

AP Language and Composition

Summer Reading Questions of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*

Directions: Use the following questions to help you interpret your independent summer reading assignment. These questions are designed to help you read actively and make connections between the text to modern society and your own life.

Answer each of the questions in **hand-written** complete sentences, writing to the best of your ability. Select a minimum of three pieces of especially apt and relevant text evidence per question as preparation for our class. Document your evidence using correct MLA parenthetical documentation. The Purdue Owl Writing Center is a good resource to help you: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

These will be due within the first three weeks of the 2017-2018 school year.

1. One of the first things Frederick Douglass tells us about himself is that he doesn't know who his father was, that his mother died when he was very young, and that he hardly recognized his biological siblings as relatives. Discuss Douglass's attempts at replacing these foundational family relationships. What potential father or mother figures appear in the novel? Who might we qualify as new brothers and sisters? What, finally, can we say about Douglass's search for relationship? Is he finally successful, or not? Be sure to explain the significance of your findings.
2. In his preface to the *Narrative*, William Lloyd Garrison approves of the author's "manliness." Throughout the *Narrative*, Douglass himself gives constant attention to his desire to not only prove that he is human but also to prove that he is a "man." What assumptions about gender (gender = what sort of expected cultural behaviors make a person masculine or feminine) are revealed by a close reading of the *Narrative*? In other words, what does it mean to be a "man" (or to be "womanly"—cf. his description of Sophia Auld)? Discuss how Douglass uses these assumptions to help him make his point about slavery (remember to identify the point you think Douglass is trying to make). Additionally, using Douglass's insights and your own ideas, what qualities "make a man" today?
3. Think about the relationship between self and community. How does Douglass represent himself in relation to community? Define the various communities that Douglass identifies in his text. To what degree is he a part of these communities? To what degree is he isolated from them? Be sure to consider whether or not Douglass's relation to community changes with time or location.
4. In addition to his own slave narrative, Frederick Douglass also narrates parts of the lives of his fellow slaves. Select a group of other slave stories that somehow fit together (such as those Douglass tells about women slaves) and explain the role those stories play in his own narrative. You might consider: How does his use of others' stories affect his own narrative? Why does he choose to include them? Are they rhetorically effective in helping him make his claim? What do these stories help us understand about Douglass's own experience?

