

Reading Against Limits

A model reflection comparing two literacy narratives.

10.W.1.C "Write reflectively in response to readings in which students compare two or more texts with details, examples, and other textual evidence to support an idea or position."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two specific details about Douglass and two specific details about Malcolm X. Circle the writer's main comparison, and put a star beside one sentence that shows personal reflection.

Learning as a Claim to Power

- ① After reading Frederick Douglass's "Learning to Read and Write" and Malcolm X's "A Homemade Education," I see literacy as more than a school skill. Both writers portray reading as a way to claim power that others tried to limit. Still, their experiences made me notice that access to books is not equal. Douglass learned secretly while enslaved, whereas Malcolm X built a reading practice while imprisoned. Their accounts pushed me to consider how easily I treat libraries, teachers, and time to read as ordinary resources instead of opportunities that earlier readers had to fight for.
- ② In Douglass's narrative, reading begins with small, risky exchanges. After his enslaver's wife stops teaching him because her husband objects, Douglass trades bread with poor white boys for reading lessons. He also reads *The Columbian Orator*, a book containing speeches and dialogues, and finds language for criticizing slavery. These details show that he pursues literacy under direct control and danger. I was struck by how each page requires strategy. Douglass does not present reading as private self-improvement alone; his growing knowledge makes him more aware of the injustice surrounding him.
- ③ Malcolm X's account develops the same idea through a different setting and method. In prison, he copies a dictionary by hand, page after page, to strengthen his vocabulary and handwriting. He later describes reading during the night by using light from the corridor after lights-out. Unlike Douglass, Malcolm X emphasizes the range of books he studies, especially history, philosophy, and religion. His determined routine made me reflect on concentration. Although prison severely restricted him, he turns limited time and materials into a broad education that reshapes how he understands the world.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What main idea does the writer develop about literacy? Give one detail from Douglass's account and one detail from Malcolm X's account that support the idea.

2 Compare the barriers each writer faces and the actions each takes to keep learning.

3 How does the focus of Douglass's reading differ from the focus of Malcolm X's reading? Use details from both accounts.

4 What does the writer's reflection reveal about the writer's own access to education? Cite a detail from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a 120 to 150 word reflective comparison of Douglass's and Malcolm X's accounts. State your position about access to education, use two specific details from each account, and explain how the comparison affects your own thinking.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two specific details about Douglass and two specific details about Malcolm X. Circle the writer's main comparison, and put a star beside one sentence that shows personal reflection. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What main idea does the writer develop about literacy? Give one detail from Douglass's account and one detail from Malcolm X's account that support the idea.	The writer argues that literacy is a way to claim power despite restrictions. Douglass trades bread with white boys for lessons, and Malcolm X copies a dictionary and reads in prison.
2	Compare the barriers each writer faces and the actions each takes to keep learning.	Douglass is forbidden from receiving lessons and learns secretly by trading bread for instruction. Malcolm X is imprisoned with limited time and materials, so he copies a dictionary and reads by corridor light.
3	How does the focus of Douglass's reading differ from the focus of Malcolm X's reading? Use details from both accounts.	Douglass uses reading, including <i>The Columbian Orator</i>, to understand and criticize slavery. Malcolm X stresses studying many subjects, including history, philosophy, and religion, to broaden his understanding of the world.
4	What does the writer's reflection reveal about the writer's own access to education? Cite a detail from the passage.	The writer recognizes taking access for granted, naming libraries, teachers, and time to read as resources that earlier readers had to fight for.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Douglass and Malcolm X show that self-directed reading can challenge systems designed to limit a person, but the cost of learning differs in each account. Douglass loses formal lessons when his enslaver's husband forbids his wife to teach him, so he trades bread with white boys for instruction. Malcolm X, confined in prison, copies an entire dictionary and reads by corridor light after lights-out. Both men use restricted circumstances creatively, yet Douglass's literacy exposes the violence of slavery while Malcolm X's wide reading helps him reconsider history and identity. Their experiences make me think about my own choices. When I decide what deserves my attention, I have easier access to information, so choosing not to read carefully can mean ignoring an opportunity they did not have.

Accept equivalent claims that compare both accounts and support a position with accurate textual details. For the open response, accept varied positions if the student uses at least two relevant details from each account and includes a genuine personal reflection.