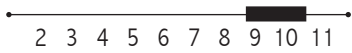


Teacher Guide for FAST-R Passage: Autobiography of Malcolm X

FAST-R: Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading

Autobiographical narrative

At a Glance

Approximate Grade Range:  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Genre: Autobiographical narrative


Topic: Malcolm X reflects on what motivated him to learn to read and write.


Author: Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley

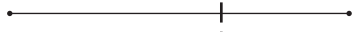
Source: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964)


Special Note: used on MCAS retest 2005


Difficulty Index: Considerate Challenging


Structure: 

Purpose: 

Richness: 

Relationships: 

Vocabulary: 

Style: 

Lexile Measure: 1200L

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 Muhammad—."
- 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

Continued on next page →

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.

6 I spent two days just riffling uncertainly through the dictionary's pages. I'd never realized so many words existed! I didn't know *which* words I needed to learn. Finally, just to start some kind of action, I began copying.

7 In my slow, painstaking, ragged handwriting, I copied into my tablet everything printed on that first page, down to the punctuation marks.

8 I believe it took me a day. Then, aloud, I read back, to myself, everything I'd written on the tablet. Over and over, aloud, to myself, I read my own handwriting.

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 even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.

Style: This first-person autobiographical narrative uses straightforward, mostly simple sentences with expressive phrasing and specific examples.

See especially: Questions 5, 9

.....
: **Ideas for Connected Writing Activities** :
:

- Explain how Malcolm X became motivated to learn to read and write.
- Write about the significance of reading in your own life.
- Construct a persuasive essay that makes an argument for why people should NOT have to learn to read (do the best you can!).

.....
: **Humanities Connections** :
:

- Research the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and Malcolm X's role in it.
 - Compare and contrast the leadership and philosophy of Malcolm X with Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X with Frederick Douglass.
 - Based on his autobiography, what would Malcolm X think about today's society? Describe what would make him feel angry, happy, sad, and/or hopeful.
-

Richness: The theme of education as a form of liberation, or freeing of the mind, is made explicit here.

See especially: Questions 7, 8, 10

.....
: **Spotlight on Malcolm X:** See the final page of this teacher guide for the text of the **Spotlight On: Malcolm X.** :
.....

Teacher Guide for FAST-R Passage: Autobiography of Malcolm X

FAST-R: Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading 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.

1. According to the excerpt, what inspired Malcolm X to educate himself? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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)	FE2: <i>Recognize the explicit meaning from varied wording in the text</i>
2. According to the excerpt, Malcolm X began to use a dictionary to <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A. acquire new vocabulary and write more neatly. (¶5) 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)	FE2: <i>Recognize the explicit meaning from varied wording in the text</i>
3. Who is Bimbi? A. Malcolm X’s brother (OOB) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> B. a knowledgeable inmate from the Charlestown prison (¶4) C. a minister (OOB) D. an inmate who spoke Chinese in the Charlestown prison (OOP2, ¶4)	FE2: <i>Recognize the explicit meaning from varied wording in the text</i>
4. In paragraph 4, the word “emulate” means A. admire. (OOB) B. motivate. (OOP2, ¶4) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C. imitate. D. betray. (OOB)	MI1: <i>Determine implicit meaning from words in context</i>
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) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> D. emphasize a word.	MI5: <i>Determine meaning by incorporating an understanding of literary concepts</i>
6. In paragraph 10, “tablet” means A. a small table. (OOB) B. a stone with writing on it. (OOB) C. a pill. (OOB) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> D. a notebook.	MI1: <i>Determine implicit meaning from words in context</i>

Grades 9-10 • Autobiographical narrative • “The Autobiography of Malcolm X”

7. The purpose of paragraph 3 is to

- A. explain his motivation for learning to read. (OOP1, ¶2, 4)
- ✓ B. emphasize the significant impact of his “prison studies” on his career.
- C. establish the fame of Malcolm X. (OOB)
- D. explain why he went to Charlestown prison. (OOP2, ¶4)

MI2: Determine a singular meaning from the sum total of a particular paragraph

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. (OOP2, ¶10)
- ✓ B. he still remembers what he learned from studying the dictionary.
- C. he can relate to the aardvark. (OOB)
- D. there are things from Africa in the dictionary. (OOP2, ¶9)

MI3: Determine implicit meaning by understanding the organization of information in the text

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. (OOP2, ¶6)
- ✓ B. emphasize his love of reading. (¶11)
- C. suggest that prison was too confining. (OOP2, ¶11)
- D. appeal to the reader’s sympathy. (OOB)

MI5: Determine meaning by incorporating an understanding of literary concepts

10. What irony is expressed in the last two sentences of the excerpt?

- A. Malcolm X disliked having visitors in prison. (OOP2, ¶11)
- B. Few people knew anything about Malcolm X. (OOP2, ¶3)
- C. Elijah Muhammad joined Malcolm X in prison. (OOP2, ¶2, 11)
- ✓ D. Malcolm X found a type of freedom in prison. (¶11)

MI5: Determine meaning by incorporating an understanding of literary concepts

Spotlight on: Malcolm X

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 Muhammed. 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 Afri-

can 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. •

FAST-R

Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading



Name	The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Autobiographical narrative)
Date	Teacher/Class

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.

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by Malcolm X as told to Alex Haley

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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.

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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.

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FAST-R Formative Assessments of Student Thinking in Reading



Name _____ "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" • Autobiographical narrative

Date _____ Teacher/Class _____

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by filling in the circle for the best answer on your answer sheet.

1. According to the excerpt, what inspired Malcolm X to educate himself?

- A. He wanted his letters to be more eloquent.
- B. He wanted to become a great leader.
- C. He wanted to get a job in education.
- D. He wanted his family to be proud of him.

2. According to the excerpt, Malcolm X began to use a dictionary to

- A. acquire new vocabulary and write more neatly.
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3. Who is Bimbi?

- A. Malcolm X's brother
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- C. a minister
- D. an inmate who spoke Chinese in the Charlestown prison

4. In paragraph 4, the word "emulate" means

- A. admire.
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5. The author uses italics in paragraph 6 to

- A. identify a direct quote.
- B. introduce a contrast.
- C. set off a title.
- D. emphasize a word.

Name

School

Date

Teacher/Class

6. In paragraph 10, “tablet” means

- A. a small table.
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- C. a pill.
- D. a notebook.

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- 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.

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

- 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

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RESEARCH:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
OPEN RESPONSE:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>