# Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Study Guide

## Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl by Harriet Ann Jacobs

BOOKRAGS

# Contents

# Plot Summary

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl carries the reader through the events of one woman's birth into slavery, her sufferings under that institution, and the manner in which she is eventually able to free herself and her family from bondage and create a new life in the North.

Through the pseudonym Linda Brent, the author, Harriet Jacobs, begins her story by telling us about her unusually (for a slave) happy childhood, which comes to an abrupt end as the deaths of her mother, father and a kind first mistress leave her an orphan and the helpless property of Dr. Flint.

Linda manages to adjust to life with the Flints, largely due to her maternal grandmother, who has been freed from slavery and offers whatever support she can to her orphaned slave grandchildren. However, as Linda approaches maturity, she becomes the object of her master's lecherous advances. She makes every effort to rebuff his advances, but since she is his legal property, this becomes very difficult. She ultimately decides that the only way to avoid her master's sexual advances is to become the mistress of another prominent gentleman in the town. She bears this gentleman two children.

Now, as the mother of two, Linda is not only still frustrated by her lack of power to control her own destiny, but also by her inability to protect the best interests of her children. When she becomes aware that her master intends to take her children to the plantation to break them in for a life of backbreaking labor, she plans her escape.

After escaping from slavery, Linda spends many years uncomfortably hidden in her grandmother's home. During this time she effectively secures the freedom of her children and eventually is able to escape to the North herself. Even after she reaches the North, she is still in danger. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law makes it possible for her to be caught and returned to the South as Dr. Flint's rightful property at any time. She is reunited with her children in the North, however, and is able to gain employment to provide for them and educate them. While she has successfully secured her own freedom and that of her children at the end of the narrative, she still has not achieved her goal of obtaining a home of her own where she and her children can live together.

Interspersed throughout the story of her own life, Linda shares with the reader the experiences of her family, friends, and others in slavery. Through these anecdotes, the reader learns about a wide range of different slave experiences and about those who are indirectly affected by this institution.

# Preface by the Author and Introduction by the Editor

## Preface by the Author and Introduction by the Editor Summary and Analysis

In her author's preface, Ms. Jacobs explains that while she did change the names of the characters and other identifying details in her narrative, all of the significant information presented is non-fiction. She anticipates that the reader might find it difficult to believe certain highly dramatic events in her life but insists that everything she reports is true. She says that she was, at first, hesitant to write a book about her experiences due to her self-consciousness about her lack of formal education. She believes that her literary talents are not up to the task of portraying the evils of slavery to the reader. However, at the insistence of her friends, she has consented to write and publish her story. She hopes that she might, through this book, be able to help change the destiny of the millions of women who still live in slavery.

In her introduction to the narrative, editor L. Maria Child backs up the claims made by Ms. Jacobs in the introduction—that the book is primarily the work of a former female slave, and that the information is, to the best of her knowledge, factually accurate. Ms. Child anticipates that she will be criticized for publishing a work that addresses "delicate subjects" (notably that of sexual slavery). However, she has published the narrative regardless, since she believes that the public needs to be aware of these issues, and that hiding them from public view in the interest of decorum only enables their perpetrators.

# Chapter 1, Childhood

## Chapter 1, Childhood Summary and Analysis

Here, Linda relates the details of her early childhood, which she admits is an unusually happy one for a slave child. For the first six years of her life, Linda lives in a house with her mother and father. Although both of her parents are slaves, they have been granted an extraordinary amount of freedom, being allowed to live together and raise their family with little interference from their masters. Her father is even able to work independently and earn his own income, so long as he pays his mistress an annual fee of $200 for this privilege. During this time, Linda is not even aware that she and her family are slaves.

When Linda is six, her mother becomes ill and passes away. It is at this time that she first discovers that she is legally a slave. However, aside from her grief over the loss of her mother, Linda's life continues relatively happily. Her mistress takes Linda into her own home, treats her kindly, and teaches her how to read and write. However, this kind mistress passes away when Linda is twelve years old. Since Linda has never been treated like a slave, she is hopeful that she will be granted her freedom. When she discovers that she has been bequeathed to her mistress's five-year-old niece, Linda is made to feel like a piece of property for the first time, and feels bitterly betrayed by the mistress she had dearly loved.

Linda's unusually free and happy childhood will prove to be both an advantage and a disservice throughout her life. It will be a disservice because it will make it extremely difficult for her to function as someone else's slave when she has been raised to expect humane and respectful treatment (other members of her family, notably Benjamin and William, suffer the from the same difficulty in adjustment). However, the fact that her parents and first mistress raised her and her brother "to feel that they were human beings" undoubtedly contributes to the self-assurance that enables Linda to resist Dr. Flint's advances, and helps her to eventually extricate herself and her children from slavery.

In this chapter the reader also learns the history of Linda's maternal grandmother. Aunt Marthy, as she is called by the townspeople, was legally granted her freedom during childhood, but was later recaptured and sold back into slavery. She was purchased by a slave-holding family who seem more humane than most, and is evidently treated fairly well, but is unable to save her children from the auction block. Her youngest son, Benjamin is sold to a neighboring family at the age of ten, much to his mother's dismay.

# Chapter 2, The New Master and Mistress

## Chapter 2, The New Master and Mistress Summary and Analysis

As her new legal mistress is a five-year-old child, the girl's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Flint, become Linda's de facto master and mistress. William is purchased by the same family, and he finds it difficult to adjust to life in bondage

Linda and William's father is distraught by his utter lack of power to protect his own children. He has tried to purchase their freedom, but to no avail. Shortly after Linda and William enter the home of the Flints, their father dies suddenly, bringing the children increased awareness of their own powerlessness. Their grandmother, Aunt Marthy, resolves to be a mother to her grandchildren to the greatest extent possible.

The reader learns the story about how this same Dr. Flint tried to cheat Linda's grandmother out of her lawfully obtained freedom, and how she was rescued by a kind relative of her late mistress who purchased and freed her at the age of fifty. At the time when Linda and William go to live in the Flint household, Aunt Marthy is living in her own house as a free woman.

In Dr. Flint's house Linda is exposed for the first time to the kinds of horrific abuses to slaves that Linda later concludes are widespread. Shortly after her arrival, a man is beaten within an inch of his life for voicing his (rightful) suspicions that Dr. Flint has fathered his wife's child. The reader learns that this man, his wife, and her illegitimate child are subsequently sold to slave traders to shield Dr. Flint from public suspicion. One also learns about another young woman who suffers greatly before she dies giving birth to her master's child. These are the first mentions of the sexual abuse of female slaves, which is a recurring theme throughout the narrative.

Linda also comments that many of the slaves in Dr. Flints household are not properly fed. However, Linda herself is never forced to go hungry because her grandmother generously provides decent food from her kitchen.

# Chapter 3, The Slave's New Year's Day

## Chapter 3, The Slave's New Year's Day Summary and Analysis

In this short chapter one learns about the slave auction and hiring day which occur each year on January first. The slaves live in fear of this annual event, which sends people powerlessly into unknown horrors and tears apart families. Linda laments how children (sometimes very young ones) are sold away from their mothers, never to be seen again. She tells of a woman with seven children who lost all of them to a slave trader one New Year's Day. Throughout the book, one will see several similar mentions of children permanently separated from parents and husbands separated from wives, since the law offers no legal sanction or protection for these familial bonds between slaves.

# Chapter 4, The Slave who Dared to Feel Like a Man

## Chapter 4, The Slave who Dared to Feel Like a Man Summary and Analysis

Linda's youngest uncle, Benjamin, has an independent and rebellious spirit which makes him particularly bitter about his life as a slave. Her brother, William, is still only twelve years old, but appears to be following in his uncle's footsteps.

William and Benjamin appear to derive their courage from an inner sense of self-worth—a deeply-rooted belief in their own rights as human beings that has been beaten down in most slaves. Their unusual self-assurance may be largely due to the influence of their mother/grandmother, Aunt Marthy, and of William's father, whose relative freedom has enabled them to view themselves as valid human beings rather than as chattel.

Dr. and Mrs. Flint evidently see signs of this same quality in Linda, because they make a concerted effort to humiliate her and put her in her place. Linda recounts a time when Mrs. Flint arbitrarily took way her new shoes (a gift from her grandmother) and made her walk barefoot through the snow.

Benjamin, now in his early twenties, resists the authority of his master. They get into a fight, resulting in the master being thrown to the ground. Knowing that there will be severe repercussions for this act, Benjamin escapes, but is captured on his way to the North and brought back. Upon his return, he is forced to spend several months in jail, where the infestation, poor food quality, and poor general living conditions take their toll on his health.

He is finally released from prison to be sold to a slave trader who promises not to sell him until he reaches New Orleans. Benjamin never reaches New Orleans, however. He escapes a second time—this time successfully reaching freedom in the North. His brother, Phillip later accompanies his master to New York, and happens to see Benjamin when he is there. Phillip is happy to find that his brother is free and happy. Benjamin asks Phillip to stay so they can work together in New York, but Phillip decides to return to the South and his family. This is the last that Linda and her family hear of Benjamin. Linda and her Grandmother are saddened that Benjamin is no longer a part of their lives, but understand that he is happier now that he is no longer a slave.

Benjamin's story gives the reader, early on in the story, a clearer understanding about what a slave risks by attempting to escape, and what is gained if the attempt is successful.

Later, Linda's grandmother is able to purchase Phillip and free him from slavery.

# Chapter 5, The Trials of Girlhood

## Chapter 5, The Trials of Girlhood Summary and Analysis

This is the chapter in which the author first discusses, in some depth, the theme of sexual slavery. Linda recounts how, when she reached the age of fifteen, her master began to make advances toward her—at first by merely whispering obscene comments into her ear and later by threatening her with physical injury.

Linda asserts that masters like Dr. Fling are the rule rather than the exception, and that sexual abuse of young female slaves is commonplace. Since the slave is the property of the master and subject to his authority in all matters, such sexual exploitation is legally sanctioned and acknowledged by society with some degree of approval.

Here the writer demonstrates how any slave, even the best-fed, best-clothed slaves who live in comfortable homes, are none-the-less humiliated and degraded by a system which views them as the property of another human being.

# Chapter 6, The Jealous Mistress

## Chapter 6, The Jealous Mistress Summary and Analysis

Mrs. Flint, suspicious of the attention her husband is bestowing upon Linda, becomes jealous and angry. She has reason to be suspicious, because Dr. Flint was forcing himself upon young slave girls for quite some time (Linda tells us that he is the father of at least eleven slave children). Linda confesses to her mistress that Dr. Flint had made advances to her, and that she had resisted them. Mrs. Flint is devastated, and she does offer Linda some protection from a plan that Dr. Flint had arranged that would force her into a compromising sleeping arrangement. However, the reader is never given the impression that Mrs. Flint ever considers Linda's feelings or that it ever occurs to her to regard Linda as a victim.

The author elaborates further on the dysfunctional dynamic of slave-owning households. According to her, men who sexually exploit their female slaves are commonplace, their wives are bitter and jealous, their (legitimate) sons are encouraged to follow in their father's footsteps, and their (legitimate) daughters are exposed to indecent information at a very young age, since they can hear their parents quarreling and are exposed to the town's gossip. Slave-masters often have no qualms about being the father of many little slaves, and freely send them—their own children—to the auction block as chattel.

# Chapter 7, The Lover

## Chapter 7, The Lover Summary and Analysis

Linda falls in love with a free black man who lives in her town. He proposes to marry her and wishes to buy her. Dr. Flint will not allow it and is furious that Linda would prefer the honorable proposal of a black man over his own licentious advances.

Linda refuses to enter an affair with the man she loves because she wants him to see her as a virtuous woman and because she knows that as a free man he would be devastated to see his children born into slavery (since the children of slave women "follow the condition of the mother"). Although she is heartbroken, she convinces her lover to travel north to seek his fortune and not to come back.

Linda has tried to enter a sanctified marriage and live according to the Christian model for virtuous women. She learns that the kind of sexual virtue valued by free women is not a possibility for her.

# Chapter 8, What Slaves are Taught to Believe About the North

## Chapter 8, What Slaves are Taught to Believe About the North Summary and Analysis

Here the reader learns how slaves are told believe that life in the northern states is more difficult and unpleasant than their current lives in slavery. Their masters fabricate stories about escaped slaves and the terrible fates they meet in the North. Dr. Flint tells Linda that he has seen an escaped friend of hers in the free states, living in such terrible circumstances that she begged to be returned to slavery. Linda will meet with this friend, in New York, many years later, and find her living comfortably with no thoughts of returning to slavery.

To some extent, the slaves believe these lies, since most of them lack the education and contact with the outside world they would need to determine otherwise. However, Linda believes that nearly all slaves are at least a little skeptical about the stories they are told about the North. Still, fear of the unknown discourages many would-be escapees.

Linda notes that Northerners who relocate to the South and purchase slaves tend to be harsher slave-masters than native-born Southerners, and this may contribute some credibility, in the slaves' eyes, to the unflattering stories they are told about the North.

# Chapter 9, Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders

## Chapter 9, Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders Summary and Analysis

Here Linda tells about some of the other slaveholders of the town in which she lived. The reader is given the impression that the sufferings of Linda under Dr. Flint are by no means exceptional. Much of the chapter revolves around the wrongdoings of an infamous slaveholder called Mr. Litch. Beatings, whippings, and murders are commonplace on his plantation. One learns of a particularly horrific murder of a man named James.

Linda also tells us of a young woman whom she believed to be one of a rare group of truly good slaveholders. She treated her slaves well, honored their familial ties (she owned a mother and her six children), and they served her faithfully. They were happy and did not wish to be freed from slavery. However, after the young woman married and therefore all control of her property was transferred to her husband, this good slave-mistress was powerless to stop her husband from selling the woman and her children away from each other. This anecdote demonstrates how slaves, even those in the most idyllic situations, are made to suffer because of the inherent problems with the institution of slavery itself.

# Chapter 10, A Perilous Passage in a Slave Girl's Life

## Chapter 10, A Perilous Passage in a Slave Girl's Life Summary and Analysis

Dr. Flint, still determined to have his way with Linda, devises a plan to build a house several miles from town and to move Linda there. Here she will be removed from her grandmother's protection, from the watchful eye of Mrs. Flint, and from of the gossipy small town where Dr. Flint tries to maintain a respectable reputation.

Linda is desperate to prevent this from happening, and begins an affair with Mr. Sands, a prominent white man in the town who has flattered Linda with his attention. On the day in which Dr. Flint informs Linda that she will be moved to the new house he has prepared for her, she informs him that she is pregnant with another man's child. Dr. Flint is furious and threatens her, Mrs. Flint is angry (because she believes her husband to be the father), and (most troubling to Linda) her grandmother is deeply ashamed of her and (very briefly) turns her out of the house. Soon afterward, Aunt Marthy takes pity on Linda and offers her support.

Throughout her life, Linda will be deeply ashamed about her affair with Mr. Sands and the illegitimacy of the children who are born from that union, although she will love the children dearly. She anticipates that the reading public will judge her harshly for bearing children out of wedlock. On many occasions, she expresses shame concerning her actions and implores the reader to be understanding. One can conclude that she has reason to believe that the society of her time will look down on her. However, the average twenty-first century reader is likely to find these actions easily forgivable.

# Chapter 11, A New Tie to Life

## Chapter 11, A New Tie to Life Summary and Analysis

Mr. Sands promises Aunt Marthy that he will take care of his children to whatever extent possible and that he will attempt to buy Linda.

Meanwhile, Dr. Flint is furious about Linda's pregnancy. He interrogates her concerning the paternity of her child, but to no avail.

Linda's baby boy is premature, and the doctor says that Linda will not live. Linda, who in the past had wished for death, now has, in her child, a new reason to continue living. The infant grows into a healthy and attractive child, but Linda is pained to know that he is Dr. Flint's slave and she is powerless to protect him from his fate.

Meanwhile, William is working as a medical assistant to Dr. Flint. He is so good at it that he soon becomes indispensable to Dr. Flint's practice.

# Chapter 12, Fear of Insurrection

## Chapter 12, Fear of Insurrection Summary and Analysis

Here one learns about the aftermath of Nat Turner's insurrection and how it affected the lives of Linda and the other slaves (and free black people) in her area. While the annual muster has already passed for the year, another one is planned. In a muster, the white men of the town and surrounding areas line up in military fashion and search the homes of the slaves and free Negroes for signs of resistance and conspiracy. Evidently, the annual muster is typically a reasonably painless procedure, because most of the slaves are not worried about it—many of them even look forward to it as a holiday. The muster proves to be horrific, however. Slaves' homes are destroyed. Men, women, and children are drug out into the street to be whipped and tortured. Property is looted.

Linda's family fares better than most since they have white friends who offer them protection. The poor white people who search the home of Linda's grandmother are clearly resentful that there are black people who enjoy a higher standard of living than they do.

They find one of Linda's letters and are alarmed that Linda can read. Since these poor white people cannot read themselves, they are forced to take the letter to the captain (the notorious Mr. Litch) to be read. The searchers are disappointed to find nothing incriminating written in the letter.

The muster continues for many days. After the town is searched, the Negroes in the countryside are subjected to the the same searches and persecutions.

Here, the author references a historical event that the reader is likely to be familiar with, and its ramifications on the life of common people. Since the narrative never mentions dates, this is the first time one is given a clear point of reference where one can determine the date of any of the events that are depicted in the book. Nat Turner's insurrection occurred in 1831.

# Chapter 13, The Church and Slavery

## Chapter 13, The Church and Slavery Summary and Analysis

After the scare resulting from Nat Turner's insurrection, the slaveholders in the area decide that the slaves would benefit from some religious training (to discourage them from murdering their masters). The churches within the community begin to offer special services for colored people in the afternoons when the white people are not at church.

The reader learns of a sanctimonious pastor named Mr. Pike, who inculcates the slaves with the belief that God wants them to obey their masters faithfully, and that resistance to one's master is depravity in the eyes of God that is punishable by the fires of hell.

One also learns of a second pastor. This pastor comes into town to helm the Episcopal church after his predecessor, a man popular among slaveholders leaves to take on a more lucrative assignment. This pastor takes his mission of ministering to slaves and other oppressed colored people very seriously, perhaps more seriously than his ministry to the white people in his congregation. He also respects the humanity of his black congregation and preaches that white people and black people are equal in the eyes of God. This makes him extremely popular with the black members of the community, and unpopular among slaveholders.

A common theme throughout this chapter is the problematic disconnect between the Christian message being instilled upon the slaves, and the extremely unchristian nature of the behavior of the slaveholders and of the institution of slavery itself. Linda observes that, after joining the Episcopal church, Dr. Flint makes no apparent attempt to "renounce the devil and all his works" or even to alter his behavior in any way. When Linda points this out to him, he admits that he merely joined the church in the interest of social respectability.

In one of the more touching anecdotes of the novel, an older slave man commonly called "Uncle Fred", who joins the Baptist Church, earnestly desires to learn to read so that he can read the Bible. Linda agrees to teach him, although both she and Uncle Fred are aware that they will both suffer severe consequences if they are caught. Although Linda finds his progress in learning to read to be remarkably rapid, Uncle Fred cannot be made to see it that way. He continually apologizes for his slowness, a defect he accredits to his perceived inferiority of his own race. As much as Linda tries to encourage him, he appears to have these thoughts of inferiority thoroughly ingrained in him.

# Chapter 14, Another Link to Life

## Chapter 14, Another Link to Life Summary and Analysis

Linda's second child by Mr. Sands is a girl. This devastates her because she is fearful that she will not be able to protect her child from the hardships of slavery that are specific to women. This daughter closely resembles her father and maternal grandmother, revealing the identity of her father to a furious Dr. Flint.

She has her children baptized in the church, but is deeply ashamed that they have no legitimate father's name to claim. While Mr. Sands is willing to allow them to claim his name, Linda does not think this is wise, as it is likely to incur the wrath of Dr. Flint. In the end, they decide that the children will carry the surname of Linda's father, which is Brent. She laments that, had her mother been alive, she would have been ashamed of Linda for bringing her children to be christened without a legitimate claim to their father's name. However, Linda is clearly not the first woman in her family who has been forced into this embarrassing situation—she points out that her own father did not have a legitimate claim to the name of Brent since he, much like Linda's son and daughter, was an illegitimate child of a slave woman and a white gentleman. She decides to call the boy Benjamin, after her escaped uncle, and the girl Ellen, after her late father's mistress.

# Chapter 15, Continued Persecutions

## Chapter 15, Continued Persecutions Summary and Analysis

Dr. Flint is more determined than ever to force Linda into submission. He constantly reminds her of his authority over her children, pointing out that he looks forward to selling them for large sums when they reach maturity. He reminds her that he is the only person in the world with the power to grant her and her children freedom, and tempts her with promises of a comfortable home and eventual freedom. He warns that if she resists him, she and her children will be sent to his plantation where they will be forced to do hard labor. If she believed it was in the best interest of her children, she might have been tempted to take him up on his offers, but she feels certain that he will not keep his word, for she has always found him to be dishonest. Therefore, she decides that it will be best if she goes to the plantation.

Dr. Flint's behavior and character are much the same as they had always been, but Linda has changed considerably. She originally rejected Dr. Flint's advances due to repulsion and personal pride. Although she is still repulsed by Dr. Flint, and she is still resistant to his attentions toward her, the welfare of her children has now become the primary motivation for her actions.

# Chapter 16, Scenes at the Plantation

## Chapter 16, Scenes at the Plantation Summary and Analysis

Linda is sent to work at the plantation. Young Mr. Flint, Dr. Flint's son, is preparing the plantation house for his wife-to-be, and there is a lot of work to be done in the few weeks leading up to his marriage. Initially, baby Ellen accompanies her mother to the farm, while Benny, who has been ill, remains in his great-grandmother's home. However, since Linda is kept too busy at the plantation to adequately tend to her daughter's needs, Ellen is soon sent back to stay with Aunt Marthy as well.

Linda is distrustful of Mr. Flint Jr., but is works hard and makes an effort to be agreeable, so the two get along reasonably well. Upon her arrival, the new Mrs. Flint is very satisfied with the work that Linda has done on her new home, and is friendly and gracious to Linda. Linda has little respect for this new mistress, whose character is revealed when she denies a meat ration to an old slave who is too feeble to work, but makes an effort to get along with her and they are able to work together well.

During this time, Linda makes frequent trips into town during the night—walking six miles there and back before morning—in order to visit her family. During the entire time, she is planning her escape from slavery and devising a plot to liberate her children. She tells few people of her plans. When her grandmother catches wind of it, she eagerly tries to dissuade Linda of her desire to escape, reminding her of her responsibilities to her children and imploring her to remember how Benjamin was forced to suffer after his escape attempt.

# Chapter 17, The Flight

## Chapter 17, The Flight Summary and Analysis

Linda escapes from the plantation. She informs few of her family and friends of her escape, only stopping at her grandmother's home to remove her belongings from her bedroom—thus creating the illusion that she might have taken off for the northern states. She then ventures to her hiding place at a friend's house. She tells none of her family about her hiding place, so they can truthfully say that have no idea of her whereabouts when they are inevitably interrogated by the Flints.

As expected, Linda's absence is soon noticed and the Flints interview all of Linda's family as well as search every inch of Aunt Marthy's house. Within twenty-four hours of her escape, advertisements offering a reward for her capture are posted at every public gathering place for miles around.

# Chapter 18, Months of Peril

## Chapter 18, Months of Peril Summary and Analysis

The Flints continue their search for Linda with more vehemence than she had anticipated. After she has been hiding for a week, her pursuers come within a close proximity of the house in which she is hiding, prompting Linda to run out of the house and hide in some bushes, where she suffers from a venomous snake bite.

A kind woman in town who (although a slaveholder herself) is sympathetic to Linda's plan to escape, offers to aid Linda. She hides Linda in a small storage room in her home.

Mr. Sands' agent has made very generous offers to buy Linda's children. However, Dr. Flint refuses to sell them although it is clearly in his best interests, financially. He appears determined to have his revenge on Linda no matter what it costs him. Dr. Flint throws Benny and Ellen, as well as William and Aunt Nancy into jail, hopeful that this will bring them to reveal Linda's whereabouts or provoke Linda to reveal herself in order to protect them. When this fails, Dr. Flint decides that Linda must have escaped to the free states, and borrows $500 to venture to New York in search of her. Ironically, he enters the house in which Linda hides and asks her protectors to loan him the money. He takes the money and goes to New York in search of Linda, never suspecting that his moneylenders were harboring the fugitive slave he seeks.

Meanwhile, Ellen becomes very ill in jail and is moved from the jail into the home of Dr. and Mrs. Flint. Although the home is comfortable, and she is under the care of a doctor, she is frightened of the Flints, distressed about her separation from her family, and cries to be returned to jail. When she is taken back to the filthy, uncomfortable prison, she is happy to be back with the people who love her.

# Chapter 19, The Children Sold

## Chapter 19, The Children Sold Summary and Analysis

Dr. Flint eventually consents to sell Benny, Ellen, and William to a slave trader (who is working for Mr. Sands) for much more than their typical market value. As the children are unaware that they are being purchased by their father to be returned to their great-grandmother, they are frightened when they leave the jail, are sold, and are led off to their unknown fate. Later, when they are handed over to Aunt Marthy, there is much celebration. The reader later learns that William has been taken into the service of Mr. Sands, and while William still resents being a slave, he certainly considers his new master to be an improvement over Dr. Flint.

Unfortunately, Linda is not around to take part in the joyous festivities. From her hiding place, she is ignorant of the fate of her children. She is held in agonizing suspense for hours until her friend Betty comes to see her and informs her of the children's happy situation.

# Chapter 20, New Perils

## Chapter 20, New Perils Summary and Analysis

Dr. Flint, furious to see Linda's children living happily with their great-grandmother in his own town, has Uncle Phillip arrested on charges of helping Linda escape (of which the reader knows he is innocent). Although Phillip is cleared of these charges and is soon released from prison, Linda is upset that yet another innocent person is made to suffer on her account.

She also worries about the anxiety she is causing her benefactress (who has been hiding her for several months). She decides that she must move to a new hiding place, but realizes that this will be difficult, since Dr. Flint and his family are still vigilant in their search for her. Linda leaves her benefactress' home and hides in a swamp full of snakes and mosquitoes until a new hiding place can be prepared for her.

Linda's friend Peter comes to fetch her in the swamp when her hiding place has been made ready. Linda has been told very little—only that her Uncle Phillip has prepared her a new place of concealment in her grandmother's home. Linda finds it unlikely that she could be hidden in her grandmother's house since the Flint's are so familiar with it and because they would expect her to be hiding there. However, she does not argue as Peter leads her to her new home.

# Chapter 21, The Loophole of Retreat

## Chapter 21, The Loophole of Retreat Summary and Analysis

Linda's new hiding place is in a small garret above the shed attached to her grandmother's home. The floor space is only nine feet by seven feet. The ceiling is only three feet high at its highest point, but it slopes down quickly from there, and Linda barely has enough room to sit up. Her "den" as she calls it, admits no light or air, offers no insulation or other protection from heat, cold, or even heavy rain, and is infested with mice, rats, and other vermin. Linda will live in these conditions for many years.

One day, Linda discovers a gimlet that Uncle Phillip had accidentally left behind. With it she is able to bore a small hole through which she can peer out and occasionally catch glimpses of her children. The hole also admits some much needed air and light, and allows Linda to read and do needlework to help pass the time.

Dr. Flint continues his diligent search for Linda, and makes another trip to New York in search of her.

Here begins one of the most remarkable phases in the narrative. The extremely uncomfortable living conditions Linda maintains for an incredible length of time astound the reader. This is particularly remarkable when one considers that Linda remains in her den voluntarily.

# Chapter 22, Christmas Festivities

## Chapter 22, Christmas Festivities Summary and Analysis

Christmas comes near and Linda, still in her den, is busy sewing clothes and toys for her children. When Christmas day finally comes, Benny and Ellen have stockings stuffed with presents from "Santa Claus". When a playmate tells Benny that Santa Clause isn't a real man and that the gifts come from the children's mothers, Benny replies that he knows that is false because he and Ellen had received a lot of presents even though their mother was far away. Little does he know that his mother is nearby, listening to his words.

For Christmas dinner, Aunt Marthy invites over two guests—both slave-hunters who had been searching for Linda. Aunt Marthy welcomes them in, opening every room in the house to them, in order to alleviate any suspicions they might have had that Linda was in the house or that the house contained clues to her whereabouts. As Aunt Marthy intended, the two find nothing to arouse their suspicions, which demonstrates to the reader how concealed Linda's hiding spot is, and how effective her family has been at keeping up the ruse.

# Chapter 23, Still in Prison

## Chapter 23, Still in Prison Summary and Analysis

Linda passes another summer and winter in her den. During the second winter she spends confined in the garret, she becomes very ill. She comes very near death, but her family manages to save her.

The anxiety over Linda's illness makes her grandmother very ill as well. Phillip, Nancy, William, and various ladies of the neighborhood come to tend to her, but Linda is powerless to help her in her state of hiding (not to mention her own illness). She worries that her grandmother may die on her account. Mrs. Flint is irritated when Aunt Marthy's daughter, Nancy, asks for permission to visit her, but, upon hearing that the other ladies in town are making an effort to help the sick woman, Mrs. Flint decides she must call on Aunt Marthy herself to keep up appearances.

During all of this, Benny is bitten by a dog and injured. Linda is distressed at her inability to help her child in his time of need, but Benny is soon happily recovered. Upon hearing the news about Benny's injury, Mrs. Flint remarks that she is glad of Benny's injury and that she hopes that his mother, wherever she is, hears of it.

Linda's frustration over her powerlessness to take care of herself or to support her family in times of injury and illness are a recurring theme throughout this chapter.

# Chapter 24, The Candidate for Congress

## Chapter 24, The Candidate for Congress Summary and Analysis

Mr. Sands runs for congress on the Whig party ticket, and Dr. Flint, although generally a staunch whig, actively campaigns for the opposing candidate.

Mr. Sands wins the election regardless of Dr. Flint's efforts and prepares to leave for Washington. Linda wishes to secure her children's freedom before he leaves, however, so she arranges a meeting with him. She crawls out of her little den for the first time in two years and catches his attention en route to his boat for Washington. She asks him to arrange for her children's emancipation before he goes, and he tells her it will be done. She is so weak by this time that she cannot walk and can barely crawl. She is unable to get back into her den by herself and must wait for her Uncle Phillip to carry her into it. Her grandmother and her uncle disapprove of her leaving her den and speaking with Mr. Sands, but they pity her too much to reprimand her for it.

# Chapter 25, Competition in Cunning

## Chapter 25, Competition in Cunning Summary and Analysis

Doctor Flint has now taken three trips to New York in search of Linda, so he clearly believes that she has escaped to the free states. Linda decides to reinforce this belief of his by sending him a letter postmarked from New York. She writes two letters, one to Dr. Flint and one to her grandmother, and gets her friend, Peter, to have the letters taken to New York and mailed from there.

The ruse is successful, and Dr. Flint is convinced that Linda has been living in Boston. He intercepts the letter Linda has sent to her grandmother, and replaces it with one he has written himself, in which Linda claims to be miserable in the North and wishes to return to the South. He hopes that this false letter will convince Linda's family to help him hunt Linda down in the North. Of course, Aunt Marthy, who was with Linda at the time she wrote the letter, is aware of the deception.

# Chapter 26, Important Era in My Brother's Life

## Chapter 26, Important Era in My Brother's Life Summary and Analysis

William accompanies Mr. Sands to Washington as his assistant. Mr. Sands has expressed great satisfaction with William's competence and work ethic, considers him a friend as well as a co-worker, and does not appear to treat him as a slave. William is still painfully aware that he is a slave, however, and upon entering the free states with his master, has no intention of returning to the South in bondage.

Linda and her grandmother are saddened that William is no longer a part of their lives, but try to rejoice in his newfound freedom in the North. Linda and her brother have continued contact through letters, and will be reunited years later, when Linda finally makes her escape.

# Chapter 27, New Destination for the Children

## Chapter 27, New Destination for the Children Summary and Analysis

Mr. Sands, now newly married, informs his new wife of his relationship to Benny and Ellen. His wife finds the children appealing and wishes to raise Benny in her own home. Her sister wants to adopt Ellen and raise her.

Linda is distrustful of this arrangement, and is afraid that the children may be reared for a life of slavery in the homes of Mr. Sands and his sister-in-law. She is even more afraid that Mr. Sands or his new in-laws may sell her children if they run into financial problems, but she feels powerless to do anything about it, since they are Mr. Sands' slaves and she is in hiding and believed to be either dead or in the northern states. Linda sends her grandmother to try to dissuade Mr. Sands from these plans. Mr. Sands responds that he does not regard the children as his slaves, and will not treat them as such. However, since Dr. Flint is still trying to claim ownership of the children, saying that they are his daughter's property, and that the bill of sale is not legal since it was drawn up before she came of age, Mr. Sands believes it might be safer for the children to be sent to the North.

Arrangements are made for Ellen to move to Brooklyn to stay with some of Mr. Sands' relatives. Linda wishes to meet with her daughter before she leaves. Linda does not remember her mother, who has been in hiding since she was very small, but is happy to see her. After their brief interview, Ellen leaves for New York, and dutifully keeps the secret of her mother's whereabouts.

# Chapter 28, Aunt Nancy

## Chapter 28, Aunt Nancy Summary and Analysis

Aunt Nancy, the last remaining daughter of Aunt Marthy, slave to Dr. Flint's household, and a source of support and comfort to Linda throughout her trials, dies. Linda briefly tells us her life story, believing Aunt Nancy to have been "slowly murdered" over many years through overwork and neglect. Upon her death, Mrs. Flint wishes for her to be buried next to her in the Flint family plot, to demonstrate what a valuable servant she was, without considering how her family feels.

However, Aunt Marthy insists that her daughter be buried in the slave burial ground with the rest of her family, and the reverend is inclined to honor her request. Phillip offers to bury her at his own expense.

Linda is deeply saddened by the loss of this aunt, and is troubled that she is unable to mourn her at her funeral.

Throughout this episode, Mrs. Flint and her family try to create, in Aunt Nancy's death and burial, a poignant statement about the bonds between a family and their valued servant, with little or no regard for her bereft family who are trying to cope with the loss of a beloved daughter, sister, and aunt.

# Chapter 29, Preparations for Escape

## Chapter 29, Preparations for Escape Summary and Analysis

After Linda has hidden in her den for almost seven years, her friend Peter informs her of an opportunity to escape to the North. Linda initially accepts, but her grandmother's worries about her safety convince her to stay and give up her place on the ship to Fanny, another escaped slave who is hiding on her Aunt Marthy's property.

Shortly afterward, however, Linda believes that she may have been spotted by a local gossip, and decides to go away after all. Peter arranges for both Linda and Fanny to escape on the northbound ship.

Before Linda leaves, she decides to meet with Benny. She has been living in the same house as Benny for seven years, but has not spoken with him or made her presence known to him all this time. During their talk, she discovers that Benny has known of her presence for several years, but has had the good sense not to mention his suspicions to anyone.

# Chapter 30, Northward Bound

## Chapter 30, Northward Bound Summary and Analysis

Linda says goodbye to her family and Peter, the kind friend who has provided her with this chance for escape, and boards the ship for Philadelphia. On board the ship she finds Fanny, who has no idea that Linda has been hiding in her grandmother's house all these years, and is pleasantly surprised to see her.

While the two old friends are happily reunited and enjoy each other's company on the trip, Fanny does not take pity on Linda when she hears of the hardships she bore in her hiding place, because unlike Linda, Fanny cannot look forward to being reunited with her children, who have been sold to a slave trader and taken far away to new masters.

The captain of the ship appears to be friendly, helpful, and sympathetic to the two fugitive slave women, but Linda finds it difficult to trust him, due to the dishonesty and betrayal she has suffered from white men in the past. He seems somewhat hurt, at the end of the voyage, that Linda still has little confidence in him. In retrospect, Linda believes that this ship's captain probably was an honest and decent man who was worthy of her trust.

After ten days of travel, Linda and Fanny arrive in Philadelphia.

# Chapter 31, Incidents in Philadelphia

## Chapter 31, Incidents in Philadelphia Summary and Analysis

Upon arriving in Philadelphia, the ship's captain continues to go out of his way to help them. Linda, who has never been to a big city, is overwhelmed by the sights and sounds of Philadelphia, but consciously makes an effort not to stand out or noticeably appear to be an outsider.

She and Fanny meet Rev. Durham, a kind black minister, who is sympathetic to her cause. Rev. and Mrs. Durham take Linda into their home as a guest, and find a place for Fanny to stay as well. The Durhams also introduce Linda to the anti-slavery society, who agree to help Linda and Fanny by arranging their passage to New York.

Her nearly idyllic experience is tainted when she is unable to obtain a first-class train ticket, and she is informed that, as an African-American, she will not be admitted on a first class train car for any price. At this point she is forced, for the first time, to face the reality that racial discrimination exists even in the free states.

# Chapter 32, The Meeting of Mother and Daughter

## Chapter 32, The Meeting of Mother and Daughter Summary and Analysis

After an uncomfortable trip on the train car designated for colored passengers, Linda arrives in New York. She travels to Brooklyn and there arranges to meet her daughter at the home of another former slave from her hometown. Linda is delighted to see her daughter, but is disturbed to see that her care and education have clearly been neglected. She wishes that she and Ellen were able to live together, but knows that will have to wait until she has found employment and the means to support her child. Here, she is further reminded that her escape to the North has not solved all of her problems and persecutions, and the quest to secure freedom for herself and her children is not over.

At this point, Linda begins making inquiries into the whereabouts of her brother.

# Chapter 33, A Home Found

## Chapter 33, A Home Found Summary and Analysis

Linda is concerned that she will have difficulty finding a job since her particular situation makes it impossible for her to provide references from past employers. Still, she finds a job with a kind English woman who demonstrates little, if any, racial prejudice. Linda is hesitant to confide to Mrs. Bruce, her employer, that she is a runaway slave. Nonetheless, Mrs. Bruce helps in any way she can, considering Linda's reservations. When Linda's body, still weak from seven years of confinement, cannot handle the extent to which she was required to go up and down stairs, Mrs. Bruce limits the number of stairs her servant is required to climb and hires a physician to tend her aching body. At one point, Mrs. Bruce offers to open her home to Ellen and to provide her with quality medical care, but Mrs. Hobbs will not consent to it.

While Mrs. Hobbs later justified her position by claiming that this decision is based on her fear for Ellen's safety in Manhattan, It is clear to Linda at this point that the Hobbs' are rearing Linda to be a slave in their home. She feels deceived and betrayed by Mr. Sands, who promised her that the children would be emancipated. Linda is particularly afraid of this since the Hobbses are evidently having some financial problems and may be tempted to sell Ellen to take care of their debts.

At the end of the chapter, Linda is found by her brother, William, and the two are happily reunited.

# Chapter 34, The Old Enemy Again

## Chapter 34, The Old Enemy Again Summary and Analysis

Linda receives a letter, which claims to be written on behalf of Emily Flint, and is signed by her younger brother, who is merely a child. Linda recognizes the handwriting as that of Dr, Flint, however. Still believing that Linda has been in the North for many years, instead of hidden in the den for most of that time, the Flint's assure her that they would not (and have not) gone to any trouble or expense to retrieve her. Linda knows, however, that Dr. Flint has made several trips to New York, at great personal expense, in attempt to find her. The letter goes on to tell Linda that, if she returns to her life on the Flint plantation, it may be possible to make negotiations for her sale.

Shortly afterward, Linda receives word that Dr. Flint is making yet another trip to the North in search of her. She decides to take some time off work and travels to Boston to stay with her brother, and later writes her grandmother to have Benny sent to Boston to meet her. Linda is delighted to be reunited with her son. However, when Benny remarks, "I 'spose free boys can get along here at the North as well as white boys", his mother is upset, knowing that he has many disappointments ahead of him.

Linda leaves Benny in Boston with his uncle and returns to her employer in New York, but remains nervous about the possibility of being recognized and sent back to slavery.

# Chapter 35. Prudjudice Against Color

## Chapter 35. Prudjudice Against Color Summary and Analysis

Linda travels with her employers, the Bruce family, twice during the following summer, during which time she suffers from racial prejudice. Since she is in service to a white family, she is not made to ride in uncomfortable "Jim Crow" cars like most of the other colored passengers, but she is upset that she is not given the same treatment as the other (white) nursemaids. After being reprimanded for sitting at a "white only" table with her employers on more than one occasion, Linda begins to have her meals sent to her room, rather than take her meals from the kitchen like other colored servants. After several days of this, the white waiters complain that they should not have to wait on a Negro woman.

Linda is infuriated that she, and other colored people, are forced to endure this treatment, but she seems angrier that the African-American community allow themselves to be treated in this way, and even enforce the rules themselves (on one occasion, she is ordered away from Mrs. Bruce's table on a steamship by a black ship's employee).

Between these two trips she makes with the Bruce family, Linda goes to Brooklyn in order to visit Ellen. However, she runs into Ellen on the street before she arrives at the Hobbs residence. There Ellen warns her not to go to the Hobbs' house, since Mrs. Hobbs's brother, Mr. Thorne, is visiting from the South and is likely to betray Linda's location to Dr. Flint. Linda heeds this warning and promises Ellen she will return and visit at a later time.

# Chapter 36, A Hairbreadth Escape

## Chapter 36, A Hairbreadth Escape Summary and Analysis

Upon returning from her travels, Linda again visits her daughter in Brooklyn, but still is careful to avoid Mr. Thorne, who is still a guest in the Hobbs' home. However, Mr. Thorne, aware that Linda has been avoiding him, insists on meeting with her. He is cordial to Linda, and seems genuinely grateful for many kindnesses bestowed upon him by her grandmother, Aunt Marthy. While he ardently insists that he would never betray one of Aunt Marthy's grandchildren,it is later discovered that he has been writing to Dr. Flint and informing him of Linda's whereabouts.

At this point, Linda, aware that Dr. Flint will soon come to New York in order to fetch her, must leave her comfortable station in the Bruce home and, for the first time, confesses to Mrs. Bruce that she is a fugitive slave. Mrs. Bruce is very sympathetic and gladly assists her as she goes into hiding in Boston. Mrs. Hobbs, feeling guilty about her brother's betrayal of Linda, agrees to allow Ellen to accompany her mother to Boston, and there Linda is able to live in a house together with both her children for the first time in many years.

# Chapter 37, A Visit to England

## Chapter 37, A Visit to England Summary and Analysis

In Boston, Linda receives news of the death of Mrs. Bruce, which saddens her greatly. Mr. Bruce requests that Linda accompany their young daughter, Mary, on a trip to England to visit some of her late mother's relatives. Because of her attachment to little Mary Bruce, and because of the fact that she will be able to earn a considerable sum of money, Linda agrees to make the trip before having Benny apprenticed to a trade and leaving Ellen with a friend so that she can attend school.

After a comfortable sea passage, Linda and the Bruce's check into a hotel in Liverpool. While Linda finds the hotel and dining facilities less luxurious than those she has seen in America, she is happy to find the English facilities devoid of racial discrimination, and therefore much more pleasant for her.

From Liverpool, they travel to a small town called Steventon, where they remain for ten months. During her time at Steventon, Linda witnesses a level of poverty she has not seen in America. While she sympathizes with the poor people of Steventon, and sees their sufferings as problematic, she nonetheless believes that the situation of these impoverished individuals is better than that of an American slave, because the poor Europeans' family members could not be auctioned away from them, and because anyone who beats them, whips them, rapes them, or steals whatever little they possess is subject to punishment by the law.

While in Steventon, Linda meets a clergyman who practices true Christian principles. This inspires her and helps her overcome some of the negative prejudices she has had against the church, due to the hypocrisy she had found within the Episcopal Church in her hometown.

After spending nearly a year in England, where she was never discriminated against, Linda nearly forgets about the realities of racial prejudice until her return to the United States.

# Chapter 38, Renewed Invitations to go South

## Chapter 38, Renewed Invitations to go South Summary and Analysis

After her journey to England, Linda returns to Boston to find Ellen doing well, but is distraught to find that Benny is gone. He had suffered from severe racial discrimination at the trade at his apprenticeship, causing him to quit his trade and find employment on a whaling ship.

Shortly afterward, Linda receives a letter from her legal owner, Mrs. Emily Dodge (formerly Flint). Mrs. Dodge now appears to be complicit in her father's schemes, offering her a "cordial invitation" to join her and her new husband on their plantation in Virginia. She also reveals that she is aware that Linda has recently returned from an extended trip to Europe. Linda is somewhat worried that the Flints are so well aware of her actions.

While Linda has previously offered, on several occasions, to purchase her freedom from the Flints. she is no longer interested in spending her hard-earned money, that could be better spent on her children's education, to buy something (herself) that she feels was always inherently hers.

# Chapter 39, The Confession

## Chapter 39, The Confession Summary and Analysis

William offers to finance Ellen's education at a boarding school in New York, and while Linda is saddened at the thought of being separated from her daughter, she does not wish to limit the young girl's opportunities in life.

Before Ellen departs for school, her mother wishes to tell her the story of her father. Ellen replies that she is aware of who her father is, and that she once spent several months with him in Washington, during which time he took no notice of her (he had, at that time, another daughter with his wife—to whom he granted the attention of a father).

After her daughter's departure, Linda finds herself lonely in her home in Boston, and eventually travels to Rochester to open an anti-slavery reading room with her brother. While this endeavor is unsuccessful, she makes many friends in Rochester who are sympathetic to the abolitionist cause, most notably Isaac and Emily Post, whom she stayed with for much of this time.

# Chapter 40, The Fugitive Slave Law

## Chapter 40, The Fugitive Slave Law Summary and Analysis

After the failure of the anti-slavery reading room endeavor, William decides to move to California and to take Benny (who evidently has returned from the whaling expedition) with him. Ellen is happy at her boarding school, and Linda is once again alone.

Mr. Bruce is remarried, and he and his second wife have a new infant child. Linda is again offered the position of nursemaid to this family and she gladly takes it, although she feels far less secure in New York than she did in Boston. In New York she is much more likely to be captured and turned over to Dr. Flint.

Linda finds that she likes the second Mrs. Bruce as well as the first. The new Mrs. Bruce, while being an American of an aristocratic upbringing, appears to be as devoid of racial prejudice as her English predecessor. She is also an avid abolitionist who actively protects Linda from the Fugitive Slave Law. The Fugitive Slave Law was passed shortly before Linda returned to the Bruce household and required all free states to hand known fugitive slaves over to authorities in the states from which they escaped.

Linda runs into an escaped slave from her hometown, named Luke, who had been particularly abused by his late master. She asks him if he is aware of the dangers he faces while walking the streets of New York, and asks if he has enough money to pay for his passage to Canada. Luke informs her of a scheme of his which allowed him to justify stealing the sufficient cash from his master upon his death. While Linda agrees that Luke is entitled to the money, and much more, for serving the master for many years without pay, she laments on the way in which slavery warps the moral reasoning of all those involved.

Eventually, Linda becomes afraid to leave the house when sent on errands by her mistress, for fear of being apprehended. Mrs. Bruce happily sends Linda into hiding in the country for a month and tells her to carry the child with her for protection. Linda is deeply moved that Mrs. Bruce would part with her child in the interests of protecting a poor fugitive slave. Mrs. Bruce states that she is aware that the penalty for harboring a fugitive slave is imprisonment and a $1,000 fine, but that she would gladly risk this punishment rather than compromise her beliefs. Linda returns to New York when she feels the danger has passed.

# Chapter 41, Free at Last

## Chapter 41, Free at Last Summary and Analysis

In New York, Linda is still very fearful of capture. She regularly hears from her grandmother who, although illiterate herself, writes to her often through the aid of friends.

One of these letters brings news to Linda that Dr. Flint has died. Aunt Marthy wishes for Dr. Flint that he made his peace with God before he passed away, and appears to have forgiven the man for the wrongs he has inflicted upon her and her family—but Linda is less charitable. Dr. Flint dies in a poor position financially and leaves nothing to his daughter Emily and her husband Mr. Dodge, which makes Linda very nervous that the Dodge's will be particularly motivated to claim her as their property.

When Linda finds that Mr. and Mrs. Dodge are in residence at a hotel in New York, she is terrified, and once again goes into hiding with Mrs. Bruce's assistance. While she is gone, Mrs. Bruce purchases Linda's freedom from the Dodges for $300. She makes it clear that she is not buying Linda as a servant, and that Linda is free and therefore under no obligation. Linda is free.

Shortly afterward, Linda receives word of her grandmother's death. Later, Uncle Phillip passes away as well and an obituary for him runs in the local newspaper. It was, to Linda's knowledge, the first time this honor had been bestowed upon a black man.

Linda finally can rejoice in her own freedom and that of her children, although she still aspires to establishing a home of her own in which her family can live together.

# Appendix

## Appendix Summary and Analysis

The Appendix, written by Mrs. Amy Post, is similar to Lydia Maria Child's introduction. Mrs. Post is a friend of the author (one learns of the time they lived together in chapter 39). Mrs. Post, like Ms. Child before her, backs up Harriet Jacobs/Linda Brent's story, and attests to the truthfulness of the author's character.

# Characters

## Linda Brent

Linda Brent is the pseudonym of Harriet Jacobs, who is the author and protagonist of the book. Through her narrative the reader is exposed to her happy childhood, her unhappy discovery of the realities of slavery, her suffering as a slave, and the process by which she frees herself and her children and establishes herself in the North. It is through her eyes that one can see all of the other characters in the story, people who range from selflessly heroic to horrifically cruel.

Linda reveals herself to be highly intelligent, perceptive, cunning, determined and brave—these qualities (along with a certain degree of luck) help her to maintain her dignity, protect her family, and eventually obtain her freedom when so many others have failed in these pursuits.

Linda is clearly a charismatic individual, for she inspires many to help her and her family at great risk and personal expense. In her appendix to the book, Mrs. Amy Post tells the reader, "her appearance was prepossessing, and her deportment indicated remarkable delicacy of feeling and purity of thought". Even those who dislike her, such as Mrs. Flint, do so with vehement animosity. Nobody appears to be indifferent to Linda. Linda's web of family and social connections prove to be infinitely vital to her success.

Linda is evidently a physically attractive young woman since she inspires Dr. Flint's sexual obsession, and she is able to forge an advantageous social connection by becoming the mistress of the prominent Mr. Sands.

The determination and strength of character that Linda/Harriet displays in this story is astounding, particularly when she voluntarily spends seven years in a hiding place that most people would find it intolerable in which to spend even a week.

Although she and her children are free from slavery at the end of the book, the reader is left with the impression that she is not entirely satisfied with her life. Although she adamantly prefers her new situation to that of a slave, she still longs for a home of her own in which she and her family can live together.

## Dr. Flint

Dr. Flint is Linda's master in practice, although she is legally the property of his young daughter, Emily (a point he is quick to mention when it suits his purposes). As the chief antagonist of the story, he is portrayed as cruel, conceited, lecherous, proud, and duplicitous. Early in the story one learns that Dr. Flint does not feed or clothe his slaves sufficiently, and that he tortured his cook by force-feeding her slop that the dog could not eat. One also learns that his sexual abuses of slave women have resulted in his fathering eleven slave children. Not only does he have little regard for the feelings,

dignity, and well-being of his slaves, he also appears to disregard his wife. Linda sees Dr. Flint as possessing no redeeming qualities whatsoever, and attributes any action of decency on his part to his desire to maintain a respectable reputation within the town where he runs an established medical practice.

Dr. Flint's actions toward Linda appear to be rooted in a deep-seated personal vendetta. His sexual pursuit of her borders on obsession, perhaps because he is not accustomed to meeting this level of resistance. Not only is Linda resistant to his advances, she consistently outsmarts him—much to his chagrin. He appears to desperately need to prove himself to be superior to Linda, who is black and a slave, and cannot accept her rejection of him or her clever ruses. For all of her sufferings under Dr. Flint, Linda fares much better than many of the doctor's other slaves. The reader learns of a man who once quarreled with his wife who had given birth to a child with a suspiciously pale complexion, who was clearly Dr. Flint's offspring. For openly voicing this suspicion, Dr. Flint has the man whipped within an inch of his life, and afterward sells the man, his wife, and their child at auction.

Dr. Flint will not allow Linda to be sold at any price, although he has been offered much more than her market value and he could clearly use the money. After Linda's escape, he exerts an enormous level of effort and expense in fruitless attempts to retrieve her.

When Linda hears of Dr. Flints death years later she is unable to feel any remorse for him.

## Aunt Marthy

Linda's maternal grandmother, called "Aunt Marthy" by the townspeople, is a source of maternal support, strength, and inspiration for Linda, her family, and many others within their community.

Aunt Marthy seems to have been admired and respected by her masters, or at least prized as a highly valuable servant. While this admiration and respect could not prevent Aunt Marthy's children from being sold and taken away from her, it inspires a relative of her late mistress to buy her and free her after she is cheated out of her freedom by Dr. Flint. Upon her emancipation at the age of fifty, Aunt Marthy establishes herself in a humble yet comfortable house in town, and devotes herself to the formidable task of holding together her family who are scattered among several local slave-holding households.

Although Aunt Marthy has no legal claim to her children and grandchildren, she is remarkably successful in looking out for their best interests. Linda never has to suffer from a lack of decent food and clothing, thanks to her grandmother's generosity, and her house will later become a place of refuge from the anger of Mrs. Flint. After Linda escapes her master, Aunt Marthy hides Linda in her home, at great personal risk, for nearly seven years. She is able to save up enough money to purchase the freedom of her son, Phillip, and helps to facilitate the sale, and eventual emancipation, of William,

Benny, and Ellen, raising the latter two in her home for a large portion of their childhoods.

Aunt Marthy cannot read or write, but is able to maintain correspondence with family members living in the North by enlisting the aid of others.

At the time of Aunt Marthy's death, all of her surviving children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are free from slavery.

## William Brent

Linda's younger brother, whom she describes as a "bright and affectionate child". He also becomes the property of the Flint family after the death of their first mistress. While Linda is upset about her brother meeting this fate, she appears to take comfort in the fact that her brother lives and works in the same household as she does. As they grow into adulthood, they continue to be very close. William's intelligence proves to be a valuable asset to Dr. Flint and later Mr. Sands, and both entrust him with significant office responsibilities—for which his sister is very proud.

William escapes from slavery while accompanying his master, Mr. Sands, on a trip to Chicago. Although William is happy with Mr. Sands' treatment of him, he feels he cannot pass up an opportunity to free himself from bondage, since such an opportunity may never present itself again. While Linda and her grandmother are saddened that William is no longer a part of their lives, they try to put their own interests aside and rejoice in his freedom.

After Linda's escape from the South, she is reunited with her brother in New York. He later leaves to make a life for himself in California.

## Mrs. Flint

Mrs. Flint is the wife of Dr. Flint and the mother of Linda's young owner, Emily. She is depicted as a bitter, irrational, and a supremely self-absorbed woman. She is aware that her husband has fathered many slave children and, rather than hold her husband responsible for his actions, she lashes out in anger at the young slave girls who are the objects of his attention. She is cruel and abusive to Linda.

## Benjamin

The youngest child of Linda's grandmother, Linda regards Benjamin more like a brother than like an uncle due to the small difference in their ages. Benjamin is his mother's favorite child, and she is devastated when he is taken from her and sold at auction when he is only ten years old. However, he is sold locally, so Benjamin continues to be a part of his family's life for many years after his sale. He doesn't take to well to enslavement, however. He frequently rebels against his master and is punished harshly.

When he finally attempts to escape to the North, he is caught, returned to slavery, imprisoned, and sold to a speculator who plans to take him to New Orleans. He is never delivered to Louisiana, however. Before he is successfully transported he escapes, this time successfully. Uncle Phillip later runs into him in New York and reports that he is doing well. After this encounter, no more is seen or heard from Benjamin. Linda and her grandmother are upset about losing him, but try to put their selfish desires aside and rejoice in his freedom. Linda describes Benjamin as handsome, bright, and "nearly white" (this last quality undoubtedly helps him during his attempts at escape).

## Uncle Phillip

Linda's Uncle Phillip is a slave on a local plantation. He is evidently in a position of some responsibility, because he frequently travels with his master on trips to do business in the North. On one of these trips he runs into his brother, Benjamin (the only contact Benjamin had with the family after his escape.) Although Benjamin is clearly Aunt Marthy's favorite child, it is Phillip who chooses to remain with her in the South, despite his opportunities to escape slavery and live as a free man in the North. Eventually, Aunt Marthy is able to purchase Phillip's freedom for $800.

Phillip is the only one of Aunt Marthy's children who is still a part of her life at the time of her death.

Uncle Phillip is instrumental to Linda's escape. It is he who prepares her hiding place and he is one of the few people who have contact with Linda during her long period of hiding.

## Aunt Nancy

The twin sister of Linda's mother, Aunt Nancy is a slave within the household of Dr. and Mrs. Flint. She serves as a source of comfort and protection to Linda during her time with the Flints. Aunt Nancy has not been able to have any children of her own, a fact that saddenes her greatly. When Aunt Nancy becomes ill and passes away, Mrs. Flint wishes to honor her by burying her in the Flint family plot—without considering the wishes of Aunt Nancy's own family. When Nancy is finally interred in the Negro cemetery, Linda regrets that she is unable to come out of her hiding place to mourn her.

## Benny Brent

Linda's first child with Mr. Sands is named after his great-uncle Benjamin. When Linda reveals herself to Benjamin after hiding in her den for seven years, she learns that Benny had long been aware of her presence and had had the discretion not to reveal this knowledge. Linda rejoices that Benny has remained silent on this issue, but laments that slavery has taught him to be secretive and skeptical. He remains idealistic however, about obtaining his freedom and moving to the North, where he expects to be granted

all of the freedoms afforded to freeborn white boys. He is disillusioned when he discovers that, even in the North, he is the victim of racial discrimination.

## Ellen Brent

The daughter of Linda and Mr. Sands. Ellen is born a slave but is purchased by her father at a very young age and placed within the custody of her great-grandmother. She grows up without any memory of her mother, unaware that her mother is observing her the entire time from her hiding place. Ellen is a polite, dutiful child who never complains or troubles anyone on her own account, even when her mother can see that she is unhappy and her needs are neglected.

## Linda's Father

Although a slave, Linda's father is granted considerable freedom. So long as he pays his mistress $200 a year, he is able to manage his own business and collect his own earnings. He runs a successful carpentry business and lives in a house with his wife and his children until the wife dies (at which time the children go to live with their mistress).

He is distraught when his children become the property of the Flint family, and furious when his son William is obligated to obey his mistress rather than his father. Dr. and Mrs. Flint disapprove of him spoiling his children by "teaching them to feel like human beings". He tries to purchase the freedom of his offspring but is unsuccessful.

Upon the death of their father, Linda and William feel acutely vulnerable and alone in the world. They despair over what the future is likely to hold for them as slaves.

## Linda's Mother

Linda's mother, whose name is never mentioned, rears her during the first six (happy) years of her life. The reader is told little about her, only that Linda was happy in her home and that she was well thought of by her mistress's family. It is only after her mother's death that Linda learns she is a slave.

## Linda's First Mistress

Linda goes to live in the home of her first mistress at the age of six. The mistress had promised Linda's dying mother that her children would not suffer. She treats Linda well and teaches her to read and write. Linda loves her mistress and eagerly serves her. Since her mistress had always treated her as a member of the family rather than as chattel, Linda and her friends were hopeful that the mistress would grant Linda's freedom in her will. However, she instead wills Linda to her young niece. For the first

time, Linda learns that her beloved mistress regarded her as a piece of property, and she feels deeply betrayed.

## Linda's Lover

As a teenager, Linda falls in love with a local free black man. He wishes to buy her and marry her, but Dr. Flint will not allow it. For some reason, the author chooses not to refer to the love of her childhood by name. This is particularly interesting when one considers that Harriet Jacobs uses fictitious names for all of the characters in this book. Why was she unable to mention him by name—even an assumed name?

Since the writer holds the reader at a distance from this character, the reader knows little about him. It is clear, however, that Linda admires his noble character and intelligence.

## Mrs. Bruce

An English woman in New York who employs Linda as a nurse to her daughter. Linda observes that English women tend to carry less racial prejudice than Americans, and she appreciates this quality in Mrs. Bruce. When Linda finally confides to her employer that she is a fugitive slave, she finds Mrs. Bruce very sympathetic and helpful. The two grow very close, and when Mrs. Bruce becomes sick and dies, Linda continues her association with the Bruce family.

## The Second Mrs. Bruce

Mr. Bruce's second wife, whom he marries after the death of the first Mrs. Bruce. The second Mrs. Bruce differs from her predecessor in that she is American and from a wealthy, aristocratic family. Her vehement opposition to slavery is expressed not only through her words, but also through her brave actions. She risks arrest by helping to shield Linda from the fugitive slave act, and hands over her own daughter in hopes that it might offer Linda some protection. It is the second Mrs. Bruce who finally purchases Linda from the Flints and legally frees her from slavery.

## Mr. Litch

The owner of a nearby plantation who is notorious for his extreme cruelty.

## Betty

Linda's friend. When Linda hides in Betty's mistress's house, Betty is largely responsible for taking care of her. She is employed as a cook, and therefore feeds Linda well.

## Betty's Mistress

A kind woman in Linda's town who, although a slaveholder herself, takes pity on Linda and helps to hide her after her escape. She appears to treat her own slaves very well, and Betty seems happy to serve her.

## Miss Fanny

A kind relative of Mrs. Flint, and close friend of Aunt Marthy. After Dr. Flint denies Aunt Marthy the freedom that was granted her in her master's will, she is purchased by Miss Fanny and set free.

## Peter

Linda's friend who is instrumental in her final escape to the North after spending several years in hiding.

## Young Mr. Flint

Dr. Flint's son. Linda does not think highly of him, but they manage to get along reasonably well during the short time they work together on the plantation.

## Young Mrs. Flint

Mr. Flint's new wife. Linda feels she is naive and idealistic and fears she will soon be disillusioned when she is exposed to the harsh realities of life as a slaveholder's wife. Linda does not think much of her moral character, particularly after Mrs. Flint callously denies an older slave his meat rations, but she manages to get along with her new mistress during their short time together.

## Sally

A friendly woman who lives with Linda's grandmother.

## Aggie

A woman who lives in a small house on Aunt Marthy's plot of land.

## Fanny

Aggie's daughter who is a friend of Linda's and later escapes with her to the North.

## Ship's Captain

Captain on the vessel that takes Linda and Fanny to freedom in the North. Linda is slow to trust him, but his goodwill toward the two fugitive slaves appears genuine.

## Rev. and Mrs. Durham

A couple who aid Linda when she first arrives in Philadelphia.

## Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs

Relatives of Mr. Sands with whom Ellen goes to live in Brooklyn.

## Sarah and her Mother

Other former slaves from Linda's hometown who live in Brooklyn.

## Mr. Thorne

Mrs. Hobbs's brother who betrays Linda's whereabouts to Dr. Flint, nearly resulting in her capture.

## Lucas

An escaped slave from Linda's hometown who has endured particularly harsh cruelties.

## Uncle Fred

An older slave whom Linda teaches how to read, despite considerable risk of punishment.

## Charity and James

James is the unfortunate victim of the most gruesome murder detailed in the book. Linda is hopeful that his mother, Charity, never heard about the ultimate fate of her son.

## Isaac and Amy Post

A couple with whom Linda resides while in Rochester. Amy Post is the author of the book's appendix.

# Objects/Places

## Linda's Childhood Homeappears in non-fiction

Linda spends the first six years of her life living happily in a house with her parents and younger brother.

## First Mistress's Homeappears in non-fiction

After the death of her mother, Linda and her brother live in the house of her mistress. This first mistress treats her well, and Linda is happy in this home.

## The Flint Houseappears in non-fiction

The home of Dr. and Mrs. Flint in town. Linda goes to live here after her first mistress dies and bequeaths her to her five-year-old niece (who is the Flints' daughter). Linda is miserable in the Flint household, where she is the object of Dr Flint's lechery and Mrs. Flint's anger.

## Aunt Marthy's Houseappears in non-fiction

The home of Linda's free grandmother. A constant source of comfort and solace for Linda throughout her troubles.

## The Flint Plantationappears in non-fiction

Linda is sent to live on the Flint's plantation, several miles away from town, shortly before her escape.

## The Home of Betty's Mistressappears in non-fiction

The home of a kind local slaveholder who hides Linda for a short time after her escape.

## Linda's Denappears in non-fiction

A small, cramped, barely habitable space in a gable above a shed where Linda hides for nearly seven years.

## Shipappears in non-fiction

The vessel that carries Linda and her friend, Fanny, from North Carolina to Philadelphia.

## Philadelphiaappears in non-fiction

The point at which Linda first arrives on northern soil, and her first exposure to a large city.

## Brooklynappears in non-fiction

Ellen is sent to Brooklyn to live with Mr. and Mrs. Hobbs. Later, her mother goes there to meet her.

## The Bruce Homeappears in non-fiction

Home in Manhattan where Linda works as a nursemaid.

## Bostonappears in non-fiction

Linda resides in Boston at several points in the story, and leaves her children there to be educated during her trip to England. Boston is presented as a city that is especially friendly to the abolitionist cause and, previous to the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law, a relatively safe place for a fugitive slave to avoid being forcibly returned to the South.

## Englandappears in non-fiction

Linda travels to England with her employer. There she is free from the effects of racial prejudice. While the poverty she witnesses in England saddens her, she believes that the poor Englishman is far better off than an American slave.

## Rochesterappears in non-fiction

Linda moves to Rochester to start an anti-slavery reading room with her brother, but this endeavor is unsuccessful.

# Themes

## Degradation Inherent to Slavery

Ms. Jacobs' narrative focuses less on the slaves' poor quality of life than on the dehumanizing nature of slavery itself.

The author does tell the reader about slaves who are starved, overworked, and forced to face the elements with inadequate clothing and shelter, but she leads one to believe that poor living conditions, however unfortunate, are not the most significant part of the problem, and that simply improving the slaves' physical living conditions will not make the institution of slavery less oppressive or less evil.

Many times, the author tells the reader that she believes it is better to be poor than to live as a slave—even as a comfortable, well-fed/clothed/housed slave. While she admits that poverty can severely limit a person's options (and expresses pity for the impoverished people she sees in Europe), she still believes that the poor individual, who cannot be bought and sold at auction, and who benefits from social institutions such as marriage that are protected by law, is more fortunate than any slave. The law also protects the freeborn person from battery, murder, and rape—protections often not available to slaves.

The narrator herself appears to have lived much more comfortably than most slaves. The poor white people who search her grandmother's home after the insurrection are envious of the level of comfort that Linda and her family enjoy. The reader is left with the impression that Linda never had to suffer from serious privations until after her escape, when she goes into hiding. As terrible as the living conditions in her hiding place were, she was never tempted to return to her comparatively comfortable life in slavery.

## Home and Family

The quest for a home of one's own and a stable environment in which one can tend to the needs of one's family is always the primary goal of Linda and her grandmother.

Upon obtaining her freedom, Linda's grandmother, called "Aunt Marthy", establishes herself in a comfortable home and tries to create a stable home and base of support for her children, her grandchildren, and later her great-grandchildren. Aunt Marthy is free to leave and go to the free states, where she would likely suffer less from racial discrimination, but refuses to leave the small town where she has suffered under slavery while she still has family enslaved there. She does an admirable job of holding her family together considering the circumstances (all of her living descendants are somebody else's legal property), but is often frustrated at the hurdles Dr. Flint and others put in her way when she is only trying to look out for her family. She is finally able to purchase the freedom of Phillip, facilitate the purchase (and later emancipation) of Benny, Ellen, and William, and enable the escape of Linda.

Linda's primary motivation, much like that of her grandmother, is to keep her family together, provide a stable home for them, and make every effort to secure them a chance at future happiness. Although she defies all odds by freeing both herself and her children from slavery, moving with them to New York, finding herself acceptable employment, and providing a decent education to her children, Linda is still dissatisfied at the end of the book because she still does not have a home of her own and because she and her children are living separately.

This aspiration of home and family, as presented in this narrative, is largely a feminine one. While Benjamin and William free themselves from slavery at the first opportunity and have no strings to tie them down, Linda and her grandmother are forced to consider their family responsibilities before they take drastic action. The desire to serve the needs of their family keeps Linda and Aunt Marthy in the South for a long time (in the case of Linda, in abject circumstances) while the men in their family are free to pursue better lives for themselves on their own.

## Gender

While the original audience of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl certainly saw it as a piece of abolitionist literature, modern viewers are likely to view it as a feminist work.

Ms. Jacobs adamantly believes that, while slavery is a horrible and evil thing for any human being of either gender, it is infinitely worse for women than it is for men. According to her, the female slave has to endure all of the sufferings of the male slave, on top of an entire class of sufferings that are specific to the woman slave. Most notably, that of sexual harassment and rape at the hands of her master or any other number of men who have absolute power over her (such as her overseer, or sons of her master).

Also, the women in the story appear to be burdened with responsibilities toward their family, and therefore have less freedom to look out for their own interests than their male relatives. While Benjamin and William both manage to escape with relative ease and no responsibility to anyone but themselves, Linda must look out for the best interests of her children in securing her own freedom. Her grandmother, whose freedom has been legally granted, nonetheless spends the rest of her life in the South trying to defend the interests of her family. Linda's Aunt Nancy is one of the most selfless characters in the book. She spends her entire life as a poorly treated slave in Dr. Flint's household. Whenever she can find time to get away from the Flints, she is actively offering her family whatever help she can. Aunt Nancy claims that getting her relatives safely to freedom and giving them stability is what she wants most in life, and doesn't appear to want anything for herself. Both of her brothers eventually obtain their freedom; however, Nancy, although a constant support to her family, is never able to escape slavery herself.

# Style

## Perspective

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is a personal memoir. In this work, one woman tells of her story about her experiences as a slave and her eventual escape from slavery. The reader hears about the events of this one woman's life and about her own thoughts and observations. Through her story one can get a better idea of how the millions of American women who were enslaved during that time would have suffered. While it may seem counterintuitive that a single first-person narrative may paint the best picture of the lives of millions in slavery, the format gives one a much more personal account of the horrors of slavery that one can't get from a broad, sweeping, third-person account of slavery in general.

At the time it was written, this narrative was intended to serve as a moving commentary on the era's most significant political issue, as viewed by an individual who is directly affected by it.

While Harriet Jacobs has written her story under the pseudonym "Linda Brent", and has changed the names and identifying details of all of the characters, the reader is led to believe that this is otherwise an entirely candid, non-sensationalized, first person account of an actual woman's real-life experiences.

## Tone

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is written with the intention of inciting anger in the reader and calling him or her to action. The author makes no effort to disguise her political message. She tells the reader outright that she does not write the book to illicit sympathy for herself and would rather not have exposed her personal life to public scrutiny. However, she feels it is her responsibility to do what she can to help the millions of people who are still slaves.

Every passage in this book in intended to convey this message. Therefore, the tone of the book is highly serious, and usually conveys anger or despair. Even when Ms. Jacobs tells the reader about happy moments in her life, such when when she is reunited with her children after a long separation, or when she discovers that her kind employer has purchased her freedom, the reader is always given the impression that she takes everything that is mentioned in the book very seriously. She never offers humorous asides or anecdotes to lighten the mood.

Her attitude toward the events depicted in this book is never in question. She outright condemns every aspect of slavery, calling it an evil abomination of nature that worsens everything and everyone that comes in contact with it. She is rarely ambivalent about anything, aside from a few slave-holding individuals, such as Mr. Sands and a kind woman who aids her after her escape, whom she seems to see good qualities in

despite the fact that they are owners of slaves. However, she believes that even they would be much better people if it were not for slavery.

## Structure

The book is divided into forty-one relatively short chapters. The chapters vary widely in their length, but none are longer than fifteen pages.

The bulk of the chapters narrate events in the author's life in chronological order, beginning with her early childhood when she was blissfully ignorant that she was a slave, and following her into her relatively pleasant later childhood with her first mistress, her intolerable adolescence in the Flint household, her escape as a young adult, the dismal hiding place where she spent most of her twenties, and her escape to the North coupled with her quest to establish herself and provide for her children, and finally her emancipation by way of the kindly second Mrs. Bruce.

However, she occasionally diverts from this chronological narrative to give the reader tangential information about slavery or to relay the experiences of her family and friends. She does this more frequently toward the beginning of the book, with chapters such as "The Slave's New Year's Day", and "Sketches of Neighboring Slaveholders". Other chapters partially tie into the time line of her autobiographical narrative. For example, chapter 28, entitled "Aunt Nancy", is largely about her aunt's death, and is placed in the book at around the same time when Aunt Nancy's death occurred, chronologically, in relation to the other events in the story. However, much of the chapter is dedicated to relaying events of Aunt Nancy's earlier life.

# Quotes

"I would ten thousand times rather that my children should be the half-starved paupers of Ireland than to be the most pampered among the slaves of America." (p.162)

"Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women." (p.218)

"The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble." (p.370)

"Reader, it is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you truthfully what I suffered in slavery. I do it to kindle a flame of compassion in your hearts for my sisters who are still in bondage, suffering as I once suffered." (p. 161)

"I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others." (p.193)

"If God has bestowed beauty upon her, it will prove her greatest curse. That which commands admiration in the white woman only hastens the degradation of the female slave." (p.159)

"They seem to satisfy their consciences with the doctrine that God created the Africans to be slaves. What a libel upon the heavenly Father, who 'made of one blood all nations of men!' And then who are Africans? Who can measure the amount of Anglo-Saxon blood coursing in the veins of American slaves?" (p.180)

"I can testify, from my own experience and observation, that slavery is a curse to the whites as well as to the blacks. It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation." (p.189)

"I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight. I foresaw the inevitable blight that would fall on the little slave's heart. I knew how soon her laughter would be changed to sighs. The fair child grew up to be a still fairer woman. From childhood to womanhood her pathway was blooming with flowers, and overarched by a sunny sky. Scarcely one day of her life had been clouded when the sun rose on her happy bridal morning.
How had those years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood?

She, also, was very beautiful; but the flowers and sunshine of love were not for her. She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink." (p.161)

"for slaveholders have been cunning enough to enact that 'the child shall follow the condition of the mother,' not of the father; thus taking care that licentiousness shall not interfere with avarice." (p.218)

"Those were happy days—too happy to last. The slave child had no thought for the morrow; but there came that blight, which too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel." (p.134)

"And now came the trying hour for that drove of human beings, driven away like cattle, to be sold they knew not where. Husbands were torn from wives, parents from children, never to look upon each other again this side the grave. There was wringing of hands and cries of despair." (p.253)

"But though my life in slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships, God pity the woman who is compelled to lead such a life!" (p.263)

"'We have the same sorrows,' said I. 'No,' replied she, 'you are going to see your children soon, and there is no hope that I shall ever even hear from mine.'" (p.315)

"The bill of sale is on record, and future generations will learn from it that women were articles of traffic in New York, late in the nineteenth century of the Christian religion. It may hereafter prove a useful document to antiquaries, who are seeking to measure the progress of civilization in the United States." (p.369)

"The Scripture says, 'Oppression makes even a wise man mad'; and I was not wise." (p. 367)

"Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage." (p.370)

"Friend! It is a common word, often lightly used. Like other good and beautiful things, it may be tarnished by careless handling; but when I speak of Mrs. Bruce as my friend, the word is sacred." (p.370)

# Topics for Discussion

What did you know about slavery in America before you read this book? How were your knowledge and perceptions of slavery changed by reading this narrative?

Linda/Harriet asserts many times throughout the work that slavery, while horrible and degrading for men, is far worse for women. Why is this the case? What hardships of slavery are specific to women? Are there hardships specific to men?

Harriet Jacobs tells us that she is writing this narrative not to solicit sympathy for her own sufferings but to motivate the reader to take action and help the millions of Americans still living in slavery. How do you think the reading public, in 1861, are likely to have responded to the book? Based on what you have read, do you think it was a useful tool for inciting social change?

The poor white men who searched Linda's grandmother's home after the insurrection were envious and resentful about the luxuries and comforts they found there. Linda and her family were evidently living more comfortably than these free white people in her town. What's more, these men are illiterate, while Linda and William have learned to read. However, while Linda comments that the same forces that are keeping her in slavery are keeping these men in poverty, she none-the-less believes that it is better to live in freedom and poverty than to live as a slave, even a "pampered slave". Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

In her introduction to the work, editor Lydia Maria Child anticipates that she will be criticized for the book's discussion of "delicate subjects". What topics in the book might be considered "delicate"? Why does Ms. Child feel the need to present these topics to the general public? What does this tell us about the book's intended audience?

Ms. Jacobs believes that slavery not only brings unhappiness to slaves themselves, but also to the white slaveholders and their families. According to her, the abolition of slavery would make everybody's life better. Do you think this is true? Do you believe that slavery caused unhappiness for slave-owners as well as for slaves? If this is the case, why do you think slavery continued to flourish in her world?

Ms. Jacobs decided to publish this narrative under the pseudonym Linda Brent and used fictitious names for the other characters in this, otherwise non-fiction book. Why do you think Ms. Jacobs decided not to use her real name or the real names of the other people in the story?

What do you think of Mr. Sands? Are his actions admirable? Is he taking advantage of Harriet when he begins an affair with her? Are his efforts to secure his children's freedom admirable? As the story progresses, Mr. Sands appears to have less and less contact with the children Harriet bore him and Harriet trusts him less and less. Is this

merely the result of a love affair that has fizzled out or gone sour? Does his new position in society as a congressman and respectable husband render it necessary for him to distance himself from these illegitimate offspring? All in all, what is your opinion of Mr. Sands' character?

What are the author's views on religion as evidenced in the book?

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl tells us one woman's perspective of her experience in slavery. What can we know about slavery from one person's story? Would the narrative be more effective if it included other slaves' viewpoints? Why or why not?