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Global Literature II

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Frederick Douglass Responses

#1 - While Frederick Douglass emphasizes the power of written language throughout his Narrative, he mentions language as song in chapter 2.

*After listening to a few nineteenth-century spirituals (or reading the lyrics from contemporary documents such as *Slave Songs of the United States*), consider the following: How do the style and language of the songs differ from the style and language of Douglass's document? Who is the intended audience of the spirituals, and who is the intended audience of the written Narrative?*

Glancing through *Slave Songs of the United States*, the style as compared to Douglass's is much more wild and free than his. The style is often relational: there are calls and responses. Biblical imagery, addressals to God, angels, Gabriel, Mary, and humans are often used. Repetition is common. The language of the songs is again steeped in biblical imagery, is less formal and uses slang, and often calls out to people, like a son, or an Angel. Douglass's writing is very structured and organized, on the other hand. He writes simply, clearly, and honestly. However, both of these writing styles are raw and speak from the heart. They are honest and do not gloss over pain.

Regarding the audience, Douglass writes in chapter 2 that these spirituals were songs of deep complaint and prayer to God for deliverance. They were songs of anguish, songs that spoke out against slavery more deeply than words ever could, and songs that may have sounded

meaningless to an outsider. In this way, it seems the songs may not have necessarily been intended for a specific audience other than God, however, it isn't stated. The songs seem to be more self-expression, coming from deep grief welling up inside that needed to be listened to. Yet, Frederick Douglass had a specific audience and objective to his writing: to convince those in the United States to abolish slavery.

#4 - The main body of Frederick Douglass's Narrative ends with him speaking at an antislavery convention. Write about how Douglass's story provides him with both the education and the authority to effectively address this subject. Consider how Douglass presents in his text the relationship between outside knowledge (such as literacy) and self-knowledge.

Douglass began to learn how to read and write from Sophia Auld, his mistress. He then went to extreme lengths to finish learning from those in the neighborhood or books he found. This allowed Douglass to not only read and learn about the events, history, and reality of the world, but to express himself. Douglass has authority to speak out against slavery because he was a slave himself, escaped to freedom, and became free. He has details, stories, and is a living testimony.

Outside knowledge such as literacy enables us to have a sense of identity. This is because we can now see how we relate to the larger world. Literacy allowed Douglass to learn more than only what he was told. He learned about his history, that he came from an enslaved group of people taken from their own land and lives, and became infuriated because his identity was stolen. But in the end, Douglass is able to assert his value and right to an individual identity: he proclaims, "I am Frederick Douglass." Douglass also identifies himself from the outside knowledge of God's providence in his life.