

Please analyse the following passage from Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by addressing the following tasks and questions. In your analysis you should use the terminology on the relevant handouts.

"I knew an old black man, whose piety and childlike trust in God were beautiful to witness. At fifty-three years old he joined the Baptist church. He had a most earnest desire to learn to read. He thought he should know how to serve God better if he could only read the Bible. He came to me, and begged me to teach him. He said he could not pay me, for he had no money; but he would bring me nice fruit when the season for it came. I asked him if he didn't know it was contrary to the law; and that slaves were whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read. This brought the tears into his eyes. 'Don't be troubled, uncle Fred,' said I. 'I have no thoughts of refusing to teach you. I only told you of the law, that you might know the danger, and be on your guard.' He thought he could plan to come three times a week without its being suspected. I selected a quiet nook, where no intruder was likely to penetrate, and there I taught him his A, B, C. Considering his age, his progress was astonishing. As soon as he could spell in two syllables he wanted to spell out words in the Bible. The happy smile that illuminated his face put joy into my heart."

This is a sample solution. Your answers need to be written in full sentences and paragraphs.

1. IDENTITY [AND MEDIA] (25)

Whose identities are constructed in this passage and by whom? Name the relevant features/markers for each identity.

- Identity construct of "uncle Fred," a trustworthy, intelligent, and virtuous "old black man," who is eager to learn how to read the Bible
 - o pious, faithful: "childlike trust in God"; member of "the Baptist church"; "thought he should know how to serve God better if he could only read the Bible"
 - o age: "fifty-three years old"
 - o poor, destitute: "he said he could not pay me"
 - o integer, possesses propriety: willing to "pay" Linda back through an exchange: her teaching against "nice fruit" of the season
 - o intelligent, quick on the uptake: "considering his age, his progress was astonishing"
 - o eager and delighted to be able to read: "He had a most earnest desire to learn to read"; "begged me to teach him"; the "happy smile that illuminated his face" once he is able to spell out words

- risking punishment for his desire to learn to read, resisting the law: “this brought tears into his eyes”; “he thought he could plan to come three times a week without its being suspected”
- Identity construct of “I” meaning Linda as a character of a literate slave, trustworthy teacher as well as somebody who resists the slave law of teaching/learning how to read and write; gratified by the delight of Fred in his ability to read and willing to risk the danger of punishment for Fred’s happiness/desire to read the Bible
 - Fred begs her to teach him; makes him aware of the law that forbids it, but reassures him of being his teacher and risking punishment: “Don’t be troubled, [...] I have no thoughts of refusing to teach you”; “I only told you of the law, that you might know the danger”; I selected a quiet nook, where no intruder was likely to penetrate”; “there I taught him his A, B, C”; his “happy smile [...] put joy into my heart”
 - identity construct of “I” meaning the narrator who relates the event in retrospect: “I knew an old black man”

2. DISCOURSES AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS (35)

Name the discourses you can recognize in this passage (please quote characteristic terms and vocabulary)! What is the relationship between these discourses?

You should cite at least three discourses and quote the relevant terms:

- discourse of religion: “piety,” “witness”; “childlike trust in God,” “Baptist church,” “serve God,” “read the Bible”; “teaching each other to read”; “tears”; “Bible”; “illuminated”; “joy”
- discourse of literacy: “desire to learn to read”; “read the Bible”; “teach him”; “no thoughts of refusing to teach you”; “progress”; “I taught him his A, B, C”; “spell”; “syllables”; “spell out words”
- discourse of slave law against teaching slaves to read/resistance against that law: “contrary to the law”; “slaves were whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read”; “the law”; “danger”; “be on your guard”; “being suspected”; “intruder”; “penetrate” / “no thoughts of refusing to teach you”; “know the danger”; “be on your guard”; “come three times without [...] being suspected”; “quiet nook”; “no intruder was likely to penetrate”
- discourse of race: “black”; “slaves”; “whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read”;
- discourse of sentimentalism: “piety”; “childlike trust”; “beautiful to witness”; “most earnest desire”; “serve God”; “begged me”; “tears”; “troubled”; “danger”; “be on your

guard”; “quiet nook”; “no intruder was likely to penetrate”; “happy smile”; illuminated his face”; “joy”; “heart”

Other discourses: race, gender, age, ...

Discussion of relationship between the selected discourses.

For example: In this passage, the discourses of religion, literacy, and sentimentalism clash with the discourses of race and the slave law that prohibits slaves teaching each other as well as being taught to read and write. The slave law, which is based on race, is shown to violently and unjustly destroy the pious aspirations of uncle Fred regarding his religious practices and his happiness. While among slaveholders it was usually literacy and the teaching of slaves to read and write which was considered to be the source of trouble, Linda Brent (Harriet Jacobs) connects the discourses of literacy with religion so that the ability to read becomes an integral part of Fred’s virtuous conduct of life. As the narrator and Fred’s teacher, Brent (Jacobs) thus inverts the slaveholding view of the criminal act: here, she shows, the crime stems from the slave law which nips in the bud any spiritual and moral aspirations of “uncle Fred.”

3. CONTRAST AND COMPARISON (30)

Name one other passage from the autobiography which corresponds or contrasts with this representation of slavery in one particular aspect (10). Describe the nature and significance of the correspondence or contrast (10). Relate both representations of slavery to one key concept in cultural studies (10). (You may build on your findings from questions 1 & 2.)

4. LECTURE (10)