



Reading Douglass's Rhetoric

Student Name _____ Date _____

Read the following passage from Frederick Douglass's *Narrative*. With a pencil or highlighter, mark the words that have an emotional, visual, auditory, or tactile impact on the reader. Consider these words and phrases as you answer the questions below.

He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave. I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an old aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped the longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cowskin. I remember the first time I ever witnessed this horrible exhibition. I was quite a child, but I well remember it. I never shall forget it whilst I remember any thing. It was the first of a long series of such outrages, of which I was doomed to be a witness and a participant. It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it.

Which words or phrases serve as strong images?

Which verbs seem particularly strong? What effect do they have on the reader?

What effect does the repetition of certain words have on the reader?

What rhetorical appeals – logos, ethos, pathos – is Douglass using? Is he effective? Why?