

## Irony (Chapters I-IX)

Irony is a rhetorical device in which there is an incongruity or discordance between what one intends and what happens or is generally understood. The main characteristic of irony is that a surface meaning and an underlying meaning are not the same.

*When John Hinckley attempted to assassinate President Ronald Reagan, all of his shots initially missed the President; however a bullet ricocheted off the bullet-proof windows of the Presidential limousine and struck Reagan in the chest. Thus, the windows made to protect the President from gunfire were partially responsible for his being shot.*

Frederick Douglass uses irony to emphasize the immorality of slavery to both slaves and slaveholders. For the passages below note on the **Irony Chart** why each passage is ironic and how this irony helps support Douglass' anti-slavery message. The first one is done for you.

### Irony Chart

#### Passage

#### Irony

##### Chapter III

"This establishment [the stable] was under the care of two slaves—old Barney and young Barney—father and son. To attend to this establishment was their sole work. But it was by no means an easy employment; for in nothing was Colonel Lloyd more particular than in the management of his horses. The slightest inattention to these was unpardonable, and was visited upon those, under whose care they were placed, with the severest punishment; no excuse could shield them, if the colonel only suspected any want of attention to his horses—a supposition which he frequently indulged, and one which, of course, made the office of old and young Barney a very trying one."

It is ironic that the colonel treats the valuable animals he owns so well but treats the even more valuable human beings he owns with such lack of care.

This illustrates how slavery leads slaveholders to be more cruel than they probably would be otherwise.

##### Chapter III

"Moreover, slaves are like other people, and imbibe prejudices quite common to others. They think their own better than that of others. Many, under the influence of this prejudice their owners are better than those of the other slaves; and this, too, in some cases, when the very reverse is true. Indeed, it is not uncommon for slaves even to fall out and quarrel among themselves about the relative goodness of their masters, each contending for the superior goodness of their own over that of the others. At the very same time, they mutually execrate their masters when viewed separately."

## **Chapter VI**

"The very decided manner with which he spoke, and strove to impress his wife with the evil consequences of giving me instruction, served to convince me that he was deeply sensible of the truths he was uttering. It gave me the best assurance that I might rely with the utmost confidence on the results which, he said, would flow from teaching me to read. What he most dreaded, that I most desired."

## **Chapter IX**

"Some slaveholders use the Scriptures to justify their behavior. Prior to his [Captain Auld's] conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty. He made the greatest pretensions to piety. His house was the house of prayer. He prayed morning, noon, and night. He very soon distinguished himself among his brethren, and was soon made a class-leader and exhorter."

## **Chapter IX**

"Slaveholders actively try to prevent slaves from learning about Christianity. While I lived with my master in St. Michael's, there was a white young man, a Mr. Wilson, who proposed to keep a Sabbath school for instruction of such slaves as might be disposed to learn to read the New Testament. We met but three times, when Mr. West and Mr. Fairbanks, both class-leaders, with many others, came upon us with sticks and other missiles, drove us off, and forbade us to meet again. Thus ended our little Sabbath school in the pious town of St. Michael's."