
Comprehension Questions: Preface (completed)

*Suggested answers appear in **bold** below.*

1. Reread the following sentences: "They were not so much responsible for the curse under which I was born, as the God of nature and the fathers who framed the Constitution for the United States. The law descended to them, and it was but natural that they should recognize it, **since** it manifestly was their interest to do so. And **yet** a wrong was inflicted upon me; a cruel custom deprived me of my liberty, and since I was robbed of my dearest right, I would not have been human had I not rebelled against the robbery."

- A) Who is Keckley referring to as "they"? Replace the word "they" in the sentences with the noun. Then circle "yet" and "since" in the third sentence. **"They" could be the people of the South Keckley refers to in the previous sentence, some of them slaveholders.**
- B) Rewrite the three sentences in your own words. **The people living in the South were not responsible for slavery (not like God and the founders of the Constitution are?). They didn't create slavery. It was a practice they brought with them from Europe, so it was natural that they should continue to use slaves for their own purposes. But slavery is wrong, and it deprived me of my freedom, so it is right that I should rebel against it.**
- C) What does Keckley describe in the first two sentences? **She doesn't blame southerners for holding slaves because they were just doing what they had been brought up to believe was right.**
- D) How does the third sentence relate to the first two? **In the third sentence, she says that even though she doesn't blame others for enslaving her, she has every right to rebel against slavery.**
- E) How do these three sentences describe Keckley's ideas about slavery? **She is sympathetic toward southern slaveholders, but at the same time believes slavery to be wrong.**

2. Reread the following sentences: "An act may be wrong, **but** unless the ruling power recognizes the wrong, it is useless to hope for a correction of it. Principles may be right, **but** they are not established within an hour." Circle the word "but" in each sentence.

- A) Consider how Keckley uses the word "but" in each of these sentences. Rewrite Keckley's sentences in your own words. Write as many sentences as you need to to express the same meaning. **An act may be wrong, but unless the act is made against the law, people shouldn't hope to make people stop performing the act. While people might believe an act is wrong, laws take time to create.**
- B) What is she describing? **Keckley is describing the fact that while the belief that all people should be free is a principle that many people might agree with, it will take time for the new nation's laws to create the reality.**

3. Divide the following sentence into meaningful chunks, drawing a slash mark between phrases: **"The masses are slow / to reason, / and each principle, / to acquire moral force, / must come to us / from the fire of the crucible; / the fire may inflict unjust punishment, / but then it purifies / and renders stronger the principle, / not in itself, / but in the eyes of those / who arrogate judgment / to themselves."** (Hint: Chunk based on punctuation first, then locate phrases.)

- A) Look at each chunk of meaning in the sentence. Identify the connections between each chunk, (i.e. does it describe another phrase? Provide additional information? Introduce a new idea? Annotate the text as you think through the connections, using circles and arrows.
- B) Break the sentence into two or more shorter sentences. **The masses are slow to reason. In order to acquire moral force, each principle must come to us from the fire of the crucible. The fire may inflict unjust**

punishment. Afterwards, it purifies and makes the principle stronger. It doesn't actually become stronger by itself. It becomes stronger in the eyes of people who arrogate judgement to themselves.

- C) Rewrite the shorter sentences in your own words. **Arrogate = assume without right. Crucible = severe test or trial. The American population as a whole is slow to see that all men should live free and happy lives. In order to make this principle a reality, however, people will suffer and cause others to suffer. In the end, the suffering people endure will make their resolve even stronger.**

4. Who are "those who give force to moral laws"? Are these the same people as "the ruling power"? **"Those who give force to moral laws" are people who fight for their principles. Keckley is referring here to abolitionists. The "ruling power" she refers to is whatever force, or government, is in power.**

5. Circle words in paragraph 1 that are strong or stick out. **true, criticism, judges, dark side, bright side, good, evil, curse, God of nature, natural, liberty, robbed, rebelled, robbery, feeble instrument, human destiny, harmonies of natural laws, truth, principles, moral force, crucible, fire, punishment, purifies, judgment, evil, monstrous, overshadows, destroy, victims, bitter water, destiny.**

- A) What is significant about those words? **Many of the words have to do with right and wrong, good and evil. God seems to be on the side of right and good, while man seems to be described as mostly evil.**
- B) What feelings do you associate with those words? **guilt, sadness**
- C) How does Keckley use words to impact and enhance the meaning of the text? **Keckley seems to use these words to emphasize that there are two sides that are at odds with one another, but she also seems to be saying that the conflict is a natural one which will eventually go away once the struggle is over.**

6. According to Keckley, what influenced slavery to be perpetuated in the United States? **When people came from Europe to settle the new world, they brought slaves with them because they were familiar with using slave labor in their old countries.**

7. Keckley says, "The solution was developed so gradually that there was no great convulsion of the harmonies of natural laws."

- A) To what solution is Keckley referring? **People naturally and gradually began believing that slavery was not right.**
- B) How is the solution for eradicating the "plant of evil" a gradual one rather than one that can happen quickly? **Each person must decide for himself what is right and wrong, and then work with others to turn belief in principles into reality in the form of government and laws.**
- C) What steps does Keckley describe must happen for change to occur? **Keckley believes that certain stages must be passed through. The evil must grow to monstrous proportions in order for people to recognize that change is needed. Only then will people work to destroy the evil. She also seems to believe that destiny (perhaps as decided by God) determines outcomes.**
- D) What influences people to desire change? **People will change when they recognize that there is a better path, or when destiny dictates that they change.**