

The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings Study Guide

**The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings by
Olaudah Equiano**

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Plot Summary

The Interesting Narrative is African-born Olaudah Equiano's first-hand autobiographical account of his sea voyages around the West Indies, the Mediterranean, and elsewhere. Equiano is kidnapped into slavery at age eleven and fights for many years for his freedom, becoming a significant voice in the abolitionist movement in his later years.

Equiano recounts his early, happy childhood in the inland African province of Eboe. The people of Eboe are simple farmers, and Equiano's father is a respected elder. Equiano and his sister are kidnapped when he is eleven. After serving as a slave in Africa, he is forced to endure a long journey across Africa. Equiano is separated from his sister, and he never sees his sister or family again when he is whisked away into the slave trade by boat.

He ends up in Virginia as a plantation slave. A British Royal Navy officer named Michael Henry Pascal takes a liking to Equiano on a visit and purchases him. Equiano then spends the next few years with Pascal on board military ships as Pascal rises in the ranks. Equiano is present during the siege of Louisbourg during the Seven Years' War, among other conflicts involving the British against the French.

Fooled by Pascal into thinking he is earning his freedom by working under the naval officer, Pascal instead cruelly sells Equiano to another man, Captain Doran. Doran in turn sells Equiano to a man named Robert King on the West Indies island of Montserrat. Pascal spends years under King working with a man named Captain Thomas Farmer, loading and unloading ships and traveling to various places in the Caribbean and the American colonies.

During this time, Equiano establishes a small but lucrative merchant trade, buying goods and selling them in another location. Eventually he procures enough money to buy his freedom from King, who reluctantly agrees to sign Equiano's manumission, a document declaring Equiano a free man.

After some time working under King and others in the Caribbean, Equiano travels to England and becomes apprentice to a hairdresser, Dr. Irving. Not finding the wages enough to support himself, Equiano engages in further sea voyages, including an ill-fated expedition in the Arctic to find a north-east passage to India, and a voyage to the Musquito Coast to help start a plantation. After the Arctic voyage in particular, Equiano expresses a need to find a religion, and later passages are devoted to Equiano's "born-again" conversion to Christianity, particularly Protestantism.

Equiano spends his last years living comfortably in England, arguing against slavery and distributing his Interesting Narrative to interested and sympathetic citizens around the United Kingdom.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

The author first offers an apologia, stating why he has chosen to write his narrative. He does not wish to be vain, which is the danger with writing about one's self. Rather, he wishes to celebrate God, for God has made him a favorite and bestowed him with a great deal of favor, especially in contrast to his enslaved African countrymen. If he is able to provide a little satisfaction and promote "the interest of humanity" to the small circle of acquaintances which has requested this narrative, he will consider the narrative a success.

Olaudah Equiano is born in the African territory of Guinea, in the kingdom of Benin, in the remote province of Eboe, in 1745. In his childhood, he never encounters a white man. His father is a village elder, called Embrenche, a term of great respect. Scarification of the forehead is involved in adopting this title. Embrenche punish crimes, conduct trade, and generally run government; Equiano is next in line to be Embrenche, as the title is hereditary. Of all crimes, adultery is among the worst, and is punishable by slavery or death. However, there is a double standard, and women are usually the ones tried and punished, not men. Weddings are celebrated with great feasts and communal gatherings. Once a woman is wedded to a man, she becomes that man's property, and dowry is given by parents or friends of the woman to the man in the form of land, slaves, or cattle.

Dance and music are of great importance to the Eboe culture, conducted at every festival. Men and women dress alike—a long piece of dyed blue calico is wrapped around the body. Women wear gold ornaments on arms and legs. Diet is simple and consists of goats and poultry, stewed, with spices added. Rigorous washing is observed of the hands before meal, and in general the Eboe culture places great importance on cleanliness. The chief beverage is a weak palm wine. One rare luxury the Eboe indulge in is perfume, from an odoriferous tree bark. Dwellings are simple, made of wood but with a hardened red earth wall and moat surrounding them. Men and women's living quarters are separate rooms. House-building is a communal exercise.

Goods are usually traded by barter, though sometimes a coin is used as currency. Frequent trade is conducted with a neighboring kingdom. Eboe's own products include corn, cotton, tobacco, pine apples, spices, gum, and honey. Agriculture is the chief occupation. Everyone works from a young age, and there is no such thing as unemployment or beggars. "Cheerfulness" and "affability" are cited as the two chief characteristics of Eboe people. Farming is accomplished with simple tools, and not with beasts of husbandry. Rarely, locusts swarm and devour a crop, leading to a period of famine.

Slavery is common in the region. Eboe men (and women, who are also trained in combat) will go out with spears dipped in poison to kidnap men from other districts for



slavery. At other times, traders will simply barter with chiefs for slaves among the chief's people. Slaves, though segregated in society, are asked to do no more work than a free person, and in some instances own slaves themselves.

In regards to religion, Eboe people believe there is one Creator who influences events on earth. An afterlife is an unknown, undiscussed concept. Rather, spirits of the dead regularly walk the earth, and to ward off evil spirits Eboe people may make offerings of food. Circumcision "like the Jews" is observed, and children are often named for some event or circumstances at the time of their birth. Oludah's own first name means both fortunate, and having a loud voice. As mentioned, cleanliness is strictly observed and is part of the religious ethos. Poison is a particular superstition, and merchants may "kiss" their edible wares to assure buyers that they are not poisonous.

Equiano lastly makes his case that Africans and Europeans are related. Eboe culture and religious practices are similar to the Jews in the Old Testament. Several biblical scholars have traced Africans back to sons of Abraham. Europeans were once barbarous like the Africans. As for the difference in skin color, Equiano ascribes that to the environment rather than anything innate, citing anecdotal evidence that Spaniards or Portuguese living in African areas have become "dark coloured" after a time. Many Europeans cannot see the potential for civility in the African because all they see are enslaved Africans, and slavery by its definition debases one.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Equiano is the youngest of six sons and a daughter. He is a favorite of his mother. He is taught from a very early age both agriculture and warfare, in the form of javelin-throwing. He grows up in this way until age eleven, when he and his sister are kidnapped from home while all the adults are away tending the fields. His kidnappers, two men and a woman, force the two to walk for two days, stopping only briefly at a small house. Equiano tries to cry out and is gagged and put into a sack. To his great horror, Equiano is then separated from his sister, who is taken elsewhere, and for days Equiano does not eat and has to be forcibly fed. After changing several hands, he lands as a slave in the house of a kind chieftain and his family, who treat him well. He helps the man work the bellows in his goldsmith shop.

After a month, Equiano is given a little freedom to move about the estate, and his thoughts turn to escape. One day, to pass the time, he throws a pebble at a chicken and accidentally kills it. Fearing punishment, he runs away and hides in a thicket. The village searches for him but he is too well-hidden. After several hours, scared and hungry, he leaves the thicket and collapses from exhaustion back in his master's kitchen. Equiano receives only a slight reprimand for his behavior.

Soon after he is sold again and taken on a long, hard journey. During several months on the road he acquires two other languages. Equiano chances upon his lost sister once again and they share a temporary happy reunion over a night until once again she is taken away. Equiano is eventually sold to a merchant in a prosperous town called Tinmah, where he is treated very well and allowed to eat with the family, to the point he almost forgets he is a slave.

However, after two months, he is again sold, and taken on a huge journey of six or seven months, encountering various cultures and lands, until at last he reaches the sea coast. He is amazed and terrified at the large slave-ship waiting for him, for he has never seen its like. He encounters white men, Europeans, for the first time and marvels at their white skin and long hair. He is brought aboard and faints when he realizes his fate by viewing the black people in chains on deck. He wakes up amid these slaves. He fears they are being prepared to be eaten by the white people, but he is assured that is not the case. Over the next days, Equiano becomes so depressed he cannot eat, and he is flogged for refusing to eat. He wishes for death to take him.

Soon after, he is forced to switch ships, all the time marveling at the "magic" used by the white men to move ships on the water and make them stop. The slaves are forced to remain below deck on this ship, and the crowded space and lack of hygiene soon lead to an epidemic, in which many slaves die. The conditions are filthy and horrifying. Equiano characterizes the whites as very cruel, as when they dine on fish but dump the leftovers back in the water rather than feed the starving, pleading blacks.

They eventually land in Barbados, and Equiano again marvels at the magic of the Europeans: horses and great houses made of brick. He is herded into a pen and eventually sold at auction.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

After about two weeks Equiano is put on another ship for Virginia. He and his fellow slaves are treated much better on this journey than the last. He is put on a plantation where he does lonely work by himself and no one knows his language. One day he is sent in to fan the unwell plantation master, and marvels at various novelties like a ticking clock and a portrait painting. One day, a lieutenant of the royal navy, Michael Henry Pascal, visits the plantation and takes a liking to Equiano, purchasing him. Equiano is put on a ship for England, and Pascal renames him Gustavus Vasa, after a well-known freedom fighter. At this point Equiano begins to speak a little English. Though the whites treat him well, Equiano still fears he will be eaten or suffer some other horrible fate. On board he meets a teenager named Richard Baker, and they become fast friends.

After thirteen weeks the boat arrives in Falmouth, England. Equiano is amazed at such things as snow and church service. Along with his new master, Richard Baker remains Equiano's constant companion and interpreter, explaining the ways of the world.

As their master Pascal is in the royal navy, for the next months Equiano and Richard Baker go to various points around the North Atlantic Ocean, carrying supplies and what not, but never seeing military warfare. Equiano is compelled to fight other boys on these voyages as the men bet on who will win. Eventually Equiano and Richard Baker get a chance to get on shore, and their master summons them back to London. There, Equiano gets very sick (the result of many months on the freezing seas), and at one point a doctor expresses the need to amputate his left leg, fearing gangrene. However, Equiano refuses, and by degrees he gets better. Pascal is promoted and is appointed to a huge ship called the Royal George. At this point he is separated from Richard Baker and they share a teary good bye.

After a few weeks Pascal is assigned to join a large expedition to attack the port of Louisbourg in French Canada. After some weeks they arrive, and the fleet fights off an entrenched French battery at Louisbourg. After days of fighting and casualties and lost ships on both sides, the English take Louisbourg. Equiano experiences a great deal of freedom and is able to go on shore at his leisure. The fleet gathers and sails back for England. On the way, they meet a French fleet they mistake for English, and a French ship damages them with a broadside attack in the confusion. The English pursue the French for days, chasing them off eventually and capturing a small ship in the process. Eventually the fleet sails to England and arrives in Portsmouth. Pascal and Equiano go to London to press-gang more men into service to make up for those lost in the battle.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Three years pass. Equiano proves to be an able seaman, and he knows English quite well by now. While on shore, he visits a Miss Guerins who informs him he should be baptized or else he cannot get into heaven. At her insistence, Equiano is baptized.

Equiano accompanies his master on a journey to the Mediterranean. While on shore on way to Gibraltar, Equiano is told that someone knows his long-lost sister. He is taken to the woman, but she is not his sister. Equiano is next told that a ship is joining him, and on board is Richard Baker. His joy is short-lived, for Equiano learns that Richard Baker died in an expedition.

Equiano's ship stops at Barcelona, and he enjoys some time there, for the Spanish are very kind and they bring the ship all sorts of fruits and other goods.

They reach Gibraltar, and in the middle of the night there comes word that a French fleet is near. There is a great hurry and confusion to get the ships ready for war. The English fleet then chases the French fleet for hours, until they catch the ships. A furious cannon battle ensues (Equiano is amazed at how deafening the noise is), until finally the French line is broken and the English fleet victorious. The English claim three French ships, while the other ships flee. In their hurry a couple fleeing French ships run aground, and are blown up when it is decided they cannot be unloosed from the earth.

Equiano's job in the fight is to run powder to guns. He sees many men blown up in front of his face, but he escapes unhurt. His master is injured and spends some time with the surgeon getting patched up. Equiano is in great danger running explosive powder amid French gunfire on the deck.

Equiano's ship is badly damaged in the battle. Equiano's master recovers and they board a smaller ship bound to help bring the captured French ships back to port. As a result of a large delay Equiano guesses is due to the English king's death, Equiano spends nearly all of the year 1760 stationed at the Isle of Wight, where he improves himself by reading and writing.

In March of 1761 Equiano's master takes to sea once again. During their next journey, Equiano's ship is nearly sunk by a "friendly fire" incident in which an English ship accidentally rams it. The ship completely destroys the cabin of a recently born again Christian named John Mondle, with Mondle barely escaping with his life, a miracle Equiano ascribes to providence. After much effort, the ship is saved from sinking.

The proceeding city siege against the French lasts until June, when the English take the city. Equiano then spends most of the year on board ship when the fleet attacks another French fleet, blockading them. During this time, Equiano sees a lot of military action, and many strategies tried by one or the other fleet to outwit their enemy.



After this action ends, Equiano's ship returns to Portsmouth, and in December 1762 there is word that the war is over. Equiano and his master return to London to get paid by the royal navy, and Equiano rejoices that peace is at hand and that he will be able to continue his studies by becoming a free man and acquiring an education.

However, before they leave ship, Equiano's master has other plans and suddenly turns very cruel, ordering Equiano to stay on board under threat of violence. Equiano is under the assumption that, since he has worked for his master for years and his master takes all his navy earnings, Equiano has paid his way out of servitude. However, Equiano's master (Pascal) is intent on selling him like a slave to another ship, denying him freedom. Equiano is sold, despite his passionate objection, to one Captain Doran and is put on board Doran's ship. Equiano's shipmates are on Equiano's side and believe they are witnessing a grave injustice. Equiano ends the chapter filled with sorrow and despair.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Equiano laments his "new slavery" and prays to God for some sort of salvation. After some time, he ascribes his new unfortunate circumstances to a test given him by God. His new master soon sets sail for the island of Montserrat, a place which has a reputation for slave auctions. Equiano is greeted with the new horror that he might be sold at auction. After months of hard labor involving loading and unloading ships, one day Equiano is sold, from Captain Doran to a man named Robert King, despite Equiano begging to be taken back to England. The small comfort is that Robert King is known as a kind and good man. King promises to take Equiano eventually back to Philadelphia (where King lives) and, because Equiano knows some arithmetic, make a clerk of him.

For the time being, Equiano works at rowing boats for King's merchant operations. He is paid better than most slaves, and King is among the kindest masters on the island. Equiano's travels around the islands allow him to see the brutal treatment of other slaves, including a slave whose leg is cut off for trying to run, a casual attitude about raping African girls, and pestilential living conditions. Equiano takes the opportunity to expose the hypocrisy of this cruelty being committed by Christian men, whose religion teaches them quite the opposite. Equiano also calls out the slave codes governing Montserrat and the West Indies in general as savage and barbaric. Additionally, slave auctions have the effect of separating families, and it has affected Equiano deeply to see families torn apart in this manner.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Equiano relates a couple of strange events on the island. There is first a place called "Brimstone Hill" which is riddled with ponds full of boiling water. Equiano also relates a time when he feels the earth shake in the middle of the night and thinks it is ghosts; he is later told it is an earthquake, which he has never experienced.

At the end of 1763, Equiano begins serving on the ship of a Captain Thomas Farmer. Farmer likes Equiano's work ethic so much that he badgers Equiano's master to let him voyage with him on his trading journeys around the islands. The master (King) relents, and soon Equiano is once more a sailor.

For the next four years he spends his years sailing with Farmer. During this time he conducts a small but profitable merchant business. Starting with the purchase of one tumbler, he buys items and then sells them for more than the purchase price on another island. Though there is a stigma against slaves owning anything whatsoever—Equiano relates a time when two white men simply take hard-earned bags of fruit from him—Captain Farmer for the most part protects Equiano's interests. Equiano earns a few pounds with his merchant business—an amazing amount of money for a slave.

Meanwhile, Equiano dreams of escaping slavery. He hires the first mate of the vessel to teach him navigation, in the chance he might have any opportunity to escape slavery by sailing away in the ship. However, when given the opportunity, Equiano does not steal Captain Farmer's ship, as he is ambivalent towards the man.

One day, King, Equiano's master, and Captain Farmer confront Equiano, stating that King will sell Equiano because they heard he intends to run away. Equiano swears he had no such intentions, and Captain Farmer confirms that there were many opportunities in which Equiano could have run away but did not. It turns out the first mate is trying to get Equiano in trouble by spreading a lie about his intention to run away. King is then convinced of Equiano's honesty, and in fact gives him additional goods to sell in Equiano's long quest to buy his freedom. Equiano is allowed to take a trip to Philadelphia, which Equiano has been excited about since meeting King.

Equiano sells goods in Philadelphia and makes quite a profit. He also visits a prophet of sorts, Mrs. Davis, who claims she can see the future. She tells him he is not long for slavery, and Equiano rejoices at the news.

While on travels between Montserrat, Philadelphia, and Georgia, Equiano has several brushes with death. He gets the ague in Georgia and nearly dies before recovering.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

By the beginning of the year 1766, Captain Farmer buys a large sloop named Nancy and Equiano is chosen as part of the crew to sail to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, he sells many of his goods to Quakers. While in the city, Equiano happens upon an evangelical sermon conducted by the famous George Whitfield, and is struck at how boisterous and fevered everyone is.

They sail first to Georgia and then back to Montserrat. In their travels, the captain becomes close with a dying silversmith who promises the captain his large fortune in exchange for caring for him as he dies, and so the captain is very attentive to this man. The silversmith dies, but much to the captain and Equiano's disappointment, the silversmith has only a dollar and a half to his name, not even enough to buy a coffin.

By the return to Montserrat, Equiano has amassed forty-seven pounds from his merchant transactions. He is very eager to buy his freedom. Captain Farmer and Equiano approach Robert King (the master) and present Equiano's request and money. King is unpleasantly surprised that Equiano has made so much money so fast, stating that if he knew what Equiano was financially capable of, he would never have agreed to allow Equiano to purchase his freedom. However, at Farmer's prodding, King honors his word and allows Equiano to go to the Register Office to draw up a "manumission" or official document proclaiming the emancipation of a slave. Equiano is elated as he races to the Register Office.

The Register Office provides the manumission, and King signs it, and thus Equiano is a free man. Equiano's thoughts immediately turn to returning to England and visiting his old master Pascal whom he still has affection for. However, he feels a sense of duty to King and Captain Farmer, and so he agrees to become a paid sailor for Farmer, at least for the time being.

While on a voyage, a slave insults and strikes Equiano, forcing Equiano to retaliate by beating the slave soundly. The next day, the master of the slave approaches Equiano and demands that Equiano be flogged in town for the crime of property damage. Equiano stays on board and dares not step on land because of this threat. The slave master threatens to come on board with constables to arrest Equiano, and so Equiano hides in several places outside of town for days until the slave master's anger relents. This episode reminds him that a free black man is not the equivalent of a free white man.

On a subsequent voyage, Captain Farmer promises Equiano two bulls as part of his wages, but then breaks his word and refuses to carry them on board, leading to a bad argument. Farmer eventually placates Equiano by compelling him to carry turkeys on board instead of bulls. On this voyage, Farmer becomes very sick and is eventually



bed-ridden. The first mate also comes down with a bad sickness, leaving Equiano as the man left to steer the ship, despite knowing only the basics of navigation. Equiano assures Farmer on his death bed that Farmer never did any harm to Equiano and was a kind man, and thereafter Farmer dies. All the bulls on board die, and the turkeys survive. Equiano manages to steer the ship safely into port, and he receives some acclaim for his heroics.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

The Nancy sloop gets a new captain, named Phillips, and Equiano once again sets sail after King begs him to remain working for him. On the journey, Equiano has nightly dreams about the ship wrecking. He also "damns" the ship vocally when he is pumping water. Soon after, the ship gets dangerously close to currents that could dash the ship against rocks. The new captain, despite repeated warnings, seems unconcerned or ignorant of the danger, and refuses to go on deck. By the time Phillips finally does go on deck, the ship hits rocks and gets stuck. Equiano attributes the disaster to his sin of damning the ship.

Phillips orders the hatches to be nailed shut, so that the slaves below deck cannot overwhelm the crew and take over the rescue boats. Equiano yells at Phillips for being an incompetent captain, and because of Equiano's influence the hatches are not nailed and so the slaves are not doomed to drown. Equiano essentially takes over, patching a rip in the ship's hull with leather and grease, and leading a team of rowers who, in five or so trips, manage to get everyone off the boat and onto a nearby island. Phillips and most of the white crew are incompetent and useless, having given up and become drunk in their despair.

Equiano again leads the crew in setting up shelter and ensuring food on the deserted island (later revealed to be one of the Bahama islands). The crew catches fish and sets up tents. They are initially frightened when a pack of flamingoes are mistaken for "cannibals" but when the pack flies off their fears subside.

It takes eleven days to repair the sloop enough to travel. Freeing the boat from the rocks, Equiano, Captain Phillips, and others journey to find an inhabited island. They spend several days camping on islands in desperate search of drinkable water, and in fear of wild beasts. Finally they spy a ship and hail it. The ship's crew happens to be in a very similar situation; their own whaling schooner has wrecked and they have left people on an island. The crews join forces and set off for the island still full of Equiano's people. They arrive and provide some much-needed food and water. Then, Equiano goes off with several men in the little sloop they have found to travel to New Providence to seek help for both crews.

On the way, they suffer through a terrible storm with gale winds that nearly beach the ship. However, finally, they arrive at New Providence. Equiano spends almost three weeks there, looking for a trip to Georgia, and finally his Captain Phillips arranges one. However, on the first day out on the new ship, the ship encounters fierce winds and is nearly dashed against the rocks. The crew returns to New Providence to get refitted and repaired, with some claiming Phillips' crew has a curse on them.



However, the crew arrives in Georgia. Equiano has a couple of unpleasant experiences during his stay. He is nearly flogged for having a light on after 9 P.M., despite being a free man. In another episode, two white men try to kidnap him and pass him off as an escaped slave, but Equiano resists fiercely, knowing this common trick. Equiano speaks English too well for the men to succeed in their ruse, and so he is let free. Equiano ends the chapter on a sloop bound for Martinico.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Once in Martinico, Equiano makes it his mission to get back to Montserrat, in time to say goodbye to his former master King and set sail for London. He is delayed when his current captain refuses to give him money Equiano let him borrow, and so Equiano (having no legal recourse, as a black man) must crew with the captain on several more journeys, pestering him to give back the money, until the captain finally does so. After a couple stops, Equiano lands in Montserrat.

Equiano relates the fate of the Nancy sloop to King. It turns out King has had his own misfortune; his house has been flooded and washed away. Though King wants Equiano to stay, Equiano is resolute, and King bids him farewell, even writing him a letter to attest to Equiano's good character.

After seven weeks, Equiano arrives in England with thirty-seven guineas to his name. He seeks out and finds an old acquaintance, Miss Guerins, who is glad to see him. He also encounters Pascal, his old master, who is not happy to see him and treats Equiano with contempt. Equiano asks Miss Guerins if she will help him to procure employment. Equiano says he wants to be a hairdresser. Guerins finds a friend of a friend, Dr. Irving, who takes Equiano in as an apprentice hairdresser. During this time, Equiano also finds time to learn the French horn, and learn arithmetic from a kind reverend.

However, Equiano soon finds he cannot live on his meager wages, and he endeavors to sail again for a decent income. He especially wants to see Turkey, and delights in the fact that a ship is soon setting sail for Turkey in need of a hairdresser. He joins the crew of the Delaware, captained by John Jolly.

They stop in fabulous places in Italy and around the Mediterranean before settling in Turkey. Equiano remarks that the Turks seem to tolerate blacks much better than Western Europe, and that he finds it odd to see women in their veils. After five months of decent living, the ship sails back for England laden with trade goods. The crew next makes a trip to Portugal, which Equiano enjoys.

Other stops include Genoa and Naples, cities which Equiano finds clean and beautiful. He witnesses an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, and describes the busy marketplace in Smyrna, Turkey, which the crew returns to.

Eventually, to "try my fortune," Equiano again sails back to the West Indies, in April 1771. After this trip, Equiano joins a ship traveling to Jamaica. Like elsewhere in the West Indies, Equiano finds black slaves treated very poorly by whites on the island. Equiano gets back to London and, tired of the sea, rejoins his old hairdressing master. He hairdresses for a little less than two years, when the promise of an exciting



expedition once again seduces him back to sea. The expedition is designed to find a "north-east passage" to India, led by Lord Mulgrave on a ship called the Race Horse.

They travel to the North Pole, encountering great cold and ice, and animals like whales and walruses. A great sheet of ice eventually prevents them from going any further. As they turn back, the weather turns even colder, and soon their ship is trapped in ice. Ice is sawed in such a way as to prevent the ship from being squeezed to pieces by allowing it a little pond to float in. They are faced with the grim reality of having to drag the ships across the ice in a desperate race to open water, but thankfully the weather changes and grows much milder, and so some ice disappears and the crew is able to find open water. After a journey of four months, the crew returns to England.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Equiano's near brush with death near the North Pole makes him very anxious about the afterlife and his salvation. He endeavors to find a religion to devote himself to. He attends many services and listens to religious people from many religions, including the Quakers, Jews, and Roman Catholics, but he does not find the enlightenment he craves. He reads the first four books of the New Testament himself, and finds himself very attracted to Christ and his qualities. He decides the Turks are the most Christ-like people he has encountered, and so he boards a ship bound for Turkey.

The journey goes badly. A black man on board, John Annis, who has been freed by his master, is nonetheless pursued by that same master, who now wishes to recapture the man. The master boards Equiano's ship and forcibly kidnaps John Annis. Equiano is outraged at this behavior, and pursues this master in England in a bid to make him give up Annis. Unfortunately, Equiano tracks down Annis but it is too late, and Annis has already been sent off to the West Indies. Equiano hears that the man was flogged mercilessly once he arrived, and he finally dies from such punishment soon after. This wickedness in life makes Equiano even more serious about a religious conversion, and he prays to God to give him an answer to his doubt and anxiety.

He finds an answer in a chance encounter with old fisherman in his cottage. This man speaks plainly about Christ, and Equiano finds much to admire in the man's relationship with God. The fisherman is a member of a "Dissenting" group of Christians, probably Protestants excluded from the official Church of England. A Dissenting minister visits Equiano and the fisherman, and Equiano is invited to a service. At the service, Equiano is overcome with what he perceives as true Christian fellowship, and it appears he has found his congregation. The fisherman gives Equiano a little book called "The Conversion of an Indian" which Equiano finds very valuable in his religious journey.

In order to support himself, Equiano must again take to the sea. He is disgusted by all the sailors who do not fear or believe in God, and who take His name in vain. He asks repeatedly to be dropped off from the ship, but the captain refuses. However, on board on the night of October 6th, Equiano undergoes a spiritual revelation, feeling as if he is "born again" as referenced in scripture. He feels God has shown him the way, and he is free of sin and evil, and certain of salvation. He rejoices and wants to share his new life, but no one on board is a believer.

Finally he arrives back in England where he finds ready listeners to his story. During a sermon by a noted holy man, Reverend Romaine, Equiano gains clarification on one point of Christian doctrine he is confused about—whether salvation is achieved through the doing of good works, or if faith alone suffices. Equiano comes out of the sermon assured that faith, love, and obedience are all that are required for salvation. At the end

of the chapter, Equiano states that he does not fear death anymore and he in fact anticipates it, for it will result in him becoming closer to God.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

Reluctantly, Equiano takes another sea voyage, this time to Cadiz. En route, the ship hits a rock and nearly sinks, but Equiano is unafraid to die and he amazes others with his calmness. The ship's crew is joined by another crew and together the crews free the ship and it gets repaired. On the way back from Cadiz, Equiano has a dream that a little boat will be discovered by the crew, and sure enough, the next day the crew happens upon a little lifeboat with eleven near-dead men packed in it. Equiano's crew saves the men, and they thank God for their deliverance.

Back in London, Equiano's hairdressing master, Dr. Irving, purchases a sloop and means to sail to Jamaica to start a plantation. Irving asks Equiano to go, and he consents to the voyage, believing it might be an opportunity to conduct some missionary work. On the voyage, Equiano takes it upon himself to teach a "Musquito Indian," Prince George, in the ways of Christianity, and the young man responds enthusiastically to Equiano's teachings.

However, during the voyage the white men on board make fun of Prince George for following Equiano and believing in God and Satan. This makes Prince George reluctant to take any further lessons from Equiano. When Equiano tells Prince George that he either believes in Christ or risks an eternity in Hell, the Indian becomes very depressed and only wants to be alone. Equiano states that Satan intervened in the form of the mocking white men to ruin Prince George's salvation.

They arrive in Jamaica, and then take a trip to the Musquito Coast to drop off Prince George and his kin. Equiano and Dr. Irving and the crew eventually scout out a place called Cape Gracias a Dios, where they plan the plantation. Their boat is sent off for further trading and unfortunately gets captured by the Spanish, but they soldier on. The native Indians take a liking to Dr. Irving, as he cures their snake bites and other maladies. They have a large dance and feast to impress Irving and the crew.

The rainy season comes, overflowing the river and washing away much of the new plantation's crop. Equiano becomes depressed, not only because of the crop but because he feels he is far from God living in a heathen society, and so he asks Irving to give his consent to Equiano going back to Europe, which Irving reluctantly grants.

Equiano has two horrible experiences in trying to get back to Jamaica and finally England. On the first trip, a man named Hughes takes exception to a free black man and ties Equiano up, swearing he will sell him into slavery. Equiano escapes this injustice only to board another sloop whose captain promises to go to Jamaica but instead continues south along the Musquito Coast. This captain becomes crazy, beating Equiano and others and threatening to blow up the ship by sticking a hot poker into the gunpowder barrel. Equiano escapes this mad man as well, and finally gets a decent

captain and ship to take him to England. Dr. Irving, Equiano later learns, dies from eating a poisoned fish. He arrives back in England on January 7th, 1777.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Back in England, Equiano is urged to become ordained by the Bishop in order to conduct missionary work in Africa, but the Bishop denies his written request. Equiano next spends some unremarkable years in England, touring Wales and serving a Dorsetshire nobleman, "but the operations there were too minute and uninteresting to make a detail of," (p. 223). In the Spring of 1784, Equiano takes to sea again, traveling to New York, a city he greatly admires. Next he goes to Philadelphia, and rejoices at the fact that an all-black school has been set up there by the Quakers.

Back in London, the government spearheads an expedition to Sierra Leone, in order to return former slaves back to their homeland. Equiano is appointed a "commissary" for the government, a position charged with ensuring adequate provisions are provided and the government's budget is followed. However, prior to and during the trip to Sierra Leone, Equiano sees gross corruption and deceit on the part of the white leaders of the expedition, who pocket money intended for provisions and commit other abuses. When Equiano files a complaint with the government to expose this abuse, he is dismissed from his post. Many former slaves die soon after reaching Sierra Leone from lack of basic necessities. Equiano blames the individuals involved and not the government, whom he believes had good intentions with the voyage.

Equiano segues into a lengthy argument about why it makes sense to abolish slavery, not only to stop the human rights abuses and behave more like Christians, but because it makes economic sense to England to allow Africa's population to grow and prosper, such that there might be more people in need of British goods and services.

Equiano reports finally that, since the first edition of his *Interesting Narrative* was published, he has traveled around the United Kingdom and married a white woman. He hopes his narrative has been valuable and interesting to the reader.



Characters

Olaudah Equiano

Olaudah Equiano is the author of the Interesting Narrative. He is given the name Gustavus Vassa by a master, and it is by this name that he is known to his contemporaries. He is born in the African province of Eboe and taken away as a slave when still a child. He experiences much hardship in his long slavery, witnessing the massacre and mutilation of many slaves and suffering some beatings and verbal abuse himself, though he is usually "blessed" with kinder masters than most slaves.

Equiano's singular focus during slavery is to become a free man. In pursuit of this goal he develops a shrewd business acumen, selling and trading goods while on various trading voyages for his master. He is also constantly trying to better himself, learning skills like English, reading, and arithmetic in a time when Africans are discouraged from such pursuits. He also becomes a very able seaman, and is eventually much sought-after for his naval skills and ability to be calm under pressure on the high seas.

Equiano is able to purchase his freedom, and from there he goes on a religious journey, eventually settling on Methodism as the religion he converts to, accepting Jesus Christ as his savior. After his born-again conversion, Equiano is very spiritual and wants only to please God. He also loses any fear of death, and in fact invites death because it will mean he will be closer to God.

Equiano is revealed in his Narrative to be smart, resourceful, and hard working. Much of his behavior and adventures are the result of merely trying to survive as a slave with no rights or liberties. He is a very clever businessman, first conducting merchant business to buy his freedom, and second turning his story into a popular book that makes him wealthy.

Christian White Slave Owners

Equiano encounters many cruel men during his many years as a slave and later as a free black man with few rights. White slave owners during this time are, naturally, very racist, and believe the black man to be far inferior to the white man. By dehumanizing the black man, they are able to conduct their slave trade without moral objection and treat their slaves worse than cattle. Equiano calls these men "Christian" in a very sarcastic and mocking way, for they are Christian in name only. Their terrible conduct is contrary to Christian ideals as set forth in the Gospels and elsewhere. Equiano describes scenes in which these cruel masters mutilate their black slaves by castrating them or cutting off legs. White slave owners are also characterized as very deceitful men. One promises Equiano a trip back to Jamaica, but instead heads in the opposite direction, intending to enslave Equiano. Others buy goods from Equiano on credit, with



no intention of paying Equiano. In these cases, Equiano has no legal recourse, as black men cannot make any claim or accusation against white men.

While Equiano meets (and is enslaved to) ostensibly kind men, such as Robert King, who treat their slaves well, Equiano still points out that the very fact of owning slaves is not altogether Christian. While Equiano appreciates the kindness of many of his masters, and even becomes emotionally attached to several of them, nevertheless Equiano is compelled to seek freedom at great cost.

Most whites are involved in the slave trade for reasons of profit. Shipping slaves is a very profitable business, and furthermore slaves are an invaluable source of labor, on the plantation or on board ships. To these slave owners, losing slaves to disease, drowning, injuries, or anything else is the equivalent to losing a bull, boat, or crate of tobacco; the only consequence is financial.

Embrenche

Equiano's father in Eboe was one of the "Embrenche," well-respected elder chiefs who set policy for the district. Embrenche is a title of great distinction.

Olaudah

Equiano's sister is stolen from the village and enslaved along with Equiano. While they are together for a short time, the siblings are soon separated. The two see each other again, but again it is only temporary. Equiano describes this as perhaps the worst series of events in his life.

Pascal

Michael Henry Pascal is an officer in the Royal Navy who takes a liking to Equiano and buys him in order to serve him on his various military assignments. Equiano works hard for Pascal as he rises in the ranks and engages in various sea missions. Equiano is under the impression that Pascal will free him for all his hard work (and all the wages Equiano earns for Pascal), but Pascal turns on him and instead sells him to another man.

Richard Baker

Equiano meets Richard Baker when they are both teenagers. Baker befriends Equiano, teaching him English, acting as interpreter, and explaining the ways of the white world. The two friends are separated, and not long after Equiano learns with great sorrow that Baker has died in an expedition.



Mr. Robert King

Robert King is a slave master that Equiano is sold to, on the island of Montserrat. He is known as a good and kind master, and he treats his slaves well. He comes to rely heavily on the hardworking Equiano, and they develop a close friendship. While reluctant to part with Equiano, King shows his integrity when he signs Equiano's manumission, freeing him. Equiano works for King for some time after he becomes free.

Captain Thomas Farmer

Many of Equiano's West Indies sea travels are made on the ships of Captain Thomas Farmer. Farmer helps protect Equiano's merchant transactions from deceitful men, and he defends Equiano in front of King. Farmer also persuades King to do the right thing and free Equiano after Equiano has come up with money to buy his freedom. Equiano grows close to Farmer. Farmer becomes ill and dies on board his sloop.

Dr. Irving

Dr. Irving is a hairdresser to whom Equiano becomes attached as an apprentice. Eventually, Irving decides to start a plantation in the New World, and Equiano journeys with him. Uncomfortable with living among heathens, Equiano leaves Irving. Irving eventually dies by reportedly eating a poisoned fish.

John Annis

John Annis is a black cook who crews with Equiano on a particular voyage. Annis' former master (who freed him) pursues Annis and wishes to re-enslave him. The master kidnaps Annis, and Equiano conducts a search for Annis, but Annis is shipped off to be a slave in St. Kitt's, where he is flogged mercilessly and soon after dies of his injuries. Annis' tragedy is another example of freed black men having very few rights.

Prince George

Prince George is the name given to a Musquito Indian whom Equiano tries to convert to Christianity. George is responsive, but when the men on board mock George and Equiano for believing in Christianity, Prince George refuses further teaching, and Equiano becomes disillusioned about missionary work.



Objects/Places

The Province of Eboe

Eboe is a small province in Africa where Equiano is born. Equiano describes the primitive culture of Eboe in great detail, and describes his life there as simple but happy before he is stolen away for slavery along with his sister at age eleven.

Royal George

Equiano's master Pascal is assigned to a large military ship called the Royal George, and it is aboard this ship that Equiano participates in the siege on the French stronghold of Louisbourg.

Montserrat

Equiano is sold to Robert King, a slave owner and trader based out of the island of Montserrat in the West Indies. Equiano spends years in the service of King, trading back and forth between Montserrat and various points in the Caribbean and the New World.

Manumission

One of the happiest events in Equiano's life is when he gets a manumission signed by his master Robert King. A manumission is a document which emancipates a slave. After obtaining the signed manumission, Equiano is a free man.

Philadelphia

Robert King makes a promise to take Equiano to Philadelphia, a promise which sticks in Equiano's mind and has him brimming with anticipation once he finally arrives in the city. Equiano is impressed with the city, especially its Quakers, whom he conducts much business with and finds to be very honest people.

London, England

Equiano makes many stops in London during his time under Pascal, and makes friends there, including Miss Guerins. During his long stints in the Caribbean, Equiano desires to return to London, and he never quite feels comfortable among the "heathens" in the New World. Equiano becomes apprentice to a hairdresser in London, and he spends his final years in the city.



Nancy

Nancy is an impressive trading sloop ship that Captain Thomas Farmer, and later Captain Phillips, pilots and Equiano crews on. Several significant events happen on the Nancy, including the death of Farmer and a wreck on rocks at the hands of incompetent Captain Phillips.

North-East Passage to India

Equiano joins an expedition in the Arctic to find the "north-east passage to India." The ship's crew gets farther north than any Europeans have up to that point, but accumulating ice makes further progress impossible, and the ice nearly destroys the ship before the weather shifts and the ship is able to find open water. After this expedition, Equiano is especially aware of his mortality and is concerned about his eternal soul.

The Conversion of an Indian

Equiano is given a book called "The Conversion of an Indian" by a simple fisherman. The book is an important text for Equiano in his religious journey and eventual adherence to Christianity.

Expedition to Sierra Leone

Equiano is appointed by the government as a commissary to oversee budgeting and provisions for an expedition designed to return freed slaves to Africa via Sierra Leone. Equiano witnesses gross profiteering by the white men involved in the project, to the point where only very meager provisions are provided for the freed slaves while the rest of the government money is pocketed. Equiano complains and is replaced as commissary. Many freed slaves die on the journey or shortly thereafter as a result of lack of necessities like food and blankets.



Themes

Equiano's Spiritual Life

Equiano filters many of his experiences through the lens of his religious convictions. Even in his worst moments, when Equiano faces death after a ship wreck or becomes enslaved after glimpsing freedom, Equiano believes that God has a guiding hand on the events in his life. In the debate between free will and determinism (which Equiano explicitly struggles with in later chapters when he is trying to find a formal religion), Equiano ameliorates his situations by coming down on the side of determinism. Thus, every hardship is perceived as a test, administered by God, to build character or reaffirm Equiano's faith.

God is very present in Equiano's life. When he "damns" the ship out of frustration when pumping water, he ascribes the subsequent near-wreck of the ship to his curse. God is even more in the foreground when Equiano is born again and converts to Protestantism. Equiano reports that he feels a great peace due to his intimate relationship with God, and that he no longer fears but in fact welcomes death, so that he might become closer to Him. Equiano can hardly stand to be around his shipmates because they take the Lord's name in vain, and a similar unease compels him to abandon Dr. Irving's plantation on the Musquito Coast, with its population of godless heathens.

Arguments Against Slavery

In several instances, Equiano uses his experiences (either first-hand, or as a spectator) with slavery to argue against the institution. In these instances, Equiano will temporarily abandon the current plot to offer different types of arguments denouncing slavery and calling for its abolition.

A large portion of arguments are made on moral grounds. In describing butcheries and mutilations of slaves—like an escaped slave's leg being chopped off or another being castrated, as well as in describing the inhumane indifference towards Africans, Equiano is appealing to a deep, instinctual part of the reader. Equiano additionally describes the pestilential, cramped conditions on slave ships to further this appeal to a kind of "gag reflex" in the reader, who Equiano hopes, will react with disgust and join the abolitionist cause.

Equiano also argues against slavery on religious grounds. He points out passages in the Bible detailing Christ's compassion or similar traits, and then describes cruel slave owners' behavior as contrast. Equiano's argues that no Christian person could find slavery permissible, as the institution contradicts several concepts at the core of Christian thought and teaching.

Equiano also attempts to find comparisons between Africans and whites. He claims that his tribe practices circumcision and other rituals similar to Jews in the Old Testament,



and that Africans and whites are related, according to the Bible, through Abraham. The difference in skin color is ascribed to differences in environments only. By making a case that Africans and whites are not so dissimilar, Equiano is trying to combat the proslavery notion that Africans are innately inferior to whites.

Finally, Equiano tries to use economic arguments. He claims in Chapter 12 that the British would benefit from ceasing the slave trade, as abolishing slavery would increase the population of Africa, and a well-populated Africa would require British goods and services, causing Britain to thrive economically.

Freedom

It becomes increasingly apparent as the narrative moves along that Equiano chiefly values and seeks freedom, above all else. Slavery is the obvious impediment to freedom, and Equiano makes clear that no amount of "kind" masters or decent treatment changes the basic oppression and denigration of the master-slave relationship. However, it is interesting to note that, while Equiano will never mentally succumb to a master, no matter how kind, he does have a sense of duty and emotional attachment to his kind masters, most especially Robert King. Equiano makes it clear that, while he will perform the physical slave labor demanded by his masters as a pure survival tactic, mentally he will never be a slave or adopt the defeated slave mentality. So, in an important way, Equiano retains a kernel of freedom, even through the darkest days.

Equiano survives his various ordeals because of his commitment to freedom. His shrewd business transactions as he sells goods around the Caribbean for profit are not simply financial opportunism; they are an expression of freedom, not only because the money might buy his freedom, but because free men should have the right to conduct trade.

One of the ironies of freedom Equiano frequently points out is the "freed black man." Equiano receives his manumission and is thereafter emancipated as a slave. However, Equiano questions what this emancipation really means, and how truly free the freed black man is. Equiano is frequently cheated in business and other arenas because, by law, a black man has no legal rights versus a white man. The black man is not able to bring any legal action against a white man for perceived wrongs. Naturally, this legal reality is the direct result of the prevalent racism of the era. By calling into question the freedom of the free black man, Equiano demonstrates that equality is clearly not the same as the abolition of slavery, and so even the emancipated black man is not truly free.



Style

Perspective

Part of the value of the Interesting Narrative is that it is an abolitionist text written from the perspective of an enslaved African. Equiano is clearly in a position to accurately relay the various horrors of the slave trade, as he has many years of both first-hand and second-hand experience. Furthermore, Equiano has acquired an excellent grasp of the English language and the writing style of the 18th century, and so (thinking in terms of his contemporary influence) Equiano is an especially effective advocate for abolition, as he is able to speak the language of the noble men and women he wishes to reach and affect with his story.

While the emotions of initial enslavement and other hardships have been dulled by time, Equiano recreates his emotional turmoil with a considerable degree of skill, and the events relayed bear authentic detail and specificity.

Equiano is completely unafraid in allowing his anti-slavery bias to color his narrative. Christian slave owners are mocked for their un-Christ-like behavior, and Equiano may abandon a blow-by-blow account of his latest adventure and insert several paragraphs of anti-slavery rhetoric. Chapter 12 in particular offers several pages of reasonings against slavery, ranging from the moral to the economic. In later chapters, Equiano's religious conversion has a powerful impact on his narrative. The narrative becomes less about day-to-day events, and more about an amorphous journey to redemption. Once he becomes a born-again Christian, Equiano's faith has significant effects on his story. He abandons Dr. Irving's plantation because he cannot stand living among heathens, and his lack of fear of death allows him to perform admirably when his ship is nearly wrecked, for two examples.

Tone

The initial apologia provided at the beginning of Chapter 1 is important in establishing Equiano's tone. Equiano shows himself to be humble, stating that he is not writing his Interesting Narrative for vanity's sake, but to glorify God, because God has had a hand in protecting him and guiding him throughout his harrowing adventures. He also declares that the Interesting Narrative will contain only the truth, unexaggerated and unadorned. Equiano wishes to establish the veracity of his account because of his motive in helping to abolish slavery. Since Equiano's narrative is tied to the author's stance against slavery, part of the narrative's purpose is to uncover the horrors of slavery for the benefit of cloistered Londoners who may not understand the magnitude of abuses going on. Thus, Equiano maintains a sort of interesting mix between detached observer or journalist, and someone whose perspective is particularly valuable because he was himself a slave. The text then appropriately vacillates



between matter-of-fact reportage, and impassioned, emotionally-charged rhetoric against the slave trade.

Equiano assumes a certain enlightened stance in regards to the slave trade, as he must if he is to oppose it on religious, economic, and other grounds. Equiano in particular mocks the "Christians" who engage in brutalizing slaves, as their behavior is anything but Christ-like. He also assumes the form (if not the rigor) of classic rhetoric in offering arguments against slavery.

Structure

The body of the Interesting Narrative is divided into twelve chapters. The narrative proceeds in generally chronological order, starting with Equiano's childhood in the African province of Eboe and continuing with his enslavement and various sea voyages. While the beginning chapters have more emphasis on plot and causal progression—A follows B follows C—later chapters are less regimented, concentrating on Equiano's religious conversion and his arguments against slavery. This contrast is also a result of Equiano "settling down" in his later years, focusing on disseminating his book and speaking out against slavery and less on exciting sea adventures. As such, time is also partitioned differently as the book moves along. Early chapters may contain only several months in the life of Equiano, as many adventures are had and important events unfold, while Chapter 12 covers many years, because relatively less action occurs in those later years.

At the beginning of each chapter, a helpful summary previews the rest of the chapter. Along with the Interesting Narrative itself, included in this edition are supplementary texts, including subscription lists of people who purchased the various editions of the Interesting Narrative, the frontispiece and accompanying text of the original edition, and minor letters Equiano wrote.

The beginning of the first Chapter bears a traditional apologia, in which the author explains the reasons for writing the text, humbling himself before his readers and God. The end of the book contains rhetoric similar to this apologia.



Quotes

"Our women too were, in my eyes at least, uncommonly graceful, alert, and modest to a degree of bashfulness; nor do I remember to have ever heard of an instance of incontinence amongst them before marriage. They are also remarkably cheerful. Indeed cheerfulness and affability are two of the leading characteristics of our nation." (Chapter 1, p. 38)

"Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous. Did Nature make them inferior to their sons? And should they too have been made slaves? Every rational mind answers, no." (Chapter 1, p. 45)

"Yes, thou dear partner of all my childish sports! Thou sharer of my joys and sorrows! Happy should I have ever esteemed myself to encounter every misery for you, and to procure your freedom by the sacrifice of my own." (Chapter 2, p. 51)

"[C]heering myself with the reflection that there was a time allotted for me to die as well as to be born, I instantly cast off all fear or thought whatever of death, and went through the whole of my duty with alacrity." (Chapter 4, p. 84)

"Thus, at the moment I expected all my toils to end, was I plunged, as I supposed, in a new slavery: in comparison of which all my service hitherto had been perfect freedom; and whose horrors, always present to my mind, now rushed on it with tenfold aggravation." (Chapter 5, p. 95)

"Hitherto I had thought only slavery dreadful; but the state of a free negro appeared to me know equally so at least, and in some respects even worse, for they live in constant alarm for their liberty, which is but nominal." (Chapter 6, p. 122)

"My imagination was all rapture as I flew to the Register Office: and, in this respect, like the apostle Peter, (whose deliverance from prison was so sudden and extraordinary, that he thought he was in a vision), I could scarcely believe I was awake." (Chapter 7, p. 136)

"I said, 'Let us again face the winds and seas, and swear not, but trust to God, and he will deliver us.' We therefore once more set sail; and with hard labor, in seven days time, arrived safe at Georgia." (Chapter 8, p. 158)

"I bade Montserrat farewell, and never had my feet on it since; and with it I bade adieu to the sound of the cruel whip, and all other dreadful instruments of torture!" (Chapter 9, page 164)

"I felt that I was altogether unholy, and saw clearly what a bad use I had made of the faculties I was endowed with: they were given me to glorify God with; I thought, therefore, I had better want them here, and enter into life eternal, than abuse them and be cast into hell fire." (Chapter 10, p. 182)

"I saw that time was very short, eternity long, and very near; and I viewed those persons alone blessed, who were found ready at midnight-call, or when the Judge of all, both quick and dead, cometh." (Chapter 10, p. 185)

"Tortures, murder, and every other imaginable barbarity and iniquity are practised upon the poor slaves with impunity. I hope the slave-trade will be abolished. I pray it may be an event at hand." (Chapter 12, p. 234)

Topics for Discussion

According to the Interesting Narrative, what challenges does a free black man face in Equiano's time?

How does the debate between free will and determinism find its way into the Interesting Narrative?

What causes Equiano to seek religion? What prompts his eventual conversion to Protestantism?

What arguments does Equiano make for the abolition of slavery?

Equiano frequently mentions that "primitive" people like the Turks or the Musquito Coast Indians are more Christian than most white men he has encountered. What does he mean by this declaration? What is it to be Christian to Equiano?

What does Equiano find admirable about the Quakers?

What reasons does Equiano offer for telling his story in the first place? Why does Equiano believe his accounts are valuable?