**Slavery and Families**

**Part 1:**

[**http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/essays/aafamilies.htm**](http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1609-1865/essays/aafamilies.htm)

**Read until “Guided Student Discussion.”**

1. Why were slaves legally unable to marry?
2. What was the difference between nuclear and near-nuclear slave families?
3. What was it like for slave children on large plantations once they were 7 or 8 years of age?
4. What were two reasons why slave owners would sell slaves?
5. Why did some slave owners encourage marriage between slaves?
6. What was Frederick Douglass’ belief about the reason slave owners separate families?
7. What were two things former slaves did after the Civil War ended?

**Part 2:**

*Excerpts from the WPA Slave Narratives, 1936-1938*

*Close Reading Questions*

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| *Passage* | *Questions* |
| Malindy Maxwell:  I was born close to Como and Sardis, Mississippi. My master and mistress was Sam Shans and Miss Cornelia Shans. I was born a slave. They owned mama and Master Rube Sanders owned pa. Neither owner wouldn’t sell but they agreed to let ma and pa marry. They had a white preacher and they married out in the yard and had a big table full of weddin’ supper, and the white folks et in the house. They had a big supper too. Ma said they had a big crowd. The preacher read the  ceremony. Miss Cornelia give her a white dress and white shoes and Miss Cloe Wilburn give her a veil. Miss Cloe was some connection of Rube Sanders. They had seven children. I’m the oldest — three of us living. After ’mancipation pa went to see about marrying ma over agen and they told him that marriage would stand long as ever he lived. | **1. From this passage what can you surmise about Malindy Maxwell’s status on the Shans plantation? What evidence leads you to this conjecture?**  **2. What evidence in this passage suggests that Mrs. Maxwell and her husband achieved a degree of stability in their family life?**  **3. On what conditions did that stability depend?**  **4. How does this passage suggest the precariousness of family life for the enslaved?** |

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| *Passage* | *Questions* |
| ***Sarah Graves***  I was born March 23, 1850 in Kentucky, somewhere near Louisville. I am goin’ on 88 years right now. I was brought to Missouri when I was six months old, along with my mama, who was a slave owned by a man named Shaw, who had allotted her to a man named Jimmie Graves, who came to Missouri to live with his daughter Emily Graves Crowdes…. We left my papa in Kentucky, ‘cause he was allotted to another man. My papa never knew where my mama went, an’ my mama never knew where papa went… They never wanted mama to know, ’cause they knowed she would never marry so long she knew where he was. Our master wanted her to marry again and raise more children to be slaves. They never wanted mama to know where papa was an’ she never did…. Mama said she would never marry again to have children,… so she married my step-father, Tattle Barber, ’cause he was sick an’ could never be a father. He was so sick he couldn’t work, so me and mama had to work hard. We lived in a kitchen, a room in a log house joined on to the master’s house. My mama worked in the field, even when I was a little baby. She would lay me down on a pallet [small wooden platform] near the fence while she plowed the corn or worked in the field. | **5. How does this passage illustrate a slaveowner’s power to disrupt the family life of slaves?**  **6. How does it illustrate a master’s power to isolate and control slave’s knowledge of and access to the wider world?**  **7. How does Sarah’s mother transform her family life into an act of resistance?** |

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| *Passage* | *Questions* |
| Robert Glenn  [My owner] died when I was eight years old [1858] and I was put on the block to be sold…. I was bought by a Negro speculator\* by the name of Henry Long who lived not far from Hurdles Mill in Person County. I was not allowed to tell my mother and father goodbye. I was bought and sold three times in one day. My father’s time was hired out and as he knew a trade he had, by working overtime, saved up a considerable amount of money. After the speculator, Henry Long, bought me, mother went to father and pled with him to buy me from him and let the white folks hire me out. No slave could own a slave. Father got the consent and help of his owners to buy me and they asked Long to put me on the auction block again. Long did so and named his price but when he learned who had bid me off he backed down. Later in the day he put me on the block and named another price much higher than the price formerly set. He was asked by the white folks to name his price for his bargain and he did so. I was again put on the auction block and father bought me in, putting up the cash. Long then flew into a rage and cursed my father saying, “You damn black son of a bitch, you think you are white do you? Now just to show you are black, I will not let you have your son at any price.” Father knew it was all off, mother was frantic but there was nothing they could do about it. They had to stand and see the speculator put me on his horse behind him and ride away without allowing either of them to tell me goodbye. I figure I was sold three times in one day, as the price asked was offered in each instance. Mother was told under threat of a whupping not to make any outcry when I was carried away.  \* Editor’s note: Long is a white man who speculated in the buying and selling of Negroes. | **8. What evidence suggests that Glenn’s family enjoyed a degree of stability?**  **9. What does the passage suggest about the status of Glenn’s father? Cite specific evidence to support your conjecture.**  **10. What forces prevent Glenn’s father from keeping his family intact?** |

**Part 3:**

Names of slaves:

Paragraph:

How would you feel if you were a slave with a family?