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*Incidents in the
Life of a Slave Girl*
BY HARRIET JACOBS



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Names, Words, and Terms

Objective: Defining the vocabulary of the slave narrative

Activity

To prepare for a close reading of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, it may be helpful to become familiar with the names, words, and terms of the slave narrative genre. Use the dictionary or the Internet to research the following terms. We've done one for you as an example:

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS CHART

Term	Definition
Abolitionists	people who fight against slavery
Antebellum	
Bond-woman, Bond-man	
Chattel	
Cowskin	
Emancipation Proclamation	
Endorsement	
Frederick Douglass	
Fugitive Slave Act	
Hamlin, the slave	
Jim Crow Laws	
Johnkannaus	
Manumit	
Mason-Dixon Line	
Mulatto	
Nat Turner's insurrection	
Postbellum	
Yankees	
Yoke	

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters I – V**Timeline**

Objective: Arranging events in chronological order for context

Activity

The first five chapters of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* contain a lot of information about the events leading up to Linda Brent's unfortunate position in Dr. Flint's home. Some of the details from her childhood can be confusing. A timeline may help you clarify events.

Draw a line on a sheet of paper, and list the following incidents in chronological order. The first one is correct. Use it and information from the text to determine the approximate order of events and the approximate time span between them.

- Linda Brent is born.
- Her mistress dies.
- Her mother dies.
- Her brother William is born.
- Her uncle Benjamin is sold at age 10.
- Her father dies.
- She is taught to read and spell.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters XI – XV**Hidden Meaning Songs****Objective:** Understanding cultural traditions**Activity**

Despite noting the fact that slave owners often attempt to use religion to control the slaves, Linda does not discount the comfort she and her fellow slaves find in gathering together and singing songs of praise. She writes that the slaves generally compose their own songs and hymns and do not worry much about the technicalities.

Besides providing comfort, some songs contained clues intended to guide those determined to flee to the North to escape slavery. For example, in a Negro spiritual, home can mean heaven, but it can also refer to the Free states or a particular stop on the route to freedom. Phrases like “washing your garments” or “keeping your garments clean” may mean purity of soul, or they might refer to clues left on washing lines to point fugitive slaves in the right direction.

Imagine you have information you need to convey to a select group, but want to hide it from others. Choose a popular song and replace the original lyrics with your hidden message. Determine an audience for your song, and identify the person or people who must not detect the hidden meaning.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters XVI – XX**“Wanted” Poster**

Objectives: Illustrating an event in the story
Using information from the text to create a “Wanted” poster

Activity

When Linda runs away from the plantation, a search quickly ensues. Dr. Flint is furious that she has escaped, and he immediately posts a reward of \$300 for her capture. His notice is posted on every corner and in every public place for miles around:

“\$300 REWARD! Ran away from the subscriber, an intelligent, bright, mulatto girl, named Linda, 21 years of age. Five feet four inches high. Dark eyes, and black hair inclined to curl; but it can be made straight. Has a decayed spot on a front tooth. She can read and write, and in all probability will try to get to the Free States. All persons are forbidden, under penalty of law, to harbor or employ said slave. \$150 will be given to whoever takes her in the state, and \$300 if taken out of the state and delivered to me, or lodged in jail.

– Dr. Flint.”

Use the information provided by Dr. Flint and what you know of Linda from the text to create a “Wanted” poster. Use a hand drawn illustration, a photograph that matches the description, or a computer-generated image to serve as Linda’s picture to accompany the written details on the poster. Incorporate design elements such as bright colors, white space, shading, and large, easy-to-read typefaces to attract attention.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters XXVI – XXX**Obituary**

Objectives: Inferring information about a character
Writing an obituary

Activity

Linda has been in hiding in garret for six years when her Aunt Nancy becomes very ill. Nancy has been a great comfort to Linda and was a surrogate mother to her. The thought that she cannot go to see Nancy makes Linda miserable. Linda describes Nancy's death as "an inexpressible sorrow." She tries to be strong for the sake of her grandmother, who is devastated. Nancy was her last surviving daughter. Linda's grandmother visits her at the trap door of the garret frequently, so that they may grieve together and comfort each other.

An obituary in the newspaper is the typical method of notifying the public about a death. It provides specific personal information and includes details about any funeral arrangements. Most obituaries follow a standard format, but the deceased's family provides much of the content, so obituaries will vary in detail and length.

Using information provided in Chapter XXVIII and your imagination, write an obituary for Nancy. You will also need to add fictionalized information based on what you can infer about Nancy from the text. Make sure you include the following:

- full name and maiden name
- date of birth
- date of death
- the cause of death
- where she died
- her age when she died
- her slave history
- things for which she will be remembered
- the names of family members who preceded her in death
- family members and friends
- funeral or memorial information

If you are unfamiliar with the format of obituaries, you can review a few online or in a newspaper for ideas.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters XXXVI – XLI**Online Profile**

Objectives: Drawing inferences about a character
Creating an online profile

Activity

By the end of the narrative, the reader has learned a lot about Linda's personality; she is strong-willed and determined. She loves her family. She is intelligent, spiritual, creative, and passionate about freedom. She is a mother, a writer, an activist, and a friend.

Imagine that Linda has the use of computers to network and support her causes. She may use one of the many networking sites to meet like-minded people and spread her message to help end slavery. Using what you have learned from reading *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, create an online profile for Linda. You will have to fictionalize the information that the author has not provided (such as TV shows and movies), but make sure to remain faithful to Linda's character.

Profile Information

- Birthday
- Marital Status
- List of Friends
- Hometown
- Children
- Favorite Books
- Favorite Movies
- Favorite TV Shows
- Causes
- Games
- Work History
- Education Information
- Interests
- Philosophy
- Political Inclination
- Favorite Quote
- Profile Picture (can be a picture or an image that represents Linda)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up**Interview****Objective:** Communicating ideas about literature**Activity**

Interviewing is a way to exchange information and communicate ideas. A job interview, for example, is a way for employers to find out about you and your qualifications—to prove why you are the perfect candidate for the job. Sometimes, we leave an interview wishing we had been asked different questions that would have allowed us to communicate our thoughts better.

In this activity, you are going to have the opportunity to write the perfect questions that will elicit the most revealing answers. You will also have an opportunity to answer your classmates' questions. You are going to interview your classmates about the book, and they are going to interview you.

To prepare for the interview, review the book. Create a set of 3 – 5 questions that will generate discussion. In other words, no “yes or no” questions allowed. Divide into pairs. One of you will ask your questions first, allowing the other to answer each question fully. Then, you will switch places and your partner will interview you. Each of you will record each other's answers in the form of brief summaries. After the interviews have been completed, be prepared to share your questions and responses in a class discussion.