
Bondage and Freedom: Examining American Slave Narratives

Critical Reading & Thinking Questions

To answer questions 1-2, open the narrative links to view the title pages and prefaces. You can click on “Read for free” or “Download PDF.”

1. What do the title pages of each of these narratives tell us? Who is the author and who is the narrator?
 - a. [Archer Alexander's](#):
 - b. [William Wells Brown's](#):
2. What do the prefaces of each of these narratives tell us? Are the narratives “a Black message inside a white envelope”? If so, how?
 - a. [Archer Alexander's](#):
 - b. [William Wells Brown's](#):

Perform a close read of the following excerpts while keeping in mind the information you learned from the presentation. The first excerpt is from the narrative about Archer Alexander's life, and the second excerpt is from William Wells Brown's narrative. You will compare and contrast these two narratives' descriptions about slavery in St. Louis by answering the questions below.

3. Both of these narrative excerpts take place in Missouri. Let's compare and contrast their descriptions of slavery.
 - a. How does William Greenleaf Eliot characterize slavery in Missouri?
 - b. How does William Wells Brown characterize slavery in Missouri and specifically in St. Louis?
 - c. Why do **you** think these narratives depict slavery in Missouri so differently? What do **you** think we should learn from this?
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Excerpt #1

Eliot, William Greenleaf, 1811-1887. [*The Story of Archer Alexander from Slavery to Freedom March 30, 1863*](#). Cupples, Upham and Co, 1885.

Chapter 3, Pages 39-42

LIFE IN MISSOURI.--1833-63

"The life of Archer for the next thirty years varied but little in its general tenor from that of the majority of well-behaved slaves held in bondage by kind masters. The treatment of slaves in Missouri was perhaps exceptionally humane. All cruelty or "unnecessary" severity was frowned upon by the whole community. The general feeling was against it.

Archer's young master, Mr. Thomas Delaney, was not only kind and considerate, but he was personally attached to his servant, who was nursed at the same breast, and had been his constant playmate in boyhood. He was also under promise to his own mother and to Archer's mother to do what was right by the boy.

For three or four years, while in St. Louis, Archer was hired out and worked in a brick-yard (Letcher & Bobbs), at the end of which time Mr. Delaney bought a farm in the western part of St. Charles County, and moved there to live..."

"Their master was a religious and humane man. He looked upon slavery as a patriarchal institution, sanctioned by divine law, in no way inconsistent with the republican principles of a free country, and that it was the only condition for which the colored race were providentially fitted. A strange creed,--but if all slave-owners had put it in practice as kindly as he did, we might possibly in some small degree understand the delusion..."

"Some of [Archer's] children behaved badly, being over-indulged, and were "sent away;" but he didn't seem to blame his master for it. The heart learns to bear inevitable burdens."

Excerpt #2

Brown, William Wells. [*Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*](#). United States: Anti-slavery office, 1847.

Chapter 4, Pages 27-30

"Though slavery is thought, by some, to be mild in Missouri, when compared with the cotton, sugar and rice growing States, yet no part of our slave-holding country, is more noted for the barbarity of its inhabitants, than St. Louis. It was here that Col. Harney, a United States officer, whipped a slave woman to death. It was here that Francis McIntosh, a free colored man from Pittsburgh, was taken from the steamboat Flora, and burned at the stake. During a residence of eight years in this city, numerous cases of extreme cruelty came under my own observation;--to record them all, would occupy more space than could possibly be allowed in this little volume. I shall, therefore, give but a few more, in addition to what I have already related.

Capt. J. B. Brunt, who resided near my master, had a slave named John. He was his body servant, carriage driver, etc. On one occasion, while driving his master through the city,--the streets being very muddy, and the horses going at a rapid rate,--some mud spattered upon a gentleman by the name of Robert More. More was determined to be revenged. Some three or four months after this occurrence, he purchased John ... After the purchase, he took him to a blacksmith's shop, and had a ball and chain fastened to his leg, and then put him to driving a yoke of oxen, and kept him at hard labor, until the iron around his leg was so worn into the flesh, that it was thought mortification would ensue. In addition to this, John told me that his master whipped him regularly three times a week for the first two months:--and all this to "tame him." A more noble looking man than he, was not to be found in all St. Louis, before he fell into the hands of More; and a more degraded and spirit-crushed looking being was never seen on a southern plantation, after he had been subjected to this 'taming' process for three months. The last time that I saw him, he had nearly lost the entire use of his limbs."

"...While living with Mr. Lovejoy, I was often sent on errands to the office of the 'Missouri Republican,' published by Mr. Edward Charles. Once, while returning to the office with type, I was attacked by several large boys, sons of slave-holders, who pelted me with snow-balls. Having the heavy form of type in my hands, I could not make my escape by running; so I laid down the type and gave them battle. They gathered around

me, pelting me with stones and sticks, until they overpowered me, and would have captured me, if I had not resorted to my heels. Upon my retreat, they took possession of the type; and what to do to regain it I could not devise. Knowing Mr. Lovejoy to be a very humane man, I went to the office, and laid the case before him. He told me to remain in the office. He took one of the apprentices with him, and went after the type, and soon returned with it; but on his return informed me that Samuel McKinney had told him that he would whip me, because I had hurt his boy. Soon after, McKinney was seen making his way to the office by one of the printers, who informed me of the fact, and I made my escape through the back door.

McKinney not being able to find me on his arrival, left the office in a great rage, swearing that he would whip me to death. A few days after, as I was walking along Main Street, he seized me by the collar, and struck me over the head five or six times with a large cane, which caused the blood to gush from my nose and ears in such a manner that my clothes were completely saturated with blood. After beating me to his satisfaction, he let me go, and I returned to the office so weak from the loss of blood, that Mr. Lovejoy sent me home to my master. It was five weeks before I was able to walk again."



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