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Period 1

Due: 12/13/21

**Essay**

Frederick Douglass was a man born into slavery and served as a domestic slave for seven years of his early life. As a slave, he was not allowed to learn how to read, write, or receive any type of formal education. Later in his life, he wrote an autobiography for which, “learning to read and write” is excerpted. The passage explores the emotional journey he experienced through learning how to read and write as an enslaved person. Through the use of contrasting language, short emphasized sentences, and personal dialogue, Frederik Douglass demonstrates the dichotomy between the benefits and disadvantages of learning as an enslaved person.

Through his story, Frederick depicts his mental change with his use of language. By using his word choice to provide contradicting connotations, Frederick demonstrates a transition of thought process. And thus, shows his contrasting emotions and development throughout his life as a slave. To begin with, the author uses a gentle and appreciative tone. As the story progresses, he starts using a negative, detesting voice. “When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman…The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers." In the first sentence, the author discusses the generosity of the slaveholder's wife. He uses words such as “warm” and “tenders- hearted” to infuse the text with a mood of love and appreciation, allowing the reader to see his innocence and naivety. The sentence found on the next page of the text provides a contrasting tone from the previous sentence. Differentiating from the previous sentence, it uses the words “abhor” and “detest” to demonstrate a change in viewpoint and illuminate his slaveholders in a negative light. By writing in a contrasting style, the author shows the evolution through the story. As his mind expands and grows, he no longer sees any positive light, so the text shifts to a negative tone; which demonstrates the different aspects of learning overall. By learning more about the concept of slavery, the author can escape from his ignorance and see the truth. But learning also prevents him from having a positive outlook.

To emphasize the disadvantages of learning, Frederick dives deeper into the morality of slavery and reflects on his place within captivity. As he writes about the consequences and mental impact of everything he has learned, Frederick uses much shorter and clipped sentences to express the panic and fear he feels “I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own.” By stringing together short sentences, the author creates a sequence that emphasizes the author's emotions at that specific moment. The shorter sentences give the paragraph a sense of urgency that draws the reader in, showing the negative effects and mental impact learning has had on the author. Although he is no longer ignorant of the place he holds within society, he can no longer benefit from the bliss ignorance can provide. He is stuck with the knowledge that he is a slave, deserving the same rights as others but unable to do anything about it. With a new perspective on himself, he can not accept his place; that leaves him panicked, depressed, and stymied.

The next passage diverges from a technical analysis by including a more integrated example of personal reflection. Frederick includes personal dialogue in the story to provide the reader a view of his personal experience within slavery; and his reaction to it. Using personal dialogue allows him to show credibility to the reader and include more specific evidence to reflect on. “You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, But I am a slave for life! Don't I have as good a right to be free as you have?” By including dialogue, the author shows his personal opinions more clearly. Adding dialogue to the text gives the story a transparent scene of reality. Instead of being internal and the information provided as mostly conjecture, the dialogue provides textual evidence to support the story's argument. It also shows a new view of the author’s opinions. It is the first time the reader gets to see Fredricks' expression around other people and society as a whole. The dialogue also gives additional insight into his emotional state and expresses his confusion and frustration as he becomes more aware. Depicting realism in this way supports the story's overall expression of contradiction. He had gained mental independence and was able to create real connections and speak out. But, he also had to watch as others lived freely as he was trapped.

Frederick Douglas brings up the theme that knowledge is power. He displays his power gained through his evolution and parallel acquisition of knowledge. But can this power be toxic? And to what extent can we handle this knowledge? Frederick lays out his life journey and the hardships he has to face while escaping slavery and finding independence and freedom. And in the end, he was able to reflect and say that overall it was all worth it. He was able to help others, benefit society, and find a sense of freedom and individuality for himself. But what about the others? All the people who recognized their reality, tried to escape and failed, or ended up somewhere worse. Would all of those people have been better off without knowing anything in the first place?

Overall, Frederick is a success story. He was able to overcome his hardships and harness his depression and panic to gain freedom. But many others have been broken and pushed too far, and unlike Fredrick Douglass, they were not able to escape their mental or physical chains. Fredrick wrote and shared his story to persuade others to try and by doing so showed the importance of knowledge and the options it gives someone. Even if you can not act on something, you will still have that knowledge to take advantage of it whenever you can.