



This is Why I Cry.

4/5/04

Historical Character File: A Slave's Freedom

Dear audience member,

This learning product was created by a PIONEER School for Expeditionary Learning 8th grade student in the spring of 2004. And while I have been trying for several years to intertwine historical inquiry, literacy, and craftsmanship in the curriculum I develop, this is my first attempt at facilitating the development of a product of this complexity. I am truly honored by the academic and creative risks these students were willing to take as we learned from this process together. Please take a moment to read their introductory advice below, as it will help you understand the context of our endeavors. And thank you for sharing in our learning!

-Matt Strand, PIONEER 8th Grade Humanities

PIONEER 8th Graders' Introduction

What is a historical character file?

- A historically/geographically accurate, fictional story about a character we created; it includes a portrait of the character, a narrative/biography, a character map, a bibliography, and the option of including artifacts from the character's life
- Our way of showing what we are learning
- An experiment in learning based on educator Ron Berger's character file project
- A project about slaves in United States history

What were we trying to accomplish?

- To build our schema (background knowledge) about slavery
- To educate others/ourselves about the slavery era
- To bring back the history through every detail instead of bits and pieces
- To challenge the notion that slaves were merely stereotypical "victims"; they were human beings with complex emotions that often used various "forms of freedom" as a way to experience power and dignity
- To feel the personal, human level of history rather than simply memorizing dates and facts in order to gain a different perspective of and respect for the real people that endured this system

What else should the audience know?

- Our intent is not to be racist or offensive; some of us have chosen to portray the physical and verbal abuse slaves experienced; sometimes this involves violence and racial slurs that, according to the primary, secondary, and expert resources we used in our research, were commonplace; these elements were included to convey historical realities
- We worked for 2 months on this project: asking questions, researching, discussing, drafting, drawing, critiquing, revising, and creating artifacts
- We went deep. And we'll remember it because we spent so much time on it. And we actually enjoyed the process; almost all of us would be willing to do a project like this again in the future.

Charles Lane
Slave Narrative

Author:

4/5/04

This is Why I Cry

The life of a Slave

The door to the study opened quietly, and the professor looked up from his desk. A man stood in his door. Nothing was in any way particularly special about the man's appearance. He was about average height, but his broad shoulders showed his strength and were made all the more noticeable by his being somewhat small. His eyes, and his skin were the only things remarkable in a university. As slavery was still a deep issue in the regions of the South and even the North, being a young black male in a university in eighteen ten was a very strange sight. His skin was dark, but not the ebony of other Africans, but with a lightness to it that suggested him to have white heritage. And his eyes, eyes so deep and sorrowful that it seemed to drive a knife into the professor's heart. They were dark brown, but with green around the edges, a dark shade of forest green. The man was almost beautiful, but only the hardness around his mouth made him seem almost more demon than angel. He had a warm presence though, a friendliness that the professor had never really experienced with anyone who seemed also so distant.

The boy, for he could be no more than twenty, closed the door politely. The professor closed the book he had been reading and looked over the top of his spectacles at the boy. He took in the boy's dress. He had a slightly impressive suit for someone of his age and position.

The professor picked up a letter lying on his desk. "You must be Charles?" He glanced at the letter doubtfully when Charles nodded.

"Yessir. I asked if you were interested in documenting the life of a slave." He shifted his feet nervously.

The professor looked up again when he spoke. "How do you speak so well and write," he brandished the letter, waving it, "if you were a slave?"

Charles stepped forward, "I was taught, sir, by a man up here in the North."

Though his speech was somewhat hesitant and the Southern accent still lingered around his words, his speech was clear and well formulated. The professor nodded to himself, and then motioned for Charles to sit down. Charles stepped toward the large seat and settled into it, sinking back into the soft, red material. He glanced around the room. It was old and dark, the wood furnishings of dark oak and the old books worn and faded in their dark leather bindings. A fire was crackling in a brick fireplace, the flames warm and bright against the misted windows that sheltered them from the cold December chill.

The professor leaned back in his chair, "So, why do you want to talk to me about your life as a slave? Aren't those memories painful?"

Charles nodded, but sat forward in his chair, the fire kindling in his eyes like a chained spirit behind bars of glass. "Yes, it's painful, but I want all the people to know what goes on down South and even around here, and to know what a horrible thing it is." He looked straight into the professor's eyes. "I received an education and spent four years working and studying for it, and three months running through the wild to get it, just so I could talk to someone like you and show people that we are humans and can have an education."

The professor placed the tips of his fingers together and the barest hint of a frown evident beneath his beard crossed his lined face. "But why talk about it? Is that the only reason?" he asked.

Charles smiled, a sad, secret smile meant for people far away and unknown. "I want people to know what happens to us. I want to tell them why we cry."

The professor squinted his eyes as if thinking, then leaned forward in his chair and pulled a pen and ink from the side of his desk and flipped open a leather-bound journal on his desk, "Very well, Mr. Charles."

"Just Charles," said the boy, wincing at the thought of being called *mister*.

The room was quiet for a moment as the man realized what he said could have triggered a bad memory, or even anger in the man, and he was slightly embarrassed. Only the fire made a sound and the boy averted his gaze and stared deep into its depths. "Okay, Charles, tell me your story."

Charles took a deep breath as though suddenly realizing that he didn't know where to begin. "You can ask a question anytime," he told the professor.

The man laughed softly. "Just start from the beginning Charles, from when you were born, just start at the beginning."

"Alright. Well it started before I was born, everything I mean, people hating me and my loneliness. It began when my mother was out working in the field. The plantation we were on was a cotton plantation in Virginia. Well, she was working near the road, and the overseer was across the field some ways away."

He stopped suddenly, his fists clenching and unclenching, grinding his teeth in rage. The professor looked concerned for a moment, but Charles took a deep breath and gathered himself. The hate however, still flashed in his eyes, hate and something else. "How I despised that bastard.

"My mother was fifteen and rather beautiful. Our master was kind, or kinder than most to his slaves, and so he never touched her, even though her beauty was more than most. Well, she was working by the road as I said, and a white man, I believe he was an errand boy for my master, carrying messages and packages to the town for pay. He was walking by where my mother was. She was working near the woods, behind the house and next to the private road the messenger boy used. When I say *boy*, I mean a man about twenty. When he saw her he didn't even call out to her or give her any warning, but charged into the field and took her." He looked at the old man listening attentively and asked, "You know what I mean when I say *took* her, correct?"

The man nodded, and motioned for him to continue. Charles took another deep breath. "Well, my mother, I don't know why she didn't do it sooner, screamed."

"The man hit her then stood up and ran to the road, trying to buckle his pants. The overseer however, alerted by her scream, saw the man running toward the road.

"The overseer was a strong, fast man, and the boy was tired and trying to do up his britches while he ran, and the overseer easily caught him and they reached the road together. The overseer beat the man and brought him, and my mother, back to the masser's. Oh... pardon me," he said, an embarrassed flush spreading over his cheeks. The professor just smiled. "It's quite alright, son."

Charles tried again. "The *master's* house. Well, the master was none too pleased. Some errand boy had violated his property in a way that he had never thought one would. The master told the man that he would have to pay the master fifteen hundred dollars, the price he paid for my mother. But the man spat on his feet. That night, the master had the overseer whip the man in full view of all the slaves. After the beating, the man died, but for my mother, the damage was done."

"Well, the man's father took the case to court as a murder trial. The master first tried to pay the father to drop the charges. When he refused, the master said the overseer

killed him in self defense. The court got them off, but partly also because my master offered to pay them to, and they accepted.”

The professor took a note in his journal, “So, I just want to make sure I’m getting this straight. The traveler raped your mother and she became pregnant with you?”

Charles nodded. The man took another note. “Well please, go on.”

“I was born on June eighth, the year I’m not certain of, though I believe it was about 1790 or around there. I’m not even sure of my own age, only my birthday. As you can see, I’m not very tall, nor is my skin as dark as many others, but that is from my father, as is the green in my eyes. My tribe, until violated by my father, was always tall, and all hard skin as dark as freshly dug soil, but not me. No, I was a living memory of the man who had violated my mother. She loved me anyway, even if the other slaves didn’t, she loved me as though I was a child born to the man she loved, not a white pig.

“I played with the children of the master until I was around four years old. The master seemed to have a certain fondness for me, though I don’t know why. He taught me to speak better than most slaves on the plantation, and he also taught me how to write, not much, but a little.”

“Did that serve you later in helping you get off the plantation?”

“No,” said Charles, a queer look in his eyes. “That happened without my help at all, only my mother’s, but may I tell the whole story as you have asked?”

“Of course,” said the professor hurriedly, touching a handkerchief to a sweaty brow. He was engrossed in the story now, and not even the heat of the fire would move him.

“As I said, the master liked me, and my mother used that to her advantage, getting a job in the house, watching the children, both black and white. I didn’t mind having her close, but in my heart I knew that much of it was for her own benefit, but I still loved her. I loved my master’s children as well, they were my friends. We grew up together, if just for four years, and it changed their views, and their father’s I believe. But then the day came, as we all knew it would, the day where I must become a slave.

“The fields are cold and harsh in the winter, and it was my first day out there. I had been awakened early, earlier than I had ever been awakened before. And it was cold, colder than I had ever been. My master met me outside the building we all slept in. He

said to me, 'You knew this would happen one day. Now it has come.' He told me I could no longer play with Tommy or Sarah, and that my life would be in the field from then on. They put me out in the field then. My job was to carry water to the slaves in a circulating pattern. I walked all day, the only rest on my legs was filling the buckets I carried with water. I was freezing when they finally brought me inside at the end of the day. It was after the sun had gone down and the frost seemed already to be settling."

He shivered, as though remembering the cold touch of the winter on his young skin. "It was like that every day. I missed my master's children, I missed playing with them and laughing with them and screaming with them. I missed my friends, the only friends I would have in the world. The other slaves shunned me, and as I grew older, I began to realize it more and more. How can I describe to you how I felt, how can you ever know how I felt?" He smiled suddenly, a quick twitching of his large lips, "Of course, you can never know. I remember one day another slave said to me, 'You don't belong here, you belong up in da house with the massa and da missus, or in da gutter wit yo father.'

"That was where it all began, all my anger, all my suffering, all of it. That was when I began to understand I would always be a stranger in both worlds."

He noticed as the professor sat that he shifted impatiently. Charles smiled.

"I see you have a question. What is it?" he asked the professor politely.

The old man looked down at his journal for a moment at the question he had written down. "Ah, yes," he said. He looked up at Charles. "Did you ever hate your father, or, hate being alive?"

Charles looked confused for a second, then nodded slowly. "I don't think you would ever meet a slave who hadn't thought about death and dying at least once." The strange smile pulled once again at the corners of his mouth, the same sad, hopeless smile, "I wished my father had never taken my mother, I wished that for her and for me, so that she could live with dignity, and I not live at all. Yes, I had those thoughts.

"But they all started with what that slave said. I snapped then, when he said it, never feeling such rage in all my life. I threw myself at him and tackled him, me being only a scrawny eight-year-old – I think – and him a man, probably eighteen. I tackled him

to the ground and tried to hurt him, tried to hurt him to stop his words from hurting me. It didn't work. I only got more bruises added to the one that had been beaten into my soul.

"The master was angry with me than, he told me that fighting on his plantation was unacceptable. I was terrified, thinking he was going to beat me. But instead of beating me, he beat my mother, and told me that anymore fighting and she would be punished then as well. He whipped her ten times, and I had to watch.

"I hated him more then I think I'd ever hated anyone in my life. The master who had once been kind to me, teaching me to write and speak well, had beaten my mother."

Charles smiled for a moment, a quick flash and it was gone, the smile as sad as all of the others, "I began to break things, tools and such, and even began to drop the water so the slaves couldn't drink in the summer. Many got sick, the heat being too much, and the work was slowed down as the slaves recovered. The master couldn't figure out what was happening on his plantation. When the slaves began to say he was behind their sickness and the lack of water and tools, the master selected three slaves at random and had them whipped, showing us he was not afraid to use force when necessary. After the men were untied, he told us that the rumors were 'unfounded', a word which none of us knew. And he also said that when he found whoever was responsible would be sold off the plantation after a severe punishment.

"Well, I was excited. I had caused the unrest at the plantation, but the master was narrowing it down to me. His shipments were off and his money was dropping. Slowly, but steadily, and soon he would have to sell several slaves onto rich plantations, where gossip would spread about our plantation, causing several buyers to probably stop buying from my master. Finally, at around my tenth year, everything changed."

He stopped talking for a moment and pointed to a pitcher of water on the professor's desk, "Do you mind if I have a drink?" he asked the professor, who was busy writing in his journal.

The professor glanced up from his scribbling and nodded to Charles, "Whatever you want, my dear boy."

Charles poured himself a cup of water and took a drink. The professor was looking at him, a slightly impatient look on his face. "Excuse me, but, how did everything change?"

Charles put down the glass and wiped his mouth. "Sorry, just needed a drink. Oh no."

The glass slipped through his fingers and fell to the floor, shattering the cup and sending water over Charles's shoes.

"It's fine," The man professor said.

Charles stared at the broken glass on the floor for a moment, lost in the past. He looked up suddenly as the professor coughed slightly, dragged back to the present.

"Okay, where - oh yes, that's right. Well, my master began to suspect me of being the main culprit, or, maybe just a helper, in this destruction of his business, but one day while I was going around with the water, the overseer whipped me twice across the back. I had never been whipped before that, ever. The pain was unbearable on my young body. When I fell, I dropped the water."

He glanced down at the shattered glass on the ground and cringed a little, pulled back to that dreadful moment once more. A moment later he looked up, the water reflected in the sadness of his eyes. He breathed heavily, and then continued with the story.

"The master called this proof that it had been me, but it was all a game. He could have gotten rid of me at any moment he had wanted to. He didn't need to do that. But it was something to get the slaves back on his side somewhat, well, as much as you can get angry, unpaid servants to be on your side."

Anger lit up his eyes. "My mother was terrified then, and I don't think it was for me. I think she was scared that she would be beaten since I had been caught red-handed defying the master. That night, she got me out of bed, and I had no idea what was going on.

"I probably should have mentioned earlier that about a year before this time, my mother began to become strangely more distant. She began talking to herself and screaming wild things while in the field. It might have been because the strain of her moving back into the fields after my fight with the man who had insulted me and my father - the master kicked her out of the house - might have been too hard on her body and mind, or it might have been me, the living memory of the man from the field nine years before. Every time she looked at me, the older I got, the more I could tell she was

reminded of him, in my height, my face, my voice, but especially my eyes, the only part of him she stared at, and the only part that meant something. She looked into her son's eyes and saw the eyes of the unwelcome father staring back at her.

"Well, the night she woke me, I noticed she had a sickle. I don't know where she got it, or how she got it, but I knew it couldn't be good, and it wasn't. We snuck out of the slave's cabin, a small shack built for the twenty slaves to sleep almost comfortably in, and made our way out into the night. My mother snuck along the road until we reached a small shed in which the overseer slept. She told me to stay where I was and she went to the door and opened it. She went inside and I heard a slight scuffle, the sound of a blow, then a quick, muffled cry. The door to the hut opened again. I remember being terrified, wanting to run, but staying there as my mother had told me to. I was terrified of the overseer, who was a huge man and had no pity whatsoever. I felt the pain in my back from where the whip had caught me.

"A person stepped out of the door and I saw that it was my mother. In her hand, the sickle was shining in the light of the moon, and the red of blood glinted on it. She took me by the hand and we ran, as swiftly as we could.

Charles looked down at the floor, "We didn't get anywhere. My mother told me we would find a special place where people like us were helped. She brought my hopes the point of bursting. She said when we found them we'd be safe. I was excited, thinking it was all over. She said we were free."

He laughed, a quick exhale, "She was wrong. The next moment I was hog-tied and thrown over the rump of a horse, my face against its hot, stinking flanks. I lay here, hearing my mother scream. I don't know why she was screaming, but when we got back to the plantation and the whip touched my back, I was the one screaming. The continuous whipping was like fire being thrown onto your back. I could feel that blood running down my body and caking the dust on my pants. When it was done I was feverish before they untied me, and blood was leaking from me, like the hands of the Christ himself as he hangs from the cross.

"I don't know what happened while I was sick and healing of the whip marks, but I know that right when I could walk, they sold me. I was to go to a plantation about thirty miles away. This didn't really register until I was chained to the back of another slave,

and another was chained to me. I did not see my mother, or any other slaves. On the march I grew dizzy and swooned – I think that’s how you say it – and fell, right in the mud. My newly healed cuts, which were just covered in scabs, felt like my back was splitting all over again. When I fell, I remember feeling the scabs, or some of them, pulling apart. I can just remember the man behind me picking me up. He was strong, and I was small and light, having not eaten in a week, the pain not allowing me to stomach any food. I blacked out in the man’s arms and woke up on a bunk in a large cabin. I could tell it was a slave house, but it was larger than the one I had spent my life in. There were more bunks in this building, and less room, even though it was bigger. Of all the slaves around me, I didn’t recognize one. I was alone in an unknown place with unknown people.

“The doors suddenly opened and two men walked in. Each had a whip in their hand and a bucket in the other. They yelled. I don’t remember what they said, but after that they cracked their whips. I was terrified, and remember them telling everyone to get up. I jumped up, but fell back down, the scabs in my back still tender from the other day. When the men saw me fall down they both laughed. One walked over and yelled in my face, then threw the water in the bucket at me. It was ice cold. I cried out from the shock and the man picked me up and tossed me out the door, actually throwing me out of the house.”

Charles’ fingers gripped the arms of his chair so hard his knuckles were turning white. The professor looked sympathetic and put his pen down. “We can continue this tomorrow if you would like, my schedule is empty –”

“NO!” interrupted Charles. “Please. Let me finish it.” He looked at the professor pleadingly. The old man nodded, not wanting the story to end. He just saw the pain that the boy was going through in telling the story, but knew that he truly had no idea.

Charles took a deep breath. “That was the beginning of sliding slowly into hell. Every morning was like that, the rude awakening by the same two men, two of the four overseers. My master was a friend of my former master, and they were business partners. I picked this up when work was done and we ate and talked. I also learned that this master was much harsher than my other one, and any sort of music was forbidden by him. That began another power struggle between me and another of my masters.

“When I was in the field I would beat on the spade part of my shovel, singing any song I knew as loud as I could, sometimes I would make up a new song about the master, not bothering to hide what I was singing about. My master would have me beat for it and thrown back into the slave house bloody, bruised, whipped, and the other slaves would help me, healing me. I was their hero. By tormenting our master, I gave them hope and energy. I was probably thirteen or so and already was revered by the others.”

Charles smiled at those memories, not nearly as sad of a smile as the others, but still with a twinge of sorrow around his eyes, “After another year, I wouldn’t work until physically forced to do so, and tools that were found by me were broken. I was winning the private war I waged with the master.

“But, one thing I always thought about was the one person in the world who mattered most to me. The person who had betrayed me, and I had betrayed her. My mother. I hadn’t seen her or been near her since I had heard her screaming by the horses when we were reclaimed. I wondered every night where she was and if she was alright.

“During the day however, I couldn’t think about her. By protesting – I think that’s the word – I was beaten harder and more cruelly than ever. Me, a boy, just beginning to turn into a man. I hated them all, every single white person on the plantation, every white businessman who came and inspected us as we worked like he was surveying cows grazing. Every woman, every child, everyone who looked at me like I was less than them got a touch of my hate and loathing.

“But I was scared. Scared of the life that I led, scared of living like this, but also, I terrified at the thought of death. I think those conflicting emotions were the only things that kept me alive and willing to continue my war. Every whip stroke that fell upon my back, or blow that connected with my skin threw more fuel upon the already blazing rage. I was doing this to myself I knew that, but it was not their right to do this to me. Then came the true day of reckoning.”

He closed his eyes, and then poured himself another glass of water and took a drink. The professor stared with undivided attention at the ex-slave, no longer caring that he paused, but waiting with bated breath for the finale.

"The master's son was in town," Charles began, his throat hoarse even after the water. "He was more cruel than his old man. He walked around the property with the overseers and picked on slaves when he saw anything he didn't like.

"It was a hot day. The sun beat down mercilessly on my bare back, baking the polished, light ebony of my skin. Sweat soaked my body and made my palms slippery, making work with the shovel difficult. I drew a sweaty forearm across my arm, doing nothing but adding more muck and sweat to both arm and face. I straightened for a moment, bending stretching my aching back. I groaned. I had been up since before the moon had set and the sun came up. I had been awakened by a bucket of cold water hitting me in the face and then rough hands pulling me startled off of the corn shuck-filled bag that I slept on and throwing me out of the barn. When I stumbled and fell I received many blows from the two men. They had kicked me in the ribs, and then had thrown the shovel out in the field, told me I knew my job, and walked away.

"I touched the bruise that was now forming on my side and winced as the quick stab of pain ran through my body. I hated them all, hated them with such a passion that I wish I could just strangle them in their sleep. I shook my head then, trying to shake the thoughts from my head as a dog would shake water from its body. It was these thoughts that scared me. They were all too real of feelings, all too possible for me to do. It would be their fault if I did, however.

"Something stung my arm and I brushed it away. Summer was hell, and the bugs, demons.

"Sweat slid down my face and fell to the dry earth. I heard a shout behind me and I turned, in time to see the whip unfurl. It cut across my back with a searing pain. A line of fire burned across my shoulders. I just barely managed to stifle my cry of pain. I had barely enough time however, to register that blow, before the next one hit my leg. The pain was so sudden and my body so overworked, that I collapsed onto the earth that I had spent all morning digging up.

"It was cool and wet, and I rolled over, just as the third strike from the whip hissed beside me and snapped into the ground. The overseer stood over me, coiling the whip. The master's son stood beside him, holding a cane in his hand, a sign of the

stupidity of this white man. A young man does not need to carry a cane. To me, it seemed a sign of weakness. The overseer was about as slow as they come, but he was large.

“The master’s son stepped forward and spoke, ‘Relaxing, hmm? Well, we’ll have none of that here. Stand up, get back to work, you’ve been a thorn in my father’s side ever since he bought you. Up!’”

“He stepped forward and struck me with his cane. Weak as the little white man was, the solid stick across my ribs smarted. I looked at him suddenly, feeling all the rage that had gathered in me since my young age gathered at the breaking point. When the second blow of the cane came, my anger broke. Before it hit me, I grabbed the cane, and held it fast. The man’s eyes grew wide and he tugged at the cane. I still held it fast, my strong, rough hands keeping their grip. He drew back his foot to kick me. ‘How dare you! I’ll have more than your hide for this.’”

“His foot connected, but I barely felt it. All I felt was the rage, the blind anger that had overcome me. I saw the overseer step towards me and my other hand found the shaft of the shovel. I swung it up as hard as I could. It slammed into the side of the overseer’s head. He staggered back then turned on me again, a rage burning in his eyes. I released the man’s cane and caught the shovel in both hands and swung it up as the overseer raised the whip. The blow was hard, and the edge caught his ear, tearing it away and sending blood showering over the cotton like a red rain, dyeing the crop with a scarlet flowering of dots. The man stumbled back and fell, dazed and hurt. I pushed myself to my feet. It was as though I could no longer control myself. I grabbed the cane from the startled young man and hit as hard as I could in the arm. I heard a crack and he screamed. I drew back my fist and slammed it into his jaw with such force it sent him spinning and he fell onto his back. My knuckles rang from the shock of it that I shook my hand for a moment, but didn’t stop. I grabbed the whip from the ground and swung it at the terrified white man curled up the ground. I didn’t know how to use it properly, but the sounds of it striking flesh and ripping cloth and the cries of the man were terrifyingly satisfying.

“I saw blood coloring the white clothing of the frail man and screamed at him ‘It hurt, don’t it? How you like it?’”

“I could here the screams from the other slaves, cries of joy from some, fear from others, and the angry howl of the overseer from across the field.

“I heard a sound behind me and I saw the overseer rising, picking the cane from the ground where I had dropped it. I swung the whip and it hit him below the eye, pulling the blood after it. I saw the shovel lying on the ground and I dove for it, rising as the man charged, the cane held high. I didn’t know what I was doing. The anger was overwhelming. I swung the shovel as hard as I could with both hands, using all the power in my body. The shovel slammed into the side of the man’s face and several things gave. The crack was like the crack of a whip as the shovel slammed into his head, and blood flew from his mouth like a stream of beautiful silk flowing in the wind. His neck was slightly off and he crashed to the ground, the red pooling about his head.

“I suddenly came to my senses and saw the crop all around the area I had been working in was broken and trampled, and blood covered the area. The master’s son was still curled up on the ground whimpering. I saw the overseer and my stomach gave. It was so sudden I could barely bend over before I began heaving. It burned my throat, but the terror in my heart was much greater. I threw the shovel down and ran.”

He stopped talking, taking a deep breath. The old man listening took as deep breath as though he hadn’t breathed through the whole tale. He released it now, a long sigh. It filled the warm room with its sympathy and compassion. A carriage rattled below the window and Charles closed his eyes.

Charles didn’t seem like he was going to speak again anytime soon, so the professor asked, “Was the overseer dead?”

Charles shrugged, opening his eyes and looking at the floor. “I didn’t, and don’t care.”

The old man crossed himself and then looked at Charles again, “So that is how you escaped? You beat the overseer and injured your master’s son and just *ran!*”

Charles looked up and the professor saw the pain etched in all the premature lines on his face, “It wasn’t nearly that simple,” said Charles, “I ran out into the woods and kept running until dark. It was then that I stopped, when the sun went down, and wondered that to do. I was free. But what then? I was alone with no food or water in the middle of Virginia, and with no pass. Anyone who saw me would have caught me, beaten or killed me, then found my owner. But I wouldn’t let it happen. My fear of death was

over. I would never go back and I would kill myself if that is what it took to not be a slave ever again.

“I looked into the sky and saw the stars. They were a strange comfort to me, and I didn’t know why, but as I looked at them, I remembered what my mother said to me the night of our failed escape. She said, ‘Follow the bright star in the sky and you shall find your freedom.’ I looked up into the sky and found the star she had pointed out to me. The North Star I believe it’s called. Well, I followed it for two days before thirst became an issue. I was wandering across a meadow. I traveled only at night, one reason is so I could follow the stars, another was I was barely visible in the night. On the third day, when I thought I might die of thirst, I found a stream. It was in the forest and easy to miss, hidden by an overhang, but I heard it and ran to it. It was like you rich men finding more gold in the pocket of the pants you’ve never worn. I fell into the water. It was cold, and the day was hot. It was heaven found in a small patch of mud, moss, and water hidden on earth. I had taken off my shoes and threw them away on the first day. My feet were cut, blistered, and sore. One toenail had been pulled off. That hurt, I can remember. I had continued to move through that day to find water, and now that I had found it, I could find a hole to crawl up in and wait for night. But, like all things on this earth, luck has a way of turning against you.

“I heard the men and their horses before I saw them and the dogs, the terrifying sound of them braying caused me to move without even commanding my body to. By the time I caught a glimpse of them I was already running, flying through the trees, fleeing them. I was hard to see among the dark brown of the tree trunks, and I used my advantage of strength, and agility against them. I don’t think they saw me, and I saw no more pursuit.

“It took another month and a half to find this town, this wonderful, slave free town. To get here I stole from any town I came to, waiting until dark to sneak to the stores and break the windows, taking food and drink. In some towns, I even saw a wanted poster out for me. That caused a thrill in me. I was free. My feet hardened as I continued barefoot over the earth, and my body grew stronger.

“When I arrived here, I was cautious at first, keeping to the trees. But when a black man passed, wearing rather well-tailored garments, I noticed everyone in the town

for the first time. Blacks and whites walked among each other with no downward glances or noses held high. They were – well maybe not equal, but all were free. A man passed by me and stopped when he heard me question myself if this was the North. He laughed and said, ‘Aye, this is up north, but I don’t know if you’d call it *the* North. Just call it New York.’”

The old man chuckled and Charles stopped. “Yes?” he asked.

The professor stopped chuckling, but a wide smile was on his face, “You say that luck has a way of turning against you, but you were close to going into a town that still believes in slavery, and if you had, you have never thought of freedom again. I call that tremendous luck.”

Charles didn’t laugh. “Here is the rest of the story, in short. I found a man willing to tutor me and feed me and clothe me if I did some work around his house, for I told him I had no money, but would do honest labor. He was a member of the Underground Railroad, a teacher, and a man of God. He was a great man, and a kind one. I knew this wasn’t slavery, and it seemed a good trade. He taught me numbers, letters, proper speech, and other necessary skills for the world. I cleaned up a little around his yard and house and the school he teaches at for three hours every weekday, and he gave me excellent food, good clothes, and schooling.

“That was five years, up until a week ago when he bought me a small cottage in the town, when I told him I was going to tell a learned man my story and see if he could do anything. When I found you, a scholar of history and studies of people, I knew I had to talk to you.”

Charles let out a deep, cleansing breath. He looked around the room, looking once again at the books he could have never read only a few years ago, at the fire in the hearth he had never before so enjoyed. And the old little man behind the desk, his kindly face crinkled in a half smile. Charles felt so much love for that man in that moment he didn’t believe that kind of feeling to be possible. The man had listened, understood, and felt for him. He had listened to the story that Charles had been terrified yet dying to speak of since early childhood. He had done it, he had told his story.

Charles stood and stretched out his hand. The professor rose and took it in his own. Charles squeezed his hand. “Thank you.”

"No, thank you son," said the old professor, choking up. "I cannot thank you enough. If you ever need someone to talk to, I'm here."

Charles nodded, his eyes glistening. He turned and walked to the door. He placed his hand on the knob, but the professor had one more question.

"Charles?" He turned. "Charles, what happened to your mother, do you know?"

Charles turned and faced him. The professor could see that this was the one thing Charles wanted to say, but the one thing he could not find the strength to release. He waged a silent, inner war. His eyes pooled, but only a single tear slid down his face. The fire reflected in it, making it seem like a drop of blood, or fire, ran down his cheek. "A letter came yesterday to my teacher, who was, as I said, a member of the Underground Railroad. One of the safe houses was attacked and torched. Two slaves were taken alive, but three more, a woman and two men fought to the death, killing five men. The three of them died. The name of the woman was..."

He stopped and a sob rose in his throat. The professor stepped forward, but Charles looked up. Red now rimmed the green of his eyes and still, only the line of the one tear ran down his face. "This, professor," he whispered, "is where all the tears are from. *This* is why *I* cry."

ARTIFACTS

RUNAWAY NOTICE

LETTER

Dear Mr. David Porter,

We regret to inform you that one of the stations in southern Virginia has been raided. The safe house was burned down and two of our conductors and two Africans were taken into custody and the Africans will be returned to their former masters and the abolitionists held in prison until later notice. However, three of the slaves that were there two men and tragically, a woman, fought the men that raided the house. They killed five of the ten lawmen with rifles that were stored in the house and rocks after they unhorsed two of the men. The other five men shot the three Africans and burned the bodies in the house. The names of the men were Toby Chapman and John Chapman. The name of the woman was Harriet Lane. Our deepest regrets to inform you of this tragic blow to our society.

Sincerely,

Mr. Richard McGuire,

Abolitionists Movement

Dear Mr. David Porter,

We regret to inform you that one of the stations in southern Virginia has been raided. The safe house was burned down and two of our conductors and two Africans were taken into custody and the Africans will be returned to their former masters and the abolitionists held in prison until later notice. However, three of the slaves that were there two men and tragically, a woman, fought the men that raided the house. They killed five of the ten lawmen with rifles that were stored in the house and rocks after they unhorsed two of the men. The other five men shot the three Africans and burned the bodies in the house. The names of the men were Toby Chapman and John Chapman. The name of the woman was Harriet Lane. Our deepest regrets to inform you of this tragic blow to our society.

Sincerely,

Mr. Richard McGuire,

Abolitionists Movement

Runaway Notice and Arrest Warrant
For

Charles Smith

An African slave. His skin is much lighter than other blacks, having white heritage. He is of a long build. Average in height and broad in build. Strong from work in the fields. His eyes have green and his head is bald. A fair boy of 15 years. Scars on his back and on the back of his legs. His master, Richard Lane, would like him returned to back to his plantation before he be tried with the murder of one overseer. He had no grounds to run and therefore is in fault. A substantial reward of 1,000 dollars to the man who returns him.

Reward

\$ 1,000

**CHARACTER MAP
OF
CHARLES LANE**

Charles

Description	Location	History
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark brown skin, like the color of mud • Dark brown eyes • Faded, worn, and dirty cloth pants • Callused and worn feet. Covered in scars and new cuts • Callused hands and chewed fingernails • Whip welts and scars on his back • 15-years-old • he is a very free and rebellious spirit • He hates both of the masters and hates his father • He is very sensitive sometimes • He has a scar from his right eye to his ear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles was born on a plantation in Virginia • He was sold to a plantation across the state when he was ten • His family had been taking from Africa and been in America about fifty years • The plantation was ten acres, and the master owned a large house 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charles was born on June 8, • His father was not a black man, but a white traveler who came upon his mother in the field. When the master found out, he killed the man • He started working before the age of five, which was what was usual for slave children, because his master was a most sadistic person • He was beaten regularly, because he was a rebellious boy who hated the working and the rules, and the master. It was this that first sparked and started fueling a burning rage • When he was ten years old he was sold to a friend of his master as punishment to his mother for trying to escape with him • His master beats him for more trivial things than spilling milk and dropping stones in a well • He has grabbed the lash while being whipped and got hit on the head with a shovel, causing the scar
<p style="text-align: center;">Fears</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is scared for his mother and what was happening to her • He is scared of his anger and is afraid that one day he will snap, and be punished more harshly than before • He is scared that he will be sold again and never be able to find his mother • He is scared of death • Even more, he is terrified of life 	<p style="text-align: center;">Strength/weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He doesn't give up • He doesn't break down • He is susceptible to rage • He is a "lone wolf" • He's a social outcast • He doesn't trust anyone • His mother is a vulnerable tool to use against him • He is inexperienced in the ways of escape which might be his downfall when he tries to escape • He is strong and very articulate for a slave • He knew how to write, poorly, but he knew how 	

Charles (cont)

Freedom

- The way he shows his freedom is he works only when instructed harshly and is physically forced to
- He will occasionally break tools and scare other slaves so that they halt there work (kind of a manipulation way to slow down work)
- He will drum on the spade of the shovel while in the fields

Consequences g/b

- IT slows down work and aggravates the dull witted master
- It makes Charles feel much more a free soul
- When he is caught drumming he is beaten
- If he is to rebellious when being instructed to work he could get severely injured
- If he breaks tools he could get other slaves beaten angry at him

Story

- The story will be written as an interview conducted by a professor to Charles as a free, educated man
- Charles will give an account of his life in an interview
- It will be an account of the major points of his life and touch on the points that are general and not exactly the most important

Bibliography

Columbia Tri Star (producer) & E.Z. (director). (1989). Glory. [motion picture].
Columbia Tri Star

HBO Home Videos (producer) & T.L., E.B. (directors). (2002). Unchained
Memories. [motion picture]. (U.S.) HBO Home Videos

Yetman, N. (2000) Voices From Slavery.
Pubns, D.

Public Broadcasting Service (1995) Runaway Notice for Harriet Jacobs. Retrieved
3/8/04 from the website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h1541b.html>

Public Broadcasting Service (1995) The Underground Railroad. Retrieved 3/3/04
from website: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html>

Rice, A. (---) Interview With a Vampire.
Alfred A. Knopf, New York.