Harriet Beecher Stowe

Voice of the Oppressed

By Katie W., 15

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Section</td>
<td>2, 9-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos with Captions</td>
<td>2, 9-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beecher Family Tree</td>
<td>3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly's Project</td>
<td>16-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of Genres</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>27-28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the banks of the Connecticut River in Hartford, there is a beautiful, lifelike bronze sculpture of a man and a woman. The male figure can quickly be distinguished as Abraham Lincoln due to his lanky limbs, his trademark beard, and the top hat in his hand. Standing erect beside Lincoln is a slight female figure that is unrecognizable, yet intriguing to the eye. Her resolute visage indicates she is not intimidated by the impressive gentleman next to her, even though he is the President of the United States. Her hands are neatly folded, and she gazes confidently, almost fiercely, into Lincoln’s eyes.

Who is this determined woman, and what has she done to deserve a spot by one of our country’s greatest presidents? She is Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of one of America’s most famous books, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The Hartford sculpture portrays the famous meeting of the indefatigable authoress and the President ten years after the publication of Harriet’s book in 1852. Harriet’s introduction to Lincoln at the White House was yet another chapter of her work on behalf of oppressed slaves; she was there to ensure Lincoln’s signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, which would free the slaves in the South. Legend has it that, upon meeting Harriet, Honest Abe declared, “So this is the little woman who wrote the book that started this Great War.” Although the legend is not verifiable, the words attributed to Lincoln ring true. Little Harriet Beecher Stowe and her landmark novel *did* cause many Americans to be outraged at the practice of slavery and to take part in the great argument that ultimately turned into a bloody war in 1860 (Fritz 70-71; Randolph 78-79). As one of the most dynamic and influential American authors of the nineteenth century, Harriet Beecher Stowe used her skill with the pen to give the oppressed a voice and a hope.

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Harriet claimed to have received divine inspiration for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. She reportedly confessed that “[a]ll she had to do was pick up her pen and the words poured out.”
June 14, 1881
Hartford, Connecticut

My dear children,

Today I am eighty years old. As I grow older, my death certainly draws nearer. I am not afraid of death; however, I am worried that the Beecher family heritage will be lost forever. Many of my readers have written to me asking what the Beecher family was like and how my family affected my life and my writings. And so, I have decided to compile the Beecher family tree for you and for my faithful readers.

I am, always,
The Beecher Family

Lyman Beecher, father:

My father attended Yale University and became a Calvinist minister. After the passage of the Missouri Compromise in 1820, my father began delivering fiery sermons denouncing slavery. He became a strong voice of the colonization movement.

I reiterated his colonization stance in Uncle Tom’s Cabin before becoming a radical abolitionist.

Roxana Foote Beecher, mother:

My mother was very well-educated for a woman of the time. One of the few memories I have of my mother is of her reading aloud the “Frank Edgeworth” books to us every night. Many of my own books include a character inspired by my mother’s memory.

Harriet Porter Beecher, step-mother:

I never felt as if I knew my step-mother very well. We referred to her as “the Princess,” because, though beautiful, she seemed untouchable.
Catharine, sister:

Because I wasn’t very close to my step-mother, Catharine mothered me after my mother’s death. With her domineering personality, she was well-suited to the job. But do not cause this description to think ill of my sister. Poor soul! She suffered greatly. Her fiancé drowned at sea. Instead of dwelling in her great grief her entire life, she dedicated herself to the improvement of female education. She was determined that other girls should be inspired to learn and have the opportunity to learn. Catharine founded five schools, including the Hartford Academy I attended. She also wrote several books on the subjects of education and home economics.

It was Catharine who helped me publish my very first book—a geography book for children—in 1833. Catharine agreed to list herself as co-author of the book to make me feel less conspicuous and also to give the book credibility. Catharine was sometimes demanding, forcing me to assist her with her educational endeavors even while I was in the middle of writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Yet I am grateful to her for pushing me towards the field of writing.

William, brother:

William was a minister, one of seven among my siblings. Although not as famous as some of my other family members, he was a member of the temperance and anti-slavery movements.

Edward, brother:

Edward, also a minister, was a radical abolitionist and close friend of Elijah Lovejoy, the outspoken anti-slavery editor of the St. Louis Observer. In fact, Edward was with Elijah on November 7, 1837, only a few hours before Elijah was killed by an angry mob of slavery proponents. Edward wrote his own account of the mob killing of his friend, and the work was published in 1838.

Edward, along with his wife Isabella, encouraged me to join the anti-slavery movement. It was Isabella who encouraged me to write something to end the horrible business of slavery. The result was Uncle Tom’s Cabin.

Mary, sister:

Mary was the one member of our family who didn’t support a cause or do anything outrageous. She helped Catharine teach at the Hartford Academy for a while, but she did not enjoy the work. After she abandoned the life of a teacher for one of housewife, she lived quietly and happily in the same Hartford neighborhood as my husband and I.
George, brother:

George was a minister and member of the anti-slavery movement. Preaching in New England, he was interested in the idea of Perfectionism. Tragically, my dear brother suffered from depression and died from self-inflicted gunshot wounds. “The sudden death of George shook my whole soul like an earthquake.”

Henry, brother:

Henry was only two years younger than I, and if I may be permitted to say so, he was the sibling dearest to me. He was also the most famous of my minister/anti-slavery brothers. He was one of the most outspoken and prominent abolitionists and a popular orator throughout the country, despite the fact that he had a speech impediment as a child. Preaching at Plymouth Church, he eventually became so popular that his entire congregation couldn’t fit in the building; some had to stand outside the church to hear his sermons.

Henry was deeply involved in the Civil War. After the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed in 1854 and violence broke out between pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers, Henry’s church sent the Kansas abolitionists Sharp rifles in boxes marked “Bibles.” After that, Sharp’s rifles were called “Beecher’s Bibles.” When war officially broke out, Henry was sent to England by President Lincoln to convince that nation to remain neutral in the war. At war’s end, Henry was able to use his oratory skills at Fort Sumter, when the United States flag was once again raised over the fort.

Charles, brother:

Charles began his career as a preacher, like the rest of my brothers, but he was eventually tried and convicted of heresy. He abandoned the ministry for a quiet life as a superintendent of education in Florida. Charles was also an excellent writer. He gave me valuable information when I was writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin. He had spent several years working for a counting house in New Orleans, and his descriptions of the South helped me in writing my book. Charles also travelled with me to Europe and kept a journal of our doings that later provided inspiration for another book I would write, Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands.

Isabella, half-sister:

Isabella organized the National Women’s Suffrage Association in 1869 with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. She also arranged a grand convention for the association in
1871 in Washington D.C. By submitting a bill to the Connecticut legislature, Isabella managed to get women equal property ownership rights in that state.

Although I was never a public supporter of the women’s rights movement, I did quietly observe and support it. My sister would have welcomed my public support, but after the slaves were given freedom, I rather enjoyed living a quiet domestic life out of the spotlight.

**Thomas, half-brother:**

Initially, my brother, Thomas, did not wish to follow the predicted family path. He did not wish to join the ministry, and he claimed to be an anti-abolitionist, although we all thought he secretly was an abolitionist. Yet, he was still a Beecher. A strong proponent of temperance, he became a minister in 1850, and he led a congregation that included the Langdon family. As part of his duties, Thomas performed the marriage ceremony of young Olivia Langdon to a gentleman named Samuel Clemens.

**James, half-brother:**

James ran off to sea for a few years before he finally joined the ranks of the Beecher preachers. He fought in the Civil War and actually commanded an African-American regiment.

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Harriet Beecher was born to Lyman and Roxana Beecher on June 14, 1811 in Litchfield, Connecticut, and her life bore the unmistakable imprint of their influence. Lyman Beecher was a strict Calvinist preacher who became famous when he began delivering sermons denouncing slavery and supporting colonization, the transportation of slaves back to Africa. Lyman’s wife, Roxana, passed away when Harriet was only five, but she became Harriet’s idol. Unlike typical women of the time, Roxana had been well-educated, and she had a literary mind, which her daughter inherited. Harriet nurtured that young literary mind in her father’s study, which contained a rich store of tedious sermons and histories that Harriet learned to read by the age of six. At her aunt’s home in Guilford, Connecticut, young Harriet also had access to novels and poetry. This early exposure to books developed a love of reading and learning that translated into Harriet’s schooling. She attended several small primary schools until the age of eight, when she was able to enter Litchfield Female Academy four full years before the customary entrance age (Hedrick 3, 6-7, 9, 25-26; Randolph 11, 15-16).

At the age of thirteen, Harriet continued her education at Hartford Female Seminary, a small academy founded by her older sister, Catharine. Harriet spent eight years at Hartford Female Seminary. She worked as an “assistant pupil” for the first three years, helping younger students while tackling difficult subjects herself, subjects traditionally labeled as strictly “male” disciplines. Eventually, she progressed to working as a senior teacher. During this time at the academy, Harriet also somewhat informally launched her life as a literary woman. She edited an issue of the school newspaper, immersed herself in Romantic literature by Sir Walter Scott, and developed a fascination for Lord Byron. The Romantic style of Scott and Byron would eventually emerge in Harriet’s own writing (Hedrick 19-21, 32, 34, 42, 50; Randolph 19).

The Beecher family’s move west to Cincinnati in 1832 helped Harriet to finally commence her professional writing career. Shortly after the move, Harriet joined the Semi-Colon Club, a small, elite Cincinnati literary society for both male and female writers. At meetings, writers anonymously submitted their works to be read aloud and critiqued by the
other members. The weekly meetings encouraged Harriet to experiment with different styles and hone in on her writing voice. Specifically, the meetings helped Harriet discover and perfect both satire and dialogue (Randolph 25, 32).

...Harriet wrote descriptions of scenes, or sketches, that described an event, a person, or an activity in detail. At the club, she could see how the members reacted to her writing, and she adjusted her work so that she could get the reaction that she wanted. Harriet also practiced writing in a colloquial voice, or writing the way characters would actually talk. She would use this experience of writing vivid descriptions and writing in local dialects in her later work. (Randolph 32)

Another benefit of the club was its kind, helpful members. One member, James Hall, was an editor of *Western Monthly Magazine*. After reading Harriet’s writing, he encouraged Harriet to submit her work to the magazine for publication (Randolph 32).

The move to Cincinnati also precipitated changes in Harriet’s personal life. She became close friends with Eliza Stowe, another member of the Semi-Colon Club. When Eliza died in 1834, her husband, Calvin, who was an associate of Lyman Beecher, sought out comfort from Eliza’s close friend. Harriet’s devoted consolation soon endeared her to Calvin, and their friendship became love. Harriet and Calvin were married in 1836, and a year later Harriet gave birth to twins (Fritz 22; Hedrick 83; Randolph 33-35).

Fourteen years and six children later, Calvin accepted a teaching position at Bowdoin College in Maine. While Calvin tied up loose business ends back in Cincinnati, he sent his wife ahead to choose the family’s new home and set up housekeeping. Harriet chose to rent the home where Longfellow had lived as a student, Titcomb Homestead. Even though the rent for the dilapidated home was almost twice the amount the family had allotted in their budget, Harriet was determined to live at Titcomb, for the house satisfied her romantic sensibilities. Harriet took charge of the
Remodeling project. She hired several men to work on the bigger jobs, and she worked on the smaller tasks herself, despite being pregnant yet again. At the same time, to help pay the house's steep rent, she began writing stories for magazines (Hedrick 193-195; Randolph 35).

Then, two events—one personal and one public—changed the purpose of Harriet's pen. In 1849, Harriet's eighteen-month-old son, Charley, died from cholera (Randolph 42). She later reflected, "It was at his dying bed and at his grave that I learnt what a poor slave mother may feel when her child is torn away from her" (qtd. in Hedrick 193). One year later, in 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which required northerners to return suspected runaway slaves to the South and threatened citizens who aided runaway slaves with fines and imprisonment. As a result of the Act, many legitimately free African-Americans in the North who had bought their freedom or been freed by their masters were captured and enslaved once again. The Act and its consequences were infuriating and saddening to Harriet. As reports of the injustices of the Act increased, she became more and more disgusted by the practice of slavery itself. She began writing to her abolitionist brothers and sisters with increasing ardency (Randolph 42, 51-52). She told her sister, Catharine, "...I have felt almost choked up at times with pent up wrath that does no good" (qtd. in Hedrick 204).

As an attempt to get out some of her wrath, Harriet began producing parables denouncing the Fugitive Slave Act for anti-slavery newspapers, yet she still felt angry and helpless (Hedrick 204). She told her fervently-abolitionist brother Henry: "You don't know how my heart burns within me at the blindness and obtuseness of good people on so simple a point of morality as this." She yearned "to do something even the humblest in this cause" to raise American outrage over the Fugitive Slave Act (qtd. in Hedrick 205). Finally, Harriet's sister-in-law Isabella wrote a letter that made Harriet realize that she could do something to help the cause. Isabella wrote, "Now, Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that would cause this whole nation to realize what an accursed thing slavery is." That correspondence was a watershed moment in Harriet's life and in the history of her country. Upon receiving Isabella's words, Harriet stood up from her chair and declared, "I will write something. I will if I live" (qtd. in Hedrick 207).
Harriet kept her word. On March 9, 1851 she wrote to Gamaliel Bailey, the publisher of the *National Era*, proposing to write a short serial about the effects of slavery. She planned on painting “word pictures” for her readers. “There is no arguing with pictures,” she explained, “and everyone is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not” (qtd. in Hedrick 253). She planned to “hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible Slavery, its reverses, changes, and the negro character, which I have had ample opportunities for studying” (qtd. in Randolph 53). Harriet’s short serial of word pictures became a long, moving narrative released in installments for nearly a year. The installments were published in book form on March 20, 1852, as *Life Among the Lowly; or, Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Within one week, 10,000 copies of the book were sold. By the end of the year, that number grew to 300,000 copies of the book in the United States alone, more than any other book besides the Bible. In Great Britain, where slavery had already been abolished, over one million copies of the book sold in the first year (Hedrick 223; Randolph 54; “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”).

The book’s prolific sales reflected its revolutionary nature. The work cogently denounced the practice of slavery without directly preaching at the reader. Instead, it drove its point home by painting moving scenes of the horrors of slavery as it followed the lives of four slaves (Hedrick 208-209; Randolph 54). Moreover, “[t]he hero of the novel, for the first time in American literature, was a slave, Uncle Tom” (Randolph 54). The book was also groundbreaking because its author was a woman, part of a demographic segment of nineteenth century society normally limited to quiet domestic wifehood. Harriet herself realized that, as a woman of the time, she had no societal standing that entitled her to publicly express her opinion about the controversial topic. Yet, she decided that the issue of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Act were important enough for her to be willing to rebel against her accepted, traditional place (Hedrick 209). She expressed these sentiments to Gamaliel Bailey when she first proposed the serial in 1851: “Up to this year I have always felt I had no particular call to meddle with this subject, and I dreaded to expose even my own mind to its exciting power. But I feel now that the time is come when every
woman or child who can speak for freedom and humanity is bound to speak” (qtd. in Hedrick 208).

The publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin ignited profound, explosive reactions in the nation and the world beyond. First, the work’s unique manner of portraying the common cruelties of slavery and mounting evidence backing up the book’s allegations galvanized many Americans against slavery and the Fugitive Slave Act. Pro-slavery Americans in the South, however, doubted the book’s credibility. In response to their criticism, Harriet produced a second book, A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. At its outset, Harriet had intended the Key to be a simple bibliography for Uncle Tom’s Cabin to substantiate its stories of mistreatment of slaves. But as she continued her drafting of the Key, she decided to include additional examples of cruelty she had not originally used when writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The new work was a success. Its additional sources effectively corroborated incidents from Uncle Tom’s Cabin and therefore silenced many of Uncle Tom’s critics. Furthermore, the Key’s supplemental accounts of cruelty persuaded still more readers to throw their support behind the abolitionist movement. Second, Uncle Tom’s Cabin helped unite the previously-disjointed anti-slavery movement; it was a document all those opposed to slavery could point to as the essence of why the practice of slavery was wrong and should be ended (Hedrick 225-231, 236). Third, as a collateral consequence, Uncle Tom’s Cabin caused the rest of the world, specifically England, to respect the new American literary style developing in the still-young nation. As one Englishman remarked, “Let us hear no more of the poverty of American brains, or the barrenness of American literature. Had it produced only Uncle Tom’s Cabin, it had evaded contempt…” (qtd. in Hedrick 234).

Harriet, too, changed with the publication of her novel. The newly-famous author was now able to travel extensively throughout the United States and Europe, where she was easily recognized and enthusiastically adopted by the abolitionist movement. Surprisingly, at the time she penned Uncle Tom’s Cabin, Harriet had not been a supporter of the immediate emancipation of slaves. In fact, at the end of the book, she suggested colonization—her father’s position—and not immediate emancipation as the solution for slavery. Her position changed quickly, largely because of her friendships with William Lloyd Garrison and Fredrick Douglass. Shortly after the publication of her book, Douglass in particular managed to convince her that colonization was not the solution to slavery (Hedrick 235-236; Randolph 69-71). He...
responded to her pro-colonization stance in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with the quip, “The truth is, dear ma’am, we are here, & here we are likely to remain” (qtd. in Hedrick 235). From that time on, Harriet Beecher Stowe spoke as an unreserved abolitionist (Hedrick 235).

After her conversion from the moderate stance of colonization to the radical stance of complete abolitionism, Harriet became eager to unite the anti-slavery movement. She wrote to Garrison, “I am increasingly anxious that all who hate slavery be united...” (qtd. in Hedrick 252) Towards that end, Harriet began furiously writing the anti-slavery novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*. At that same time, monumental events were occurring in the nation. When Harriet was about a third of the way through the book, Kansas settlers began bitterly and violently fighting over whether their state should be a free state or a slave state. The melee in Kansas spurred Harriet on in her writing, but unfortunately it also made her writing shrill, bitter, and anxious, characteristics not found in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Because of Harriet’s abrupt change in writing voice midway through the book, *Dred* was not nearly as popular or critically acclaimed as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. However, the change in Harriet’s writing voice reflected the profound change in her soul and in the nation’s simmering dispute over slavery. For Americans, slavery was no longer just a topic that people civilly discussed in their parlors while sipping tea and observing the weather; it was now a deep, openly divisive issue that could only be solved with the blood of hundreds of thousands of men in a brutal civil war (Randolph 72-74).

That war came on April 12, 1861, when Confederate forces attacked Fort Sumter. Harriet’s son, Fred, joined Union forces shortly after the war began. As the death counts mounted, Harriet grew frustrated with President Lincoln’s dogged determination to reconcile the Union and his reluctance to free the slaves. After Lincoln released a preliminary draft of the Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862, Harriet went to Washington to speak to Lincoln personally to make certain he intended to make the Proclamation official. On December 2, 1862, Harriet’s legendary meeting with the President took place. There are no documented accounts of what Harriet Beecher Stowe said to Abraham Lincoln that day. However, thirty-one days after her determined visit, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law. Harriet joined hundreds of others at Boston Music Hall in anticipation of the signing of the document. When word finally came that the Emancipation Proclamation was the law of the land, joyous excitement filled the music hall (Hedrick 303-306; Randolph 77). Then the audience
members remembered that Harriet was among them. “Mrs. Stowe! Mrs. Stowe!” they cried, acknowledging her vital role in the great victory of the abolitionist movement (Randolph 77).

The Emancipation Proclamation was the beginning of the end of the Civil War. Although the war would drag on for two more years before northern victory, southern morale was mortally wounded. In the spring of 1865, four years after its commencement, the war finally came to a close, and Harriet was able to step out of the public spotlight in her later years. Her husband retired, and Harriet supported the family by writing books and articles until she was seventy-two. In total, Harriet Beecher Stowe produced over thirty books and many articles. These published writings were, with few exceptions, fictional works that avoided the explosive social commentary that had characterized *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Among the most famous of these later works were *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*, *Lady Byron Vindicated*, and *The Agnes of Sorrento*. During this period, Harriet also casually observed and supported the rise of the women’s rights movement, although she was not public about her support. For the most part, Harriet dedicated herself to her family after the war. She was able to build her dream house in Hartford, Connecticut, and, in old age, she and Calvin often visited their second home in Mandarin, Florida. Unfortunately, when Harriet was seventy-eight, she had a stroke, and she never fully recovered. In 1896, at the age of eighty-five, she passed away (Fritz 110; Randolph 90, 96-97, 99).

Harriet Beecher Stowe left behind a legacy as one of America’s most influential female authors. Undoubtedly, her most dynamic work was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

I wrote what I did because, as a woman, as a mother I was oppressed & broken-hearted, with the sorrows and injustices I saw, because as a Christian I felt the dishonor to Christianity—because as a lover of my country I trembled at the coming day of wrath. It is no merit...to me that I must speak for the oppressed—who cannot speak for themselves [sic]. (qtd. in Hedrick 237)
In her chosen role as the voice for the oppressed, Harriet was a revolutionary woman. Even though women in nineteenth century society did not have the standing or position to speak to public policy or decry injustice, she did so anyway. She was determined to use her skill with the pen to give the oppressed slaves a voice. She did that and more. Little Harriet Beecher Stowe produced a best-selling novel, elevated American literature, and ignited a “great,” terrible war that gave the oppressed not just a voice, but freedom.

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From: flirtygumchewer@hotmail.com
To: redpen@jerseyshoreschools.edu
Sent: Thursday, April 14, 2011 11:59 PM
Subject: project thingy

Attachment: Transcript of My Chat with the Guys

Yo Miss Redpen,

Thanks for the extension on my writing project on Harriet Beecher Stowe. I know you said the new, absolute deadline for my final paper was midnight. The thing is... I’ve just been sooo busy. Facebook notifications, Twitter tweets, texts, and IMs all demand attention, ya know? So then I figured, why sweat it when you can bat your eyelashes and ask the smart boys for help? So rather than bore you with some research paper--blah blah blah--I’ve just attached a transcript of my conversation with some smart guys who knew Harriet and actually read her books without Cliff Notes!

Polly Ditzcannon

P.S. The guys helped me edit this transcript. I had some trouble spelling some of the words.

Sent from my iPhone 11:59 p.m.

-------------------------------Attachment-------------------------------

Polly: Hey guys. I’m guessing you all know each other, since you’re all, like, literary legends. I mean, at least that’s what
my mom told me. But you know what? She also told me the word

_The Gullible_ was written on the ceiling, and it’s NOT!

Anyway, I guess it would be polite or whatever for me to introduce you. [She gestures to each member as she says his name.] Mr. Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain... Mr. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow... Mr. Charles Dickens... Mr. Nathaniel Hawthorne... Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson... Mr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. I’ve brought you together because I have to write a project about Harriet Beecher Stowe for my English class at school, and I really don’t know much about her writing, other than _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_.

I’m hoping you nerdy—I mean, uh—brilliant guys who lived at the same time as Harriet will help me out. So here goes. What do you think is her greatest work?

Holmes: If I may begin. [Mutters under his breath] Even though someone decided to introduce me last. I knew Harriet quite well. [Raising his voice to normal level] Ahem. We were both members of the Breakfast Club, a literary society for select, elite writers who contributed to a fine newspaper, the _Atlantic Monthly_. [Looks into the distance dreamily] The Breakfast Club met at the home of James Fields, the editor of _Atlantic Monthly_. Since both Harriet and I had written pieces for the magazine, we were invited to the meetings along with several other writers, including Mr. Hawthorne and Mr. Emerson here. We discussed literature and philosophy and enjoyed breakfast.

Although I realize that _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ is widely recognized as Harriet’s greatest work, personally, I find _Lady Byron Vindicated_ to be one of her more intriguing works.

Polly: _Lady Byron Vindicated_ what-icated?

Holmes: Vindicated. Haven’t you ever heard of it? _Lady Byron Vindicated_ was a non-fiction work that Harriet wrote. You see, Lady Byron was the wife of _Lord Byron_. [Looks at Polly expecting a reaction] You know, the inspiration for the Byronic hero in the works of Romantic authors? [Polly continues to look blankly.] My dear child, were you born in a barn?

Polly [under her breath]: No, just the twenty-first century.
Holmes: Well, I suppose I shall have to enlighten you. [Looks at Polly’s puzzled expression] “Enlighten,” Polly, is another word for “inform.”

Polly [obviously enlightened by the definition of enlighten]: OH, wow! Boy, you’re just a walking dictionary, aren’t you?

Holmes: Oh dear. I see I’ll have to explain this story rather simply.

Lord Byron was an English writer who led an immoral and dark life. Most works of the Romantic authors include a “Byronic Hero,” an anti-hero inspired by Byron.

At any rate, Lord Byron married a woman but continued leading an adulterous life. However, Lady Byron, when she discovered the life her husband was leading, abandoned him. The public did not know why Lady Byron left her husband, and so she was the object of merciless criticism.

Harriet met Lady Byron when she travelled to Europe in 1853. The two developed a close correspondence, and eventually Lady Byron told Harriet about Lord Byron’s private behavior. Harriet decided to write an article for Atlantic Monthly about Lady Byron, and she asked me to proofread it. It was excellent. After reading it, I wrote to Harriet: “When has anything ever appeared in a periodical so like to attract universal attention and comment?”

Indeed, the article and the later book—which was an expanded version of the article—attracted much attention. Unfortunately, the attention was not favorable. Even though Harriet’s claims were substantiated, many readers did not believe them, because they were blinded by their admiration for Lord Byron. Harriet was accused of writing a “sensation story,” and she lost many admirers. I, however, admired her for helping the oppressed Lady Byron.

Polly: Oh! So she was like a writer for People? Thanks for the info, Ollie.

[Oliver winces at the nickname.]
Polly: Ok, so does anyone else care to briefly share their thoughts about Harriet’s greatest work, or the work most interesting to you personally? Because my paper is DUE in like three hours!

Longfellow [confidingly to Polly]: My dear Miss Polly… I apologize if Mr. Holmes has taken some of your valuable time with his long-winded and condescending words. Please understand that he does not mean to be rude.

Polly: He does dominate the convo, doesn’t he?

Longfellow: Pardon me?

Polly: Never mind. You were saying?

Longfellow: Ah, yes. At any rate, my personal favorite is Harriet’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, although at first I must admit I was skeptical of the book. But when I read it, I said, “At one step she has reached the top of the staircase up which the rest of us climb on our knees year after year. Never was there such a literary coup-de-main as this.”

Polly: So Henry, how DID you get to meet Harriet? Something tells me you weren’t able to use the mutual friend button on Facebook. LOVE that button, btw! You probably didn’t have that back then. The mutual friend button, I mean. Of course you had Facebook.

Longfellow: Uh, no. Mr. Emerson, have you ever met someone by simply facing a book?

Emerson: I cannot say that I have, Mr. Longfellow. I really feel that you must meet someone in person to get a feel for their character. Nature, of course, enhances the meeting. Nature is so enlightening to us, mere mortals though we are.

Polly: Huh? Idk what he’s talking about!

Longfellow: Oh, my dear Miss Polly. Pray, what has been your education?

Dickens [gently suggests]: Perhaps you are an orphan, who has been deprived of a proper education? Like Oliver Twist?
[Holmes chuckles at Dickens’ suggestion. The two begin a friendly chat.]

Polly: No, I go to high school, like every other teenager. Except those weird homeschoolers, you know. ROFLOL!

Hey, so anyway guys, you’re being totally A.D.D. So far I don’t have much info for my paper, and time is ticking away.

Longfellow [Obviously puzzled by the term “A.D.D.”]: Ah, well, I suppose we had better stay on topic. As I was saying, I met Mrs. Stowe in England, when she visited in 1853. You see, she had been very interested in me, even to the point of choosing to rent my former home. Apparently, I was a bit of a literary legend.

Polly: Boy, and I thought my friend Bethany was obsessed with Justin Bieber! Talk about stalking! LOL!

Longfellow [Ignores the interruption]: She wrote to me and sent me a copy of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. I’m still not sure how she got my address.

Polly: Duh! Whitepages.com!

Longfellow: Er, I suppose so. At any rate, she begged to meet me when she came to England, just so that she could say: “I have met Longfellow.” [He chuckles.] I thought that was amusing. So that’s how I got to know Harriet.

Polly: Mr. Hawthorne, you’ve been quiet this whole time. Do you have anything you’d like to add to my paper?

Hawthorne: Ah, pardon me, Miss Polly. I am rather timid around people.

Holmes [under his breath]: Just a wee bit, eh?

Emerson: Indeed! He frequently avoided the literary society meetings at Fields’ house, even though he knew all the rest of us!

Longfellow [gently chiding]: Nathaniel, I’ve never quite understood how someone who wrote so well could be afraid of talking.
Dickens [whispering to Holmes]: I’m not up-to-date on my American gossip. Is it true that Harriet resented Hawthorne, even though they ran in the same circles?

Holmes [smirks and bellows back]: The Dickens it is, Dickens! You see, Hawthorne was good friends with Franklin Pierce, who was pro-slavery. The preface of Nathaniel’s book Our Old Home was a dedicatory letter to Pierce. It was filled with glowing praise. Obviously, Harriet was infuriated by that preface, because Pierce was so unabashedly pro-slavery. Why, I remember hearing her very words, for she wrote an angry letter in 1863 to James Fields, who published the book. Fields let me read it. She wrote: “Do tell me if our friend Hawthorne praises that arch traitor Pierce in his preface & your loyal firm publishes it...I regret that I went to see him last summer—what! Patronize such a traitor to our faces!"

But actually, the works of Mrs. Stowe and Mr. Hawthorne are a bit alike, no matter how Harriet tried to avoid the comparison. They both...

Hawthorne [obviously angry with Holmes, interrupts and begins speaking at an incredible rate]: Well, you see, Miss Polly, some of my works are a bit similar to Harriet’s. She used a lot of local dialects in her writing like me. We both set many of our stories in New England, where we both had grown up. But there are differences as well. One main difference between our works is that her works are, in general, much lighter than mine. My works tend to have deep psychological themes.

Polly: Did she write anything that you particularly like?

Holmes [under his breath, sarcastically]: Wow. We are making progress. “Particularly” has five syllables.

Hawthorne: Well, being a New England man, I’ve always enjoyed Pogunac People, one of Harriet’s more colorful romances written after the Civil War.

Polly: How about you, Charlie?

Dickens: Well, like Mr. Hawthorne, I’ve often been compared to Harriet as an author. I remember when we both were at the same dinner with the Lord Mayor of London. I was seated across from
Harriet, and we were toasted together “as having employed fiction as a means of awakening the attention of the respective countries to the condition of the oppressed and suffering classes.”

Harriet once wrote an essay about my works praising me for writing about “the whole class of the oppressed, the neglected, and forgotten, the sinning and suffering...within the pale of sympathy and interest.” But she also had criticism for my work, as well, comparing me to Byron, who she then detested. She also accused me of writing “anti-temperance tracts.”

Despite her criticism, I really do enjoy Harriet’s works, since they are somewhat similar to my own. If I had to choose a book that I most appreciate, it would be Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands. I myself have travelled quite a bit, specifically to America, so I find it interesting to hear an American’s view of my own country.

Polly: What was that book about?

Dickens: It was a travel guide, one of the first European travel guides ever written. She wrote it in the form of letters to her aunt to make for easier reading.

Clemens [nodding his head wisely]: Yes, that makes for a good read. You know I later used the same technique when I wrote Alta California.

Polly: Oh, that’s cool that she was, like, the first to, like, use that technique thingamajig.

Holmes [muttering to Dickens]: You lived longer than me, so maybe you’re more up to date with what’s in vogue. Is it now the style to utter the meaningless word “like” every syllable? And, please, I beg of you...what is a “thingamajig”?

Polly: Mr. Clemens, what else can you give me?

Clemens: Well, I have to say that I enjoyed Harriet’s anti-slavery novels. Even before Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, I was a wholehearted abolitionist.

Polly: Novels with an s? She wrote more than one anti-slavery novel?
Clemens: Oh yes, she wrote three, actually. Two are well-known. The first is obviously *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the other is *Dred: A Tale of the Dismal Swamp*. No one liked *Dred* as much as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Harriet was so upset over Bleeding Kansas that she ended up coming off a trifle sharp in *Dred*.

Polly: Wait, Kansas was bleeding?

Holmes [rolls his eyes]: Please tell me she didn’t just ask that.

Longfellow: That’s alright, Holmes. I will try to explain it to her briefly. My dear Miss Polly, have you ever heard about the Compromise of 1850?

Polly: Uh, yeah, I think so. I was supposed to read about that in my history textbook Tuesday night, but you know, that’s *American Idol* night. I had to text in my votes. I’m guessing it was a compromise that happened in 1850, right?

[Holmes smacks his forehead with his hand before responding sarcastically]: No, actually it was an uncompromising document of our country signed in 1776.

Polly: Wait, wasn’t 1776, like, the year of the Constitution or something?

Holmes: It’s a good thing I’m already deceased, or I would have just done myself in over what you just said. 1776 was the date of the Declaration of Independence, Polly, not the Constitution. And I was using the literary tool of sarcasm.

Longfellow [patiently]: Miss Polly, the Compromise of 1850 was a series of acts passed by Congress that year. The most famous of those acts was the Fugitive Slave Act.

Polly: OH, that inspired Harriet to write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*!

Dickens: Right-o!

Emerson: Following the Compromise of 1850, Congress passed the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, which gave the settlers in the territories of Kansas and Nebraska the ability to vote on whether slavery would be allowed or not. Quickly, this “democratic” way of deciding whether a territory would be free
or slave became violent, in Kansas particularly. But even in the United States Senate, the quarreling over the issue became violent.

My dear friend, Charles Sumner (who introduced me to Lincoln!) was a senator of Massachusetts. A few days after a particularly violent outbreak in Kansas, Charles gave a fervent speech denouncing the Kansas-Nebraska Act and blaming slavery supporters for causing the violence. The next day on the floor of the Senate, South Carolina’s senator, Preston Brooks, a slavery proponent, caned Sumner until he was near the point of death.

Polly: That’s awful!

Clemens: You can imagine how these events shook the country to its core. Harriet was disgusted, scared, and infuriated by Bleeding Kansas and the Sumner caning, and her feelings quickly leaked into her writing in *Dred*, making her writing more bitter and less persuasive than *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had been.

Emerson: I agree with Mr. Clemens that *Dred* wasn’t as effective as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in bringing new supporters to the anti-slavery cause. However, *Dred* is a clear reflection of the growing conflict within the country just prior to the Civil War. For that reason, it is an important work for students of history—especially Harriet Beecher Stowe’s history—to be familiar with.

Clemens: Indeed, Mr. Emerson. Harriet’s post-Civil War works, while pleasant reads, are less significant in history. Those years of being the pen of the anti-slavery movement had been exhausting for Harriet. After the Civil War, she stepped out of most of the country’s debates, and she invested herself in her domestic duties. I know because she actually lived next door to me!

Polly: Wait a second! You lived next to her?

Clemens: Oh yes!

Polly: How come I never learned any of this in school?

Holmes: I’ll venture a guess… the texting?
Emerson: My dear, we do not just learn in school. We can learn everywhere, especially in nature.

Polly: What is it with you and nature?

Dickens: He’s a transcendentalist, my dear.

Polly: What’s a…

Holmes [smacks his forehead]: Oh no! Here we go again. :)

Longfellow: Miss Polly, it is getting perilously close to midnight. I believe you a paper to turn in?
Summary of Genres

Within this project, there are four genres. One of the genres, the expository section, is entirely factual. The other three genres included in the project seek to creatively blend factual and fictional information. The following is a summary of what is fact and what is fiction in each of those three additional genres.

First, fourteen photos with captions are interspersed throughout the expository section. This genre is entirely factual (Ash 21-22, 28; Fritz 81; “Harriet Beecher Stowe 1811-1896”; Hedrick 6-7, 29-30, 156, 306, 397; “General Information for the Academy”; “Lord Byron”; Randolph 10-11, 22, 39-40, 55, 97; “Uncle Tom”; “Uncle Tom’s Cabin: the Book”). The captions contain almost entirely new information, with two exceptions: Harriet’s age upon entering Litchfield Academy and Harriet’s home in her old age.

Second, this project also includes a Beecher family tree purportedly created by Harriet. Most of the information in the genre is factual (“Beecher Family”; Fritz 10, 21-22; Hedrick, Harriet 11, 23; Hedrick, “Stowe’s” par. 7). It should be noted, however, that Harriet’s letter at the beginning is fiction. Also, the sympathy and gratefulness she expresses in regards to Catharine are somewhat exaggerated. The information in the genre is entirely new, with the following exceptions: Harriet’s adoption of her father’s colonization stance in Uncle Tom’s Cabin; Isabella Beecher’s encouragement to Harriet to write Uncle Tom’s Cabin; and Catherine’s assistance to Harriet in the publishing of the geography book.

Finally, this project contains Polly’s Project, a transcript of student Polly Ditzcannon’s interview of Emerson, Longfellow, Dickens, Hawthorne, Clemens, and Holmes. There are multiple fictional elements in this genre. Obviously, Polly Ditzcannon and Miss Redpen are purely fictional characters, and Polly’s last-minute email is made-up. No interview with the literary greats represented could have possibly taken place in the 21st century, since all of the gentlemen are deceased. In addition, the men (with the exception of Longfellow and Holmes) all express opinions of Harriet’s works that are somewhat fabricated based on an extrapolation of each man’s relationship with Harriet and each man’s interests. However, the distinctive personalities of each of the men have, to the best of this author’s ability, been based upon fact. The historical and literary facts recounted are true (Hedrick 156, 236, 242-243, 94-95, 314-315, 353-354, 355-356).

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