

Freedom Under Control

Compare how two nineteenth-century slave narratives develop a shared theme.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9a "Apply grades 11-12 Reading standards to literature (e.g., "Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature...")

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the sentence that states the narratives' shared argument, then circle one detail about each work that shows how its focus differs.

Two Voices Against Slavery

- ① In the decades before the Civil War, Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs used autobiographical narrative to expose slavery's damage to family and selfhood. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, published in 1845, Douglass recounts learning to read in Baltimore after Sophia Auld begins teaching him. Her husband stops the lessons, saying literacy would make an enslaved person unfit for slavery. Douglass presents reading as painful knowledge, yet also as a tool that helps him imagine freedom and resist the system that claims him. His account emphasizes the deliberate control of an enslaved man's mind.
- ② Harriet Jacobs, writing under the name Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861, treats freedom through a woman's struggle to protect her children and bodily autonomy. Jacobs hides for nearly seven years in a tiny garret above her grandmother's storeroom rather than allow Dr. Flint to control her. From that cramped space, she can hear her children but cannot openly live with them. Like Douglass, Jacobs shows slavery restricting a person's choices. Unlike Douglass's focus on literacy, however, her narrative centers the sexual harassment and family separation that shape an enslaved woman's decisions.
- ③ Read together, the narratives argue that slavery operates not only through physical force but also through control over relationships and knowledge. Douglass describes a system that blocks his education because reading could undermine enslavers' authority. Jacobs describes a system that threatens her safety and makes motherhood difficult to practice openly. Both writers use first-person testimony to make institutional cruelty visible to readers who may not have witnessed it. Their different emphases matter: Douglass traces an intellectual path toward resistance, while Jacobs reveals how gender changes the dangers an enslaved person faces. The two works therefore share an abolitionist purpose while documenting distinct forms of oppression.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What shared argument about slavery do the two narratives make? Use the passage to state the argument.

2 How does Douglass connect literacy to freedom and resistance?

3 What does Jacobs's time in the garret reveal about the particular conflict she faces?

4 How do the writers use the same form, first-person testimony, for a similar purpose but with different emphases?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Choose another nineteenth-century foundational American literary work you have read. In 90 to 120 words, compare its treatment of personal freedom with either Douglass's or Jacobs's narrative. Name both works, make a clear claim, and include one specific detail from each work.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline the sentence that states the narratives' shared argument, then circle one detail about each work that shows how its focus differs. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What shared argument about slavery do the two narratives make? Use the passage to state the argument.	Both narratives argue that slavery controls people through more than physical force, including control over knowledge and relationships.
2	How does Douglass connect literacy to freedom and resistance?	He shows that enslavers block his education because reading could challenge their authority, while reading helps him imagine freedom and resist slavery.
3	What does Jacobs's time in the garret reveal about the particular conflict she faces?	It reveals that she must hide from Dr. Flint's control while remaining close enough to hear her children, showing threats to her safety, bodily autonomy, and family life.
4	How do the writers use the same form, first-person testimony, for a similar purpose but with different emphases?	Both use personal testimony to expose slavery's cruelty. Douglass emphasizes intellectual control and resistance through literacy, while Jacobs emphasizes gendered sexual danger and family separation.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* both question a society that denies human freedom, but they portray different risks. Jacobs hides in a garret for nearly seven years to escape Dr. Flint's control and remain near her children. In Twain's novel, Huck helps Jim travel on the Mississippi River, even when Huck believes helping an enslaved man may condemn him morally. Jacobs records the direct danger slavery poses to an enslaved woman, while Twain shows a white boy struggling against beliefs taught by his society.

Accept equivalent claims that accurately compare the texts' shared condemnation of slavery and their distinct emphases. For the open response, require a comparative claim, accurate identification of both works, and one relevant, specific detail from each.