

## Learning to Read

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

1. Who appears to be narrating the poem (**not** just the speaker's name, etc.)? (What can we seem to assume about her?)
2. The poem plays with a couple conflicts. Which single stanza best captures the central conflict of the poem? In other words, which stanza seems to best explain the ideas/motivations that are expressed in the rest of the poem?
3. How would you describe the tone of the poem? Why? What lines most seem to develop that tone? Explain your answer.
4. The last stanza seems to have little to do with the rest of the poem, in the sense that it doesn't appear to fit the topic. How does the last stanza still connect to the central idea (and title) of the poem? Explain your answer.
5. Harper uses a little bit of dialect and/or slang in the poem. How did her inclusion of that shape the poem? Do you think it was especially effective or did you find it ineffective/unimportant? Why?
6. Both *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass* and "Learning to Read" deal with the topic of slaves trying in secret to learn to read and write. Which piece do you believe to be more effective in its discussion of the topic? Explain your reasoning.
7. The author, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, was never a slave—she was born a free woman in the north, but she was an active abolitionist. How does this knowledge shape the way you view/feel about the poem? Explain your answer.