

# Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Chapters 17–23

by Harriet Jacobs

## Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

**Practice words:** abate, benefactress, conjecture, contrive, despicable, devoid, garret, grievous, irascible, prudence

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### PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Vocabulary Preview ..... 2

Answer Key — Preview ..... 3

**Caution:** share only if self-checking

### OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context ..... 4

Answer Key — In Context ..... 5

**Caution:** do not share with students

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### About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

### About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.

### Vocabulary Sections for this Book:

Section 1 · Chapters 1–9 · Linda's childhood and family

Section 2 · Chapters 10–16 · A young woman's perilous years

**Section 3 · Chapters 17–23 · The flight and life in hiding**

Section 4 · Chapters 24–30 · The long wait in hiding

Section 5 · Chapters 31–41 and Appendix · A new life in the North

**Bold = this section.** Other sections are available at [verbalworkout.com](http://verbalworkout.com).



[verbalworkout.com](http://verbalworkout.com)

(all resources free)

# Vocabulary Preview

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

*Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.*

1. We waited indoors until the storm began to **abate**.

- A. to shift direction
- B. to spread more widely
- C. to lessen or die down

2. The library was built with funds from a wealthy **benefactress**.

- A. a woman who inherits wealth
- B. a woman who collects books
- C. a woman who gives help

3. With so few facts, we could only **conjecture** about what had happened.

- A. to recall from memory
- B. to guess from clues
- C. to inquire of others

4. They had to **contrive** a way to get the piano up the narrow stairs.

- A. to carelessly throw together
- B. to hastily borrow from others
- C. to cleverly devise or arrange

5. The con artist's **despicable** scheme ruined many families.

- A. deserving contempt
- B. cleverly disguised
- C. wildly reckless

6. The desert plain was **devoid** of any trees or shade.

- A. newly cleared
- B. entirely without
- C. in great need

7. The young poet rented a **garret** above the noisy café.

- A. a shared sitting room
- B. a small attic room
- C. a cluttered storeroom

8. The storm caused **grievous** damage to the village.

- A. very severe
- B. slowly spreading
- C. widely scattered

9. Everyone tiptoed around their **irascible** supervisor.

- A. easily angered
- B. very demanding
- C. deeply gloomy

10. Out of **prudence**, she saved part of every paycheck.

- A. careful good judgment
- B. stubborn love of routine
- C. anxious fear of the future

### Reading Helpers

*(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)*

**blessing** — something one is grateful for; here in bitter irony – Senator Brown declared slavery 'a great moral, social, and political blessing... a blessing to the slave!'

# ANSWER KEY

## Vocabulary Preview

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| #  | KEY |
|----|-----|
| 1  | C   |
| 2  | C   |
| 3  | B   |
| 4  | C   |
| 5  | A   |
| 6  | B   |
| 7  | B   |
| 8  | A   |
| 9  | A   |
| 10 | A   |

**Vocabulary in Context**  
**Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl**  
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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Score \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

*Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.*

**1** *"The application gave me some relief, but the swelling did not abate."*

As it is used in the passage, the word "abate" most nearly suggests that the swelling...

- A. stayed as severe as before
- B. was growing infected
- C. had started to spread

**2** *"As a matter of prudence no names were mentioned."*

It can reasonably be inferred that names were withheld as a matter of prudence in order to...

- A. protect those who were helping her
- B. keep her destination a surprise
- C. speed up the night's journey

**3** *"Words choked in my throat; but I could have kissed the feet of my benefactress."*

According to the passage, the speaker regards the woman as someone who has...

- A. agreed to employ her
- B. done her a great kindness
- C. offered to buy her freedom

**4** *"Several keys were tried, but none fitted. I instantly conjectured it was one of the housemaids ..."*

The passage most strongly suggests that the speaker's belief about who tried the door was...

- A. based on something she clearly saw
- B. a guess drawn from limited clues
- C. confirmed by the housemaid herself

**5** *"... between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by any thing but rats and mice. ... The garret was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air."*

The information in the excerpt primarily functions to...

- A. stress how cramped and airless it was
- B. explain how the trap-door was built
- C. show the grandmother's poverty

**6** *"But though my life in slavery was comparatively devoid of hardships, God pity the woman who is compelled to lead such a life!"*

The ironic phrase "comparatively devoid of hardships" serves mainly to...

- A. minimize the suffering of others
- B. highlight how cruel slavery still was
- C. praise her enslavers' kindness

**7** *"My food was passed up to me through the trap-door my uncle had contrived;"*

In context, the word "contrive" emphasizes...

- A. that the trap-door was cleverly devised
- B. that the trap-door was poorly hidden
- C. that the food was hard to deliver

**8** *"... begged of her not to allow the children to be impertinent to the irascible old man."*

In the passage, the "irascible old man" is characterized as...

- A. weary and broken-down
- B. cold and calculating
- C. quick-tempered and easily angered

**9** *"The duties of his office were despicable, but he was superior to his companion, inasmuch as he did not pretend to be what he was not."*

Which choice best describes the narrator's attitude toward the constable?

- A. open admiration
- B. outright contempt
- C. grudging, qualified respect

**10** *"... who had loved her in her infancy, and who had been repaid by such grievous wrongs."*

Which statement about Mrs. Flint and the aunt is best supported by the passage?

- A. the two had always disliked each other
- B. the harm done was minor and brief
- C. past devotion was repaid with deep injury

# ANSWER KEY

## Vocabulary in Context

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| #  | KEY | NOTE                                                                                                |
|----|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | A   |                                                                                                     |
| 2  | A   | Event comprehension.                                                                                |
| 3  | B   |                                                                                                     |
| 4  | B   |                                                                                                     |
| 5  | A   |                                                                                                     |
| 6  | B   |                                                                                                     |
| 7  | A   | Here 'contrived' is positive – cleverly devised – not the modern sense of 'artificial' or 'forced.' |
| 8  | C   | Character comprehension. The 'irascible old man' is Dr. Flint.                                      |
| 9  | C   | Character comprehension. His honesty is set against his companion, who passes for white.            |
| 10 | C   | Character comprehension. The aunt (Aunt Nancy) had nursed Mrs. Flint in infancy.                    |

#### Teacher Context: Chapters 17–23

Linda escapes and goes into hiding, enduring months of peril before concealing herself in the cramped crawlspace above her grandmother's shed — the loophole of retreat. Her children are sold to Mr. Sands and remain nearby, though she can only watch them in secret. The section ends before Chapter 24 to keep the initial flight and concealment together, set apart from the long campaign of schemes that follows.