*To Be A Slave* Questions

“Author’s Note”:

1. What was used as a weapon to sway Northern public opinion against slavery?
2. What did the Federal Writer’s Project do?
3. What did Lester do in 1963?
4. How were slave narratives recorded in the 19th century?
5. Why were they written in this manner?
6. When reading this book, how will you be able to determine if the narratives came from white abolitionists or the Federal Writer’s Project?

“Prologue”:

1. How old was the slave trade in 1619?
2. What country brought slaves to Europe?
3. Whose words are written in italics?
4. As you read, find an example of a narrative taken by a white abolitionist and an example of a narrative taken down by the Federal Writer’s Project. Explain how you know the difference.
5. Why were the colonists unsuccessful when they tried to use Native American labor?
6. After this, where did the colonists get new labor?
7. What did Granny Judith say lured the Africans to the ships?
8. Why did the English colonies turn to Africans as the ideal labor solution?
9. Historically, how was the slave trade carried out?
10. Who was Charles Ball?
11. Describe Ball’s journey.
12. What was Ball’s first impression of white people?
13. What payment did the white men give for the slaves?
14. On page 24, the author describe the room a slave had on the ship to be as big as what?
15. What did the slave traders do to the babies?
16. What were the slaves given to eat on the ship?
17. What percentage of slaves died on the journey?
18. How many people are estimated to have been taken from Africa during the slave years?
19. The slaves were scattered to what three areas in the world?
20. What parts of African culture survived in South America and the Caribbean?
21. How was slavery in the U.S. different from slavery in other parts of the world?

Chapter 1: “To Be a Slave”:

1. Whose words are written in italics?
2. As you read, find an example of a narrative taken by a white abolitionist and an example of a narrative taken down by the Federal Writer’s Project. Explain how you know the difference.
3. What does Sallie Crane say about names?
4. How was Bryl Anderson’s experience unusual?
5. Traditionally, who on the plantation did the whipping?
6. Why was Roberta Manson’s father whipped?
7. What did Frank Cooper’s mom do to give her kids a taste of slavery? Why did she do it?
8. Describe West Turner’s story about Gabe.
9. What did Henry Johnson’s master make them do? Was this unusual or not?
10. According to Lester, slaves felt slavery existed for what two reasons?
11. Which story in the chapter is the most powerful or important? Why?

Chapter 2 “The Auction Block”:

1. Whose words are written in italics?
2. As you read, find an example of a narrative taken by a white abolitionist and an example of a narrative taken down by the Federal Writer’s Project. Explain how you know the difference.
3. Why would slave owners sell their slaves?
4. Which state was considered the “slave-breeding state”?
5. Describe Lou Smith’s mother’s experience.
6. How much warning did slaves get when they were sold?
7. The sale of slaves was generally carried out in what two ways?
8. How much profit did the slave trader Nathan Bedford make in one year?
9. Lester compares the slave market to what economic indicator today?
10. What happened in 1860 that caused many slave owners to sell their slaves?
11. Prices for slaves usually went up at what time of year?
12. What kind of scene does Lester describe as happening at the foot (base) of an auction block?
13. How is Doc Daniel’s story about Eliza unusual?
14. What was a slave coffle?
15. Why were slaves traded during the months of October through May?
16. Describe Ball’s experience moving with his new master. (P.54)
17. Describe Ben Simpon’s journey with his new master.
18. Why do you think Lester added the clarification at the bottom of p. 58?

Chapter 3 “The Plantation”:

1. Whose words are written in italics?
2. As you read, find an example of a narrative taken by a white abolitionist and an example of a narrative taken down by the Federal Writer’s Project. Explain how you know the difference.
3. How did most plantation owners live?
4. How is this the same or different from how plantations are often presented?
5. In the South, owning slaves earned a man what in the community?
6. What did slaves call the owner’s house?
7. Where did the overseer live?
8. How many slave owners were there in the South in 1860?
9. How many of these owners owned 100 or more slaves?
10. The majority of slave owners had how many slaves?
11. What percentage of the southern white population did not own slaves?
12. How were the slave quarters owned by Thomas Jefferson unusual?
13. How does Julian Niemcewicz describe the slave houses built by George Washington?
14. How does Northrup describe the slave’s name? Be specific.
15. What and when did slaves eat?
16. What clothes were they given?
17. Lester writes that people could tell the month of the year by what work was being done where?
18. How high does a cotton plant grow?
19. Going through the fields, why did people have to be careful not to break the branches?
20. How does Ball describe the slaves’ clothes?
21. According to Northrup, how long were the slaves’ workdays?
22. How long were they given for lunch?
23. How many pounds of cotton were slaves expected to pick each day?
24. Why would a slave not want to go over this amount?
25. How many lashes would slaves receive for different cases?
26. How does Northrup describe the evening for the slaves (dinner, cooking, timing)?

Chapter 4 “Resistance to Slavery”:

1. Whose words are written in italics?
2. As you read, find an example of a narrative taken by a white abolitionist and an example of a narrative taken down by the Federal Writer’s Project. Explain how you know the difference.
3. What two methods did slave owners use to enslave people?
4. According to Lester, why were slaves given their masters’ names?
5. Describe the religious sermons mentioned in this book?
6. How did slave owners use religion to control slaves?
7. What religious belief gave the slaves comfort?
8. According to Ball, the slaves’ vision of heaven included what?
9. What is Samson’s story from the Bible and how did it relate to the slaves’ lives?
10. How was the African language different from English?
11. How did Ball describe Native African’s feelings about “fine houses and superb furniture.”
12. Ball says that native Africans were “universally of the opinion” that what would happen after death?
13. What kind of slaves were given the name Uncle Tom?
14. How did slaves working on the field feel about “house slaves”? Why?
15. What information did William Hayden share with his master?
16. How did Charles Ball try to win the approval of his master?
17. What story does Susan Broaddus tell about Gabe and Rufus?
18. Tell the story of Josiah Hensen.
19. What happened when Hensen and the other slaves passed the Ohio shore?
20. Josiah Hensen equates running away to what?
21. How did Josiah Hensen’s master respond when Josiah purchased himself? Many field slaves lived and died without once setting foot where?
22. Why did field workers sometimes pretend to be dumb?
23. What did overseers mean by the word “rascality”?
24. According to Lester, how did slaves determine what was right and wrong?
25. Who were the “paddrollers”?
26. Betty Jones talks about Jenny. Who was she?
27. What does Charlie Snipes mean when he talks about “feet de de diddle”?
28. On what night did slaves usually socialize?
29. What were people really doing when they were “cutting the pigeon wings”?
30. When were the biggest parties held?
31. In Africa, people used music for what?
32. What African instrument did the slaves bring to America?
33. Wash Wilson talked about instruments made out of what?

Chapter 5 “Resistance to Slavery”:

1. Whose words are written in italics?
2. As you read, find an example of a narrative taken by a white abolitionist and an example of a narrative taken down by the Federal Writer’s Project. Explain how you know the difference.
3. Why did many slaves despise Lew Cheney?
4. Who was Nat Turner?

Chapter 6 “Emancipation”:

1. What began in April 1861?
2. Why did slaves in Southern states remain on the plantations instead of fighting in the Civil War?
3. When did freedom come to most of the slaves?
4. Who was Jefferson Davis and what proclamation did he make?
5. When it appeared that the South may lose the war, some slave owners moved to what state?

Chapter 7 “After Emancipation”:

1. “Radical Republicans” argued that every slave should receive what?
2. What did it mean when ex-slaves were allowed to work “on shares”?
3. How does Frank Fikes describe life after “freedom”?
4. What terrorist group was organized in 1866?
5. How were the “spirits” described on p.149-150?
6. Explain the rain analogy on page 151.

*You may use the space below to write your answers in complete sentences. Remember to include specific details from the text to support your answers.*

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