

Narrative of Sojourner Truth Study Guide

Narrative of Sojourner Truth by Sojourner Truth

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

[Narrative of Sojourner Truth Study Guide.....1](#)

[Contents.....2](#)

[Plot Summary.....4](#)

[Narrative of Sojourner Truth Entry #1 and 2.....7](#)

[Entry #3 and #4 Her Brothers and Sisters, and Her Religious Instruction.....8](#)

[Entry #5 and #6, The Auction and Death of Mau-Mau Bett.....9](#)

[Entry #7 and #8, Last Days of Bomefree and Death of Bomefree.....10](#)

[Entry #9 and #10, Commencement of Isabella's Trials in Life and Trials Continued.....11](#)

[Entry #11 and #12, Her Standing with her New Master and Mistress and Isabella's Marriage...12](#)

[Entry #13 and #14, Isabella as a Mother and Slaveholder's Promises.....14](#)

[Entry #15 and #16, Her Escape and Illegal Sale of her Son.....15](#)

[Entry #17 and #18, It Is often Darkest just before Dawn and Death of Mrs. Eliza Fowler.....16](#)

[Entry #19 and #20, Isabella's Religious Experience and New Trials.....17](#)

[Entry #21 and #22, Finding a Brother and Sister and Gleanings.....18](#)

[Entry #23 and #24, The Matthias Delusion and Fasting.....19](#)

[Entry #25 and #26, The Cause of her Leaving the City and The Consequences of Refusing a Traveller a Night's Lodging.....20](#)

[Entry #27 and #28, Some of her Views and Reasonings and The Second Advent Doctrines...21](#)

[Entry #29, Another Camp-Meeting.....22](#)

[Characters.....23](#)

[Objects/Places.....26](#)

[Themes.....28](#)

[Style.....30](#)

[Quotes.....32](#)

Topics for Discussion.....34



Plot Summary

Olive Gilbert, a white woman, wanting to help Sojourner Truth, transcribed THE NARRATIVE OF SOJOURNER TRUTH for everyone to read. It was first published in 1850 and was reprinted three times between 1878 and 1884. The narrative is a chronological work that is developed as if a diary. Gilbert begins with the birth of Isabella, now Sojourner, and names her parents, James and Betsey. Isabella was never sure of the date of birth. She was born in New York and lived in the North all of her life. Since she was born into a household that spoke Dutch, she only spoke Dutch for much of her younger years. Isabella was one of at least eight children, but she only knew three of her siblings. The older children had already been sold by the time she was old enough to meet and remember them.

Isabella described the way the slaves lived in New England which was in the dark, damp cellars under the big houses. The only daylight they saw was through the cracks in the floorboards. There was no privacy at all. Everyone lived in the one big space.

The narrative makes slavery real and more horrible as Isabella described her parents sitting out a little pine knot that they set afire for light in the evenings and talked to remember their children who had been sold away from them. Isabella remembered her little brother being taken.

Isabella's mother told her children about God. Isabella believed He was in the sky and could only hear someone if the prayer was said aloud. Betsey, the mother, insisted that her children pray and ask God to help them and protect them. She also taught honesty as an important part of their faith. Even if a slave or her children were starving, they would not touch a piece of bread that belonged to the master. The moon and stars were there to remind them that God saw the whole family all over the land. They might not be physically together but the universe saw them and kept them a family. Auctions were a terrible time. Isabella lived through one that took her and her younger brother away from her mother and father. They were the last of the children. Isabella's mother was allowed to remain with her husband because he had been a good slave and was old and needed care. Betsey was to care for him. Unfortunately, Betsey died before James and left him to get along on his own. He lived with a few families before dying.

Isabella's real trials began with the auction. The new master and mistress only spoke English and Isabella did not understand the orders and directions she was given. She suffered every time she did not obey correctly. She was sold from this family to a fisherman's family who owned an inn. She did better with them. The family that followed the fishermen would have been a very good place if the mistress had understood slavery. The mistress had only experienced paid servants and had not ever had slaves. Isabella makes the point that without hope, people are not motivated to work or to better themselves. While they might look just lazy, they have given up. The mistress wanted to see ambition and hard work.



Isabella was married to Thomas. It is pointed out that marriage to a slave means nothing. Thomas had had two wives who had been sold away from him. Isabella and Thomas were married by another slave. A real minister of the gospel could not marry a man and woman whose marriage was a farce. Since the marriage was ended at the whim of a white master, the vows of marriage meant nothing.

Isabella had five children. She tells that her master was a good one. Master Dumont promised to free Isabella a year early. The law was going to free the slaves who were forty the next year. When the time to free her arrived, M. Dumont did not want Isabella to go. She planned and left anyway. She found a family not too far from Dumont who took her in and hired her. When Dumont came looking for her, Mr. Van Wagener paid twenty-five dollars for Isabella and her baby. Mr. Van Wagener was the first white man to tell Isabella not to call him master. He explained that the only master was God, not any man.

Before Isabella left Dumont, he had sold her five year old son to another master. Isabella discovered that Peter, her son, had been sold again and was on his way to the South. Northern Negroes were very fearful of the Southern slaveholders. New York had passed a law to protect the children of the newly freed slaves. If the child lived in New York, he could not be sold to another state. He would achieve his freedom under the New York law. Isabella took Peter's case to court. She found a lawyer who took the case and followed it through. Even though it looked as if she would not get her boy back, eventually, she won the case. The boy had gone South with a woman from the New York area. Later, the man who had been his master as well as the woman's husband would kill the wife. Peter had been saved from a very brutal master.

Isabella has her own epiphany and meets Jesus. Life had grown pleasant for her after she got her son back. She was no longer facing a cruel master or beatings. She did not seem to need God. One holiday season, she became lonely and almost went back to her old master to be with his slaves again. A light stopped her from getting into the old master's slave sleigh. As she realized that God was everywhere and that she was not equal to God, she became afraid and humbled. She knew that someone had to help her. She saw a person that she felt she knew yet did not recognize. She learned it was Jesus. After a while she learned that others knew Jesus too. She was a bit jealous to learn that she was one of many. Isabella moved to New York with Peter. Unfortunately, Peter is now a teenager who joins the wrong crowd and gets into trouble. It takes a couple of years before his crimes are such that he needs to find a way out of the city before he is sentenced to jail. Peter does find a place on a ship with Isabella's help and goes to sea. While Isabella would receive a few letters over the years, she did not see him again. During Isabella's time in New York, she did find a brother and sister. She discovered that she had met another sister in the church she attended. The sister had died before they had realized their relationship.

The next entry of the journal-like narrative is called gleanings. While Isabella tells the writer that she will not tell some of the worst horror stories from fear of reprisal, she tells several very horrific stories of the ways slaves were abused by the white slaveholders. The South claimed that their slaveholders were nothing like the North. The Southerners



drew pictures of peace and harmony, rather like a Stephen Foster song. Isabella tells some stories that illustrate the facts of slavery and the real abuse.

Isabella fell into a cult-like group when she met Matthias. Robert Matthew or Matthias came to the home where Isabella worked. He looked like Jesus to her. Her employer, a spiritual man, Mr. Pierson joined with Matthias to start a "real" religion. Matthias was God upon earth and Pierson was John the Baptist. They had their following as all cults do and they had their rules. Isabella gives us a few pages of description and rules for the group. Eventually there is murder in the group and Isabella gets away from their teaching. She was freed again.

Isabella adds an entry on fasting. She tries it because Mr. Pierson was fasting each week. Isabella felt that if Mr. Pierson needed to fast, she should fast twice as much. She says she got lighter and lighter but it seemed to her it was only in her body and not in her mind. In 1843 Isabella left the city to travel and lecture. She changed her name to Sojourner Truth at that time. She went East from New York City into Brooklyn, Long Island, and talked to whoever she could. She stayed with anyone who would take her in. If she had to pay for the night, she would. She would stop and work as necessary to keep on traveling. Isabella traveled all around the area and spoke when she had the opportunity. She gave her testimony and gave her thoughts on how to live as God wants his people to live.

Because Isabella could not read, she had others read the scriptures to her. She liked to have the scriptures read over and over again. With adults reading, they would read the passage a couple of times and then decide to explain what they had read. Isabella liked to have children read to her because they would read the passage as many times as she asked without the commentary.

Isabella happened into a "Second Advent" group in her traveling. The Second Advent philosophy preached that Jesus was coming any minute and life was lived as if it would be over in the next second. Isabella went about her business without arguing with the people but was able to witness to them by her example. Isabella went on moving about and places are mentioned that she visited. At a camp-meeting in Northampton, a group of young men threatened the gathering. Sojourner went into the group and began to sing one of her hymns. Her voice was strong and she gained everyone's attention easily. As the hymn ended, the boys wanted another. She sang a little more after they promised to be quiet and listen or to leave after she sang. She was good at ending trouble before it began.

Gilbert ends with a note about Sojourner's belief that she should not grasp treasures here on earth and that her Christian community would take care of her just as she took care of others all through her life. Gilbert asks what this woman could have done had she not been born a slave.



Narrative of Sojourner Truth Entry #1 and 2

Narrative of Sojourner Truth Entry #1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

The Narrative of Sojourner Truth is autobiographical. Olive Gilbert, a white woman, helped write Sojourner Truth's life in a journal style. Sojourner was born as a slave in the Northeast and into a house that spoke only Dutch. She became a free woman who spoke before crowds and met presidents of the United States. Written as a journal, the reader can feel the pain and inner soul of the slave.

Entry #1, Her Birth and Parentage: This entry explains that her birth name was Isabella and she was the daughter of James and Betsey. A Col. Ardinburgh, Hurley, Ulster County, New York owned their family. Slaves did not know their birth dates. However, Sojourner knew that she was liberated by the act of 1817, which freed the slaves who were 40 years and more. Ardinburgh's people were known as Low Dutch. Sojourner felt fortunate that Master Charles was a kind master. He allowed her family some land on which they could grow tobacco, corn, and flax to trade for extras. The slaves could work their land in the late evenings and Sundays.

Entry #2, Accommodations: Isabella's earliest memories include Master Charles and his move into a new home which he intended as a hotel. The slaves all lived in one big cellar. The only light came in from small basement windows and the cracks in the flooring above their heads. The cellar was a wet, dark hole stuffed with people who had only straw for beds. A slave was lucky to have a blanket. Slaves were expected to give good service and obedience. The nature of slavery was to beat the "man" out of his soul and make him more of a beast.

It is interesting to note the level of vocabulary in this journal. One might expect that it is due to the scribe but considering that this was done after Sojourner was speaking out in public and all history paints her as a dynamic speaker, the reader believes that we are seeing her words more than an interpretation from the writer. The reader also has to look at the literature of the day that Sojourner was hearing and seeing.



Entry #3 and #4 Her Brothers and Sisters, and Her Religious Instruction

Entry #3 and #4 Her Brothers and Sisters, and Her Religious Instruction Summary and Analysis

Entry #3, Her Brothers and Sisters: Sojourner's family numbered ten or twelve. Sojourner is not sure of the exact number. Her father, Bomefree, which means tree in Low Dutch, and her mother, Mau-mau Bett saw all their children taken from their home. Sojourner was next to the youngest. She only knew the others through the talk about them late at night by the parents. Sojourner comments that anyone who does not believe that slaves had feelings for their families needed to hear the memories and nightly grieving. Sojourner relates one story of the robbery of two children. One son was up early to start the fire for his mother and family when a sleigh came to the big house. He was excited until he was put into the sleigh and then saw his little sister locked into the sleigh box. He jumped out and ran to hide under the bed. Of course he was found and driven away in the sleigh. Parents lived in dread and foreboding of their children being taken again and again.

Entry #4, Her Religious Instruction: Sojourner was with her family and her youngest brother, Peter, until she was nine years old. The master was dying and Sojourner's mother was grieving for her lost children. Her mother would gather her small family together and talk of God. She told them He was in the sky and they should call on Him for help. He was the only one who could protect them. She also instructed them to obey their masters and not lie or steal. She wanted them to turn to God when they were beaten cruelly or fell into trouble. She also reminded them that God could see the rest of the family and somehow connect them through Him.

These two entries make the reader aware of the feelings of the slave. When reading the entries, the voice of a slave sounds in a reader's heart and soul. Once again, the vocabulary is excellent and Sojourner cuts through to the issues that she addresses.



Entry #5 and #6, The Auction and Death of Mau-Mau Bett

Entry #5 and #6, The Auction and Death of Mau-Mau Bett Summary and Analysis

Entry #5, The Auction: This was a terrifying time for Sojourner's family. Sojourner and Peter and Bett were to be sold. The question came up about taking care of Bomefree who had been a faithful slave. Since he was older and infirm, the masters decided to allow Bett her freedom as long as she took care of Bomefree. They were allowed to stay in the dark, damp cellar. Bett had to find ways to work to keep them from starving. Sojourner believes that her mother lived a few years after she was set free. Sojourner visited her mother and father two or three times during the years. Sojourner was too young to have a real understanding of time so isn't sure how long her mother lived.

Entry #6, Death of Mau-Mau Bett: One day Bomefree went out to knock some apples from a tree so he and his wife would have something to eat with the bread that Bett was making. When he came into the cellar, expecting to smell the bread, he discovered Mau-Mau Bett on the floor in a fit of palsy. She died soon after he found her. Sojourner asks the reader to imagine living and dying in our own warm homes compared to Bomefree staggering into the basement with his staff. He was penniless, weak, lame, and nearly blind and alone.

The family has no importance in a life of a slave. Children are taken just like people take animals away from a mother animal when it is weaned. The beatings that are so well advertised probably don't hurt the human as badly as having a family destroyed and a life with no worth.



Entry #7 and #8, Last Days of Bomefree and Death of Bomefree

Entry #7 and #8, Last Days of Bomefree and Death of Bomefree Summary and Analysis

Entry #7, Last Days of Bomefree: These were days of wandering from house to house. The Ardinburgh's moved him from basement to basement. If it was less than 10 miles, he walked to the new home. If it more than 10, he got a ride to the next home. Sojourner was able to see him only a couple of times during the rest of his life. He was always begging to die and telling God that he should have been taken before Betts. Sojourner tried to talk him into hanging on for 10 years when she had a promise of being freed but that couldn't happen. Finally, Bett's brother and his woman agreed to having their freedom if they would care for Bomefree. Since freedom was such a dream, they took their freedom and lived in destitution for the rest of their lives.

Entry #8, Death of Bomefree: After Bomefree and the couple went to live in a rude cabin that the Ardinburghs had given them, it did not take long before the couple died. First the woman and then the man. Bomefree was left alone and this time he had no one. Another free slave came by once. He begged for her help but she was afraid to make herself weaker and sicker. It wasn't long until he was found frozen and starved. The Ardinburgh's gave him a pot of black paint for the coffin and a jug of ardent spirits. Sojourner comments that people who will not help someone while they live seem to want to do something once they are dead. Sojourner does wonder if it was a show for Ardinburgh's own slaves.

Each entry illustrates harder and harder truths of the times and the people of the times. Sojourner not only tells the story but adds her philosophy and what she sees of those around her.



Entry #9 and #10, Commencement of Isabella's Trials in Life and Trials Continued

Entry #9 and #10, Commencement of Isabella's Trials in Life and Trials Continued Summary and Analysis

Entry #9, Commencement of Isabella's Trials: Isabella was sold at the auction which kept her mother and father together. She remembers going for \$100 and a group of sheep. Her new master and mistress spoke English and Isabella had no knowledge of English. She was constantly being whipped for not following directions when she had no idea what those directions were. She could remember her feet being frozen in the winter but she did have plenty to eat. Isabella also remembers being whipped one Sunday morning until the blood was running down her back and the stripes remained for the rest of her life. During this time, she didn't forget her mother's instruction about praying and felt that her prayers were answered. She believes that if she had time to pray before a whipping, God would have stopped it. She never realized that she could pray silently. She thought she had to get by herself and pray aloud for God to hear her.

Entry #10, Trials Continued: After so many beatings, Sojourner began praying that her father would come by. Slaves helped each other obtain new masters from time to time. Sojourner told her father what was happening and when spring came, a man came and bought Sojourner. The new master owned an inn and was a fisherman. Sojourner had a different type of life with them. She tells the reader that she learned to curse from this family. The innkeeper was a good fellow but of a lower class than she had been living with. It was not long until she was sold again.

Sojourner's explanation of slaves moving from master to master was new information to most readers.



Entry #11 and #12, Her Standing with her New Master and Mistress and Isabella's Marriage

Entry #11 and #12, Her Standing with her New Master and Mistress and Isabella's Marriage Summary and Analysis

Entry #11, Her Standing with her New Master and Mistress: Mrs. Dumont was not a kind woman and had not been raised with slaves. She did not understand the difference in the thinking of the free worker who was paid for a service and in the slave who had no expectations of any kind. She was impatient with the slow and slovenly work of the slave. Mr. Dumont who was raised with slaves had more understanding for the attitude and basic nature of the society. Isabella shares one memory when she was pitted against a white servant. Mrs. Dumont and the white servant found nothing good that Isabella accomplished. Finally every morning the potatoes that Isabella cooked turned dingy and dirty. Mr. Dumont could not take Isabella's side against the obvious bad potatoes and Isabella suffered for it. Mr. Dumont's oldest child decided to stay in the kitchen and see what happened to the potatoes while Isabella was out gathering eggs or doing some other chores before the breakfast was complete. The oldest child saw the white servant scoop up ashes and stir them into the potatoes. The child reported the offense and Isabella had a champion. Isabella began to work harder and harder trying to please the white master. The other slaves became jealous and began to call her a white folk's nigger. During this time, Isabella believed that the master knew everything she did just as God could see her from the sky. She even believed that slavery was right at this time.

Honesty was held so high that at times a slave mother would beat her child who was hungry to quiet it instead of sneaking it some bread. The slaveholders found it their religious duty to instill honesty in them.

Isabella came to love one slave named Robert. They visited until Robert's owner forbid him to visit another plantation and make it richer with slaves. Robert was caught visiting Isabella when he heard she was sick. He was beaten brutally by his master before Isabella's master forced them to stop. Robert never visited Isabella again.

Entry #12, Isabella's Marriage: Isabella was forced to marry Thomas who had had two previous wives. His wives had been sold away from the land where he lived. Slaves were not married in a church or by a preacher. Another slave was likely to say the words that pronounced anyone man and wife. There could be no divorce or annulment or any recognition of the institution of marriage among the slaves.

As the reader continues through this accounting of slavery, it is as if a mirror is held up to the horrors of what one person can do to another. It is amazing to watch people who warm church pews every week, having no more care of another human than an animal that they fed and watered.



Entry #13 and #14, Isabella as a Mother and Slaveholder's Promises

Entry #13 and #14, Isabella as a Mother and Slaveholder's Promises Summary and Analysis

Entry #13, Isabella as a Mother: Isabella had five children. She believed she was doing great things by adding to the number of slaves for her slaveholder. Isabella always taught by example. Isabella believed stealing, even if someone was hungry, was not acceptable. Isabella always obeyed and completed the mistress's orders even if her child was crying. In one household if the slaveholder would come in and find the child crying, he would order Isabella to take care of her child. He did not like the child to cry from need. Isabella made a swing for the baby when she worked in the fields. A younger child would have the job of making it swing. Isabella tells the reader about hammocks made for sick children. The child is not jarred around in a bed and the nurse or mother does not have to bend down too far to care for the child.

Entry #14. Slaveholder's Promises: Isabella was promised an early release from slavery by her master. She was supposed to be free one year earlier than the law forced the freedom of the slaves. When the time came for the release, the slaveholder refused to allow her to go. Apparently it was common for the slaveholders to make promises that were never kept. Isabella tells of a man who had been given permission to visit his wife after the harvest. When the permission was refused, the slave went on wiping his feet to travel. The slaveholder hit him in the head and killed him. Nothing was done.

As usual, these chapters have the factual stories and then some philosophy about the life of the slave. Even the short entries are packed with pictures of the life at the time.



Entry #15 and #16, Her Escape and Illegal Sale of her Son

Entry #15 and #16, Her Escape and Illegal Sale of her Son Summary and Analysis

Entry #15, Her Escape: Since Isabella was afraid to travel at night and felt she would be caught in full daylight, she decided to leave Dumont's house at dawn. Once she was away, she sat down and nursed her baby and thought about where to run. She had only considered the running and not a destination. Finally it came to her that she knew a kindly man and wife not too far away and she went to them. They sent her on to the Van Wagener's. Mr. Dumont came for her and when she refused to go back with him and reminded him of his promise, Mr. Dumont said she could stay but he would take her child. Mr. Van Wagener bought her and the child at that point. However, Mr. Van Wagener did not believe one person could own another and would not allow her to call him master. Isabella remained with the Van Wagener's for her year and took their last name when the law freed the Northern slaves.

Entry #16, Illegal Sale of her Son: Isabella's five year old son had been sold before she left the Dumont's. He was taken to New York and when it was decided that he was too small to be of the use the man had in mind, the child was sold again and sent South. It was against the law to take a child out of the Northern state where the free parent resided. The child was assured of his freedom when he became the correct age. When Isabella learned of the sale, she went to the child's first mistress and let her feelings be clear and spoke strongly for a slave. Mrs. Dumont paid no attention to her. Isabella went on to the new owner's mother and complained. She got no satisfaction. Yet, Isabella was very vocal and determined to have her child returned to her. She felt that God was on her side, and she had a real strength about her.

Entries #15 and #16 are the first that the reader sees the spirit of this woman who will speak to the world. She comes into her ability to stand up and declare what she believes and what she feels.



Entry #17 and #18, It Is often Darkest just before Dawn and Death of Mrs. Eliza Fowler

Entry #17 and #18, It Is often Darkest just before Dawn and Death of Mrs. Eliza Fowler Summary and Analysis

Entry #17, It Is often Darkest just before Dawn: Isabella was determined to get her boy out of the South. She went looking for someone to help and found the Quakers. The Quakers were very sympathetic and kept her in their homes for some time. Isabella was given the opportunity to sleep in a bed above the floor for the first time. She always slept on the floor because of her past experiences. The Quakers helped her with a lawyer and the Grand Jury. In court she had to kiss the Bible and swear to tell the truth, even though she did not know what the Bible was. They started hunting down her son. After more false starts, they found the boy in Alabama. Because of heavy fines and jail time, the boy was brought back to the court in New York. At first, the child claimed that Isabella was not his mother. The boy claimed to like his master even though he was severely beaten many times. Finally, when he was convinced that he could and would stay with his mother, he told stories about the beatings and stabbings that the master inflicted.

Entry #18, Death of Mrs. Eliza Fowler: Mrs. Eliza Fowler's mother had been uncaring and cruel toward Isabella when she went to her regarding the selling of her son to someone in the South. Isabella, after Mr. Van Wagener's death, went into a number of different homes to help them. Many of the people who had fought her in her reclaiming of her son were among those she helped. One day she was in the home of Eliza's mother when the message came that Eliza had been murdered by her husband. He had knocked her down with his fist and then jumped her to break her collar bone and then rip out her windpipe. He was caught. The children had lost their mother and their father. Isabella felt that God had allowed her to see His justice to those who treated her and other slaves so badly. She even said that she had not wanted such harsh retribution. Eliza's mother did not recover but became deranged as her life continued.

The narrative shows that Isabella is less the slave in these entries. She goes to the white man's court and seeks justice for her son. She is beginning to move off the slaveholder's land and influence. She forces the white man to stand and deliver justice for her son.



Entry #19 and #20, Isabella's Religious Experience and New Trials

Entry #19 and #20, Isabella's Religious Experience and New Trials Summary and Analysis

Entry #19, Isabella's Religious Experience: Isabella had only what her mother had taught her about God. She had no knowledge of scripture or any teaching from any church. She believed that God was a great man and lived in the sky. She believed that she should pray loudly and tell God exactly what was wrong or how badly she was treated. She found a small island in a stream on the land of one of her owners and went there twice a day. She would complain loudly and always ask, 'Do you think that is right, God?' She came to the point of promising God that if he would place her in a safe place with good people, she would be good all day. She never met her goal but eventually at the Van Wagener's she was finally treated well and was happy. Then she quit talking to God because she had no complaints. While being happy, a holiday came up. Slaves were always given some time and were allowed parties and festivities at those holidays. Frederick Douglass claimed that these holidays were what kept the slaves from rising up. Isabella began to feel that she should take her child and return to Dumont. She got everything ready and was walking to the sleigh when Isabella saw an all encompassing light. When she came to herself, Dumont was gone without her. When she woke, she began to think that her old way of praying (complaining to God) had been terribly wrong and she could no longer go to God herself. During one of those times, she saw someone come to her in light again. Isabella called a name of a friend and then realized that while she felt she recognized the figure in the light, she did not know the figure. During the visitation, she came to realize that this figure was standing between her and God. She felt the love and believed that the figure had known her all her life. Finally she felt as if she was seeing Jesus. She starts to hear different theology about who Jesus was. She decides to believe what she saw and believes Jesus was her advocate with God.

Entries #20, New Trials: Isabella and her son were free for about a year when they moved to New York. Peter, her son, was just the right age to find trouble. He did find it and was bailed out by his mother several times before she decided he needed to face his troubles on his own. Peter had taken the name of Williams and the man who had the same name got curious and went to see Peter. Instead of going to prison, Peter agreed to get on a ship and serve as a crew member. Isabella got a few letters from him after that but never saw him again. Peter went back to using name Van Wagener, the name that his mother had taken from the man who bought her for the last time to set her free.

Olive Gilbert's style remains the same throughout the narrative. She writes as if it were Isabella talking with a few notes to the "reader" as if an aside from time to time.



Entry #21 and #22, Finding a Brother and Sister and Gleanings

Entry #21 and #22, Finding a Brother and Sister and Gleanings Summary and Analysis

Entry #21, Finding a Brother and Sister: Before Isabella went to New York, she attended the Methodist Church. Once in New York, she joined the Zion's Church which was entirely a colored church. She resided with a Mr. Pierson and was slowly drawn into the "kingdom" which was led by the prophet Matthias. During her time in New York, Isabella met with a sister that she had not seen in seventeen years. Sophia, the sister, introduced her to her brother, Michael, who Isabella had never met. Isabella also learned that her sister, Nancy, who had been taken away from her family in a sleigh box years before had recently died. Isabella learned that they had both attended the Zion Church and Isabella could remember seeing her.

Entry #22, Gleanings: Gleanings is a good title for this entry. Isabella explains that she cannot tell everything that she has seen as a slave. She does not believe that the reader will believe her. She says many of the things are unnatural and non-human. She does give an example of one woman slaveholder hitting a woman so hard in the head that her head cracked open. After the head wound, the woman was then beaten by the mistress. The mistress became a murderer but no one cared. She relates another story about a slave's child that was born unable to walk or talk even at the age of five. It would wiggle around on the floor and moan. The master would come in and kick the child as if it were a football. He kicked the child around so much that others hoped he would kill it and put it out of so much pain. Isabella also points out that the person in power seems to always use that power. Power corrupted everyone. This crazy behavior would happen even the slaves when the slaveholder got older and needed care turned into the abuser.

Isabella always tries to keep names out of her stories. Since she is telling this so close to the time that it happened, perhaps she is afraid of retribution. As always she paints a vivid picture of the things that happen to the slaves as well as to the slaveholders.



Entry #23 and #24, The Matthias Delusion and Fasting

Entry #23 and #24, The Matthias Delusion and Fasting Summary and Analysis

Entry #23, The Matthias Delusion: Isabella met Mr Pierson and was attracted to his spirituality. When Pierson met Matthias, Isabella was allowed to sit at the table with them as they discussed spiritual matters. Isabella was starved for this type of discussion. As Matthias became more delusional and felt he was getting more and more direct communications from God, his family refused to join him. He found other followers. Isabella was one of them. Since Mr. Pierson did not believe in attending a regular church or to having any guidance from ministers, he was easily led by Matthias. Matthias informed his group that he was God on earth and Pierson was John the Baptist. Of course the two of them should work together.

Matthias shared his religion which claimed that the only heaven was on the earth. All real men would be saved and all mock men would be damned. Teachers of women were wicked. Women were the utmost of devilry. Eating pork would make one sick as the pork will go crooked within the body. The association between Matthias and Pierson ended with Pierson's murder. Matthias was convicted of murder.

Entry #24, Fasting: Mr. Pierson always fasted one day a week and sometimes he fasted for three nights and two days. He claimed it made him lighter and more able to receive from God. Isabella figured that if Mr. Pierson needed three nights and two days to grow light, she would need more time. She fasted to the point of making her lighter but it was in the physical rather than the spiritual that she felt lightened.

There are several pages in this entry explaining some of Matthias' ideas and rules for his faith. It was surprising that Isabella who had come out of slavery and able to get her son returned to her believed any of this teaching. The attitude toward women was that attitude of white toward the slaves. Isabella seemed to still be looking for an earthly master and Matthias set himself up for that. Isabella, for the first time, calls the culprits by name. In the past she seemed to be fearful of retribution.



Entry #25 and #26, The Cause of her Leaving the City and The Consequences of Refusing a Traveller a Night's Lodging

Entry #25 and #26, The Cause of her Leaving the City and The Consequences of Refusing a Traveller a Night's Lodging Summary and Analysis

Entry #25, The Cause of her Leaving the City: Before Isabella became part of the Matthias group, she had saved plenty of money to keep her in her old age. The Matthias group insisted that everyone put his money into one big pot. Matthias and Pierson had control of the money. After the murder, Isabella only had a few pieces of furniture and very little money. Isabella went to work to try to put money aside for old age again. The harder she worked the less she had. Finally she decided that New York was not where God wanted her. Without consulting her family, she put a few pieces of clothing together and three coins with a bit of food and took off for the East. She changed her name to Sojourner and headed for Long Island. Isabella would speak when the opportunity came. She asked for lodging at different homes and if she could not find something for free, she would pay for lodging at an inn. When money became scarce she worked for different families along her way.

Entry #26, The Consequences of Refusing a Traveller a Night's Lodging: Sojourner tells of meeting Indians in her travels. In one town the courthouse and jail were all together. She asked about staying there and they agreed to let her stay in a cell if they locked her up. She refused that offer and went on to run into a man and his wife who offered her a place. On their way home, they stopped by a ball. It was filled with lowlifes and undesirable people. Sojourner found a corner and slept until the man and his wife were ready. When Sojourner saw the home, she felt fortunate that she had slept in the corner of the ballroom for she did not want to sleep in the shack. On the Fourth of July she was in Huntingdon. She pitched in and worked with everyone to decorate, cook, and feed the crowd. She began to find more people who believed in Jesus and was able to share her faith with them. She began to get letters of introductions to others. Sojourner still could not read or write but she shared of herself.

These two entries are not as detailed as others have been. These entries are more of a summary of her travels.



Entry #27 and #28, Some of her Views and Reasonings and The Second Advent Doctrines

Entry #27 and #28, Some of her Views and Reasonings and The Second Advent Doctrines Summary and Analysis

Entry #27, Some of her Views and Reasoning: Sojourner became more and more aware of how all encompassing God is and wanted to learn more and more. She wanted to know what was written and tried to find everything that concerned God. She questioned everything. Finally she understood that God was a spirit and everything did not have to stop so he could rest. Isabella would pay people to read the scriptures to her. She had a problem with the adults who read for her. Sojourner asked her reader to read the same passage over and over. The adults would always stop the reading and start explaining. Sojourner soon learned that it was better to have a child read to her. They would read the passage again and again as asked. Sojourner did not want the Word to be put through a filter of another adult.

Entry #28, The Second Advent Doctrines: Sojourner discovered believers who were concentrating on the Second Advent of Christ. The group was in chaos as they ran around warning people and trying to get ready. After Sojourner listened to them and understood them, she pointed out some of the mistaken ideas about the second coming. She believed that the scriptures said to "Be still and know that I am God." She reminded them of the fiery furnace and that God's people could stand through fire. She calmed them with the Word. Sojourner stayed long enough with this group and some nearby to be accepted for the strong Christian that she was. People came from all around to hear her speak.

When reading these two entries with her explanations of how she arrives at some facts about God, one realizes why she was such a speaker. It is easy to imagine sitting in a room and listening to her speak. It is interesting that after she begins to have the Bible read to her, she was no longer falling for false prophets.



Entry #29, Another Camp-Meeting

Entry #29, Another Camp-Meeting Summary and Analysis

Entry #29, Another Camp-Meeting: This camp-meeting drew a group of young men who were planning to attack the meeting and the black woman who was present. At first Sojourner hid but after deciding that she was a child of God and should act like it, she stood up and got a couple of brave people to go with her to the group and offer to sing for them. She had such a big voice and sang with such sincerity that the young men stopped heckling the crowd and started listening to her. She was accepted into the Northampton Association and was very happy there for awhile. The transcriber of this narrative met Sojourner there. The last few pages are a bid for funds for Sojourner in her later days. Her sunny, God is Love, faith is pointed out as well as her hard work and care for others. The writer feels that if Sojourner had received some training, she would have been very well off and a very powerful figure.

Gilbert is the first voice to begin the historical significance of Sojourner Truth. Gilbert would no doubt be surprised at the number of books and articles that have been written about Sojourner even today over more than a hundred years later.



Characters

Isabella or Sojourner Truth

Isabella was born in New York of at least eight children. She only grew up with one of them. She was the daughter of James and Betsey. She was liberated under the act of 1817 which freed slaves who were at least forty. This is her narrative of her life. She moved from slavery to freedom. She was a voice to be admired before her death. The narrative does not just tell stories of what happened but it contains philosophy about life.

Betsey or Mau-mau Bett

Betsey was Isabella's mother. Isabella was allowed to stay with her mother and father longer than most of her siblings. Betsey taught her children about the God who lived in the sky and could see everything. The method of praying was to complain to God about the treatment that was being received and ask for help and freedom. Betsey also stressed honesty to her children. Betsey appears to be the more optimistic one in the family. She also keeps the idea of family alive even though much of her family was taken from her and scattered around the country. Isabella seems to be more like her mother in temperament.

James or Bomefree

James was Isabella's father. He outlived his wife even though he was in very bad health. At the auction that sold Isabella away from the family, the slaveholders allowed Betsey to stay with James if she would care for him in his feebleness. Once she died, Bomefree was shifted from one family member of the slaveholder's to another. He was always complaining about his bad health and his state. Toward the end he was sent away with another slave couple that was freed if they would take him. The couple died before him and he was basically homeless with no food when he died. James is very hopeless and without any will to live.

The Dumonts

Mr. Dumont bought Isabella and brought her into a home where Mrs. Dumont had never been accustomed to slaves. Mr. Dumont was an easier master than some, but Mrs. Dumont did not like any of the slaves. She saw them as slovenly and unintelligent. She was quick to anger. Isabella was with them until a year before the act of 1817. Mr. Dumont was so impressed with Isabella's work that he had promised her freedom a year earlier than required by law. However, when the time came, he did not want to lose her and tried to refuse that freedom.



The Van Wageners

Mr. Van Wagener took Isabella and her son in when they left the Dumont land. Isabella was forcing Dumont to honor his promise to free her a year early. When Dumont came to Wagener's home to take Isabella, he agreed to only take the son. Mr. Van Wagener gave Dumont \$25 for both Isabella and Peter to allow them to remain. When Isabella asked Van Wagener what to call him, he told her not to call him master. There was only one master and He was the Master to everyone. When Isabella left Van Wageners, she took their last name. Many slaves took the last name of their last owner when they were freed.

Esquire Chip

Esquire Chip was the officer of the court who forced the return of Isabella's son. It was amazing that any white lawyer took the case of the black woman.

Matthias or Robert Matthews

Matthias was a self-appointed prophet. As his group and importance grew, he saw himself as God. He basically rewrote the Bible to fill his own needs. He definitely found women as lower than the animals. Matthias really believed that he was to take possession of the world. As he became more and more delusional, he would take a life. The Matthias group would be disbanded after the murder.

Mr. Pierson

Mr. Pierson took Matthias into his home because he believed that Matthias was a prophet. He was second in command of the group that Matthias led. This time the power was in a faith instead of a plot of land. Power as usual was a corrupting influence. Mr. Pierson thought himself to be John the Baptist and only second in command as Matthias took over the world.

Peter Van Wagener

Peter van Wagener was Sojourner Truth's son. Sojourner was able to go to court and save him from a life as a slave in the South. Once Peter was back in the North, he did well for a little while but as he reached teen years, he and Sojourner lived in New York City. He fell into a bad crowd and got into trouble. Sojourner Truth found some help for Peter and got him a position on a ship instead of a jail cell. Sojourner did not see her son again but did receive a few letters from him.



Solomon Gedney

Solomon Gedney was the slaveholder who took Peter to the South. He was a horrible, cruel man. Not only did he beat his slaves but beat his wife and any other person in his home. They saved Peter from him just in time. A few months later, Gedney beat his wife nearly to death before he strangled her.



Objects/Places

Cellars

Cellars were always cold and dark with no light or furnishings. The northern slaveholders usually housed their slaves in the cellars. There was no privacy for the slaves. Everyone was stuck into the cellars together.

Small island in the midst of a stream which was Isabella's m

Isabella found the small island in the stream and went there several times a day to complain to God about the treatment that she was receiving at the hands of the slaveholder. She had cleaned the ground on the island and worked with the willows to make her own little cathedral. While still in slavery, this was her important spot.

Grand Jury at the courthouse

The grand jury marked the point that Isabella went to the law of the land for help with her own problem. The act of 1817 had made it illegal to sell a slave South or even out of the state so their freedom would not be jeopardized. She was able to stand up to the white men and win.

Mr. and Mrs. Van Wagener's land

Mr. Van Wagener was the first person to tell her that no man had a master except for God. This was a real moment for Isabella. She took on their last name as her own when she left them. She worked for the Van Wagener's for about a year before she went out on her own to New York.

New York City

Isabella was in New York when her son, Peter, found trouble a few times. She sees him for the last time here. He joined a ship's crew in lieu of being imprisoned and apparently never left the sea again. He did write his mother about four times over the years but did not ever hear from her. Letters apparently found her better than they could find him. Isabella worked for different families in the City and met Matthias there.



Dumont's Home

Dumont owned Isabella for some years. Isabella worked so hard for the Dumont family that she was resented by the other slaves. Dumont promised to free Isabella a year earlier than the state had decreed. Of course, when the day came to free her, he did not want to do it. Isabella had to press him by running away. While Dumont did go to claim her, he sold her to the man she had run to. While the man paid, Isabella was free.

Eliza Fowler

Eliza Fowler did not appear in the journal except through her mother. Isabella went to Eliza's mother for help to get her son back from the South. Eliza Fowler would be one of the people who would die because of the cruelty of the times. Eliza and Eliza's mother would do nothing to help Isabella to save Peter from the brutality. Isabella saw this as an example of justice for people who claimed to be Christians but did nothing to help another.



Themes

Absolute Power Corrupts

Throughout this narrative, the reader sees that the slave has no power and the slaveholder has no humanity. Page after page of the narrative illustrates the slave losing his or her family members. They are sold. The same white slaveholder who sits in church every Sunday and prays over meals and supposedly cares for the family has no compunction when it comes to selling children to another plantation. If the slave makes a mistake or displeases the owner, the owner beats the slave viciously. No one does anything about the mistreatment of the slaves. The mistress of a household can be as deadly as the master. Women beat the slaves and may kill them as well as the men. The example is offered in the narrative of the mistress killing and then going on with life as if nothing had happened. Things such as living conditions and lack of food are illustrated as well.

It is surprising to some readers to discover that the narrative takes place North of the Mason-Dixon line. With the War Between the States people seem to believe that the North did not have slaves. It is amazing to learn that the North was no different from the South long before the War. The narrative reminds us that slaves came into all parts of this country in its early days.

Spreading the Salvation Message Is Important

Sojourner came to believe that sharing Jesus and God with others was important. After her time with the Matthias group, she took some time to work and think about the group and her misunderstandings. She felt she had found her calling. Sojourner felt as if she was being led by the spirit to move about from place to place and talk about Jesus and the Word of God as she had come to understand it. Sojourner moved into some different groups who had a misunderstanding of the Word. She worked with groups by moving into the groups and little by little teaching and explaining. This was shown particularly by the Second Advent Group. The example of her easing the crowd of hecklers at a camp meeting makes the reader believe that it was her calling to spread the message.

Sojourner goes through a journey to learn to share the Word of God. She begins her life by believing that slavery is right and voicing that belief. She moves on throughout her life to learn about a God who is a little different from the one her mother told her about. She is not able to read the Bible herself but she is resourceful and finds others to read to her. She changes her message to a salvation one as she matures.

Where There Is a Will; There's a Way

Sojourner may have begun her life as a slave but as her narrative continues, the reader sees her take her life into her own hands and make a life that other slaves never attempted. When Sojourner was promised freedom a year early and Dumont refused to give it to her, she ran away. She planned her freedom and was careful to make it easy for Dumont to find her. She explained herself and found sanctuary. Another example of her will was illustrated as she went to court to force the Southern slaveholder to bring her son back. For a black woman to accomplish this was truly amazing. Yet another example would be her desire to know what the Bible said. Although she could not read, she found people to read the scriptures to her and do it in such a way for her to learn the scriptures. The last example would be her leaving New York City and moving out on her own to spread the gospel because she felt that God had called her.

Style

Perspective

The point of view for most of the work belongs to Sojourner Truth. While the writer tried to make it seem as if Sojourner was writing it herself, sometimes Gilbert could not keep her own voice out of the work. Since Sojourner could neither read nor write, Sojourner told her life story to Gilbert. Gilbert does write in third person as she tells Sojourner's story. Gilbert is also careful to make it clear when Gilbert is making her own point about something that Sojourner has told her about her life. When Gilbert discussed Sojourner's use of children to read the Bible to her, Gilbert pointed out that the adults that read it always wanted to do a commentary. Gilbert was very good throughout the narrative to do very little commentary style work. The narrative might have been a bit stronger had it been in first person but Gilbert did an excellent work with the narrative as it is.

Tone

Gilbert writes the narrative in an open and honest style. Sojourner's life as well as other slaves' lives are laid out without too much combative language. It is obvious that Gilbert is sympathetic to the horror of the slaves' lives. Gilbert also points out Sojourner's misconceptions because she was raised as a slave and had to overcome much of her childhood and young adulthood. While Gilbert discusses the lack of Christian charity that white people showed their slaves, she does not show Sojourner as resenting the white people. Sojourner accepts them as they are. As Sojourner grows older and is following her calling, she shows her patience and love to many misguided people with which she comes into contact. The tone of the narrative is a growing journey that seems more of acceptance of others, not blaming others, and loving other people.

Structure

The Narrative of Sojourner Truth is written as if it were a journal. The writer starts with the beginning of Sojourner's life and follows her growing years. Gilbert takes the reader into Sojourner's life as she follows her calling and begins to preach the gospel. There is no uniform length of the entries to the narrative. Most of the time the entries are in chronological order. Once or twice, Gilbert tells a story and then moves back in time to explain what is happening to another member of Sojourner's family at that same time. For the first years of Sojourner's life, there is no consciousness of time. Sojourner's does not know how old she is or about how old she was when things happened to her family. Instead of a journal divided by dates or days of the week, this narrative has titles of each section depending on what is being told. Most of the narrative is chronological but infrequently there will be one subject that reads as if it is just a subject that Sojourner wants added but does not necessarily fit in one of the entries. For instance,

there is a entry called "Fasting" which seems to be one of those entries. It is less than a page long and could easily be left out of the narrative with no real loss. It is interesting but not essential. The whole narrative is short and certainly not her whole story but because it was written while she was still alive, it is a very valuable history of this amazing black woman.



Quotes

"But Isabella long since concluded that it was the impending fate of her only remaining children, which her mother but too well understood, even then, that called up those memories from the past, and made them crucify her heart afresh." (p. 4).

"'Oh,' he would exclaim, 'I had thought God would take me first,—Mau-mau was so much smarter than I, and could get about and take care of herself; —and I am so old, and so helpless. What is to become of me? I can't do any thing more—my children are all gone, and here I am left helpless and alone.'" (p. 7).

"Mankind often vainly attempt to atone for unkindness or cruelty to the living, by honoring the same after death; but John Ardinburgh undoubtedly meant his pot of paint and jug of whiskey should act as an opiate on his slaves, rather than on his own seared conscience." (p. 9).

"'And now,' she says, 'when I hear 'em tell of whipping women on the bare flesh, it makes my flesh crawl, and my very hair rise on her head! Oh! my God!' she continues, 'what a way is this of treating human beings?'" (p. 10).

"Robert did not live many years after his last visit to Isabel, but took his departure to that country, where 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage,' and where the oppressor cannot molest." (p. 16).

"Salveholders appear to me to take the same notice of the vices of the slave, as one does of the vicious disposition of his horse." (p. 17).

"The Lord only knows how many times I let my children go hungry, rather than take secretly the bread I liked not to ask for." (p. 17).

"And in speaking of it, she says, 'Oh, my God! I know'd I'd have him agin. I was sure God would help me to get him. Why, I felt so tall within—I felt as if the power of a nation was with me!'" (p. 22).

"'Oh, no, ' says Soan; 'he was so wicked, the devil will never let him out of hell long enough for that.'" (p. 48).

"Mr. Pierson was characterized by a strong devotional spirit, which finally became highly fanatical." (p. 50).

"On opening the door, she, for the first time, beheld Matthias, and her early impression of seeing Jesus in the flesh rushed into her mind. (p. 52).

"She said, 'she never could find out that the rich had any religion.'" (p. 59).

Topics for Discussion

An old quote from Christians is "God has no grandchildren." Discuss what this quote means and how it applies to Isabella and her journey to find her way to the God and Jesus of the Bible instead of what others told her.

Does power always create monsters? Does absolute power corrupt? Was it only the slaveholder who used power abusively? Give examples from the narrative to support your stance.

What did you find the most horrifying in the life of a slave? Explain and then give an example using one of Isabella's stories.

Discuss Matthias. After you explain his delusion, consider other delusional situations and compare them to Matthias and his group.

In the chapter about the camp meeting when the young group of men come to attack, discuss Sojourner's handling of the situation. Were you surprised? Did the writer of the journal give you enough information to make you believe the story? Why or why not?

Discuss Sojourner's travels and life after she left New York City. What do you think about her philosophy concerning rich people and money?

What aspect of a slave's life created the most empathy for you? Have you ever thought about this aspect like you do after reading the narrative? Was this your first experience with Sojourner Truth? Discuss your reaction to her life.