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?

Oral Commentary Discussion Questions for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

1. “Art could be created out of the American language.” What is so significant about Huck’s voice and point of view?
2. In what ways is Huck and Jim’s story also the story of America?
3. Why does Twain use elements of Romanticism, Realism, and Regionalism in this novel?
4. What does Twain satirize in the novel? Why?
5. What purpose does Twain have in pairing Jim with Huck? In pairing the Duke with the King? In pairing Tom with Huck in the final chapters?
6. How are women depicted in the novel? What might these depictions say about Twain’s view or about society’s view of women?
7. In what ways is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* uniquely American?
8. How does Twain use ‘disguises’ in the novel to advance his ideas about 19th Century America?
9. What might Twain’s arguments be in favor of either moral relativism or moral absolutism?
10. In what ways is *Huckleberry Finn* a long deconstruction of the fallacious myths of the South?