

CliffsNotes.com® Conversation Starters for INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL

Does Brent's narrative support the concept that literacy is a metaphor for freedom?
What is "literacy"?

Brent's relationship with her grandmother (Aunt Martha) gives her the strength to endure seemingly impossible hardships in order to be near her children. Who are some of the other important women in the narrative who impact Brent's life? What impact do these other women have on Brent's life?

Language is a critical factor in Brent's narrative. Does Brent's sophisticated manner of speaking seem at odds with her character?

Incidents is often compared to Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*. How do the opening chapter of *Incidents* compare to the opening chapter of Douglass's *Narrative*? What are some of the key differences between these two works?

In discussing the continuing problems of racism and the dismal social and economic status of inner-city blacks, historians often refer to "the legacy of slavery." Based on Brent's experiences as a slave and as a free woman in the United States, how valid are their observations?

When Aunt Martha tells Linda that her father is dead (Chapter 2), Linda recalls her initial response: "He had died so suddenly I had not even heard that he was sick." What does this incident reveal about Aunt Martha? About Linda? What are the circumstances surrounding her father's death? Why do you think Linda was not permitted to attend her father's funeral?

In Chapter 4, "The Slave Who Dared to Feel Like a Man," Brent tells the story of her Uncle Benjamin. What impact does this story seem to have on her?

In Chapter 5, "The Trials of Girlhood," Brent relates the story of two sisters — one black, one white — and their very different fates. How does this story affect her personally?

In Chapter 6, "The Jealous Mistress," Brent describes the relationship between Dr. and Mrs. Flint. Based on her description, how would you characterize their marriage?

In Chapter 7, Linda describes her relationship with a free black man who offers to buy her freedom. How does this relationship affect her decision to enter into a sexual liaison with Mr. Sands?

In Chapter 8, Brent describes "What Slaves are Taught to Think of the North." What is the underlying message of this chapter?

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In Chapter 9, Brent provides sketches of three slaveholders: Mr. Litch, Mr. Conant, and Mrs. Wade. How would you characterize these three individuals?

In Chapter 10, "A Perilous Passage in the Slave Girl's Life," Brent describes her relationship with Mr. Sands. How is her decision to enter into this relationship a "perilous passage" in her life?

By Brent's choosing to have two children by Mr. Sands, is Brent largely responsible for creating her own dilemma?

In Chapter 11, Brent describes the birth of her son, Ben. How does this incident impact her life?

In Chapter 13, "The Church and Slavery," Brent explores the moral conflict between slavery and Christianity. Does she build a successful case for the incompatibility of these two institutions?

In Chapters 14-16, Brent describes the birth of her daughter, Ellen, and her experiences on Mr. Flint's plantation. How do these incidents affect her?

What is the significance of Brent's statement that "the colored race are the most cheerful and forgiving people on the face of the earth"?

Chapter 21, "The Loophole of Retreat," presents a pivotal point in Brent's story. What is this pivotal point? Why is it pivotal?

In Chapter 35, "Prejudice Against Color," Brent explores the complex issue of color prejudice among some blacks, a prejudice that can be traced directly to the institution of slavery. How so?

In Chapter 37, "A Visit to England," Brent compares her treatment in England with her treatment in the United States. How does she characterize her experiences?

In Chapter 40, "The Fugitive Slave Act," Brent discusses the impact of this law on runaway slaves. What were some of the issues that led to the passage of this law?

In Chapter 41, "Free at Last," Brent describes her experiences upon finally obtaining her freedom. How "free" is she really? What are some examples in the narrative to support that she is "free"? That she isn't "free"? (You may also want to research the passage of Jim Crow laws in the South.)
