

Malcolm X 20 pts

Use RACE open-ended rubric.

Restate all questions and answer them all thoroughly with examples from the story. Use a quote to support your opinion and end with insight (your thoughts and feelings). Write one handwritten page.

Why does Malcolm X feel it is important to become literate? What does he do to reach his goal? What were Malcolm's feelings about himself when he gained knowledge from books? Why was reading empowering for Malcolm?

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Open Ended Response Rubric  
R - A - C - E



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Block \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ (5) Restatement of question/opening/ending (R and E)

\_\_\_\_ (10) Answer all parts of the question and cite textual evidence (support your statements) (A and C)

\_\_\_\_ (5) Conventions (correct grammar/spelling/punctuation)

\_\_\_\_ (5) Fluency (smooth transitions from idea to idea)

\_\_\_\_ (25) Total score

Returns to Mrs. DeYoung  
**Prereading**

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*  
by Malcolm X and Alex Haley

**Cross-curricular Connections**

**American History.** Malcolm X was a leader in the Black Muslim religious movement who attracted many followers with his speeches and writings. The Black Muslim movement, also known as Nation of Islam, was established in the United States in the early 1930s by Fard Muhammad, who began as an Orthodox Muslim. The key principle that separated Black Muslims from traditional, or Orthodox, Muslims was a belief in separation of the black and white races. After the disappearance in 1934 of Fard Muhammad, Elijah Muhammad further developed the movement, which gained popularity by the end of World War II.

Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, adopted the Black Muslim faith in 1946 while he was serving a prison sentence for burglary in Massachusetts. As part of his conversion, Malcolm Little changed

his name to Malcolm X. After his release in 1952, he became a leading spokesperson for the Black Muslim movement, delivering messages such as economic self-sufficiency that inspired many African Americans.

In 1964, Malcolm X had a disagreement with Elijah Muhammad and left the movement. He formed a rival group called the Organization of African-American Unity (OAAU). After a trip to Mecca in 1964, Malcolm X began to modify his ideas about black separatism and to consider the idea of creating one human race. Hostility between the Black Muslims and Malcolm X's followers brought several death threats to the leader, and on February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated by three men, including two Black Muslims.

**As You Read**

In this selection from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm discusses his self-education while he was in prison. Make a chart like the one below. As you

read, fill in the chart with information about Malcolm's motivations, the actions he takes, and the effects that his self-education has on his life.

MOTIVATIONS

ACTIONS

EFFECTS

frustrated at inability to  
express himself in letters

## READER'S JOURNAL

What do you remember about learning to read and write? What difficulties have you had with reading and writing? What positive or encouraging experiences have you had with reading and writing? Write about these questions in your journal.



FROM

# The Autobiography of Malcolm X

MALCOLM X AND ALEX HALEY

It was because of my letters that I happened to stumble upon starting to acquire some kind of a homemade education.

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,<sup>1</sup> the way I would *say* it, something such as, "Look, daddy, let me pull your coat about a cat, Elijah Muhammad—"

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.

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 conversation 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.

*Why did Malcolm X have difficulty communicating in letters?*

1. **slang.** Informal speech that is outside traditional or standard usage

### WORDS FOR EVERYDAY USE

**ac • quire** (ə kwīr') *v.*, get or gain by one's own effort  
**con • vey** (kən vā') *v.*, make known, communicate  
**ar • tic • u • late** (ār tik'yōō lit) *adj.*, expressing oneself easily and clearly

**func • tion • al** (funġk' shə nəl) *adj.*, able to perform a task well enough to serve its purpose  
**en • vy** (en'vē) *n.*, ill will or discontent because of another's advantage  
**em • u • late** (em'yōō lāt') *v.*, imitate, copy

What did Malcolm X learn from copying the dictionary?

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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 worlds 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.

What effect did reading have on Malcolm X?

WORDS  
FOR  
EVERYDAY  
USE

**rif • fle** (rif'əl) *v.*, leaf or look rapidly through something such as a book

**in • ev • i • ta • ble** (in'ev'ī tə bəl) *adj.*, certain to happen

The Norfolk Prison Colony's library was in the school building. A variety of classes was taught there by instructors who came from such places as Harvard and Boston universities. The weekly debates between inmate teams were also held in the school building. You would be astonished to know how worked up convict debaters and audiences would get over subjects like "Should Babies Be Fed Milk?"

Available on the prison library's shelves were books on just about every general subject. Much of the big private collection that Parkhurst had willed to the prison was still in crates and boxes in the back of the library—thousands of old books. Some of them looked ancient: covers faded, old-time parchment-looking binding. Parkhurst, I've mentioned, seemed to have been principally interested in history and religion. He had the money and the special interest to have a lot of books that you wouldn't have in general circulation. Any college library would have been lucky to get that collection.

As you can imagine, especially in a prison where there was heavy emphasis on rehabilitation, an inmate was smiled upon if he demonstrated an unusually intense interest in books. There was a sizable number of well-read inmates, especially the popular debaters. Some were said by many to be practically walking encyclopedias. They were almost celebrities. No university would ask any student to devour literature as I did when this



Archive Photo, NY

new world opened to me, of being able to read and *understand*.

I read more in my room than in the library itself. An inmate who was known to read a lot could check out more than the permitted maximum number of books. I preferred reading in the total isolation of my own room.

When I had progressed to really serious reading, every night at about ten P.M. I would be outraged with the "lights out." It always seemed to catch

WORDS  
FOR  
EVERYDAY  
USE

prin • ci • pal • ly (prin'sə pəl lē) *adv.*, most importantly or significantly  
em • pha • sis (em'fə sis) *n.*, special attention given to something

re • ha • bil • i • ta • tion (rē'hə bil'ə tā'shən) *n.*, process of restoring physical or mental health; preparation for employment  
i • so • la • tion (ī'so la'shən) *n.*, aloneness, solitude

What does Malcolm X do every night? How is this different from when he lived on the streets?

me right in the middle of something engrossing.

Fortunately, right outside my door was a corridor light that cast a glow into my room. The glow was enough to read by, once my eyes adjusted to it. So when “lights out” came, I would sit on the floor where I could continue reading in that glow.

At one-hour intervals the night guards paced past every room. Each

time I heard the approaching footsteps, I jumped into bed and feigned sleep. And as soon as the guard passed, I got back out of bed onto the floor area of that light-glow, where I would read for another fifty-eight minutes—until the guard approached again. That went on until three or four every morning. Three or four hours of sleep a night was enough for me. Often in the years in the streets I had slept less than that. ■



### About the Authors



**M**alcolm X (1925–1965) was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska. In his early years, he lived as a petty criminal. While imprisoned, he adopted the Black Muslim faith and taught himself to read and write. Malcolm X became a strong and influential leader among African Americans. He was the source of much controversy in mainstream America for his willingness to talk about racial issues and the African-American experience. Malcolm X was assassinated in New York City in 1965.

**A**lexander Palmer (Alex) Haley (1921–1992) was born in Ithaca, New York, and attended Elizabeth City State Teachers College in North Carolina for two years before entering the U.S. Coast Guard. He served as editor of *Out Post*, the official Coast Guard publication, and later as a public relations official in Coast Guard District Headquarters. Haley assisted in writing *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), one of the most influential books of the decade. Haley won the Pulitzer Prize in 1977 for *Roots*, a fictionalized chronicle tracing his family history back to its African origins.

WORDS  
FOR  
EVERYDAY  
USE

en • gross • ing (en grōs 'īŋ) *adj.*, occupying one's complete attention  
feign (fān) *v.*, make a false show of, imitate, simulate