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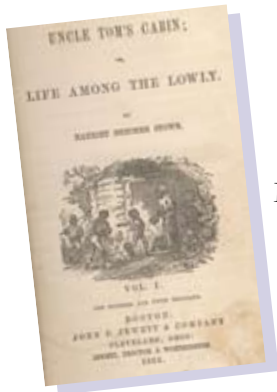
Reading Comprehension: Uncle Tom's Cabin

Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in 1852. Stowe was a strong abolitionist, and the book reflects her opposition to slavery in the United States. The book became extraordinarily popular; it was the best-selling book of the 19th century. It is credited with raising awareness and promoting anti-slavery opinions.



Harriet Beecher Stowe

The passage below is about Eliza, an enslaved woman owned by the Shelby family. Her husband George is owned by a neighboring family. Eliza and George have one child, a small boy named Harry. Harry is charming, smart, and handsome. Earlier Eliza had overheard a slave trader speaking with her owner about buying Harry. Now her husband has come to say goodbye to her. George is speaking at the beginning of the passage.



Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe Chapter III: The Husband and Father

“Well, lately Mas'r has been saying that he was a fool to let me marry off the place; that he hates Mr. Shelby and all his tribe, because they are proud, and hold their heads up above him, and that I've got proud notions from you; and he says he won't let me come here any more, and that I shall take a wife and settle down on his place. At first he only scolded and grumbled these things; but yesterday he told me that I should take Mina for a wife, and settle down in a cabin with her, or he would sell me down river.”

“Why—but you were married to me, by the minister, as much as if you'd been a white man!” said Eliza, simply.

“Don't you know a slave can't be married? There is no law in this country for that; I can't hold you for my wife, if he chooses to part us. That's why I wish I'd never seen you,—why I wish I'd never been born; it would have been better for us both,—it would have been better for this poor child if he had never been born. All this may happen to him yet!”

“O, but master is so kind!”

“Yes, but who knows?—he may die—and then he may be sold to nobody knows who. What pleasure is it that he is handsome, and smart, and bright? I tell you, Eliza, that a sword will pierce through your soul for every good and pleasant thing your child is or has; it will make him worth too much for you to keep.”

The words smote heavily on Eliza's heart; the vision of the trader came before her eyes, and, as if some one had struck her a deadly blow, she turned pale and gasped for breath. She looked nervously out on the verandah, where the boy, tired of the grave conversation, had retired, and where he was riding triumphantly up and down on Mr. Shelby's walking-stick. She would have spoken to tell her husband her fears, but checked herself.

Q&A: Answer each question below.

1. Why does George say he wishes he had never seen Eliza? _____

2. What does George mean when he says “a sword will pierce through your soul for every good and pleasant thing your child is or has...”? _____

3. Why does Eliza turn pale and gasp for breath? _____

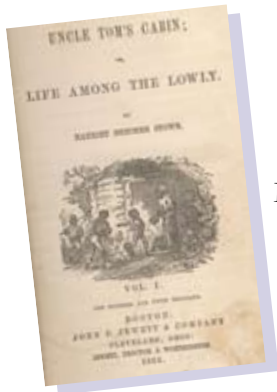
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Q&A: Answer each question below.

Student's answers will vary. Correct answers should include references to the following:

1. Why does George say he wishes he had never seen Eliza? If he had never seen Eliza, they would have never married or had Harry. He would no be facing separation from Eliza and Harry.
2. What does George mean when he says "a sword will pierce through your soul for every good and pleasant thing your child is or has..."? Every good trait of Harry's will make him more valuable, and more likely to be sold away from Eliza, which would break her heart.
3. Why does Eliza turn pale and gasp for breath? She knows that George is right, and Harry could be sold away from her at any time.