The Narrative Of Life Of Frederick Douglass: A Memoir

The Narrative of Life of Frederick Douglass is an 1845 memoir written by Frederick Douglass himself. His main goal while writing the novel was to show readers how the convention of slavery degraded not only the slaves but also the slave owners and their conscience. The unrighteous power the masters have on the poor slaves affected their moral sense. The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass gives brief information on how severe hardships a slave has to face throughout their lives.

Douglass displays several heart-rending tales of his everyday life as a slave. His stories are unexpectedly enlightening to the real life of slaves. Ultimately, he wanted to open the eyes of American who are ignorant of all the injustice slaves tolerated. To achieve an effective narrative, he uses several literary devices all over the narrative.

In The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, the autobiographical tool plays an important role in the narrative. He affirms “If you want to know about slavery, I can tell you about slavery because I was there, I lived it:” He clearly knows what he’s talking about as he witnessed and lived in that situation, thus it makes him more believable and these incidents provide him ethos. At the beginning of the narrative, Douglass is only aware of the slave world and their duties towards masters. Douglass spends most of his time comparing his life with the lives of whites. He says, “You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains and am a slave!” Douglass's memoir weaves multiple pathos together, each showcases a different aspect of dehumanization. In the narrative, Douglass recounts his experiences in a certain way that lets readers feel shameful of being in possession of another person. For example, Douglass narrates the experience of watching the master whip his aunt until she was covered in blood and the pleasure the slaveholder had in beating her. The visual illustration of her exploitation makes readers feel the same rage Douglass have experienced. Douglass also emphasizes the breakdown of families by slaves as he wanted to show societal unfairness by the breakdown of family. Douglass mentions that slaves never had the chance to speak for themselves. In the opening of chapter one, Douglass starts to build his ethos by saying that he is unaware of his birthday, unlike white citizens, who know every detail of their lives. Douglass talks about how the masters didn’t give them any beds. He said, “They found less difficulty from the want of beds than from the want of time to sleep.’’ He demonstrates how most of their time was spent in preparing the fields and when they completed their work, everyone side by side slept together on a damp floor in one common bed. He uses the phrase ‘the cold, damp floor’’ and aligned structure “old and young, male and female, married and single’’ in order to evoke emotions among the audience. It serves as a powerful appeal to pathos in his reasoning.

Again, Douglass talks about the time when he was sent to live in Baltimore. He conveys his master’s son died and after three years, the old master died too. Also, how he was sent with other properties to be evaluated. “Here again my feelings rose up in detestation of slavery. I had now a new conception of my degraded condition. I left Baltimore with a young heart overborne with sadness and a soul full of apprehension.” He chose this line carefully as it kindles many emotions. “A young heart overborne with sadness and soul full of apprehension” grabs all the attention of the audience as it's a strong appeal to pathos.

Douglass' elderly grandmother is evicted from the plantation because she is too old to work anymore. Although his grandmother was loyal and even cared for the master when he was a child. The master kept her into the woods to live alone. This anecdote describes that a slave is valued only upon his physical ability and dedication to work.

Douglass portrays an evident picture of a different practice of slavery in urban and rural plantations. In rural plantations, masters were more discriminative, punished slaves severely and slaves often lived in poor conditions. For instance, masters often whipped the slaves with heavy cowskins for most trivial reasons."No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose." This line shows how cruel and atrocious his master was. Rural slave owners never cared about the quality of food the slaves nor they gave them enough time to eat food properly. Slaves were expected to do strenuous work in fields and gardens. They also got a limited monthly allowance of food. Masters never cared about slave's needs to be fulfilled rather always wanted their work to be completed with utmost dedication and in the given time. In contradictory to rural slave owners, urban masters always cared about their slaves being well fed. Frederick Douglass uses syllogism by saying his Master didn't give an adequate amount of food to his slaves, hence he is a vicious person.

Douglass often uses irony to display the flaws of society during the 1800's. Douglass describes how his master Colonel Lloyd valued his horses more than the lives of his slaves. Additionally, he demonstrates how Colonel Lloyd used to beat his slaves if they made any mistakes while taking care of the horses. Douglass uses irony to show that Lloyd treats his animals better than he treats the human slaves. To prove his point furthermore, Douglass states "There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in the scale of being, and were all subjected to the same narrow examination."

Douglass reinforces a difference between true Christianity and false Christianity. Douglass shed light on this topic by saying the earlier 'the Christianity of Christ' and the later 'the Christianity of this land' To prove his point further, Douglass contends slaveholders' Christianity was not an act of kindness towards others, rather is only hypocrisy to support their unrighteous actions.

To establish this difference, Douglass shows the basic contrast between the peaceful principles of Christianity and the violent and wicked actions of slaveholders.

Later the narrative shows Douglass's change from ignorance towards scholarly knowledge in many ways. He begins to understand the concept of knowledge with the help of Ms.Sophia Auld. Frederick Douglass personifies freedom as a blessing from God. Douglass says that education is a "blessing of liberty"

Humans become more alert of the prejudice and injustice that's going around them. Knowledge is the most powerful tool to break the cages of slavery and making the slaves a free bird.

As Douglass grows to expand his knowledge, he becomes more aware of the injustice found in his world of slavery.Mr.Auld ordered Mrs.Auld not to teach him anymore. Mr.Auld said "If you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him as a slave. He would at once become unmanageable and of no value to his master. It would only make him discontented and unhappy." One remark of Mr.Auld made Douglass understand the whole concept. This quote explains a slave shouldn't even listen to his heart rather always obey his master's command dutifully. It helps the audience understand the incompetence of

slaves “These words sank deep into my heart. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty-to wit, the whites man’s power to enslave the back man” This is his allegory of the cave moment when he realizes what is going on and he finally found out what he was searching for. This phrase as well as serves as an appeal to logos.

Within that time of learning to read, he starts to question his identity as a slave.

He narrates “From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom”.

Douglass also embodies the changes in a slave’s life by saying “I often found myself regretting my existence.” Afterward, Mrs.Auld stops teaching him so Douglass decided to teach him himself with the help of some friends from the neighborhood. It marked as a big achievement for a slave at that period and a change of direction in Douglass and other slaves' miserable lives.

Douglass also uses rhetorical questions when pondering about his escape, he questions himself, “Try it?” and instantly answers with a “Yes” which shows his yearning for liberation. It shows the reader the determination and confidence to run away which makes the author sound assertive.