

Exploring the Text

1. “My father was a white man,” abruptly states Frederick Douglass (par. 3). Were you startled or surprised by that statement? Explain.
2. What appeals to ethos, logos, and pathos does Douglass make in the first few paragraphs? Which one is most prominent?
3. Of the whipping he observed, Douglass writes, “It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it” (par. 8). Read the paragraph carefully. How successfully do you think Douglass *has* committed his feelings to paper? Explain.
4. Chapter 2 begins with a description of Colonel Lloyd’s plantation. What is your impression of the conditions there?
5. Douglass writes of Mr. Hopkins: “He whipped, but seemed to take no pleasure in it. He was called by the slaves a good overseer” (par. 16). How would you describe Douglass’s tone in that statement? What does it suggest about the relationship between slaves and their masters?
6. Douglass writes, “I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear” (par. 19). Ralph Waldo Emerson (p. 590), in his 1841 essay “Circles,” states, “The field cannot be well seen from within the field.” Douglass seems to be elaborating on Emerson’s metaphor. What is the nature of the appeal that Douglass makes with this reference? How does the remark aid the reader’s understanding of Douglass’s situation?
7. In Chapter 3, what is the chief irony that Douglass develops regarding slaves?
8. How does Douglass use rhetorical strategies to characterize Mr. Gore in the second and third paragraphs of Chapter 4? (Consider such features of style and rhetoric as juxtaposition, antithesis, antimetabole, contrasts, irony, and parallelism.)
9. Douglass states, “Mr. Gore’s defence was satisfactory” (par. 28). What is the effect of that understatement?
10. From your reading of the first four chapters, what is your overall impression of Douglass’s life as a slave? Be specific.

SOJOURNER TRUTH

Sojourner Truth (c. 1797–1883), born Isabella Baumfree, was an African American abolitionist and women’s rights advocate. Born into slavery in New York, she escaped with her infant daughter in 1826. The next year, she went to court and succeeded in winning the freedom of her son, who had been sold into slavery in Alabama, since New York law had emancipated its slaves in 1827. In 1843, she officially changed her name to Sojourner Truth, and in 1844, she joined the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, a Massachusetts-based organization that was funded by abolitionists and supported women’s rights and religious tolerance. In 1850, abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison privately published her autobiography,

The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave, and she bought her first home in Northampton, Massachusetts. She became a well-known speaker, appearing at women's rights conventions all over the country.

Ain't I a Woman?

Sojourner Truth delivered the following speech, "Ain't I a Woman?," in 1851 at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention.

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women of the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man — when I could get it — and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [Intellect, someone whispers.] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negro's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be man not to let me have my little half-measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.

(1851)

Exploring the Text

1. How does Sojourner Truth's opening paragraph set the tone for her speech? Is referring to her audience as "children" likely to antagonize them?
2. What is the effect of her repeated question, "And ain't I a woman?" How does this question appeal to ethos?