Frederick Douglas answers

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1. The mistress’s initial kindness had a greater effect because it was during that time that she taught Douglass to read, an event which had enormous impact on his life. He acknowledges this when he says, “Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell.”

2. People are fed and sustained not only by food, but also by ideas and understanding.

3. Effect: Douglass finds vindication for his belief that slavery is wrong. Effect: Douglass “was led to abhor and detest” his enslavers. Effect: Douglass comes to feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing.

4. He thinks that if he were an animal, he wouldn’t have the ability to think and worry about his circumstances. Now that he can read, Douglass is tormented by his constant thoughts about his life as a slave and the impossibility of freedom.

5. He regards slaveholders as “a band of successful robbers” and as “the meanest as well as the most wicked of men.”

6. Douglass’s purpose is to express his thoughts and feelings about being enslaved and about the effects of literacy. He relates three events that help him achieve his goal: his mistress teaching him to read, his further pursuit of instruction from “all the little white boys,” and the acquisition of certain reading materials that encouraged his own thoughts and feelings about slavery.

**Guided Questions**

1. locate the pronouns I, me, and my in the text. From what point of view is Douglass writing?

How does this point of view help Douglass achieve his purpose? (The text is written in first person. This point of view makes the text more personal, emphasizing the horror of slavery through his personal experience.)

1. what impact the use of master and mistress has on the text, given that Douglass had been a free man for seven years when he wrote this. What do these word choices reveal about Douglass? (The use of master and mistress helps put readers into Douglass’s shoes at the time of the events he is recounting. Douglass’s word choices imply that his comments and feelings are directed to all who owned slaves.)
2. reread lines 14–41 and to explain Douglass’s purpose in devoting so much space in his autobiography to describing his connection to this woman. (Douglass’s mistress had a big influence on him; she was one of the two people who were completely in control of his life. Describing the change in her behavior helps readers understand the effects that slavery had on slave owners, as well as on the enslaved people themselves.
3. What changes slavery brought about in Douglass’s mistress. (The mistress’s “tender heart became stone, ” and her gentle nature “gave way to one of tigerlike fierceness.”)
4. Have students reread lines 49–76 and cite evidence that shows the attitudes of the white boys. Ask: How are these attitudes similar to or different from the attitudes of the master and mistress? (The boys provided “kindly aid, ” and they expressed “the liveliest sympathy” when Douglass talked about slavery. Their attitude toward Douglass is very different from the harsh treatment he is used to receiving from his master and mistress. The boys are willing to help him read because, as children, they don’t share the fear that many slave owners had about the education of slaves. )
5. reread lines 84–92 and explain what happens as a result of the dialogue. Ask why the dialogue was so interesting to Douglass and what effect it may have had on him. (As a result of the dialogue, in which the slave argues successfully against slavery, the master frees the slave. This text awakened Douglass to the idea that there was a way out of slavery and that freedom was possible.)
6. reread lines 112–120 and explain what Douglass believed his ability to read had caused. Ask them to cite evidence showing why he felt that way. (Douglass says that reading exposed him to ideas that made his life unbearable because they confirmed what he knew to be the truth but offered no solution.)
7. reread lines 120–134. Ask why Douglass, as a free man writing his autobiography, included these anguished thoughts that he had as a teenager. (These thoughts help readers understand his despair and also his determination to gain freedom.)