The Escape of William and Ellen Craft

Before Reading

The true story of William and Ellen Craft has been told since 1848 when William and Ellen escaped slavery and made it to freedom in Philadelphia. Their story is different from many others in part because Ellen could pass for white. Her mother was a slave, but her father was the plantation owner. Some visitors mistook her for her owners' daughter. William was recognizable as African-American, but he had an interesting background too. He was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker. His owner realized that once William learned a trade, he could earn money for his master. William worked and his owner allowed William to keep the money he made when he worked overtime. William and Ellen both had easy lives compared to field hands and they had each other, so they had a lot to lose when they risked escaping. The story goes that William very much wanted to escape. He was the one that came up with the idea for Ellen to pass as white. He realized that a white woman would never travel alone with a black male slave, so he revised his idea. What if Ellen dressed as a young gentleman? Then he could travel with her as a slave. At first Ellen dismissed the idea. She couldn't imagine keeping up the disguise for the days and nights it would take to get to Philadelphia from Georgia. Finally, she agreed.

Reading: An Excellent Disguise

Even the purchase of the disguise was difficult. It was against the law in Georgia for a white man to trade with a slave without his master's consent. Still, there were some storekeepers who were willing to sell to slaves–not because they were sympathetic to the slaves, but because a slave could never tell on them, since a slave could not testify in court against a free white person.

William stealthily went to different parts of town at odd times, buying a coat, a shirt and a hat for Ellen, and a hat for himself. In this way he was able to acquire everything needed for Ellen's disguise, except a pair of trousers. These Ellen had to sew for herself. Ellen hid all the purchases in the chest of drawers William had made for her.

. . .

They were able to get passes from their owners to visit friends. Because it was the holiday season, they had a good excuse. Next Ellen realized that when they traveled, people would expect her, a young, white man to be able to read and write. She would have to sign her name in guest books, for example. Luckily she had a brainstorm:

. . . "I can make a bandage and bind up my right hand in a sling, and ask the hotel proprietors to register my name for me."

It then occurred to Ellen that the smoothness of her face might betray the fact that she was a woman. She decided to place a bandage on her cheek, and tie a scarf under her chin and over her cheeks, as if she were suffering from a bad toothache. But would not her eyes betray her fear? William went to yet another shop and bought a pair of green eyeglasses for her.

William and Ellen stayed up all night going over their plans, trying to think of all situations that might arise. Just before the time came for them to leave, William cut off Ellen's hair. Ellen then dressed in her disguise.

These excerpts are from Two Tickets to Freedom *by Florence B. Freedman. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1971, p. 22-23. You can also read the story of William and Ellen Craft in the book* Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom *(originally publised in England in 1861 and reprinted in 1969).*

After Reading

1. Ellen Craft's story is about passing as someone she wasn't. List all the ways Ellen had to alter her appearance to pass. Have you ever passed as a different race or gender? What was the experience like?

2. Some people who dress the way of that the opposite sex dresses like the feeling. They continue to dress that way whenever they can even if they can't do it every day. Find a woman who wears men's clothes or a man who wears women's clothes to interview. Find out what makes the clothes of the opposite sex attractive. Do you think Ellen Craft continued to wear men's clothes once she got used to them? Why?

Dirty Laundry

Before Reading:

1. Discussion
Are you responsible for doing laundry?
For yourself, or for others as well?
Describe doing the laundry: long does it take; do you iron clothes; how often do you do it; where do you do it; etc.

2. Vocabulary
As you read, please underline any sentences in the reading that you think are especially important for understanding what it is about. If you run into any unfamiliar vocabulary, you can look at the list below for help:

diarist - someone who writes a diary
Herculean - Hercules was a Greek god known for incredible strength
domestic - related to the home or housework
advocated - suggested or argued for
stance - position or opinion
jettisoned - got rid of
discretionary - a situation where an individual makes her own decision about something Caustic - harsh or strong (like a chemical)
bluing - a laundry product that makes clothes look brighter
adjacent - next to

Reading: Doing the Laundry

Of all the household chores that depended on hauling water and building fires to heat it, laundry earned the most complaints from nineteenth-century housewives and the writers who advised them. Rachel Haskell, the Nevada diarist, called it "the Herculean task which women all dread" and "the great domestic dread of the household"; she complained of her aching back and "hands too tender to sew" and "thought I should not attempt to do this another week but suppose when the day comes shall do so rather than send clothes up town. Nearly every writer of household advice made the same point: laundry should not be a one-woman job. Catharine Beecher called it "the American housekeeper's hardest problem" and advocated its removal from household routine, despite her general stance promoting housework as women's "proper profession." From all available evidence–how-to manuals, budget studies of poor people's households, diaries–it appears that women jettisoned laundry, their most hated task, whenever they had any discretionary money at all. Although their solutions varied, even women of limited means sought relief in the form of washerwomen, commercial laundries, and mechanical aids. Without running water, gas, or electricity, even the most simplified hand-laundry process consumed staggering amounts of time and labor. One wash, one boiling, and one rinse used about fifty gallons of water - or four hundred pounds - which had to be moved from pump or well or faucet to stove and tub, in buckets and wash boilers that might weigh as much as forty or fifty pounds. Rubbing, wringing, and lifting water-laden clothes and linens, including large articles like sheets, tablecloths, and men's heavy work clothes, wearied women's arms and wrists and exposed them to caustic substances. They lugged weighty tubs and baskets full of wet laundry outside, picked up each article, hung it on the line, and returned to take it all down; they ironed by heating several irons on the stove and alternating them as they cooled, never straying far from the hot stove.

Without miracle fabrics, washing machines, or detergents, getting clothes really clean was a complicated process, described in almost identical detail by Catharine Beecher in 1841 and Helen Campbell forty years later as the "common mode of washing." Sort the clothes first by color, fabric, and degree of soil, they suggested, and soak them over

night in separate tubs full of warm water; with few soaps or washing fluids, overnight soaking saved "considerable labor." The next morning, drain off that water and pour hot suds on the finest clothes. (Beecher suggested wringing them out from this first suds bath, then throwing them into another tub of hot suds, but one wash water was sufficient for Campbell.) Wash each article in that suds bath, rubbing it against the washboard. Wring them out, rub soap on the most soiled spots, then cover them with water in the boiler on the stove and "boil them up. (Beecher suggested "moving them about, with the wash-stick, to keep them from getting yellow in spots" during the boiling. Although Campbell, like everybody else, recommended some boiling, she emphasized that a short scalding would suffice; "long boiling does not improve clothes." Take them out of the boiler, rub dirty spots again, rinse in plain water, wring out, rinse again in water with bluing, wring very dry, dip the articles to be stiffened in starch, and wring once more. Hang clothes on the line until perfectly dry. And while that load is on the line, repeat the entire process on progressively coarser and dirtier loads of clothes.

It took all day. Monday was traditional because most people changed their clothes on Sunday and the operation could be eased by washing "before dirt has had time to harden in the fiber of the cloth. Campbell hinted that Tuesday might be better because it allowed for preparation on Monday, saving Sunday as a day of rest; otherwise the tubs could be filled on Saturday night and warmed on Sunday night with just a bit more hot water, in preparation for a Monday washing. Although same women may have rebelled at the tradition - one California woman recalled that her mother "said she'd wash on the day she wanted to, so she did" - most, at least in towns, found a whole community of women outside on Mondays, gossiping in groups "awaiting their turn at the pump" and hanging laundry on adjacent lines, displaying (and competing about) their skills and their pride in their craft. Every other household chore suffered on washday; washday meals consisted of whatever was easiest, and a good husband would "eat a cold dinner on washday without grumbling. Ironing usually consumed the day after washday. First the dry clothes had to be dampened; Campbell suggested either sprinkling them with the hand or "shaking over them a small whisk-broom which is dipped as needed in water. Rolled in a cloth and left to sit for one to twelve hours (depending on the kind of material and the person giving the advice), they awaited ironing. Three to six irons, each rubbed with beeswax and wiped before each use, stayed hot on a piece

of sheet iron set on a heart "free from cinders and ashes, later in the century, on a stove; cast-iron stoves must have saved many a woman from the irritation and extra work of clothes soiled by sooty irons. Every iron fresh from the fire had to be tried on a piece of paper or spare cloth to be sure it would not scorch the cloth. Large articles were ironed on tables, covered with a woolen ironing blanket and then a linen or cotton ironing sheet; for smaller items, both Beecher and Campbell recommended a bosom-board, which raised the fronts of shirts from the regular ironing surface, and a skirt-board. "This," wrote Beecher in 1841, "is a board five feet long, two feet wide at one end, tapering to one foot and four inches wide at the other," the large end resting on a table and the small one on a chair; "it saves much trouble, in ironing the skirts of dresses, and enables the ironer to do them quicker and better. " By 1894, Montgomery Ward offered three different folding ironing boards: one standard kind that came in six sizes, one "adjustable to standing or sitting position, " and a third that could double as a stepladder. Fluting, crimping, and ruffling irons for fancy work were available as early as Beecher's 1841 book.

After Reading:

Multiple Choice Practice

1. Which list correctly summarizes Beecher's and Campbell's directions for doing laundry?

(1) sort, boil, wash, soak, wash, wring, rinse
(2) sort, soak, wash, boil, rinse, wring, rinse, wring
(3) sort, soak, boil, wash, rinse, wring, rinse
(4) soak, wash, rinse, wring, wash, boil, rinse, wring

2. Which of the following statements can NOT be concluded from the reading?

(1) For women in the 1800's, keeping their famliies' clothing clean was a task requiring many hours each week.
(2) The washing machine was invented because women com plained bitterly about the hard work of hand washing.
(3) In the 19th century, taking care significant physical strength.
(4) Among household chores, most women preferred cooking to laundry in the 19th century.

Writing Activity

1. What do you think might have been same of the promises made to housewives in advertisements for the first automatic washing machines?

2. On a separate sheet of paper, design a magazine ad for the first automatic washer. Include some of the promises you described above. And use your imagination!

3. Think about how we do laundry today. It's certainly a lot easier than it used to be. But then, we own a lot more clothes and expect them to be much cleaner than one hundred years ago. Write a paragraph analyzing the "promises" made by the introduction of automatic washing machines. Have they been kept?

4. Many women in cultures around the world still do laundry as described in this reading. Do you come from such a culture? Is there someone in your family–a mother or grandmother who remembers what it is like? If not, find someone who comes from such a culture and who remembers what it is like. Interview her or him and ask what they remember about it, how the laundry was done and how they felt about it.

Susie King Taylor
1848-1912

Before Reading

Susie King Taylor speaks about slavery times and post-war times for African-Americans in the south. She was a nurse and teacher and became a writer. Why do you think she wrote her life story? As you read, think about the rules for her times, which ones she lived by and which she broke. What skills did she have? How did she make a living?

Reading: Excerpts from her Autobiography

Clandestine School
My brother and I being the two eldest, we were sent to a friend of my grandmother, Mrs. Woodhouse, a widow, to learn to read and write. She was free woman and lived on Bay Lane, about half a mile from my house.

We went every day about nine o'clock, with our books wrapped in paper to prevent the police or white persons from seeing them.

We went in, one at a time, through the gate, into the yard to the L kitchen, which was the schoolroom. She had twenty-five or thirty children whom she taught, assisted by her daughter, Mary Jane. The neighbors would see us going in sometimes, but they supposed we were there learning trades, as it was the custom to give children a trade of some kind.

After school we left the same way we entered, one by one, when we would go to a square, about a block from the school, and wait for each other. We would gather laurel leaves and pop them on our hands, on our way home.

I remained at her school for two years or more, when I was sent to a Mrs. Mary Beasley, where I continued until May, 1860, when she told

my grandmother she had taught me all she knew, and grandmother had better get some one else who could teach me more, so I stopped my studies for a while.

I had a white playmate about this time, named Katie O'Connor, who lived on the next corner of the street from my house, and who attended a convent. One day she told me, if I would promise not to tell her father, she would give me some lessons. On my promise not to do so, and getting her mother's consent, she gave me lessons about four months, every evening. At the end of this time she was put into the convent permanently, and I have never seen her since.

. . .

The Uses of Literacy

I often wrote passes . . . for all colored persons, free or slaves, were compelled to have a pass; free colored people having a guardian in place of a master. These passes were good until 10 or 10:30 p.m. for one night or every night for one month. The pass read as follows:

Savannah, GA., March 1, 1860.
Pass the bearer from 9 to 10:30 p.m.
Valentine Grest

Every person had to have this pass, for at nine o'clock each night a bell was rung, and any colored persons found on the street after this hour were arrested by the watchman, and put in the guardhouse until next morning, when their owners would pay their fines and release them.

I knew a number of persons who went out at any time at night and were never arrested, as the watchment knew them so well he never stopped them, and seldom asked to see their passes, only stopping them long enough, sometimes, to say "Howdy," and then telling them to go along.

About this time I had been reading so much about the "Yankees" I was very anxious to see them. The whites would tell their colored people not to go the the Yankees, for they would harness them to carts and make them pull the carts around, in place of horses.

I asked grandmother one day if this was true. She replied, "Certainly not!" that the white people did not want slaves to go over to the Yankees, and told them these things to frighten them. "Don't you see those signs pasted about the streets? one reading, 'I am a rattlesnake; if you touch me I will strike!' Another reads, 'I am a wild-cat! Beware,' etc. These are warnings to the North so don't mind what the white people say."

I wanted to see these wonderful "Yankees" so much, as I heard my parents say the Yankee was going to set all the slaves free. Oh, how those people prayed for freedom!

A New Life

On February 9, 1866, the regiment was mustered out. My husband and I returned to Savannah, a number of the comrades returning at the same time. A new life was before us no, all the old life left behind. After getting settled, I opened a school at my home, as there was not any public shool for Negro children.

I had twenty children at my school, and received one dollar a month for each pupil. I also had a few older ones who came at night. There were several other private schools besides mine, one on the same street I lived on. I taught almost a year, when a free school opened, which took a number of my scholars.

My husband, Sergeant King, was a boss carpenter, but being just mustered out of the army, and the prejudice against his race being still too strong to insure much work at his trade, he took contracts for unloading vessels, and hired a number of men to assist him.

On September 16, 1866, he died, leaving me soon to welcome a little stranger alone.

In December, I was obliged to give up teaching, but in April, 1867, I opened a school in Liberty County, Georgia, and taught there one year; but country life did not agree with me, so I returned to the city, and a friend took charge of my school.

On my return to Savannah, I found that the free school had by now taken all my former pupils, so I opened a night school, where I taught a number of adults.

This together with other things I could get to do and the assistance of my brother-in-law supported me. I taught this school until the fall of 1868, when a free night school opened, and again my scholars left me, and I had to close my school.

The Work of Colored Women During the War

There are many people who do not know what some of the colored women did during the war. There were hundreds of them who assisted the Union soldiers by hiding them and helping them to escape.

Many were punished for taking food to the prison stockades for the prisoners. When I went into Savannah, in 1865, I was told of one of these stockades which was in the suburbs of the city.

The Union soldiers were in it, worse than pigs, wthout any shelter from sun or storm, and the colored women would take food there at night and pass it to them, though the holes in the fence. The soldiers were starving and these women did all they could towards relieving those men, although they knew the penalty, shoud they be caught giving them aid.

Others assisted in various ways the Union army. These things should be kept in history before the people. There has never been a greater war in the United States than the one of 1861, where so many lives were lost,–not men alone, but noble women as well.

Let us not forget that terrible war, or our brave soldiers who were thrown into Andersonville and Libby prisons, the awful agony they went through, and the most brutal treatment they received in those loathsome dens, the worst ever given human beings; and if the white soldiers were sujected to such treatment, what must have been the horrors inflicted on the Negro soldiers in their prison pens? Can we forget those cruelties?

From Susie King Taylor's Autobiography in Growing Up Female in America*. by Eve Merriam. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971*, pp. 162-165 and pp.

173-174.

After Reading

1. A well-known expression says, "You can't believe everything you hear." Find two examples in Susie King Taylor's autobiography which prove this saying.

2. Give an example from your own life which proves the saying, "You can't believe everything you read."

3. What is Susie King Taylor's attitude toward rules? Which rules did she break in her life? Which rules did adults around her break? Why did they break them?

4. In some ways the work that Susie King Taylor did was invisible. Give two examples of what she and other colored women did which people didn't know about. Why does some people's work go unnoticed?

5. Given what you have learned about women's dress during this period, what do you imagine Susie King Taylor's clothing included? List the items she might have owned. Consider her income, the weather where she lived, and other circumstances that might have had an impact on her clothes.

A Woman Must Be Planning for Her Future

She was weary from teaching, and her work no longer offered any challenge. Her social life held only minimal interest for her, and it was no longer enough for her to be personally independent. "I have a pleasant school of 20 scholars," she admitted, but "I have had to manufacture the interest duty compels me to exhibit . . . energy and something to stimulate is wanting." . . . Yet she had not plans for her future, which aggravated her depression. "I am out of sorts with the world," Susan admitted. Would a shopping spree solve her problem? "I want a new $5 fancy hat, $15.00 pin, $20.00 mantilla, dresses, shoes, gloves, pocket handkerchief, oh yes, a nice fur." Apparently not. Instead she decided to have her old bonnets retrimmed and to remake her old dresses. Conservation was necessary if she were to leave teaching, especially since she had no future work or life direction in mind.

from Susan B. Anthony: A Biography of a Singular Feminist *by Kathleen Barry, New York: Ballantine Books, 1988, p. 50.*

After Reading

Locating Susan B. Anthony

1. Can you picture Susan B. Anthony? She is the only female figure to appear on U.S. coins or bills. You can find her on the dollar coin.

2. What did Anthony accomplish to claim her place in history? Try an internet search or the reference department of your local library. Many descriptions will call her a feminist and a leader. Unlike many women of the time, her parents believed women should be educated. She went to boarding schools, worked in her father's mill, became a teacher, and eventually put all her energy in reform movements.

Writing or Discussion Questions

1. What does the author say might cheer her up?

2. Does buying something for yourself sometimes change your mood? Why do you think that buying something can have this effect?

Multiple Choice Practice

1. What aspects of Susan's life contributed most to her lethargy? Choose all that apply.

(1) She had tragic love affairs that never ended well.
(2) Her work life didn't capture her interest.

(3) She couldn't reach the goals she set for herself.
(4) Teaching school didn't suit her personality.
(5) She didn't have enough money for new clothes.
(6) She had no goals in mind for herself.

2. In the sentence, "Conservation was necessary if she were to leave teaching, . . . " the word "conservation" means

(1) Susan had to save her money.
(2) Susan needed to stick with a conservative wardrobe.
(3) Susan had to express conservative views in discussions with her supervisor at the school.
(4) Susan needed to recycle her cans and bottles.

Question 3 is based on the following passage:

If teaching drained her, an argument with her uncle and cousins over slavery enlivened her. She was excited when her father visited and was "really glad to have father express his sentiments with regard to re-form. Though the good old folks call us crazy fanatics now, the day will come when they must acknowledge their stupidity." Temperance reform sparked her attention, . . . She wanted action now . . . But she was not focused . . . p. 50

3. Which of these statements is NOT supported by the passage?

(1) Susan got high talking and arguing about slavery and temperence.
(2) She and her father agreed that drinking is terrible.
(3) Susan is unclear about her focus.
(4) Susan's views were ahead of her time.
(5) All of the above

First Job

Before Reading

This reading is taken from one of the "Little House on the Prairie" series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder. These are the books on which the TV series of the same name, which was created in the 1980's and which you might see today in reruns, was based. Although the prairie family on the TV show endured many hardships and struggles, the overall tone of the show was usually very sunny. As you read, ask yourself how the tone of the book compares.

Reading: First Job

No one could imagine what work there could be for a girl in town, if it wasn't working as a hired girl in the hotel.

"It's a new idea of Clancy's," Pa said. Mr. Clancy was one of the new merchants. Pa was working on his store building. "We've got the store pretty near finished, and he's moving in his dry goods. His wife's mother's come West with them, and she's going to make shirts."

"Make shirts?" said Ma.

"Yes. So many men are baching on their claims around here that Clancy figures he'll get most of the trade in yard goods, with somebody there in the store making them up into shirts, for men that haven't got any womenfolks to do their sewing."

"That is a good idea," Ma had to admit.

"You bet! There's no flies on Clancy," said Pa. "He's got a machine to sew the shirts."

Ma was interested. "A sewing machine. Is it like that picture we saw in the Inter-Ocean? How does it work?"

"About like I figured out it would," Pa answered. "You work the pedal with your feet, and that turns the wheel and works the needle up and down. There's a little contraption underneath the needle that's wound full of thread, too. Clancy was showing some of us. It goes like greased lightning, and makes as neat a seam as you'd want to see."

"I wonder how much it costs," said Ma.

"'Way too much for ordinary folks," said Pa. "But Clancy looks on it as an investment; he'll get his money back in profits."

"Yes, of course," Ma said. Laura knew she was thinking of how much work such a machine would save, but even if they could afford it, it would be foolish to buy one only for family sewing. "Does he expect Laura to learn how to run it?"

Laura was alarmed. She could not be responsible for some accident to such a costly machine.

"Oh, no, Mrs. White's going to run it," Pa replied. "She wants a good handy girl to help with the hand sewing."

...

She did not want to work in town, among strangers. But she couldn't refuse a chance to earn maybe fifteen dollars, or ten, or five. She swallowed, and asked, "May I go, Ma?"

Ma sighed. "I don't like it much, but it isn't as if you had to go alone. Your Pa will be there in town. Yes, if you want to, you may."

"I-don't want to leave you all the work to do," Laura faltered.

Carrie eagerly offered to help. She could make beds, and sweep, and do the dishes by herself, and weed in the garden. Ma said that Mary was a great help in the house, too, and now that the stock was picketed out, the evening's chores were not so much to do. She said, "We'll miss you, Laura, but we can manage."

There was no time to waste next morning. Laura brought the water and milked Ellen, she hurried to wash and to brush and braid her hair

and pin it up. She put on her newest calico dress, and stockings and shoes. She rolled up her thimble in a freshly ironed apron.

[Laura decides to try the new job despite her fears. She and her father walk into town together early the next morning.]

The inside of the store was all new, and still smelled of pine shavings. It had, too, the faint starchy smell of bolts of new cloth. Behind two long counters, all along both walls ran long shelves, stacked to the ceiling with bolts of muslin and calicoes and lawns, challis and cashmeres and flannels and even silks.

There were no groceries, and no hardware, no shoes or tools. In the whole store there was nothing but dry goods. Laura had never before seen a store where nothing was sold but dry goods.

At her right hand was a short counter-top of glass, and inside it were cards of all kinds of buttons, and papers of needles and pins. On the counter beside it, a rack was full of spools of thread of every color. Those colored threads were beautiful in the light from the windows.

...

Pa gave Laura a helping smile, and then he was gone.

Laura hoped that her trembly feeling would wear off, in time. She hung up her bonnet, tied on her apron, and put her finger into the thimble. Mrs. White handed her pieces of a shirt to baste together, and told her to take the chair in the window by the sewing machine.

Quickly Laura drew the straight-backed chair back a little way, so that the sewing machine partly hid her from the street. She bent her head over her work and basted rapidly.

Mrs. White did not say a word. Anxiously and nervously she kept fitting the pattern-pieces to the goods and cutting out shirt after shirt with long shears. As soon as Laura finished basting a shirt, Mrs. White took it from her and gave her another to baste.

After a time, she sat down at the machine. She whirled its wheel with her hand, and then her feet working fast on the pedal underneath kept

the wheel whirring. The racketing hum of the machine filled Laura's head like the buzzing of a gigantic bumblebee. The wheel was a blur and the needle was a streak of light. Mrs. White's plump hands scrambled on the cloth, feeding it rapidly under the needle.

Laura basted as fast as she could. She put the basted shirt on the shrinking pile at Mrs. White's left hand, seized pieces of the next one from the counter and basted it. Mrs. White took basted shirts from the pile, sewed them on the machine and piled them at her right hand.

There was a pattern in the way the shirts went, from the counter to Laura to a pile, from the pile to Mrs. White and through the machine to another pile. It was something like the circles that men and teams had made on the prairie, building the railroad. But only Laura's hands moved, driving the needle as fast as they could along the seams.

Her shoulders began to ache, and the back of her neck. Her chest was cramped and her legs felt tired and heavy. The loud machine buzzed in her head.

Suddenly the machine stopped, still. "There!" Mrs. White said. She had sewed the last basted shirt.

Laura still had to gather a sleeve and to baste the armhole and under-arm seam. And the pieces of one more shirt lay waiting on the counter.

"I'll baste that one," Mrs. White said, snatching it up. "We're behindhand."

"Yes, ma'am," Laura said. She felt she should have worked faster, but she had done the best she could.

[At midday Laura joins the family for a noisy dinner. Then she and Mrs. White get back to work.]

In two hours they finished the four shirts. Laura based the collars carefully; collars are hard to set properly onto a shirt. Mrs. White sewed them on the machine. Then there were the cuffs to set on the sleeves, and the narrow hems all around the shirt bottoms to be done. Then the fronts, and the cuff openings, were to be faced. There were all the small buttons to sew firmly on, and the buttonholes to be made.

It is not easy to space buttonholes exactly the same distance apart, and it is very difficult to cut them precisely the right size. The tiniest slip of the scissors will make the hole too large, and even one thread uncut will leave it too small.

...

Laura had never sat still so long. Her shoulders ached, her neck ached, her fingers were roughened by needle pricks and her eyes were hot and blurry. Twice she had to take out bastings and do them over. She was glad to stand up and fold her work when Pa came in.

They walked briskly home together. The whole day had gone and now the sun was setting.

"How did you like your first day of working for pay Half-Pint?" Pa asked her. "You make out all right?"

"I think so," she answered. "Mrs. White spoke well of my button-holes."

from Wilder, Laura Ingalls, Little Town on the Prairie*, New York: Harper & Row, 1941.*

After Reading

Multiple Choice Practice

1. How was Laura's new job in town most similar to the jobs in the Lowell textile mills?

(1) It was in a large building housing many workers.
(2) It required her to learn how to handle new machines.
(3) It required continuous work over long hours.
(4) It afforded her the opportunity to move to a new town and live independently.

2. According to the reading, Laura did not want to use the sewing machine because

(1) She did not want to be responsible for breaking it.
(2) She did not like the loud noise it made.
(3) She feared she would not be able to learn how to use it.
(4) She enjoyed the rhythm of hand sewing.

3. How was Laura's new job in town similar to the work she and her mother and sisters likely did at home?

(1) Both "jobs" gave Laura an opportunity to develop her skills.
(2) Both "jobs" kept you indoors for most of the day.
(3) In both settings, work was done in a spirit of friendly cooperation.
(4) Both "jobs" included a wide variety of tasks.

4. Most likely, why does the author have Laura compare shirt-making in the Clancy's store to "the circles that men and teams had made on the prairie, building the railroad."?

(1) To assert that "women's work" such as sewing was just as important as "men's work" such as building the railroads.
(2) To highlight the continuous, nonstop nature of modern work.
(3) To illustrate Laura's sense of pride and heroism in her new job.
(4) To show how new white settlers, both men and women were contributing labor to making the prairie home.

5. Walking home at the end of the day, Laura's tone in speaking to her father was most likely one of

(1) resignation
(2) irony
(3) pride
(4) fear

Writing Assignment

1. Write a story, either in the first person or in the third person, describing your first day on your first "real" job. As Laura does in this reading, try to remember exactly how you felt and what made an impression on you at that time. Try to include as much detail as you can.

2. This activity has three parts.

(1) Make a list of all the statements that support the idea: Laura wanted to work. She felt happy to have the job.

(2) Make a list of all the statements that support the idea: Laura was unhappy at her job.

(3) Which list is longer? Would you say that one statement or the other is the truth or is the truth more likely that Laura had mixed feelings?

"Mother" Mary Jones
May 1, 1830-November 20, 1930

Before Reading

This reading starts with an introduction to Mother Jones and then leads into her autobiography. Autobiographies are one way to learn history. Are they a reliable way? Most people change details when they tell the stories from their lives. Read this section twice. The first time read as though every word is fact. The second time read with a critical eye. What might be an exaggeration? What important facts might have been left out?

Reading: Mother Jones

Mary Harris Jones is one of the most remarkable figures in American labor history. At the age of fifty the widow Jones changed her style of living completely. From having worked as a teacher and dressmaker, she became a full-time union organizer.

In her widow's weeds and black bonnet, with an umbrella for a sword, she traveled on foot from one workers' community to another, through the coal towns of West Virginia and Pennsylvania all the way west to the copper mines of Colorado.

She worked in the cotton mills of the South to gather material for a series of meetings against child labor. Later she supported the garment and streetcar strikes in New York City.

The only dangerous weapon in her possession was the hatpin that attached the flat-top bonnet to her curly white hair, yet more than one state governor called out the militia against her. What right, they demanded, had she to be organizing in their areas, to be interfering with private ownership's ways of conducting business? Who was she? Could she prove that she was a resident of the state? Where was her identification?

"Here," Mother Jones would reply in her high falsetto voice, her gray eyes flashing behind her spectacles, "right here," and she would rap the point of her umbrella against her worn and dusty shoes. "My feet are my passport; they take me where my children call for help." . . .

In Pittsburgh to support a strike in the steel mills, she was asked by the local judge if she had a permit to speak on the streets. "Yes, your honor," she answered, "I have." "Who issued it to you?" the judge demanded. She answered, "Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams!"

. . . Six months after her 100th birthday, Mother Jones died of old age.

. . . Her funeral was not somber. The crowd of mourners remembered her words and applied them. "Pray for the dead," was what salty old Mother Jones had taken for her motto, "and fight like hell for the living."

Excerpts from her Autobiography

The March of the Mill Children

In the spring of 1903 I went to Kensington, Pennsylvania, where seventy-five thousand textile workers were on strike. Of this number at least ten thousand were little children. The workers were striking for more pay and shorter hours. Every day little children came into Union Headquarters, some with their hands off, some with the thumb missing, some with their fingers off at the knuckle. They were stooped little things, round shouldered and skinny. Many of them were not over ten years of age, although the state law prohibited their working before they were twelve.

The law was poorly enforced and the mothers of these children often swore falsely as to their children's age. In a single block in Kensington, fourteen women, mothers of twenty-two children all under twelve, explained it was a question of starvation or perjury. That the fathers had been killed or maimed at the mines.

I asked the newspaper men why they didn't publish the facts about child labor in Pennsylvania. They said they couldn't because the mill owners had stock in the papers.

"Well, I've got stock in these little children," said I, "and I'll arrange a little publicity."

We assembled a number of boys and girls one morning in Independence Park and from there we arranged to parade with banners to the court house where we would hold a meeting.

A great crowd gathered in the public square in front of the city hall. I put the little boys with their fingers off and hands crushed and maimed on a platform. I held up their mutilated hands and showed them to the crowd and made the statement that Philadelphia's mansions were built on the broken bones, the quivering hearts and the drooping heads of these children.

The officials of the city hall were standing in the open windows. I held the little ones of the mills high up above the heads of the crowd and pointed to their puny arms and legs and hollow chests. They were light to lift.

I called up on the millionaire manufacturers to cease their moral murders, and I cried to the officials in the open windows opposite, "Some day the workers will take possession of your city hall, and when we do, no child will be sacrificed on the altar of profit."

The reporters quoted my statement that Philadelphia mansions were built on the broken bones and quivering hearts of children. The universities discussed it. Preachers began talking. That was what I wanted. Public attention on the subject of child labor.

The matter quieted down for a while and I concluded that people needed stirring up again.

The Liberty Bell that a century ago rang out for freedom against tyranny was touring the country and crowds were coming to see it everywhere. That gave me an idea. These little children were striking for

some of the freedom that childhood ought to have, and I decided that the children and I would go on a tour.

I asked some of the parents if they would let me have their little boys and girls for a week or ten days, promising to bring them back safe and sound. They consented. A man named Sweeny was marshall for our "army." A few men and women went with me to help with the children. They were on strike and I thought they might as well have a little recreation.

The children carried knapsacks on their backs in which was a knife and fork, a tin cup and plate. We took along a wash boiler in which to cook the food on the road. One little fellow had a drum and another had a fife. That was our band. We carried banners that said, "We want more schools and less hospitals." "We want time to play." "Prosperity is here. Where is ours?"

from Growing Up Female in America: Ten Lives*, ed. by Eve Merriam. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971*

After Reading

Multiple Choice Practice

1. Mother Jones' motto: Pray for the dead and fight like hell for the living means:

> (1) Don't give up working because that is the way to a better life.
> (2) People should accept what they have and make the best of it.
> (3) Amazing things happen when you pray. You can't get any where without prayer.
> (4) The only way life will get better is if people fight to make it better for everyone
> (5) Working with others is a waste of time. It's up to individuals. to improve their lives.

2. Mother Jones says, "I asked the newspaper men why they didn't publish the facts about child labor in Pennsylvania. They said they couldn't because the mill owners had stock in the papers." This indicates that

(1) The mill owners controlled what was said in the papers
(2) Newspaper men could be fired if they went against what the newspaper's owners did.
(3) The newspaper men knew very well that there was a problem and kept silent
(4) Mother Jones tried to work with the newspapermen.
(5) All of the above.

3. Mother Jones' statements sometimes don't make sense in a literal way. Nevertheless, her meaning and her passion come across. For example, Mother Jones says, "I called upon the millionaire manufacturers to cease their moral murders, . . ." This sentence could mean many things. It most likely means

(1) Children were literally dying in the mills and Mother Jones had had enough.
(2) The mill owners were killing the spirit of children and families and it wasn't right.
(3) The mill owners were getting away with breaking the law because making money is considered a morally good thing in the U.S.
(4) The mill owners had made so much money, they could get away with murder
(5) The mill owners were rich and didn't look into what was going on in their own factories.