

● Being a Slave

How was life and work on the plantations?

1 Slave auctions

A. Look at the picture and guess what "slave auctions" were.

B. Focus on the following aspects:

- The merchant's attitude;
- The treatment of the slaves.



Still from S. McQueen's film *12 Years a Slave*, 2013

2 Solomon Northup's story

A. Look at the cover of Solomon Northup's autobiography. What can you guess about his story?

B. Online, watch the trailer for the film adaptation of *12 Years a Slave*. Pick out the main events that led to Solomon Northup's enslavement.

C. Write a short synopsis of the film.

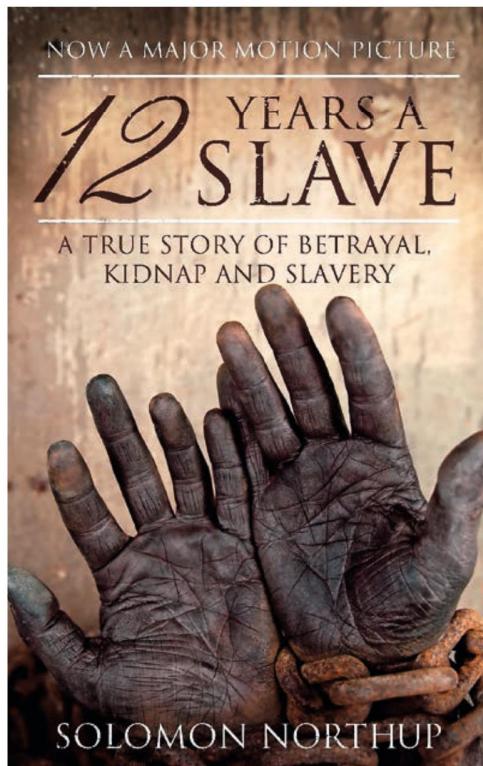
HELP!

Words

- betrayal /b'retel/: trahison
- abduct = kidnap
- captive
- survive

Tip

- Use the passive voice when you can ("I guess Solomon was...").



3 Cotton picking season

A. Read the text. What are the slaves forced to do on the plantations?

B. What penalties are inflicted on the slaves?

C. Pick out the words describing the slaves' feelings and physical condition at the end of the day.

In the latter part of August begins the cotton picking season. At this time each slave is presented with a sack. A strap is fastened to it, which goes over the neck, holding the mouth of the sack breast high, while the bottom reaches nearly to the ground. Each one is also presented with a large basket that will hold about two barrels. This is to put the cotton in when the sack is filled. The baskets are carried to the field and placed at the beginning of the rows. When a new hand, one unaccustomed¹ to the business, is sent for the first time into the field, he is whipped up² smartly, and made for that day to pick as fast as he can possibly. At night it is weighed³, so that his capability in cotton picking is known. He must bring in the same weight each night following. If it falls short, it is considered evidence that he has been laggard⁴, and a greater or less number of lashes⁵ is the penalty. [...] The day's work over in the field, the baskets are "toted"⁶, or in other words, carried to the gin-house, where the cotton

is weighed. No matter how fatigued and weary⁷ he may be – no matter how much he longs for sleep and rest – a slave never approaches the gin-house⁸ with his basket of cotton but with fear. If it falls short in weight – If he has not performed the full task appointed him, he knows that he must suffer. And if he has exceeded it by ten or twenty pounds, in all probability his master will measure the next day's task accordingly. So, whether he has too little or too much, his approach to the gin-hose is always with fear and trembling. Most frequently they have too little, and therefore it is they are not anxious to leave the field. After weighing, follow the whippings...

1 pas habitué à • 2 fouetté • 3 pesé • 4 boiteux • 5 coups de fouet
• 6 totalisé • 7 las • 8 endroit où le coton est égrené

12 Years A Slave,
Solomon Northup, 1853



Your TURN! 4 Write an article

You are an historian. Write an article about slaves' working conditions. Use the picture and what you have learnt to write an 80-word article.

HELP!

- "On Master Epps's plantation, the work is... / life is..."
- "Every working day starts with..."
- "By the end of the day, we are..."
- "My master is..."
- "The overseer (= supervisor) checks / controls..."
- Pick cotton, weigh the basket, whip / lash the worker...



Picking cotton, in a southern State, 1878

4 “Slave Culture”

Music and legends as the only way out

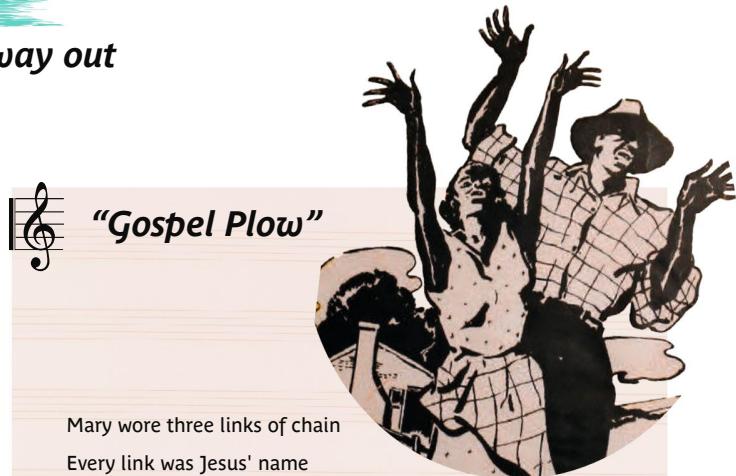
1 From “slave music” to American music

- A. Read Bob Dylan's adaptation of a famous slave song and react to the lyrics.
- B. What seems to be this song's message? Justify your answer with lyrics from the song. Use the picture for help.
- C. Read the *Cultural fact*. What did music represent for slaves?
- D. Pick out information about the content of Negro Spirituals. Can you find examples in the lyrics of “Gospel Plow”?

Cultural fact

The Deep South and Negro spirituals

Slaves led very difficult lives. They were forbidden many things, but they were allowed to go to church and play music. Because they had so few things to enjoy, they put a great deal of energy into their music. Combining African rhythms and harmonies with messages of hope from the Bible, they created what are called “Negro spirituals.” [...] The words of the songs were often taken from stories in the Bible that told about freedom and hope for a better future.



“Gospel Plow”

Mary wore three links of chain
Every link was Jesus' name
Keep your hand on that plow¹, hold on²
Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your hand on that plow, hold on

⁵ Mary, Mark, Luke and John
All these prophets are dead and gone
Keep your hand on that plow, hold on
Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your hand on that plow, hold on
Well, I've never been to Heaven

¹⁰ But I've been told streets up there
Are lined with gold
Keep your hand on that plow, hold on
Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your hand on that plow, hold on
Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your hand on that plow, hold on
Oh Lord, oh Lord, keep your hand on that plow, hold on

¹ charrue • ² tenir bon

“Gospel Plow”,
Bob Dylan, 1961



YOUR TURN! 2 Write your own “Negro spiritual”

Complete the opposite stanzas to create your own song.

Find a title and include rhymes if possible!

“ My dear brothers, hear me sing,
May this song keep you from moaning,

One day...
I see a...
Help me...
Together, we...

We were...
But tomorrow, we'll... ”

3 The lasting legacy of voodoo

A. Look at the picture. What can you associate with voodoo?

B. Read the texts. What could be the link between voodoo and slavery?

C. Using the texts and the picture, draw a mind map including the places, the history and the rituals.



The Day of the Dead is celebrated on the first two days of November during All Saints and All Souls Day and voodoo believers and devotees celebrate with candles [...] and food. The festival sees families congregate to remember loved ones who have passed away by celebrating their death [...].

Voodoo or voudou is the Haitian folk religion. It consists of various African magical beliefs and rites that have become mixed with Catholic elements. It began with the arrival of slaves in the New World, most of them from the western, "Slave Coast" area of Africa [...]. In Benin's Fon language, *vodun* means "spirit," an invisible, mysterious force that can intervene in human affairs.

4 Anansi

A. Read the text and observe the picture. Write Anansi's profile on [Worksheet n°67](#).

B. What is the link between Anansi and slavery?

Have you ever heard of the tricky spider named Anansi? This West African god frequently takes the form of a spider, and holds the knowledge of all of the folktales¹ and stories; he is cunning² and tricky³, and uses his

5 cunning guile⁴ to try to get what he wants. [...]

During the Atlantic slave trade, the stories crossed the ocean with the slaves through oral tradition. Especially in the Caribbean, Anansi's cunning ways symbolized a resistance to powerful slave owners.

10 Anansi stories (and their variants: in the US he is known as "Aunt Nancy") are considered "trickster" folktales⁴ because the small spider uses his intelligence and trickiness to triumph over larger creatures.

1 contes populaires • 2 astucieux • 3 rusé • 4 malice



Your TURN! 5 Imagine an African folktale!

Imagine an African folktale in which Anansi will save his people from a great danger. You can add an illustration if you want.

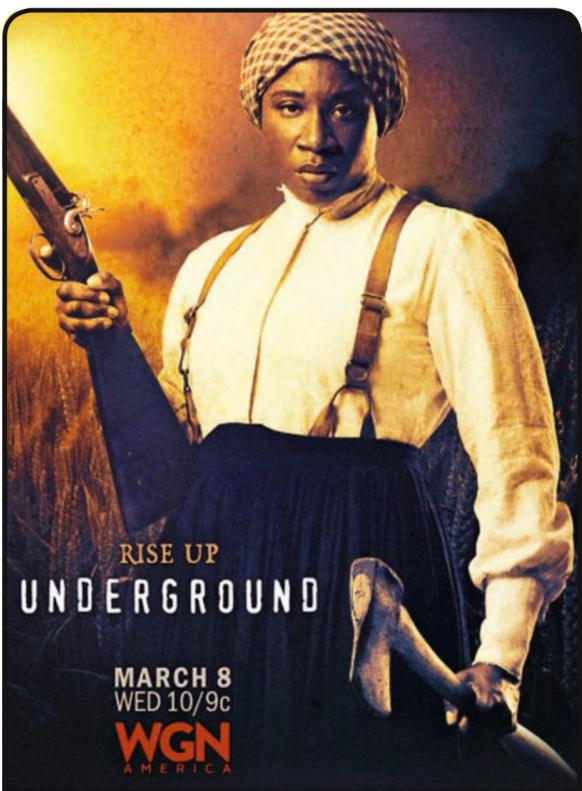
Help!

Tips

- Let me tell you a story...
- Once upon a time, a village was being attacked by...
- Anansi was summoned by... in order to save...
- He managed to...

● Hope and Resistance

How to break the chains?



1 The Underground Railroad

- A. Look at this poster and describe the character.
- B. Can you guess the topic of this TV series?
- C. Read the *Cultural fact* about the *Underground Railroad*. Explain the title of the TV series and the woman's goal.
- D. **Online**, watch the trailer for *Underground* and listen carefully: what did you understand about the main characters?
- E. What dangers did runaway slaves face?

Cultural fact

The Underground Railroad was a secret network organised by people who helped men, women, and children escape from slavery to freedom. It operated before the Civil War (1861-1865) ended slavery in the United States. The Underground Railroad provided hiding places, food, and often transportation for the fugitives who were trying to escape slavery [by travelling to Northern states, or Canada].

2 Fugitive slaves

- A. Study the painting (title / action / characters' attitudes / atmosphere).
- B. Link your findings with your knowledge of the *Underground Railroad*.

3 Present the painting!

The Brooklyn Museum in New York City is holding a temporary exhibition on the *Underground Railroad*. You have been asked to present Johnson's painting for the opening ceremony of the exhibition. Give the visitors some historical context and present the painting.



A Ride for Liberty – The Fugitive Slaves, Eastman Johnson, 1862

4 Slave rebellions

- A. Read the text. Fill in the table on [Worksheet n°68](#).
- B. Sum up what happened in August 1831.
- C. What was the ultimate goal of Nat Turner's rebellion?



The most celebrated slave rebellion in American history, organized by Nat Turner, took place in Southampton County, Virginia, an area of small farms rather than large plantations. Born in 1800, Turner was a slave preacher and something of a mystic. In the 1820s, he

⁵ began to see visions in the sky: black and white angels fighting, the heavens running red with blood. He became convinced that he had been chosen by God to lead his people to freedom. In August 1831 Turner and five followers met and, without a plan or a clear objective, launched their rebellion. For twelve ¹⁰ hours, they moved from farm to farm, killing every white person they encountered [...]. By the time the militia suppressed the uprising, nearly eighty slaves had joined the rebellion, and sixty Whites lay dead.

5 Breaking the chains

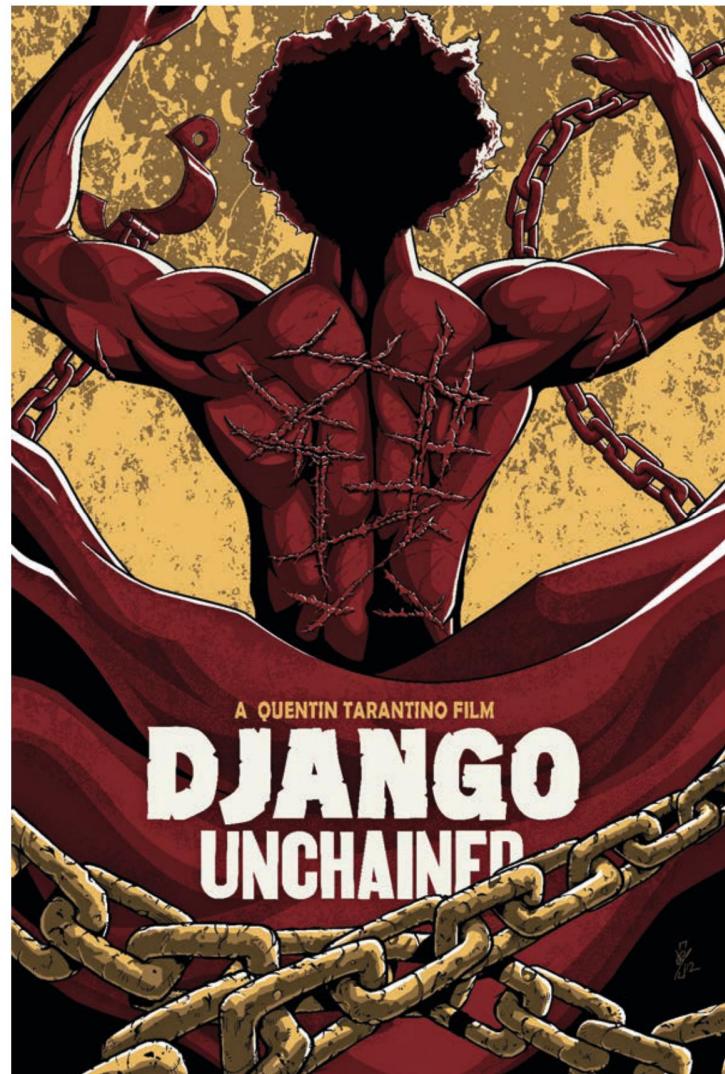
- A. Look at the poster. Describe the main character.
- B. Imagine Django's personal story.
- C. Draw a parallel between Nat Turner's rebellion and the poster for *Django Unchained*.

HELP!

- One day, Django was enslaved by / bought by...
- He had to...
- ... until the moment when he decided to...

YOUR TURN! 6 Is it worth it?

Pairwork. Act out the conversation between a slave who intends to run away and his/her friend who believes it will be too risky and detrimental to the other slaves on the plantation.



Fan art poster by Daz Tibbles