

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## Writing Prompts

### Part 1: Behind the Big House

#### MISSION 2: "Flight to Freedom"

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#### A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR:

*You will need to decide how best to share these writing prompts with your students. You might share them all and ask students to choose one to respond to. You may assign one or more to the entire group. You might make one or more of the topics the basis for in-class discussions. Make your decisions according to the needs of your group.*

*You may notice that many of the topics contain some version of the phrase, "Write about a time in your life..." The intention of these prompts is twofold: first, since students remember the content of their own lives, they can more easily respond to the questions and they are more likely to want to express themselves if they feel competent to do so; second, these questions can form a meaningful bridge between what happens in the lives of ordinary people today and the lives of people in history or in historical events. For these reasons, you might decide to use some of the prompts before students encounter the history because thinking about them sets the students up to understand and to relate to it better.*

*Since students vary in their degree of comfort and skill in writing, you should decide when and how much students should write. We suggest that since students need to share their writing with each other to make personal and historical connections, you should encourage them to focus on content rather than on mechanical skills. Pieces can be revised and edited later if you decide they should be shared formally (such as on a bulletin board or in a newsletter).*

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Read through all the topics first, and then choose one of them to write about. Write the title of the piece at the top of your page. Write in complete sentences. After you are finished, proofread your work for correctness.

**WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE?** Suppose you lived in Kentucky in the late 1840s and somehow you had the following choice to make: EITHER TO BE an indentured servant for a period of seven years to a farmer who was a sadistic tyrant, who overworked you, insulted, beat, and otherwise abused you for small mistakes you made, underfed you, and showed you no sympathy or affection, but who would, in the end, release you and give you two acres of farmland; OR TO BE a slave on a small family farm in the home of a kindly couple who treated you almost like one of the family, with a reasonable amount of work to do, who provided you with food similar to what they ate in quality and amount, comfortable clothing, and adequate quarters in which to sleep. They forgave your mistakes, encouraged you to read and to better yourself. They would never, however, entertain any conversation about ending your bondage as a slave. Which would you choose? Why?

**ARE YOU A SLAVE?** Most students of school age are entirely, or nearly entirely, dependent on their parents for food, clothing, shelter and a general level of care. While most parents are caring most of the time, some parents mete out punishments to their children when they feel it's necessary or make rules for their children that seem harsh or unfair. Children under the age of eighteen or twenty-one are, in general, far from free people. So are children, in a sense, slaves to their parents? Explain. If you disagree, say why.

**LUCY AS SABOTEUR.** In Part 1, Lucy is confronted with several instances in which she might pretend to take longer to do a task than it requires, or she might even take action to undermine the smooth running of the plantation by destroying property. In historical France, people sometimes wore wooden shoes called *sabot*. The intentional clatter made by *sabot* to distract or muddle people who were trying to work, talk or think, was called *sabotage*. Later, the definition extended to other contexts, such as what Lucy must sometimes consider. Why might a person in Lucy's position choose sabotage rather than some other way to protest her condition? You might think of times when you have either considered or actually used sabotage in your own life to try to imagine Lucy's thinking.

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**TAKING VS. STEALING.** *Rationalizing* is the process of making something *seem* reasonable or right when it really isn't. For example, you forget to do your homework and then play hooky from school. When you are asked why you didn't go to school, you explain that since you didn't have your work prepared, you didn't want to waste the teacher's time—that's a *rationalization*. You might think of it as well-packaged baloney. A *rationale*, on the other hand, is an expression of the thought process you use to define how you will act or what you believe, and it's not an attempt to get away with something. On large plantations, enslaved people sometimes quietly and secretly helped themselves to food or other property that belonged to the owner; they reasoned that they themselves were property and property couldn't logically steal property, so that was *taking*, and thus morally acceptable. *Stealing* was when one enslaved person took something from another, and that was wrong. Is this explanation of the difference between taking and stealing a *rationalization* or a *rationale*? Explain.

**LUCY'S JOURNAL.** Through Lucy's eyes, think about your circumstances from the beginning to the end of this part of "Flight to Freedom." Think about the people with whom you interacted, and what you learned from them. Think about the choices you made and the consequences of those choices. Now write a journal entry from Lucy's point-of-view summarizing what happened to you in Part 1. You may choose to illustrate one aspect of your entry.