out of deference for his wife and ironically, as an act of humanity-that neither he, nor their white siblings be their tormentors. For Douglass, this growing class of children with mixed parentage nullifies the argument that slavery is scriptural because God has cursed the descendants of Ham only.

Topic Tracking: Religion 1

Douglass's master, Captain Anthony, is not considered a rich landowner. He owns two or three farms and about thirty slaves. Captain Anthony is a hard man. Douglass recalls the first time he witnesses a whipping. His aunt, Hester, a woman of few superiors in appearance, is caught with a slave named Ned Roberts, whom Master Anthony has forbidden her to see. He takes her into the kitchen, strips her to her waist, ties her hands, puts her on a hook, and whips her until she is bloodied. Thinking that he will be

next, Douglass hides in a closet. Before this incident, Douglass has never encountered such horror because he had grown up on the outskirts of the farm.

Topic Tracking: Dehumanization 2



## Chapter 2

Captain Anthony has two sons, Andrew and Richard, one daughter, Lucretia, and her husband, Captain Thomas Auld. Their house is part of a plantation owned by Colonel Lloyd, a rich landowner in Talbot county. Captain Anthony serves as his superintendent, overseeing a part of the plantation. Colonel Lloyd's home plantation has three to four hundred slaves and he owns many more in the twenty or so farms nearby. All major transactions go through the Colonel's home plantation, including the slave's rations. A slave is given just enough food, clothing, and shelter to get by. After a long day working in the fields, most slaves sleep on the cold, damp floor. When young Douglass is first brought to Colonel Lloyd's home plantation, the overseer in charge is Mr. Severe, rightly named because he is a cruel, bitter man who constantly swears. He dies shortly after Douglass's arrival and the slaves consider it a merciful providence. He is replaced by Mr. Hopkins, a quiet man, whom the slaves consider a good overseer.

Topic Tracking: Religion 2

The slaves on the neighboring farms consider it the greatest privilege to serve in Colonel Lloyd's home plantation, often called the Great House Farm. Slaves chosen to go to there sing songs that express their joy in going to the Great House Farm. Reflecting back, Douglass admits that as a slave, he did not see the meaning in the seemingly incoherent slave songs. But he recalls in hearing those songs, a sense of extreme pain and sorrow, the first pangs of his deep hatred of slavery. Douglass is astonished that some in the North consider the slave's singing as evidence of happiness. For Douglass, nothing is further from the truth; a slave's song actually expresses his deepest sorrow and misery. This anguish is disguised in the slave songs.

Topic Tracking: Freedom 1



## Chapter 3

Colonel Lloyd is famed for having a garden with the most luscious fruits. Many slaves on the plantation, especially the kids, get the whip for stealing the delectable fruits. To prevent theft, tar is put all around the fence and any slave found with it is severely punished. The slaves come to fear tar as much as a lashing. Colonel Lloyd is also famous for his stable of horses. Two slaves, Old and Young Barney, are given the difficult task of maintaining them. Colonel Lloyd is known to whip old and young Barney for any reason, whether justified or not. His three sons and his three sons-in-law all engage in the practice of punishing any slave they like for whatever reason they like.

Colonel Lloyd owns so many slaves that he does not know them all and they do not all know him. It is reported that one day as Colonel Lloyd is traveling, he meets a slave and asks him to whom he belongs. When the slave replies that he belongs to Colonel Lloyd, he asks the slave if his master treats him well. The slave, not knowing that he's speaking to his master, replies that he is not. Two or three weeks later, the unfortunate slave is taken away from family and friends and sold to a Georgia trader-for having answered truthfully. For similar reasons, slaves almost always answer positively when asked about their masters. Sometimes, slave masters have spies that report what they hear from their fellow slaves. Douglass admits that as a slave he has never spoken negatively about his masters.

Ironically, slaves are prejudiced, often arguing that their masters are the best. For instance, Colonel Lloyd's slaves would argue with Jacob Jepson's slaves over who has a superior master. These arguments almost always end up in a fight. Somehow, the slaves feel that the characteristics of their masters are transferable to them. Douglass writes, "It was considered as being bad enough to be a slave; but to be a poor man's slave was deemed a disgrace indeed!" Chapter 3, pg. 63



## Chapter 4

Mr. Austin Gore replaces Mr. Hopkins as overseer. Douglass does not know the reason for the change but guesses that Mr. Hopkins might have lacked the severity that Colonel Lloyd desires in an overseer. Mr. Austin Gore has all the qualities of a first-rate overseer. He follows the maxim, "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." Chapter 4, pg. 65 In one instance, a slave by the name of Demby, while being whipped by Mr. Gore, plunges himself into a creek, refusing to come out. Mr. Gore threatens that he will shoot him if he does not come out on the count of three. After counting to three with no success, Mr. Gore cold-bloodedly shoots and kills the poor slave. When asked by Colonel Lloyd and Captain Anthony why he did what he did, he replies that if a slave is able to get away with disobedience, then all the slaves will follow his example and it will mean freedom for the slaves. His defense is accepted and he receives no further censure. Mr. Gore's reputation as an excellent overseer spreads.

Topic Tracking: Freedom 2

Douglass laments that in Talbot county, Maryland, killing a slave is not treated as a criminal offense. He tells of a man who kills two slaves, one by hacking him to death with a hatchet. Although he brags about the grisly murders, he is never prosecuted. A woman reportedly beats Douglass's cousin to death with an oak stick for having fallen asleep while watching the woman's baby. This murder *does* produce a sense of horror in the community, but not enough for the perpetrator to come before the court. Another time, an old slave of Colonel Lloyd is shot to death for unknowingly trespassing onto private property. The murderer goes to Colonel Lloyd to explain what happened and the whole matter is hushed up. It becomes a common saying among the little white boys that "it was worth a half-cent to kill a 'nigger,' and a half-cent to bury one." Chapter 4, pg. 69

Topic Tracking: Dehumanization 3



## Chapter 5

As a young child, Douglass spends most of his time at Colonel Lloyd's plantation running errands for Mrs. Lucretia Auld. Most of his leisure time is spent in the company of Master Daniel Lloyd, who treats young Douglass well. However, Douglass experiences the pains of hunger and cold on a daily basis. On cold nights, Douglass sleeps in a stolen bag so that he does not freeze to death. Slave children are fed mush, or boiled corn meal, on a trough like pigs. The strongest and the fastest eats best, though none are ever satisfied.

Topic Tracking: Dehumanization 4

When he is seven or eight years old, Douglass is sent to Baltimore to live with Mr. Hugh Auld, the brother of Captain Thomas Auld. Douglass is overjoyed upon hearing the news. The three days leading up to his move to Baltimore is considered the happiest days of his life. He spends most of that time at the creek, "washing off the plantation scurf." Douglass takes to heart the task of cleaning himself because of Mrs. Lucretia's promise to provide him with a pair of trousers. Of leaving Colonel Lloyd's plantation he feels no sorrow or loss because his mother is dead, he seldom sees his grandmother, and his relationships with his two sisters and one brother are quite limited. He places great hope in going to Baltimore, having heard from Cousin Tom about its splendid, majestic beauty. Douglass arrives in Baltimore early Sunday morning and is greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Auld, along with their little son, Thomas. And on the beaming, kindly face of Mrs. Sophia Auld, Douglass encounters something never seen before on the face of a white master-kindness. Douglass points to his move to Baltimore as the first major step toward freedom. He attributes his selection among so many other children to go to Baltimore as an act of divine Providence.

*"From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise." Chapter 5, pg. 75*

Topic Tracking: Religion 3

Topic Tracking: Freedom 3



## Chapter 6

Mrs. Sophia Auld has never been a slaveholder. She is unlike any other white woman Douglass has ever known; she treats him like a human being. But soon, the menacing effects of slavery overcome her once gentle disposition.

*"But, alas! this kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon."* Chapter 6, pp. 77-78

Topic Tracking: Dehumanization 5

This change of character is a result of attempting to teach Douglass how to read. When her husband finds out, he rebukes her severely, telling her that "'If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master-to do as he is told to do.'" Chapter 6, pg. 78 He warns his wife that learning to read will be harmful to a slave because it would make him "discontented and unhappy." Douglass takes these warnings as a personal challenge to learn to read at whatever cost. He regards this knowledge as the pathway from slavery to freedom and he acknowledges the aid of both Mrs. Auld's initial teaching as well as Mr. Auld's adamant condemnation of it.

Topic Tracking: Freedom 4

There is a noticeable difference between the slavery of the city and that of the country. In Baltimore, slaveholders share a common sense of decency in their treatment of slaves. Slaves are seldom beaten and they are given enough to eat. There are, however, some exceptions. Douglass tells of two slaves, Henrietta and Mary, who are constantly whipped and poorly fed. The mistress of the house keeps a cowskin near her that she uses unceasingly on the poor girls. Mary is so often mistreated that she is known as "pecked" rather than by her name.



## Chapter 7

During the seven years in the Auld household, Douglass succeeds in learning how to read. This, he accomplishes through diligence and clever tactics. For not only does Mrs. Auld cease to teach him, she becomes extremely vigilant in preventing his further advancement, becoming harsher even than her husband. Douglass befriends as many white kids around the neighborhood as he can and receives lessons from them. He carries his lesson book with him so that whenever he has time between his errands, he studies. He exchanges bread for instruction, especially from the poorer white kids who have less to eat than he does. Although Douglass wishes to acknowledge some of these kids by name, he resists on account of not wanting to embarrass or harm them in any way. He recounts talking with some of them about his desire for freedom, and they would sympathize with his plight.

When Douglass is about twelve years old, he obtains a book entitled, *The Columbian Orator*. The book opens up for him a vast storehouse of ideas on freedom, truth, and liberty. But along with these newfound thoughts, there is also a painful realization of his current condition under slavery. The warnings of Mr. Auld come true—knowledge torments Douglass's soul. He comes to hate both the institution of slavery as well as the people who sustain it. Many times, Douglass regards learning as a curse rather than a blessing. But he becomes curious about the abolitionist movement, something he initially knows nothing about. One day, Douglass, unasked, helps two Irishmen unload at the wharf. Afterward, one of them asks if he is a slave for life. Douglass answers that he is. The Irishmen, quite affected, advise him to run away to the north. Douglass pretends to be uninterested, fearing that they might be treacherous men who collect reward money for escaped slaves. But he takes their advice to heart and resolves to run away at the proper time. Thinking that someday he might have to write his own pass to freedom, Douglass devotes his time to learning how to write. He begins by first studying the letters written on the timber at the shipyard. After learning a few letters, he then challenges the white boys to a writing contest. Every new letter learned is copied many times on any writing surface Douglass comes across, such as a fence, wall, or pavement. By this time, his master's son, Thomas, is in grade school. Whenever Douglass is left alone to take care of the house, he writes in Thomas's copybook until he is able to write a similar hand. After many tedious years, Douglass succeeds in learning how to write.

Topic Tracking: Freedom 5



## Chapter 8

About three years after moving to Baltimore, Douglass's master, Captain Anthony, passes away. Earlier, his youngest son, Richard dies. In order to divide the estate between the two remaining children, Andrew and Lucretia, young Douglass goes back to Talbot county as property to be evaluated. At the valuation, slaves young and old are ranked along with the horses, pigs, and cattle. The slaves wait anxiously to see where they are headed. Their fates are in the hands of the white men who make the decisions.

*"A single word from the white men was enough-against all our wishes, prayers, and entreaties-to sunder forever the dearest friends, dearest kindred, and strongest ties known to human beings."* Chapter 8, pg. 90

Topic Tracking: Dehumanization 6

Douglass fears that he might fall into the possession of Master Andrew, a man known to be heartless and cruel. More than the other slaves, Douglass is troubled because he knows what it is like to be treated kindly. A few days before the dividing of the property, Master Andrew beats Douglass's brother and warns Douglass that he will receive the same when he comes under his possession. Fortunately, he is taken by Mrs. Lucretia and sent to Baltimore again to live with Mr. Hugh Auld. This, Douglass attributes to another kind Providence. Shortly after his return to Baltimore, both Mrs. Lucretia and Master Andrew die, leaving all the slaves in the possession of strangers. Of all the cruel practices of slavery, Douglass considers the fate of his grandmother most unacceptable. After years of faithful service to her master and his children, after having cared for him from infancy to death, and after populating his plantation with her children and grandchildren, she is sent out to a remote little hut to die all alone. She watches as her children and grandchildren are divided like animals. Douglass quotes the famous poet Whittier: "Gone, gone, sold and gone..." (pg. 92). Douglass imagines her death, alone and without the presence of her loved ones. He asks, "Will not a righteous God visit for these things?" Chapter 8, pg. 93

Topic Tracking: Religion 4

Two years after the death of Mrs. Lucretia, Master Thomas Auld has a falling out with his brother Hugh. As retribution, he takes Douglass back to live with him at St. Michael's. This separation is not too disheartening for Douglass because Mr. Hugh Auld and his wife, Sophia, have become increasingly disagreeable. He feels more sorrow for having to leave the white boys of Baltimore, from whom he receives many lessons. Before his departure, Douglass regrets not having attempted an escape, knowing that it is much harder to do it in the country than a city. As he sets sail, Douglass is revived with the determination to run away.

Topic Tracking: Freedom 6



## Chapter 9

Douglass goes to live with Thomas Auld at St. Michael's in March 1832. His master is still the cruel man he had known over seven years ago at Colonel Lloyd's plantation. Having experienced many years of plentiful food in Baltimore, Douglass finds it particularly discomfoting to feel constant hunger again. The slaves of his house have to resort to begging or stealing to survive. Thomas Auld is a cruel slaveholder even by the standards of the country. Being married into his role as a slaveholder, Thomas Auld is completely lacking in the ability to hold slaves. He is mean, yet cowardly-sometimes firm, and mostly insecure. Because of his inconsistency, the slaves do not respect him. Instead of calling him "master" they address him as Captain Auld.

In August 1832, Captain Auld experiences religion in a Methodist camp meeting. This brings the slaves neither emancipation nor a kinder master. Captain Auld actually becomes worse. Before, his actions are of his own depravity; now, they are justified by his religion. While he becomes a leader of revivals and his house a place of refuge for many preachers, his slaves continue to suffer under his care. Among the preachers that stay at Captain Auld's house, the slaves are most fond of Mr. George Cookman, who is instrumental in getting a rich slaveholder to emancipate his slaves. Whenever Mr. Cookman is around, the slaves pray that the same might happen to them.

In St. Michael's, a young white man, Mr. Wilson, sets up a Sabbath school to instruct slaves on the New Testament. But after only three meetings, religious folks wielding sticks and weapons close down the class. An example of Captain Auld's religious hypocrisy is in his dealings with a lame young slave, Henny. Badly burned in childhood, she does not have use of her hands and therefore considered a financial burden. He tries to give her away and when that fails, he sets her out on her own, basically to die. He whips her whenever he wishes. Master Auld, in his religious piety, claims to hold slaves to take care of them.

Topic Tracking: Religion 5

Douglass and Captain Auld do not get along. Captain Auld considers Douglass to have been spoiled by life in the city. Sometimes Douglass would let the master's horse run away to the farm of Master William Hamilton, Captain Auld's father-in-law, just so that he can get something to eat. Despite several beatings, Douglass is not broken. For that expressed purpose, Captain Auld lends Douglass to Edward Covey, a farm renter with a reputation for being a "nigger breaker." Although he hears horror stories about Mr. Covey, Douglass is happy to move because at least he would get enough to eat.



## Chapter 10

On January 1, 1833, Douglass goes to live with Mr. Covey. Within a week, Douglass gets a severe whipping because he is unaccustomed to being a field hand. On one errand, Douglass undergoes two near-death experiences while driving oxen. Upon finishing his task, Douglass is punished for his incompetence. Mr. Covey takes Douglass out to the woods and beats him with switches. For the first six months of the year, Douglass is beaten regularly. Mr. Covey works his slaves to the point of exhaustion. A hard-working man himself, he gets the slaves to work hard at all times by sneaking up on them. Thus the slaves refer to him as "the snake." Mr. Covey's most prominent characteristic is to deceive. Douglass believes that Mr. Covey deceives himself into believing that he is a sincere worshipper of God. But his actions speak differently. In one instance, Mr. Covey purchases a slave named Caroline, an able-bodied woman, as a breeder. He hires a married slave to shack up with her for the purpose of getting her pregnant. She gives birth to twins and he regards them a welcome addition to his wealth. As for Douglass, he experiences his darkest days of slavery in the first six months working for Mr. Covey.

*"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!"* Chapter 10, pg. 105

Topic Tracking: Dehumanization 7

Douglass is broken to the point of wanting to take his life and that of Mr. Covey. But a flicker of hope keeps him going. Douglass looks longingly at the vessels on the Chesapeake Bay, with their white sails and their swift mobility. He contrasts his condition of bondage to the freedom of the noble ships. It produces in him an overwhelming desire to escape from slavery or die trying. He convinces himself to endure because a better day is coming.

Topic Tracking: Freedom 7

After six months of dreadful treatment, Douglass tells of an incident with Mr. Covey that turns him from a slave into a man. One hot day in August 1833, Douglass and three other slaves are put to work on fanning wheat. Douglass, seized by a sudden failure of strength, falls down from exhaustion. On hearing the fan stop, Mr. Covey comes over and gives him a swift kick in the side. After trying unsuccessfully to get up, Douglass lies on the ground expecting the worst. Mr. Covey strikes him on the head with a hickory slat and it causes blood to run down freely. Douglass takes a great risk and takes to the road, hoping to get protection from Master Thomas Auld at St. Michael's. After some five hours covering seven miles, Douglass finally arrives at his master's store, looking like a man who has barely escaped death. Douglass tells him what happened, but Master Thomas commands him to go back or else. The next morning, Douglass makes his way back, disappointed and without hope. On coming back, Mr. Covey wastes no time in



trying to beat him again. Douglass manages to hide in the cornfields. That night, Douglass runs into a slave named Sandy Jenkins. The old slave invites Douglass to his house and in hearing the story of Douglass's dilemma, advises him to carry a certain root that would protect him from harm. Although hesitant at first, Douglass agrees to give it a try. The next morning, following Sandy Jenkin's instructions, he carries the root upon his right side. To his surprise, Mr. Covey speaks to him kindly as he goes to church. The next morning, however, while Douglass is working in the stable, Mr. Covey comes in to beat him. As he is being tied up, Douglass fights back. After nearly two hours of struggle, Mr. Covey relents. Douglass feels that Mr. Covey has gotten the worst of the fight. Afterwards, Mr. Covey does not raise a hand against Douglass. This incident is an important turning point in Douglass's life.

*"My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and 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. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping, must also succeed in killing me."*  
Chapter 10, pg. 113

The only explanation Douglass has as to why Mr. Covey does not have him publicly punished for the crime of raising his hand against a white man is to keep his reputation as a first-rate overseer and "nigger-breaker." Douglass's service to Mr. Covey ends on Christmas day, 1833. The days between Christmas and New Year's day are holidays for the slaves. Douglass feels that the slaveholders give these days as an outlet for the slaves' otherwise dreary existence. It is not due to the kindness of the slaveholders. They use clever tactics such as encouraging the slaves to get drunk. In experiencing the negative excesses of freedom, the slave is then more tolerating of slavery. This principle of disgusting the slaves with the very things they desire is a common practice among the slaveholders.

Topic Tracking: Freedom 8

Douglass goes to work for Mr. William Freeland, a fair and respectable slaveholder who is devoid of religious pretensions. Of all the slaveholders he has known, the worst are the religious ones. He describes the conduct of one reverend, Mr. Rigby Hopkins, whom he considers the greatest religious hypocrite. He relishes beating his slaves and even considers the whippings his religious duty.

Topic Tracking: Religion 6

Mr. Freeland owns two slaves: Henry Harris and John Harris. Within a short period of time, Douglass rounds up a few slaves who want to learn how to read. They call it the Sabbath school because the meetings are on Sundays. Soon, over forty slaves, some from the surrounding farms, attend for the sheer joy of learning. Douglass regards teaching the slaves the most rewarding time of his life as a slave. He is overcome with emotion when he thinks about the slaves shut off from learning. In addition to the Sabbath school, Douglass teaches the slaves at home. The year passes without



Douglass having received one blow. He gives credit to Mr. Freeland, whom he considers the best master he has had before becoming his own master.

Douglass is hired for another year, but he resolves to not let the year pass without attempting an escape. Douglass expresses his sentiments with wordplay: "But, by this time, I began to want to live *upon free land* as well as *with Freeland*; and I was no longer content, therefore, to live with him or any other slaveholder." Chapter 10, pg. 122 Douglass recruits several other slaves to escape with him. They are Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Bailey (his uncle), and Charles Roberts (uncle-in-law). After much planning, they finally decide upon a plan to take a boat up the Chesapeake Bay during the Easter holidays. Douglass has to devote much of his energy into reassuring and encouraging the other slaves. The day of their intended escape, Douglass is overcome with a feeling that they are betrayed. It proves to be correct as Douglass and the others are rounded up.

Henry refuses to be tied up and there is a scuffle before he is eventually subdued. During the scuffle, Douglass is able to get rid of the pass that he has written for their escape. Before they are taken away, Mr. Freeland's mother, Betsy Freeland, hands Henry and John some biscuits. She rebukes Douglass for corrupting their minds to run away. On the way, Douglass tells Henry to eat his pass and he spreads the word to own nothing. They are taken to the Easton jail where they spend a couple of days. Slave traders come by like vultures to see if the slaves will be put up for sale. Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Freeland come and take the others home, leaving Douglass in jail all alone. After a week, Captain Auld comes to take Douglass home, intending to send him to Alabama. But instead, Douglass is sent to Baltimore once again to the home of Mr. Hugh Auld.

After being away for more than three years, Douglass returns to Baltimore. He is immediately hired to learn how to calk. But first, Douglass is put to work in assisting the shipbuilders. This requires Douglass to heed the orders of about seventy-five people; he is always at the beckoning call of someone needing help. For eight months Douglass endures the work until he gets into a fight with some white men who are against working with colored people. Douglass fights back, but is eventually badly beaten. Douglass's condition and story garners the sympathy of Master Auld. He goes to a lawyer, but the law states that without the testimony of a white man, nothing could be done about the incident. Master Hugh sends Douglass to another shipyard and he finally learns to calk. Within one year, Douglass earns the wages of the most experienced calkers, at times bringing in nine dollars per week. As Douglass's condition improves, he finds that his desire for freedom increases. During his leisure time, Douglass once again thinks about a possible path to freedom.



## Chapter 11

Douglass comes to the point in the narrative where he successfully makes his escape. He does not recount the details of his escape so that he does not reveal the secrets that would prevent other slaves from escaping. He even disapproves of some in the west that publicize their involvement in the underground railroad, citing that they should not hinder further escape attempts by enlightening the slaveholders of the methods of escape.

Before his escape, Douglass detests having to give up his hard-earned money to Master Hugh. Sometimes he would receive a cent per dollar he made, which he regards as insulting. He asks Master Thomas whether he could hire out his time to earn some extra money. Master Thomas refuses because he feels Douglass will try to escape. Later, Douglass asks Master Hugh who agrees on the condition that three dollars be paid to him every week. Also, Douglass would be responsible for his own living expenses. The deal is in Master Hugh's favor. Douglass observes, "He 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." Chapter 11, pg. 140 After several months of tireless labor, Douglass is able to set aside some money. But when he misses one week's payment because he goes away to a camp meeting in Baltimore, Douglass is no longer allowed to hire his time. It is then that Douglass decides to attempt his escape. To prepare, he finds employment at a shipyard and for three weeks, works hard to make Master Hugh happy with the money he makes for him. Nearing the date of his planned escape, Douglass struggles with having to leave his friends and loved ones in Baltimore. On September 3, 1838, Douglass succeeds in reaching New York, at last, a free man.

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As a stranger in a new place, Douglass undergoes a short period of intense loneliness and insecurity. But with the help of Mr. David Ruggles and other abolitionists, Douglass is able to settle down with his newly wedded wife, Anna, in New Bedford, Massachusetts. They are helped out by the abolitionists, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Johnson. Douglass, who at the time is referred to as "Frederick Johnson," decides to change his name again. Mr. Johnson suggests the surname "Douglass" from a book, *Lady of the Lake*, and it becomes his permanent name.

Douglass is surprised to find that the North, without slave labor, can be so prosperous. He discovers that the people of the North, both white and colored, live far better than even wealthy southerners. Douglass sees in Mr. Johnson, the embodiment of the free colored person of the North-refined, dignified, and generous. The colored people of the North are united in their efforts to help escaped slaves, in one case, scaring a colored betrayer with death. Douglass works for three years in various labor-intensive jobs before he becomes a well-renowned abolitionist. His interest in the abolitionist movement is fueled by reading *The Liberator*, a newspaper that stirs his soul in fighting for the anti-slavery cause. While attending an anti-slavery convention at Nantucket on

August 11, 1841, Douglass, with encouragement from Mr. William C. Coffin, speaks for the first time to a white audience about slavery. From that time on, Frederick Douglass becomes one of the foremost figures of the abolitionist movement.



## Appendix

Douglass writes an appendix to address the issue of religion. In the narrative, he makes several negative references to religion, but he does not want people to misunderstand his position. Douglass makes a distinction between Christianity proper and the Christianity of the slaveholders. He finds them incompatible; one is good, right, and pure, the other corrupt, evil, and hypocritical. Douglass provides many examples of the hypocrisies practiced by "pious" slaveholders. He compares them to the Pharisees of the bible. Douglass ends the appendix with a poem written by a northern Methodist preacher, titled A Parody. Douglass concludes,

*"Sincerely and earnestly hoping that this little book may do something toward throwing light on the American slave system, and hastening the glad day of deliverance to the millions of my brethren in bonds-faithfully relying upon the power of truth, love, and justice, for success in my humble efforts-and solemnly pledging my self anew to the sacred cause,-I subscribe myself, FREDERICK DOUGLASS."* Appendix, pg. 159

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