The desire to learn is as important as the information to be learned. In this excerpt from The Autobiography of Malcolm X, the author writes about what motivated him to learn and the strategies he used. Read the excerpt below to find out more about Malcolm X's determination to educate himself. Use information from the excerpt to answer the questions that follow.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

by Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley

1. It was because of my letters that I happened to stumble upon starting to acquire some kind of a homemade education.

2. I became increasingly frustrated at not being able to express what I wanted to convey in letters that I wrote, especially those to Mr. Elijah Muhammad. In the street, I had been the most articulate hustler out there—I had commanded attention when I said something. But now, trying to write simple English, I not only wasn't articulate, I wasn't even functional. How would I sound writing in slang, the way I would say it, something such as, “Look, daddy, let me pull your coat about a cat, Elijah Mu-

3. Many who today hear me somewhere in person, or on television, or those who read something I've said, will think I went to school far beyond the eighth grade. This impression is due entirely to my prison studies.

4. It had really begun back in the Charlestown Prison, when Bimbi first made me feel envy of his stock of knowledge. Bimbi had always taken charge of any conversations he was in, and I had tried to emulate him. But every book I picked up had few sentences which didn't contain anywhere from one to nearly all of the words that might as well have been in Chinese. When I just skipped those words, of course, I really ended up with little idea of what the book said. So I had come to the Norfolk Prison Colony still going through only book-reading motions. Pretty soon, I would have quit even these motions, unless I had received the motivation that I did.

Relationships: This excerpt focuses on the relationship of man to his environment, and on education as a way to change that relationship. Malcolm X reflects on what led him to want to improve his reading and writing, and the pride he felt in doing so.

See especially: Questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 9

Structure: This excerpt is a mostly chronological narration of his process of learning to read. The one break in the chronological structure occurs in ¶3 when the text shifts to the present tense to point out that people's impressions of him as educated and articulate are due to the learning he did while in prison.

See especially: Questions 3, 8

Richness: Knowing something about the history of Malcolm X would enhance students’ appreciation of the transformation brought about by his self-education.

Vocabulary: The words used are mostly accessible, with only a few unfamiliar words.

See especially: Questions 4, 6; words in bold italics
5 I saw that the best thing I could do was get hold of a dictionary—to study, to learn some words. I was lucky enough to reason also that I should try to improve my penmanship. It was sad. I couldn’t even write in a straight line. It was both ideas together that moved me to request a dictionary along with some tablets and pencils from the Norfolk Prison Colony school.

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9 I woke up the next morning, thinking about those words—immensely proud to realize that not only had I written so much at one time, but I’d written words that I never knew were in the world. Moreover, with a little effort, I also could remember what many of these words meant. I reviewed the words whose meanings I didn’t remember. Funny thing, from the dictionary first page right now, that “aardvark” springs to my mind. The dictionary had a picture of it, a long-tailed, long-eared, burrowing African mammal, which lives off termites caught by sticking out its tongue as an anteater does for ants.

10 I was so fascinated that I went on—I copied the dictionary’s next page. And the same experience came when I studied that. With every succeeding page, I also learned of people and places and events from history. Actually the dictionary is like a miniature encyclopedia. Finally the dictionary’s A section had filled a whole tablet—and I went on into the B’s. That was the way I started copying what eventually became the entire dictionary. It went a lot faster after so much practice helped me to pick up handwriting speed. Between what I wrote in my tablet, and writing letters, during the rest of my time in prison I would guess I wrote a million words.

11 I suppose it was inevitable that as my word-base broadened, I could for the first time pick up a book and read and now begin to understand what the book was saying. Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened. Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk. You couldn’t have gotten me out of books with a wedge. Between Mr. Muhammad’s teachings, my correspondence, my visitors—usually Ella and Reginald—and my reading of books, months passed without my ever thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.
**Teacher Guide for FAST-R Passage:** Autobiography of Malcolm X

**Autobiographical narrative**

The annotated answer key below highlights common reasons students might choose each answer, and the sidebar gives more insight into the question types, to help you understand patterns of student responses. Always make time to follow up with students in conferences or small groups to probe their thinking, teach in response to patterns, and help them apply effective reading and thinking strategies to their everyday reading.

**Note:** You may find it helpful to refer to the “Types and Levels of Thinking Assessed on FAST-R” sheet from your teacher resource folder as you examine your students’ responses. The icon in the right-hand column, below, corresponds to that sheet’s more detailed explanations of the kinds of thinking each type of question asks of readers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer(s)</th>
<th>FE2: Recognize the explicit meaning from varied wording in the text</th>
<th>MI1: Determine implicit meaning from words in context</th>
<th>MI5: Determine meaning by incorporating an understanding of literary concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. According to the excerpt, what inspired Malcolm X to educate himself? | ✓ A. He wanted his letters to be more eloquent. (¶2)  
B. He wanted to become a great leader. (OOB)  
C. He wanted to get a job in education. (OOP2, ¶5)  
D. He wanted his family to be proud of him. (OOP2, ¶9) | | | |
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B. impress his relatives and keep himself busy. (OOB)  
C. improve his conversations with his friends. (OOP1, ¶2)  
D. assist him in understanding legal documents. (OOB) | | | |
| 3. Who is Bimbi? | A. Malcolm X's brother (OOB)  
✓ B. a knowledgable inmate from the Charlestown prison (¶4)  
C. a minister (OOB)  
D. an inmate who spoke Chinese in the Charlestown prison (OOP2, ¶4) | | | |
| 4. In paragraph 4, the word “emulate” means | A. admire. (OOB)  
B. motivate. (OOP2, ¶4)  
✓ C. imitate.  
D. betray. (OOB) | | | |
| 5. The author uses italics in paragraph 6 to | A. identify a direct quote. (OOB)  
B. introduce a contrast. (OOP2)  
C. set off a title. (OOB)  
✓ D. emphasize a word. | | | |
| 6. In paragraph 10, “tablet” means | A. a small table. (OOB)  
B. a stone with writing on it. (OOB)  
C. a pill. (OOB)  
✓ D. a notebook. | | | |
Malcolm X, whose given name was Malcolm Little, became one of the most influential leaders and activists of the 20th century. He spent his early years in Wisconsin and then Michigan until a white supremacist group killed his father and drove the rest of the family out of town.

Malcolm X dropped out of school after the 7th grade and headed to New York where he had various odd jobs and then became involved in a life of crime.

Malcolm X periodically lived in Boston as well, and it was during one of his stays in Boston that he was arrested and sentenced to a 10-year prison term in Charlestown, MA. He taught himself to read in the Charlestown prison library.

Also while in prison, Malcolm X was introduced to the Nation of Islam, headed by Elijah Muhammad. He became an avid follower and outspoken member of the sect. It was around this time that he changed his last name from “Little,” which he described as a “slave name,” to “X,” a letter representing his lost African tribal name.

Once released from prison, Malcolm X was known to give fiery speeches where he advocated freedom, justice, and equality for African Americans “by any means necessary.” He later traveled to Mecca, Islam’s holy city, and returned with new views on how Black people in America could work through established channels to fight white racism.

To help him write his life’s story, he commissioned Alex Haley, a writer who would later become most famous for his book and ground-breaking TV mini-series, Roots. In 1965, the same year his autobiography was published, Malcolm X was shot by an unknown assassin while he was preparing to deliver a speech in Harlem.

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**Spotlight on: Malcolm X**

FAST-R: Formative Assessment in Student Thinking in Reading. The passage text by Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley is from The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1964). Copyright © 1964 by Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley. Some questions were drawn or adapted from the G10 MCAS Retest 2005 test. All other materials are Copyright 2007 by the Boston Plan for Excellence.
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Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by filling in the circle for the best answer on your answer sheet.

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   A. a small table.
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7. The purpose of paragraph 3 is to
   A. explain his motivation for learning to read.
   B. emphasize the significant impact of his “prison studies” on his career.
   C. establish the fame of Malcolm X.
   D. explain why he went to Charlestown prison.

8. The author’s main purpose in discussing the “aardvark” in paragraph 9 is to support the idea that
   A. the “A” page of the dictionary is the most important page.
   B. he still remembers what he learned from studying the dictionary.
   C. he can relate to the aardvark.
   D. there are things from Africa in the dictionary.

9. In paragraph 11, Malcolm X uses the metaphor, “You couldn’t have gotten me out of books with a wedge,” to
   A. show that his task was overwhelming.
   B. emphasize his love of reading.
   C. suggest that prison was too confining.
   D. appeal to the reader’s sympathy.

10. What irony is expressed in the last two sentences of the excerpt?
    A. Malcolm X disliked having visitors in prison.
    B. Few people knew anything about Malcolm X.
    C. Elijah Muhammad joined Malcolm X in prison.
    D. Malcolm X found a type of freedom in prison.
FAST-R Answer Sheet

Name ___________________________ School ___________________________

Date ___________________________ Grade ___________ Class ___________

Passage Title ___________________________ Teacher Name ___________________________

Completely fill the circle for the correct answer.

1. A B C D
2. A B C D
3. A B C D
4. A B C D
5. A B C D
6. A B C D
7. A B C D
8. A B C D
9. A B C D
10. A B C D

Write your answer to the open response prompt in the lined space below. if your teacher directs you to do so.

1. __________________________________________
2. __________________________________________
3. __________________________________________
4. __________________________________________
5. __________________________________________
6. __________________________________________
7. __________________________________________
8. __________________________________________
9. __________________________________________
10. __________________________________________

OFFICE USE ONLY

RESEARCH: Y N
OPEN RESPONSE: 1 2 3 4