

**INFORMATIONAL READING COMPREHENSION:**Excerpt from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*

Answer the following questions about the passage.

1. Use context clues to help you define the following terms from the passage. **Sample answers**

reverberate	to echo with sound
rapturous	wonderful, joyful
deliverance	liberation, freedom
afflicts	to cause pain or suffering

2. Which quote from the text best represents the main idea of the passage?
- “They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune.”
  - “The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit and filled me with ineffable sadness.”
  - “Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart.”
  - “Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery.”
3. What does the phrase *boiling over* indicate about the songs of the people enslaved?
- The songs expressed joy as well as sorrow.
  - The songs released deeply suppressed emotions.
  - The songs described what it was like to work all day in the kitchen.
  - The songs were a way of getting messages to those who heard them.
- 4a. What opposing viewpoint does Douglass address in the text?

He acknowledges the viewpoint of some people in the north that enslaved people’s singing is “evidence of their contentment and happiness.”

- 4b. What explanation does Douglass give to respond to that conflicting viewpoint? What analogy does he use to illustrate his point? **Sample answer**

Douglass refutes that view by stating that enslaved people “sing most when they are most unhappy” and that the songs “represent the sorrows of his heart.” He compares their songs to the singing of “a man cast away on a desolate island” to show that a castaway’s singing and an enslaved person’s singing are both prompted by despair, not contentment.

5. What is the significance of the songs to Douglass himself? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer. **Sample answer**

The songs affect Douglass deeply and personally. He says the songs “depressed my spirit and filled me with ineffable sadness.” Douglass goes on to say that the songs gave him his “first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery” and now help to “deepen my hatred of slavery.”

6. How might historians use the content in this excerpt to learn about the past? Select the **two** most likely choices.
- as a precise chronology of historical events
  - as information about what kinds of work enslaved people did
  - as a first-person account of the songs sung by enslaved people
  - as examples of Frederick Douglass’s thoughts and feelings about slavery