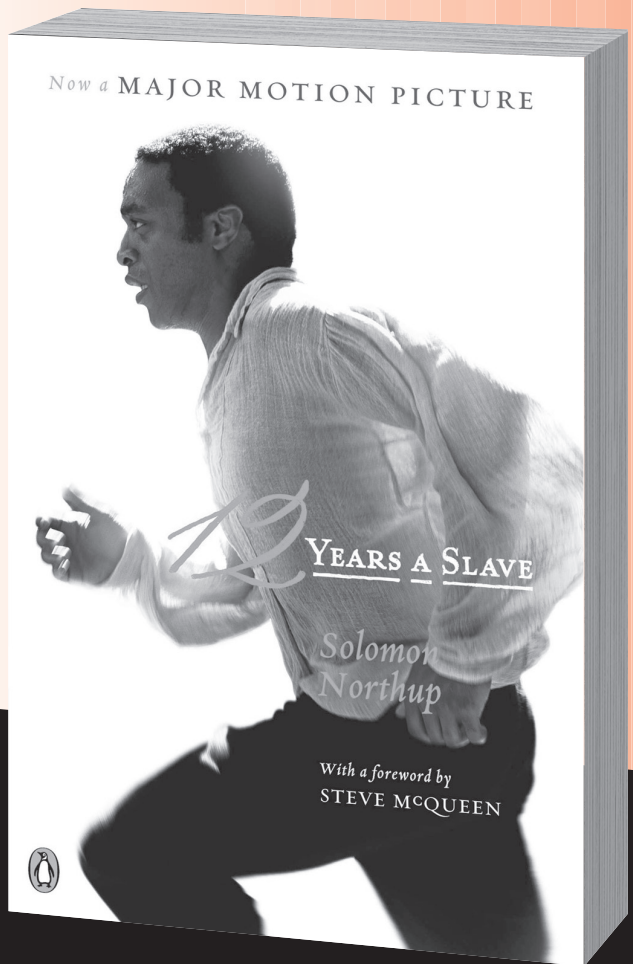


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

# TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE

BY SOLOMON NORTHUP

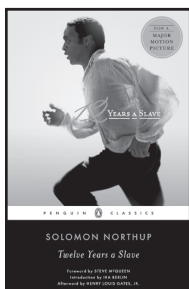


BY JEANNE M. McGLINN AND JAMES E. McGLINN

TEACHER'S GUIDE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SYNOPSIS.....	3
ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....	3
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE.....	3
MEETING COMMON CORE STANDARDS.....	3
THE SLAVE NARRATIVE GENRE .....	3
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW .....	4
DURING READING .....	6
SYNTHESIZING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.....	9
ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES.....	9
ACTIVITIES FOR USING THE FILM ADAPTATION .....	11
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES.....	13
ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THIS GUIDE.....	13



Also available in a black-spine  
Penguin Classics edition

Copyright © 2014 by Penguin Group (USA)

For additional teacher's manuals, catalogs, or descriptive brochures,  
please email [academic@penguin.com](mailto:academic@penguin.com) or write to:

**PENGUIN GROUP (USA)**  
Academic Marketing Department  
375 Hudson Street  
New York, NY 10014-3657

<http://www.penguin.com/academic>

In Canada, write to:  
**PENGUIN BOOKS CANADA LTD.**  
Academic Sales  
90 Eglinton Ave. East, Ste. 700  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M4P 2Y3

Printed in the United States of America

## SYNOPSIS

*Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, A Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, From a Cotton Plantation near the Red River in Louisiana*, was published in 1853. Solomon Northup was a free black living in New York who was lured south, kidnapped, and sold into slavery. His memoir, written shortly after his escape, recounts the harrowing events of his kidnapping and his dehu-

manizing and violent treatment as a slave on plantations in the interior of Louisiana where he worked in the cotton and sugar cane fields. During all those years, Northup looked for a chance to escape and was finally helped by an abolitionist carpenter with whom he chanced to work. With legal documents from the state of New York, Northup was finally freed and was able to bring legal action against his captors.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Solomon Northup labored for twelve years under several masters. When he re-gained his freedom, he wrote a memoir of his years as a slave and then went on to lecture with other abolitionist leaders. It is believed that he worked with the Underground Railroad in the years before the Civil War. It is unclear what happened to Northup after 1857. Some historians speculate that he had financial troubles and may have passed into obscurity. Others think that he may have sought out other adventures. There is a discussion of

several theories about Northup's later life at these web sites: "What Really Became of Solomon Northup After His '12 Years a Slave'?:" <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2013/10/23/what-really-became-of-solomon-northup-after-his-12-years-a-slave/> and "'12 Years' Is the Story of a Slave Whose End Is a Mystery" by Hansi Lo Wang, October 19, 2013 at <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2013/10/19/231520610/12-years-records-enslavement-but-how-does-the-story-end>

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE

### MEETING COMMON CORE STANDARDS

The activities described in this Teacher's Guide meet multiple Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, Grades 9-10 in Reading: Informational Text; History/Social Studies; Writing; and Speaking and Listening. Students are asked to cite textual evidence to support their analysis and arguments. They determine the themes of the narrative by analyzing tone and the choice and impact of particular incidents. They compare and contrast different texts. Activities on the film version of the narrative require students to analyze the director's choices in making the film and its faithfulness to the text. Response activities require students to write explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, and discussion activities lead students to engage in a range of collaborative exercises to strengthen speaking and listening skills.

### THE SLAVE NARRATIVE GENRE

Before beginning to read *Twelve Years a Slave*, students need an overview of the slave narrative genre. To emphasize how authors select certain details in order to develop theme or create tone in a personal narrative, ask students to create a timeline of their own lives, selecting key events they wish to highlight. Then ask students to compare their timelines with one or more partners and to talk about their choices. Discuss: What types of events did they choose to highlight on their timeline? How do their choices differ from their partner's choices? Why? What main idea might they want to convey about their life experiences and how did this affect their choices?

Once students understand that personal narratives convey a certain key idea about the person and his life, ask them to read chapter two of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick*

*Douglass* which is available on line (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>). Students can save chapter two as an MS Word document and then use the highlighter tool to mark main points as they read. Ask them to make a list of topics used in the narrative. What kinds of events does Douglass describe? What allusions or references does he make? What literary devices does he use? What is the overall idea of this section of his narrative? What is the author's purpose in choosing the details that he includes?

Using this discussion, create a class graphic organizer of the elements identified in this slave narrative. Post this graphic organizer and ask students to look for these devices as they read Northup's narrative. They can collect quotes in a response journal or learning log.

Common elements in slave narratives include biblical references and images, details about the evils of slavery, and the spiritual journey of the main character. Also these narratives include many of the elements of captivity narratives. According to Donna M. Campbell, the main character in a captivity narrative often goes

through several distinct stages as he or she is suddenly forced from a place of safety into a confrontation with an unknown, alien, and, to them, dangerous society. At first the person resists while yearning for freedom. But at the same time, she is afraid to attempt an escape. As time passes she struggles to maintain her identity against the pressure to assimilate to the new culture. In the end, these narratives tend to illustrate the spiritual growth of the character as she finds the strength to resist.

Campbell, Donna M. "Early American Captivity Narratives." *Literary Movements*. Dept. of English, Washington State University. 7/04/2013. <http://public.wsu.edu/~campbell/amlit/captive.htm>

Students can also identify and summarize the main elements in a slave narrative by reading a brief introduction to the genre, "An Introduction to the Slave Narrative," by William Andrews. It is available at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/intro.html>

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.1, RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.6, RI 9-10.9; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.5; SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.1c

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

These activities will draw out and deepen students' background knowledge of the history surrounding slavery in the United States and prepare them to understand the context of Northup's narrative.

1. Following the 1793 invention of the cotton gin, the demand for cotton increased, leading to widespread economic gains for planters. When in January 1808 Congress officially banned the international slave trade, planters faced an acute labor shortage. This short video clip from "The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross" with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. provides an overview of the impact of cotton on agriculture and expansion of slavery: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/video/page/2/#497>

Brainstorm with students potential sources of cheap labor in the early to mid-nine-

teenth century. What might planters do?

Project this woodcut from 1834 showing the kidnapping of a free black man (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h510.html>). Ask students to analyze the image. How is the black man depicted? The slavers? What does the image suggest about this practice?

How did states in the North react to protect their free citizens? Ask students to read and outline the actions recommended in the event of a kidnapping in "An Act More Effectually to Protect the Free Citizens of this State from Being Kidnapped, or Reduced to Slavery" on p. 219 of the Penguin Classics edition. Discuss: What motivated states to protect the rights of their black population?

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.9; RH 9-10.2; SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.1c

2. Ask students to read and summarize the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 at: <http://www.ushistory.org/presidentshouse/history/slaveact1793.htm> and sections 6 and 7 of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 at [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th\\_century/fugitive.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/fugitive.asp)

Ask students to compare the penalties for anyone who provides support to or conceals a slave. Discuss: What are the differences between the two laws? Why might the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 have been enacted? What might be the impact of the 1850 law on free blacks? How might the 1850 law impact the abolitionist movement?

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.9; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.4, RH 9-10.9; SL 9-10.4

3. One of the effects of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was an increase in random kidnappings of free blacks. See the print at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661523/?!oclr=blogtea> or the poster advising blacks to be aware of kidnappings at this site: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Slave\\_kidnap\\_post\\_1851\\_boston.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Slave_kidnap_post_1851_boston.jpg)

Discuss with students: What does the enactment of the 1850 law suggest about relations between the North and South in the 1850s? How might this practice of kidnapping affect anti-slavery sentiments?

Meets Common Core Standards: SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.1c, SL 9-10.2

4. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe was originally published as a serial in the *National Era*, an anti-slavery weekly newspaper between 1851 and 1852. The web site <http://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/utcl/> provides the original text of the novel with scholarly commentary. Penguin Classics and Signet Classics editions of the novel are available at [us.penguin.com](http://us.penguin.com).

Stowe who had lived for a time in Cincinnati, across the Ohio River from Kentucky, a slave state, had met many former slaves and fugitives from slavery and had heard at firsthand about the lives of slaves. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 with its

provisions that everyone was responsible to capture fugitives angered Stowe since she saw the law as requiring her and all citizens to participate in the system of slavery. She was encouraged by her sister-in-law to use her writing skills to fight the law, and she soon began to write the novel.

Remind students that the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required everyone to aid in the capture of fugitive slaves or face being fined \$1,000 and imprisoned for six months. This act also eliminated protections for fugitives. Previously, some northern states had required slave-catchers to appear before a judge and jury to validate their claims. After 1850 anyone captured was taken before an appointed commissioner who received a higher fee for every slave sent south.

Ask students to read the first chapter of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* online. In this chapter the slave trader shares, in detail, his ideas about the humanity of slaves and how they are to be treated. Outline these ideas to create a description of the system of slavery as viewed by Stowe. Discuss: According to Stowe, what drives the system of slavery? What ideas enforce the system of slavery?

Meets Common Core Standards: SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.1c, SL 9-10.2

5. In chapter nine of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, Harriet Jacobs describes the methods of torture and punishment inflicted on slaves by their masters. Depending on the students' maturity level, the teacher can summarize the material or ask students to read this chapter which is available online: <http://www.readbookonline.net/read/47019/95863/>

Discuss: Why, according to Jacobs, do planters/slave masters act in this violent way towards their slaves? What is Jacobs' idea about the effect of unlimited power and isolation? Ask students to cite Jacobs' ideas and then to discuss their own point of view.

For an account of the practices of whipping, students can research the Autobiography of Louis Hughes at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/hughes/hughes>.

html . The regular punishment in a whipping is thirty-nine stripes.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.1, RI 9-10.6, RI 9-10.9, RI 9-10.10; RH 9-10.2 RH 9-10.9; SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.1c, SL 9-10.2

## DURING READING

Discussion questions encourage students to deepen their analysis of the narrative by sharing their insights. Quotes can be used for written response or as discussion starters.

These activities can be used to meet several of the Common Core Standards, including: RI 9-10.1, RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.4, RI 9-10.5, RI 9-10.9; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.4; WHST 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.4, 9-10.9; SL 9-10.1, 9-10.4

### NORTHUP'S LIFE AS A FREE MAN—CHAPTER I

"I can speak of Slavery only so far as it came under my own observation—only so far as I have known and experienced it in my own person" (p. 5).

1. Northup sets out to convince readers that his account of slavery is the truth. What devices does he use to give credibility to his narrative?
2. From the beginning of his narrative, Northup refers to himself and other blacks in what we today would consider demeaning terms. For instance, he indicates that he is conscious of his "lowly state" (p. 8) and says his children have "clouded skins" (p. 11). He calls the slaves he encounters, "simple beings" (p. 7). What do you make of these references to blacks? What do they suggest about Northup and his goal in writing his memoir? What do they tell us about the ideas of race that were prevalent in 1853?
3. What were some of the "blessings of liberty" enjoyed by Northup before he left Saratoga with his eventual betrayers?

### CAPTURE AND JOURNEY TO NEW ORLEANS— CHAPTERS II-VI

"It could not be that a free citizen of New-York, who had wronged no man, nor violated any law, should be dealt with thus inhumanly" (p. 19).

"A slave pen within the very shadow of the Capitol!" (p. 22).

"...my spirit was not broken. I indulged the anticipation of escape, and that speedily" (p. 25).

1. Northup begins his journey with Brown and Hamilton feeling "happy as [he] had ever been" (p. 13) and ends the journey to New Orleans with his "cup of sorrow ... full to overflowing" (p. 46). During this time, what circumstances have most oppressed his spirit?
2. Northup questions the role of Brown and Hamilton in planning his kidnapping. What circumstantial evidence suggests that they were guilty of this crime?
3. In what ways does Northup's faith in God provide him consolation?
4. Northup tells the stories of two other black men who are kidnapped and sold into slavery, Robert and Arthur. What are the parallels to Northup's own situation? What happens to each of these men? Why does Northup include these stories in his narrative?
5. Why does the slave dealer change Northup's name? Why would it be common practice to re-name slaves after their owners?
6. What cruel ironies of slavery are depicted in the story of the slave Eliza and her children?
7. What might be the impact of Eliza's story on readers of the time? Why?

8. At the end of chapter VI, Northup uses a quote from Lamentations to describe Eliza's suffering (1:2). How might his use of quotes from the Bible affect readers of the time?

## FIRST YEARS AS A SLAVE: TWO MASTERS—CHAPTERS VII-XI

“The influences and associations that had always surrounded him [William Ford], blinded him to the inherent wrong at the bottom of the system of Slavery. He never doubted the moral right of one man holding another in subjection” (p. 57).

“I was his [Tibeats'] faithful slave, and earned him large wages every day, and yet I went to my cabin nightly, loaded with abuse and stinging epithets” (p. 68).

“An unfriended, helpless slave—what could I *do*, what could I *say*, to justify, in the remotest manner, the heinous act I had committed, of resenting a *white* man's contumely and abuse” (p. 72).

“A slave caught off his master's plantation without a pass, may be seized and whipped by any white man whom he meets” (pp. 102-103).

1. Why is Northup afraid to disclose his status as a free man? What does he realize might happen to him?
2. Northup's first master, William Ford, “would gather all his slaves about him, and read and expound the Scriptures” on Sundays. What does this suggest about how he viewed his slaves? What was his motivation?
3. How did Ford's treatment of his slaves affect their work output?
4. What is chattel mortgage?
5. What is remarkable about Northup's resistance to the cruel treatment of master Tibeats?
6. How does Northup use tactics of submission and resistance in response to Tibeats' murderous cruelty?
7. What physical and emotional abilities enabled Northup to escape and survive in the Great Pacoudrie Swamp?

8. How is Tanner's use of the Bible with his slaves (pp. 82-83) different from that of Ford as described in Chapter VII?

9. What does Northup's work in the garden of his mistress Ford show about him?

10. After Northup's return to Tibeats, he and the other slaves all expect him to be punished, saying that the penalty for running away is five hundred lashes (p. 98). Does this seem like an exaggeration? What would happen if a person were whipped to this extent? What could this saying and other similar references to extreme punishment mean? (See also the description of the levels of whipping on p. 117.)

11. In what way is Tibeats' actions toward Northup typical of slave owners and in what way is he an exception? How does the depiction of Tibeats present a strong argument against the institution of slavery in the South?

## LIFE UNDER EPPS—CHAPTERS XII-XVIII

(Northup was sold to Epps around 1843; he was his slave for ten years.)

“Ten years I toiled for that man [Epps] without reward. Ten years of my incessant labor has contributed to increase the bulk of his possessions” (p. 119).

“The existence of Slavery in its most cruel form among them has a tendency to brutalize the humane and finer feelings of their nature” (p. 135).

“They are deceived who flatter themselves that the ignorant and debased slave has no conception of the magnitude of his wrongs” (pp. 164-165).

“A thousand times she [Patsy] had heard that somewhere in the distant North there were no slaves—no masters. In her imagination it was an enchanted region, the Paradise of the earth” (p. 174).

1. What is Northup's purpose in describing the growing of cotton in such detail in



- Chapter XII and sugar production in Chapter XV?
- Describe the personality of the slave Patsey? What is her history and current situation with her master and mistress?
  - What aspects of slavery brutalize the slave owners?
  - In his arguments against the system of slavery (p. 135), Northup indicates some of the views of those who defend slavery. List and summarize these arguments.
  - What roles do music and dance play in the lives of the slaves?
  - What are the duties of the overseer and of the driver? How are they motivated to fulfill these duties?
  - What forms of resistance do the slaves utilize on Epps' plantation and throughout the region?
  - What falsehoods does Northup employ to protect himself and others at the plantation?
  - What is the purpose of the "pass system"?
  - Why does Armsby betray Northup on the matter of the letter?
  - What is Northup's purpose in describing the whippings of slaves and cruel flogging of Patsey in such detail?
  - What does Northup intend to illustrate about the system of slavery in his description of Epps' son?
  - Why is it so important for Bass and Northup to maintain secrecy about Northup's free status and their attempt to get free papers for him?
  - What motivates Bass to help Northup, even to suggesting that he will travel to Saratoga to seek Northup's free papers?
  - In what ways do kindly slave-owners such as William Ford and Mistress McCoy help maintain and preserve the system of slavery?
  - Why does Senator Soule from Louisiana take a strong interest in Northup's case and indicate that "it was the duty and interest of every planter in his State to aid in restoring me to freedom" (p. 196)?
  - How do the slaves respond to the news of Northup's freedom?

## FREE AT LAST—CHAPTER XXII

"I was then offered as a witness, but, objection being made, the court decided my evidence inadmissible. It was rejected solely on the ground that I was a colored man—the fact of my being a free citizen of New-York not being disputed" (p. 213).

"Those who read this book may form their own opinions of the 'peculiar institution.' What it may be in other States, I do not profess to know; what it is in the region of the Red River, is truly and faithfully delineated in these pages. There is no fiction, no exaggeration" (p. 217).

## DAWNING OF HOPE— CHAPTER XIX-XXI

"Now, in the sight of God, what is the difference, Epps, between a white man and a black one?" (p. 178).

"I would say there was no reason nor justice in the law, or the constitution that allows one man to hold another man in bondage" (p. 179).

- What points does Bass argue against Epps' opinions about the differences between a white man and a black man?
- In the end of his narrative, Northup worries that he may have presented to the reader "too prominently the bright side of the picture" of slavery (p. 217). Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?



## SYNTHESIZING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Now that students have read the entire narrative, they can return to the text to generate a deeper understanding of its themes and arguments. The following topics can be used for discussion or as writing topics.

These discussion questions can be used to meet the following Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.1, RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.5, RI 9-10.9, RI 9-10.10; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.5; WHST 9-10.1, WHST 9-10.4, WHST 9-10.5, WHST 9-10.9, WHST 9-10.10; SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.1a-d, SL 9-10.4

- Slave narratives were written for several main purposes: to present a true description of the slave system and the treatment of slaves, to show the evils of particular masters, to show the religious ideals of the main characters, to appeal to whites by showing the common humanity of slaves. What do you judge to be Northup's dominant purpose in writing the narrative of his years as a slave? What evidence can you cite to support your conclusion?
- Assuming that the main audiences for slave narratives are white readers, how would this fact influence the choices made by the writer? What evidence can you cite in *Twelve Years a Slave* of Northup appealing to this audience?
- Although slavery enabled a profitable economic system in the South, it had very negative effects not only on the slaves but also on the slaveholders and other white citizens in the South. When it was published in 1854, *Twelve Years a Slave* became a highly popular text in the argument for the abolitionist point of view. First, identify the key arguments Northup makes about the destructive and negative effects of slavery on both blacks and whites. Then argue what is Northup's strongest evidence of the negative impact of slavery based on the evidence provided in the text.
- Compare and contrast the use of the Bible by Northup and by the slave masters Ford and Tanner. Discuss how religion can be a source of consolation as well as a source for justifying exploitative systems of behavior.
- Since slaves were the valuable economic property of slaveholders, what explains the cruel abuse and punishments that slaves suffered at the hands of their owners which often made the slaves incapable of work?

## ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to read a contemporary account of the kidnapping of Northup, "THE KIDNAPPING CASE. Narrative of the Seizure and Recovery of Solomon Northup. INTERESTING DISCLOSURES. FROM *New York Times* 20 Jan. 1853" available at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/support1.html> Discuss: How does this account validate the narrative of Northup? Are any biases evident in this news account of Northup's enslavement and the trials to determine his status as a free man? Is a particular point of view regarding the events evident in the news story?
- Students can explore a significant collection of slave narratives at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill site, "Documenting the American South: North American Slave Narratives," at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/>. Ask students to select and read all or part of another slave narrative. Students can collect ideas, quotes, and images to create a Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net/>) or Visual Scrapbook at <http://www.pinterest.com/>

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.1,

RI 9-10.3, RI 9-10.5, RI 9-10.6, RI 9-10.7, RI 9-10.8; RH 9-10.1, RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.3, RH 9-10.6, RH 9-10.9; SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.1a-d, SL 9-10.2, SL 9-10.3, SL 9-10.4

In addition, students can present the par-

allels and differences between the narrative they have selected and Northup's story. Have students present their findings to the class using presentation software.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.7, RI 9-10.9, RI 9-10.10; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.6, RH 9-10.9; WHST 9-10.6, WHST 9-10.7, WHST 9-10.9; SL 9-10.2, SL 9-10.5

- Oral histories (print and audio files) of former slaves collected from the WPA project from 1936-1938, are available at "American Slave Narratives: An Online Anthology" (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/wpa/wpahome.html>). Bruce Fort of the Department of History at the University of Virginia says in the introduction to the collection that the slave narratives "...offer a sweeping composite view of slavery in North America, allowing us to explore some of the most compelling themes of nineteenth-century slavery, including labor, resistance and flight, family life, relations with masters, and religious belief."

Assign students in pairs or small groups to explore one of these topics. Using the index to the narratives, ask students to select and read 3 narratives, gathering ideas and quotes about their particular topic. Students can share their research in a Prezi (<http://prezi.com/>) or they can dramatize their interpretation of their findings, using Reader's Theatre or Dramatic Monologue. Directions for Reader's Theatre can be found at a variety of sites, including "Reader's Theatre Basics" at <http://bms2.westport.k12.ct.us/mccormick/rt/RTHOME.htm>

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.7, RI 9-10.9, RI 9-10.10; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.6, RH 9-10.9; WHST 9-10.6, WHST 9-10.7, WHST 9-10.9; SL 9-10.2, SL 9-10.5

- Have students choose one of the persons in Northup's narrative, review the portions of text relevant to the person, and then create a biopoem, describing significant details about him or her. A good site that presents the parts of a biopoem with a helpful example is: <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/>

[lesson\\_images/lesson398/biopoem.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson398/biopoem.pdf)  
As an option, students can sketch pictures of the person they have chosen, based on descriptive details in the text, and these images can be posted in the classroom with the biopoems.

Meets Common Core Standards: RH 9-10.4; WHST 9-10.9

- Ask students to write a diary entry for one of the characters, covering a significant event in his or her life, explaining what happened and the character's reactions and feelings.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2; RH 9-10.2; WHST 9-10.2, WHST 9-10.4, WHST 9-10.9

- Assign students to write a news article focusing on one aspect of Northup's life such as his kidnapping, a beating that he suffered, his escape to the swamp, or his return to freedom. The guide to writing a news article at <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-News-Article> can scaffold the process for students from gathering facts, writing an interesting lead, including factual details, and writing a strong concluding sentence.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2; RH 9-10.2; WHST 9-10.2, WHST 9-10.4, WHST 9-10.9

- Northup's narrative includes many descriptive scenes, action sequences and sustained dialogue. Ask students to collect scenes that appeal to them or that they consider central to the narrative as they read. Then grouping students according to the scenes they have selected, ask them to prepare either a silent tableau or Reader's Theatre.

In the silent tableau, or Freeze-Frame/Slide show, students prepare a fixed tableau or "still photograph" of their favorite parts of the scene. All members of the group must appear in the still life—even though some may be inanimate objects. To present the slide show, students should prepare several still photographs (four or five is a good number) which they will present in succession to the class. Each time they switch positions,

they call out “next” or “switch.” Students close their eyes until the actors call out “open,” creating a visual “slide show.”

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2; RH 9-10.2; SL 9-10.4

- Have students investigate the forms of slavery that still exist today. According to the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, slavery is “the total physical and/or mental control of a person, for purposes of exploiting that person’s labor and body for the commercial or personal gain of another” (<http://freedomcenter.org/enabling-freedom>). According to the Center, about 27 million people are enslaved today around the world, including in the United States, in a human trafficking industry that generates about \$28 billion annually.

First, discuss with students whether they think slavery still exists, and if so in what forms. Then assign them in teams to explore

the website of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and associated links and find answers to the questions about the nature and extent of slavery today and also what measures are being taken to combat this evil. Have teams report their findings to the class and discuss what measures to combat slavery can be taken in their local community.

As a follow up activity, students can view the film *Journey to Freedom* which compares the experience of Solomon Northup with that of a contemporary victim of slavery, Vannak Prum from Cambodia ([youtube.com/nurfcenter](http://youtube.com/nurfcenter)). Ask students to discuss the similarities and differences that they find between the experiences of the two men and also between the work of past and contemporary abolitionists presented in the film.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.6, RH 9-10.7; WHST 9-10.7, WHST 9-10.9; SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.2, SL 9-10.4

## ACTIVITIES FOR USING THE FILM ADAPTATION

*12 Years a Slave*, 2013. Directed by Steve McQueen. Screenplay by John Ridley. Fox Searchlight Pictures.

The film has received numerous awards and critical acclaim, including the 2014 Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture and the 2014 Academy Award for Best Picture and Best Writing for an Adapted Screenplay (John Ridley). Lupita Nyong’o won the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role. In addition, the film received Academy Award nominations for Best Director (Steve McQueen), Best Actor (Chiwetel Ejiofor), Best Supporting Actor (Michael Fassbender). Film production took place in New Orleans, Louisiana on four antebellum plantations, in close proximity to where Northup lived as a slave.

Note: Teachers should consider students’ maturity level before viewing the entire film with them. Comparisons between the narrative and the film can be made by focusing on significant scenes from the film.

- Before viewing the film, ask students to create a storyboard (<http://accad.osu.edu/womenandtech/Storyboard%20Resource/>) of a scene from the narrative. They can draw their interpretation of the setting, the characters, and the action across this scene. Later, after viewing the film, students can go back to focus on the scenes of their choice and analyze how their renditions are similar to or different from the choices made by the director and screenwriter. Students with video equipment and access to MovieMaker can actually film their own rendition of a particular scene.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.3; RH 9-10.6; WHST 9-10.9; SL 9-10.2, SL 9-10.5

- To have students analyze the ways in which the screenwriter has adapted and changed the narrative, you may choose to stop the film at several points to have students note the differences between the two. For example, you might stop the

film at the point on the trip to New Orleans on board ship when a sailor stabs a black man who tries to protect a slave woman or at the night Northup spends in Ford's mansion hiding out from Tibeats. Ask students to note the elements that are unique to each version. Then ask them to decide which version is stronger and why.

If viewing the entire film, have students analyze the film version to identify elements that appear in the narrative but not in the film. Omissions of plot events or different characterizations often occur in film adaptations. Ask students to analyze why the screenwriter may have left out or added certain events or changed the chronology.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.3, RI 9-10.7; RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.9; WHST 9-10.9; SL 9-10.1, SL 9-10.2, SL 9-10.5

3. After watching an excerpt or the entirety of the film based on Northup's narrative, ask students to write a film critique discussing one or more of following topics: the characterization, costuming, setting, and theme development. Ask students to include several ways in which the film compares to the novel with an assessment of which version is more effective and why. Questions the students can consider when viewing the film:

1. Does the setting in the film match their vision of the location as described in the narrative? Why or why not? What specific settings in the film are particularly effective and why?
2. How are music and/or sound used in the film? Do these elements add atmosphere that is missing from the narrative?
3. What differences exist between the film's interpretation of the narrative and your own while reading? Do these differences add to or change your analysis of Northup's work? Explain.
4. Do the actors provide effective portrayals of the people Northup encountered? Did you visualize a character differently than he/she appears in the film? If so, what is the effect on your reaction to the film?
5. What is your overall impression of the film? Do you think your impression would be different if you had not read the narrative first? Explain your response.

Meets Common Core Standards: RI 9-10.1, RI 9-10.2, RI 9-10.3, RI 9-10.6, RI 9-10.7, RI 9-10.8, RI 9-10.9, RI 9-10.10; RH 9-10.1, RH 9-10.2, RH 9-10.6, RH 9-10.8, RH 9-10.9; WHST 9-10.1, WHST 9-10.4, WHST 9-10.8, WHST 9-10.9

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross” with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is a series of videos on the slave experience. Teachers can explore the episodes to select background which is most pertinent to class discussions and learning goals. Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/>

Additional excerpts from slave narratives, edited by Steven Mintz are available at <http://www.vgskole.net/prosjekt/slavrute/primary.htm>

Brief summaries as well as some powerful images of the history of this era, including slavery, free blacks, abolition, and the Civil War, are available at “African American Odyssey” at the Library of Congress at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohhtml/exhibit/aointro.html>

“Twelve Years a Slave,” the website for the book, describes the work of Dr. Sue Eakin who discovered the book in the library of a plantation in central Louisiana. It includes contemporary reviews of the memoir when it was published in 1853, at <http://twelveyearsaslave.org/>

Penguin Group USA publishes several slave narratives, including the following:

- *Twelve Years a Slave* (Penguin Classics, 2012)
- *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Signet Classics, 2010; Penguin Classics, 2000)
- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Penguin Classics, 2014; Signet Classics, 2005)
- *The Classic Slave Narratives* (Signet Classics, 2012)
- *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave* (Penguin Classics, 2011)
- *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings* (Penguin Classics, 2003)
- *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Penguin Classics, 1998)

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THIS GUIDE

**JEANNE M. McGLINN**, Professor in the Department of Education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, has written extensively in the area of adolescent literature, including numerous guides to classic and contemporary literature.

**JAMES E. McGLINN**, Professor Emeritus of Education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, has taught high school English and developmental reading at all levels, elementary through adult. He is the author and editor of numerous Penguin Teacher's Guides.

**NOTES**

# FREE TEACHER'S GUIDES



A full list of *Teacher's Guides* and *Teacher's Guides for the Signet Classic Shakespeare Series* is available on Penguin's website at: [us.penguin.com/tguides](http://us.penguin.com/tguides)

## TEACHER'S GUIDES

- |  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn<br/>                 Animal Farm<br/>                 Anthem<br/>                 Atlas Shrugged<br/>                 The Awakening<br/>                 Beowulf<br/>                 The Call of the Wild<br/>                 Cannery Row<br/>                 Chekhov's Major Plays<br/>                 City of God<br/>                 ■ Cod<br/>                 The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories<br/>                 The Crucible<br/>                 Dear Zoe<br/>                 Death of a Salesman<br/>                 Doctor Faustus<br/>                 Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde<br/>                 A Doll's House<br/>                 Dubliners<br/>                 Emma<br/>                 Ethan Frome<br/>                 ■ Escape from Camp 14</p> | <p>The Fountainhead<br/>                 Frankenstein<br/>                 The Grapes of Wrath<br/>                 Great Expectations<br/>                 Heart of Darkness<br/>                 The Help<br/>                 The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays<br/>                 Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl<br/>                 Jane Eyre<br/>                 A Journey to the Center of the Earth<br/>                 The Jungle<br/>                 The Kite Runner<br/>                 Listening is an Act of Love<br/>                 Looking Backward<br/>                 ■ Lord of the Flies<br/>                 Lysistrata<br/>                 Main Street<br/>                 ■ The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood<br/>                 The Mousetrap and Other Plays<br/>                 My Ántonia</p> | <p>A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave<br/>                 Nectar in a Sieve<br/>                 1984<br/>                 The Odyssey<br/>                 Of Mice and Men<br/>                 One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich<br/>                 The Pact<br/>                 The Pearl<br/>                 Persuasion<br/>                 The Phantom of the Opera<br/>                 Poems by Robert Frost<br/>                 Pride and Prejudice<br/>                 The Prince and the Pauper<br/>                 Pygmalion<br/>                 Ragged Dick<br/>                 A Raisin in the Sun<br/>                 The Red Pony<br/>                 Redwall<br/>                 The Scarlet Letter<br/>                 The Scarlet Pimpernel<br/>                 The Secret Life of Bees</p> | <p>Silas Marner<br/>                 Sir Gawain and the Green Knight<br/>                 Sophocles:<br/>                 The Complete Plays<br/>                 A Streetcar Named Desire<br/>                 A Tale of Two Cities<br/>                 A Thousand Splendid Suns<br/>                 The Time Machine<br/>                 Treasure Island<br/>                 ■ Twelve Years a Slave<br/>                 Two Years Before the Mast<br/>                 Up from Slavery<br/>                 ■ Walden and Civil Disobedience<br/>                 The Wal-Mart Effect<br/>                 Washington Square<br/>                 We the Living<br/>                 The Women of Brewster Place<br/>                 Wuthering Heights<br/>                 ■ New Titles</p> |
|--|---|--|---|

## TEACHER'S GUIDES FOR THE SIGNET CLASSIC SHAKESPEARE SERIES

- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>Antony and Cleopatra<br/>                 As You Like It<br/>                 Hamlet<br/>                 Henry IV Part I<br/>                 Henry V</p> | <p>Julius Caesar<br/>                 King Lear<br/>                 Macbeth<br/>                 Measure for Measure</p> | <p>A Midsummer Night's Dream<br/>                 The Merchant of Venice<br/>                 Much Ado About Nothing<br/>                 Othello</p> | <p>Richard III<br/>                 Romeo and Juliet<br/>                 The Taming of the Shrew<br/>                 The Tempest<br/>                 Twelfth Night</p> |
|---|---|---|---|





PENGUIN GROUP (USA) INC.  
Academic Marketing Department  
375 Hudson Street  
New York, NY 10014-3657