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12 Years a Slave essay #2

To be torn away from what you most love, it isn’t just the physical separation, but the tearing of the soul to see them torn away from you that causes pain in anyone who holds someone dear. The idea of not having our family close, or to be forcibly removed from us is something that is universally able to be associated with both north and south. As such, this was the most likely reason that Solomon Northrup chose to refer to family and children quite frequently though his memoir.

The use of children in the novel is something that every parent can relate to. Since his readers would likely be parents themselves, they could quickly associate the situation that slavery puts any child into with their children. As Solomon continually speaks of, “Thoughts of my family, of my wife and children, continually occupied my mind” keeping the readers attention on the poignant attitude as the novel progresses (SLAVE pg47). The idea that they had to endure such hardship, something that even adults have a difficult time dealing with, creates a picture of inescapable unfair hostility that stabs at the reader whenever Solomon brings it to light.

Solomon’s use of family though the novel is kept in close ties with his use of children, as they are closely associated with, not only his emotional loss at the time, but with the average reader’s primary concerns as well. Everyone has a family that they will protect and wish no harm to, and Solomon uses this as an associative branch from someone who had to endure the loss, if temporary, to most who have never experienced such a catastrophe. When he recounts, “I think of him with affection, and had my family been with me, could have borne his gentle servitude, without murmuring, all my days” when thinking of God as to associate the faithful and the need for family together, two things that the average reader of the time can closely associate with (SLAVE pg104).

Of the topics that Solomon brings up in his novel that don’t pertain directly to slavery, children and furthermore family are two of the most common. While this does recount his thoughts at the time that would be natural for someone in his situation, it is also an intentional method to ensure that the readers in the north could more closely associate his troubles and concerns with his own. This was likely the best approach to take, as though the north was certainly aware of the practice of slavery, and no doubt of the horrors that the institution creates, it can be difficult to imagine the hardships if it was not related so directly to their lives.

In conclusion, Solomon was a man who was torn away from what he held most dear in his life, his children and family, and as such felt that this pain would be the best way to get readers to understand the terrible calamity the befell him. Though he was not wholly successful in ensuring that everyone knew his story and took to action at the time, his poignant writing lasted and touched readers not only in his time, but in many years afterwards as well.

2)  Discuss the use of children and family in Solomon Northrup's account.  How does he use this material to evoke concern amongst the people in the North?

SLAVE. Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. William Collins, 2014.