

Worksheet—Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*

Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* is a tremendously useful historical document—with some limitations. You may already know that he was a slave who escaped and wrote about his experiences. You may also already know that he became a leading abolitionist after escaping slavery. How is it useful? Douglass' *Narrative* tells us not only about slavery from a slave's point of view, but also much about abolitionism. (Both Douglass and most of his contemporary readers were active abolitionists). Since authentic slave narratives are rare, historians treasure Douglass' *Narrative* (as did many readers of Douglass' time who were anxious to learn more about slaves' experiences). But they also realize the *Narrative*'s usefulness is limited, mostly because Douglass was an unusual slave in many ways.

For the questions below, you are going to provide answers that indicate more specifically what the *Narrative* tells us about slavery, abolitionism, and why its usefulness might be limited. For each of the questions, you are going to not only provide answers, but also provide page citations for evidence (from the *Narrative*) that backs up your answer or claim. For the most part, broader and categorical answers will be better than very specific answers. For instance, for Question 3 (regarding Douglass' charges against slavery), it's better to list "physical deprivation and brutality," rather than "beatings," "whippings," and "starvation" as three separate answers. One last requirement—your evidence should be gathered from throughout the document (not just, for instance, the first 20 pages).

1. Identify 3 ways that Frederick Douglass' background and experiences as a slave were **typical** (or, like those of many other slaves).
2. Identify 3 ways that Frederick Douglass' background and experiences as a slave were **atypical** or unusual (or, unlike those of an average or typical slave in the South).

3. In his *Narrative*, Douglass wanted to indict slavery as an immoral and thoroughly corrupt institution. Identify 3 major parts of his indictment (or, three things that he argued were fundamentally immoral or corrupt about slavery).
4. Identify 3 ways in which Douglass directly appealed to the beliefs and values of his white northern, middle-class (mostly abolitionist) audience.