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Written to be Remembered

Over the course of history, humanity has collected a myriad of great works of literature. These works serve to entertain people and provide them with a way to temporarily escape the problems they face. For example, some people read narratives and are happy to find that they are not the only people enduring hardships and that many people before them have lived shockingly difficult lives. A farfetched satirical essay is capable of coaxing a chuckle out of someone after a rough workday. People suffering broken hearts can often relate to poetry from the Romantic era. However, there is much more to literature than the comfort or the distraction that it provides. Tim Gillespie said that in the classroom "...literature is justifiable in the modern curriculum for its contributions to the cultivation of imagination and of empathy" (16). Dissimilar to a simple history textbook, the empathy that literature rouses helps teach lessons to readers, while also making them feel connected with the experiences of those who lived before them. Great writers use elements such as diction, symbolism, irony, and personification to draw readers in and allow them to relate in a more meaningful and memorable way.

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave is an important piece of literature. Not only does it shed light on a crucial time in the history of the United States, but Frederick Douglass is able to make the reader empathize with him regarding his struggles as a slave, opening their eyes to the injustice of slavery. He suffered through slavery which, in his time was not so uncommon in the United States. In the present day, there are

almost no Americans who have experienced anything like the horrors of slavery first hand. Douglass explains in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, that he was born into slavery and separated from his mother as soon as possible. He remembers hearing the news of her death saying "Never having enjoyed, to any considerable extent, her soothing presence, her tender and watchful care, I received the tidings of her death with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger" (Puchner, et al., E: 237). Some readers, if they were separated from their mothers at a young age, might relate to this passage. Others cannot imagine what it must be like to feel such a lack of emotion in that situation. Either way, these words that Douglass chooses tend to stir emotions in the reader through Douglass's use of diction. His careful selection of words like "soothing" and "tender" either cause the reader to relate, or feel sadness for Douglass, who was never given the chance to know his mother.

Later in the narrative, Douglass recounts that his spirit has been broken by Mr. Covey. He sees the sails of boats from all around the world and says "Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition" (Puchner, et al., E: 264). This passage contains a contrast in the form of symbolism. Douglass saw the potential beauty that the boats' sails as they would be perceived by freemen, but was also reminded by them that he was trapped in the shackles of slavery. The symbolic contrast is shown in the description of the sails, which were both angelically "robed in purest white," but also "shrouded ghosts." This longing for an unimaginably beautiful life, which remained so far out of reach for Douglass elicits empathy in the reader. Paul Gilmore states that Douglass possesses a "...deep emotion or desire that serves to link Douglass with his readers through what we might call sentimental electricity" (Gilmore).

This is abundantly apparent throughout *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which helps readers then, and now, to understand the reality of slavery.

Some writers do not attempt to reach their readers in such a sincere way. For example, Jonathan Swift uses satire in *A Modest Proposal* to grab the attention of readers and make them either laugh or cringe in disgust. After being shocked initially, they come around to his very reasonable, and serious proposal hidden within the essay. The speaker seems to use a sincere, reasonable tone throughout the essay as he describes his grotesque solution to remedy the unacceptable state of Ireland, which is full of poor Irish people suffering under English rule. Swift's "modest proposal" for poor Irish women to breed children as a food supply to the wealthy, helping them to escape poverty. His true goal is to impress upon the reader that the Irish deserve much better treatment from the English. Swift accomplishes this through irony. He says the opposite of what he means. He ends his satirical essay with the speaker saying that he would gain nothing if his plan was put into action. He says "I have no children by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past child-bearing," as a final poke at the reader (Puchner, et al., D: 320). Through Jonathan Swift's satirical essay, "He became a hero with the Irish for waging - and winning - a pamphlet war against their extortionate English rulers" (Carey).

A third way that writers convey messages is by appealing to the reader's emotional side. Poets are very skilled when it comes to making readers feel what they want them to feel. Inducing an emotional response implants the poet's messages in the minds of readers forever, making those ideas a permanent part of their culture. John Keats is especially talented when it comes to emphasizing messages to readers through emotion. Amanda Naylor writes about Keats, saying, "At the centre of many of the odes and his narrative works lies the quest for an intense

personal experience, both imaginative and romantic" (Naylor). In his poem, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, Keats emphasizes the Romantic idea that beauty in life is fleeting. He calls the urn a "...still unravish'd bride of quietness," and the "...foster-child of silence and slow time" (Puchner, et al., E: 410). Both of these personifications give the urn human-like qualities, but they also imply stillness. His use of personifications helps readers to feel more connected to his message, bringing the urn to life while, at the same time, freezing the urn in time. Keats manages to create a sense of longing and conveys the ideas and feelings that epitomize Romanticism. He is able to express his ideas to the reader in an unforgettable way.

Bluestein observes that "...identifying with a character leads to deeper involvement with a text" (Bluestein). This statement can be proven by many great literary works. This sentiment is enhanced through the use of all many literary devices. Frederick Douglass chooses his words wisely and uses symbolism for maximum effect in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, opening eyes to the horror that he survived as an American slave. Jonathan Swift's use of irony in *A Modest Proposal* shook the Irish nation out of their stupor while they were suffering through rough times, helping to trigger change. John Keats brings the urn to life, just enough to teach readers about the fleeting beauty in life, and how it is captured in a bittersweet state in more permanent art forms. Diction, symbolism, irony, and personification are just a few ways that writers of great literature ensure that their message is not lost. Without the details generated through the masterful use of the literary devices, literature would not be a part of the world's culture. Most people, though they may not realize it, would not recognize a world in which great literature had not been written over the course of centuries. Without great literature, countless invaluable lessons would likely be forgotten in history. Consequentially, without a

deep understanding of those who lived before us, we would be doomed to relive the worst parts of our history, and potentially never know some of the best parts of it.

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