

Primary Resource 6

Uncle Tom's Cabin

In 1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe's controversial novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, became one of the bestselling books of the nineteenth century. Stowe, the daughter of a famous Protestant preacher, moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1832, where she met many runaway slaves who were crossing the Ohio River from the slave state of Kentucky to gain freedom in Ohio. Emotionally touched by the stories of these fugitive slaves, Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to capture the human side of slavery and reveal the mistreatment of slaves. Her vivid descriptions and storytelling stirred great emotions in people. Many Northerners were convinced that slavery was unjust, while many Southerners blamed this novel for the North's increasing opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and they felt as though Stowe's bias gave an unjust impression of the institution of slavery. It was clear, however, that Stowe believed that slavery was morally wrong. As President Lincoln once said many years later when he met Stowe for the first time, "So this is the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war."

Chapter VII: The Mother's Struggle

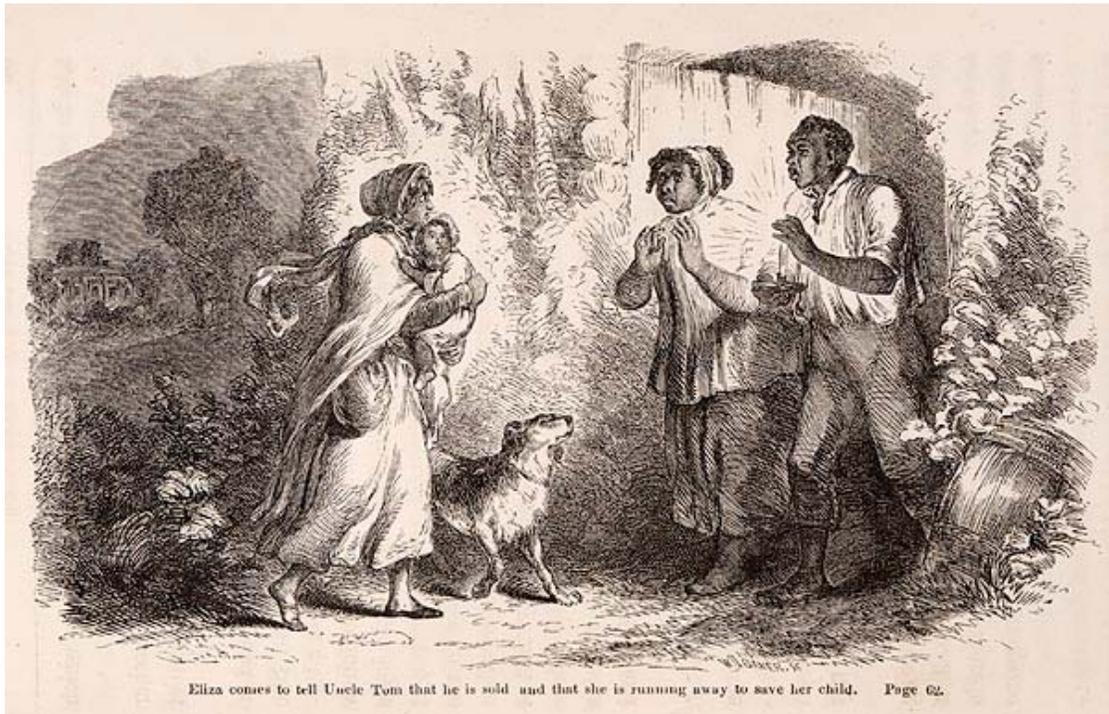
Eliza, one of the slaves portrayed in this novel, decides to run away from the Shelby plantation, after learning that her five year old son, Harry, is going to be sold to a slave trader the next morning. Her escape takes her across the icy Ohio River.

"The frosty ground creaked beneath her feet, and she trembled at the sound; every quaking leaf and fluttering shadow sent the blood backward to her heart, and quickened her footsteps. She wondered within herself at the strength that seemed to be come upon her; for she felt the weight of her boy as if it had been a feather, and every flutter of fear seemed to increase the supernatural power that bore her on, while from her pale lips burst forth... the prayer to a Friend above—"Lord, help! Lord, save me!"

How might Stowe's dramatic description impact a Northerner's point of view about slavery?

How might Stowe's dramatic description impact a Southerner's point of view about slavery?

Illustration on page 62 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*



Eliza comes to tell Uncle Tom that he is sold, and that she is running away to save her child. Full-page illustration by Hammatt Billings for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [First Edition: Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1852]

Look at the three people portrayed Billings' illustration. What emotions are being expressed by them? How can you tell?
