Discussion questions for *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

1. To what extent does Douglass follow the conventions of the “slave narrative” genre? Can you identify some of the features of the writer’s technique that you find to be particularly effective?
2. What is Douglass’ purpose for writing his narrative? Which aspect of his work do you find most convincing?
3. How is the thematic link between “literacy and freedom” developed in Douglass’ narrative?
4. Which scenes exemplify Douglass’ development of his “antithesis” as a response to the myth of black inferiority?
5. How does Douglass develop his credibility as an academic scholar? In what ways is Douglass’ narrative an attempt at social engineering?
6. In what ways would a social-class reading of Douglass’ narrative provide an insightful interpretation of the politics and economics of the time?
7. In what ways does Douglass appeal to his white readers, and in what ways is he providing his narrative as a moral compass for the United States?
8. How should we view Douglass’ relationship with the ideas of “power” and “powerlessness”? How is his narrative developed so that we engage in the questions about power?
9. Discuss the archetypal pattern of “birth to death and death into birth” in Douglass’ narrative. What is significant about this idea in Douglass’ work?
10. Are there some ideas or opinions put forward in the writing that you feel particularly sympathetic or antagonistic towards? What do you think prompted such a strong reaction?