

Frederick Douglass. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. From Chapter 1

I was born in Tuckahoe, near Hillsborough, and about twelve miles from Easton, in Talbot county, Maryland. I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little of their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it. He deemed all such inquiries on the part of a slave improper and impertinent, and evidence of a restless spirit. The nearest estimate I can give makes me now between twenty-seven and twenty-eight years of age. I come to this, from hearing my master say, some time during 1835, I was about seventeen years old.

My mother was named Harriet Bailey. She was the daughter of Isaac and Betsey Bailey, both colored, and quite dark. My mother was of a darker complexion than either my grandmother or grandfather.

My father was a white man. He was admitted to be such by all I ever heard speak of my parentage. The opinion was also whispered that my master was my father; but of the correctness of this opinion, I know nothing; the means of knowing was withheld from me. My mother and I were separated when I was but an infant—before I knew her as my mother. It is a common custom, in the part of Maryland from which I ran away, to part children from their mothers at a very early age. Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for field labor. For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child. This is the inevitable result.

Define Each Word

deprive: _____

privilege: _____

impertinent: _____

hinder: _____

blunt: _____

Write the Correct Word from the Vocabulary

1. The _____ clerk spoke rudely to the office manager and refused to file the compensation forms in the correct folder.
2. Although the manager prided himself on being _____ and outspoken, he was actually a bully who spoke in a derogatory manner to his employees.
3. Children who grow up in poverty are sometimes _____ of a good education because the schools in their neighborhoods lack academic resources.
4. Pride sometimes _____ a husband's ability to apologize to his wife.
5. Voting for government officials is not just a right but a _____ that people of a free society enjoy.

Comprehension and Discussion: Answer Each Question in Complete Sentences

1. When was Frederick Douglass separated from his mother? According to Douglass, why were children separated from their mothers at an early age?

2. How do you think that Douglass feels about not knowing his exact age? What evidence can you offer?

