Close Reading Lesson
Grade 5- Social Studies
Unit 4: The Causes and Consequences of Slavery
Source: *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself.*
http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/prince/prince.html
The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself

(1) Our mother, weeping as she went, called me away with the children Hannah and Dinah, and we took the road that led to Hamble Town, which we reached about four o'clock in the afternoon. We followed my mother to the market-place, where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall and our arms folded across our breasts. I, as the eldest, stood first, Hannah next to me, then Dinah; and our mother stood beside, crying over us. My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast, but I could not keep it still, and it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body.

(2) But who cared for that? Did one of the many by-standers, who were looking at us so carelessly, think of the pain that wrung the hearts of the negro woman and her young ones? No, no! They were not all bad, I dare say, but slavery hardens white people's hearts towards the blacks; and many of them were not slow to make their remarks upon us aloud, without regard to our grief--though their light words fell like cayenne on the fresh wounds of our hearts. Oh those white people have small hearts who can only feel for themselves.

(3) At length the vendue master, who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle, arrived, and asked my mother which was the eldest. She said nothing, but pointed to me. He took me by the hand, and led me out into the middle of the street, and, turning me slowly round, exposed me to the view of those who attended the vendue. I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words--as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. I was then put up to sale. The bidding commenced at a few pounds, and gradually rose to fifty-seven, when I was knocked down to the highest bidder; and the people who stood by said that I had fetched a great sum for so young a slave. I then saw my sisters led forth, and sold to different owners: so that we had not the sad satisfaction of being partners in bondage.

(4) When the sale was over, my mother hugged and kissed us, and mourned over us, begging of us to keep up a good heart, and do our duty to our new masters. It was a sad parting; one went one way, one another, and our poor mammy went home with nothing.


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Lexile: 1130
**TITLE:** The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave. Related by Herself. With a Supplement by the Editor. Electronic Edition. (originally published 1831)

**UNIT/WEEK:** Grade 5 - Unit 4: The Causes and Consequences of Slavery

**MA FRAMEWORKS**
RI 5.1-5.4, 5.8
SS 5.12 “Describe the harsh conditions of...slave life”

**TIME:** TBD (we really want to get the questions and task right before we start thinking about breaking it up into lessons.)

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### MATERIALS

Copy of the Mary Prince reading.

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### TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students to read the entire text independently.
2. Re-read the entire text aloud while the students follow along.
3. Set the stage for inquiry! “We are reading detectives and our goal is to uncover its meaning. The only way to do that is to read it closely.”
4. Then re-read each section and ask text-dependent questions. Push students to support their answers with evidence from the text.

### BIG IDEAS AND KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

(Identify the key insights that you want students to understand from the text. DO NOT READ THIS TO STUDENTS)

Like sheep or cattle, enslaved Africans were sold at public auction to the highest bidder. Through the public inspection, the bidding, the sale, and the destruction of her family, the slave auction and those involved in it dehumanized enslaved Africans like the narrator and her family.

### SYNOPSIS (2-4 sentence summary of the text. DO NOT READ THIS TO STUDENTS)

In this text, Mary Price recounts her experience as a young slave when she was sold at a public auction, or vendue, to a new master. As a result, she and her sisters were all sold separately to different owners. Their mother had to witness the sale of her three daughters.

### INTRODUCTION

This close reading exemplar sits within the context of the Causes and Consequences of Slavery Unit. After studying the transatlantic slave trade, students learn about the aspects of slave life in the United States.

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### TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

- Begin with a “winnable” question that will help orient students to the text.
- The sequence of questions should build a gradual understanding of the key meanings.
- Questions should focus on a word/phrase, sentence or paragraph.

### RESPONSES

- Answers that reference the text.
- Multiple responses may be provided using different pieces of evidence
- Inferences must be grounded logically in the text.
Our mother, weeping as she went, called me away with the children Hannah and Dinah, and we took the road that led to Hamble Town, which we reached about four o’clock in the afternoon. We followed my mother to the market-place, where she placed us in a row against a large house, with our backs to the wall and our arms folded across our breasts. I, as the eldest, stood first, Hannah next to me, then Dinah; and my mother stood beside, crying over us. My heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently, that I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast, but I could not keep it still, and it continued to leap as though it would burst out of my body.

1.) Based on the first paragraph, what is the setting of this narrative?

The mother and children “took the road that led to Hamble Town” at “four o’clock in the afternoon.” They followed their “mother to the market-place”.

2.) In paragraph 1, what does the narrator’s description of her heart reveal about her emotions?

She states, “my heart throbbed with grief and terror so violently.” The narrator says, “I pressed my hands quite tightly across my breast”. She could not keep her heart still. She describes that her heart felt like “it would burst out of [her] body.” Therefore, she was distraught and agitated in anticipation of the auction.

But who cared for that? Did one of the many by-standers, who were looking at us so carelessly, think of the pain that wrung the hearts of the negro woman and her young ones? No, no! They were not all bad, I dare say, but slavery hardens white people’s hearts towards the blacks; and many of them were not slow to make their remarks upon us aloud, without regard to our grief—though their light words fell like cayenne on the fresh wounds of our hearts. Oh those white people have small hearts who can only feel for themselves.

3.) Based on paragraph 2, what is the narrator’s attitude toward white people?

She says, the white people “were looking at us so carelessly” and did not “think of the pain that wrung the hearts of the negro woman and her young ones.”

She doesn’t think all white people are bad (“They were not all bad, I dare say...”), but she does think many are insensitive and hardhearted (“their light words fell like cayenne on the fresh wounds of our hearts.”) She also states, “those white people have small hearts who can only feel for themselves.”

At length the vendue master, who was to offer us for sale like sheep or cattle, arrived, and asked my mother which was the eldest. She said nothing, but pointed to me. He took me by the hand, and led me out into the middle of the street, and, turning me slowly round, exposed me to the view of those who attended the vendue. I was soon surrounded by strange men, who examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or a lamb he was about to purchase, and who talked about my shape and size in like words—as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts. I was then put up to sale. The bidding commenced at a few pounds, and gradually rose to fifty-seven, when I was

4. Note all the different ways the slave trader, bystanders, and purchasers treated the narrator like an animal?

The white people treated her like livestock at an auction (“offer us for sale like a sheep or cattle”). The vendue master “led me out to the middle of the street”, turned her around, exposed her to the views of the crowd, men “handled her” like “a butcher would a calf or lamb.” They “talked about my shape and size” as though she couldn’t understand. “I was then put up to sale.”

Then, some white people in the crowd bid on her. The white bystanders said she “fetched a great sum.”
knocked down to the highest bidder; and the people who stood by said that I had fetched a great sum for so young a slave. I then saw my sisters led forth, and sold to different owners: so that we had not the sad satisfaction of being partners in bondage.

5. Why was “the sad satisfaction of being partners in bondage” a better option than what happened to the speaker?

As with a litter of animals/puppies, the family was broken up and the sisters were “sold to different owners.”

Even though she had previously endured a life of bondage, she was with her mother and sisters. As a consequence of the auction, her family was torn apart and each of them had to endure enslavement on their own.

6. How does the word “mourned” set the tone for the last paragraph?

The word “mourned” signals that the mother has lost her children. “It was a sad parting: one went one way, one another, and our poor mammy went home with nothing.” Therefore, the word “mourned” reflects the tone of sorrow and loss in the last paragraph.

7. How does the heart imagery set the tone for the entire text?

“heart throbbed with grief and pain”; “leap as though it would burst out of my body”; “pain wrung in the hearts of negro woman and her young ones”; “fresh wounds of our hearts”; then at the end... “keep up a good heart”

**Imagery for Hearts of Enslaved Africans**

**Imagery for Hearts of Whites**

“hardens white peoples’ hearts”; “small hearts who care only for themselves”

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**VOCABULARY**

**EMBEDDED INSTRUCTION**

Words that require some attention in order for students to understand the selection. Define words quickly using student-friendly definition.

Paragraph 1: Throbbed

Paragraph 2: Cayenne

Paragraph 3: Vendue, Commenced, bondage

**EXTENDED INSTRUCTION (Tier 2)**

Words that build academic language and are essential to understanding the text. These words may be defined quickly, but will be revisited for students to integrate into their vocabulary.

Paragraph 1: Grief

Paragraph 2: Bystander, carelessly

Paragraph 3: exposed, handled, Bidding, bidder
To dehumanize means to deprive people of human qualities. According to the text, how did the slave auction and its participants dehumanize the narrator and her family?

The slave auction dehumanized the narrator and her family in many ways. (anticipation of the auction, the inspection, the bidding, the sale, the separation) The narrator describes her mother’s grief as she led her daughters to the market-place to be sold. She writes, “Our mother, weeping as she went, called me away with the children...” There is no more dehumanizing task than to force a mother to bring her children to be sold. In addition, the narrator describes how the white people at the auction made her feel like an animal. She recalls that the men, “examined and handled me in the same manner that a butcher would a calf or lamb he was about to purchase.” The white spectators also made hurtful comments about her “size and shape” and acted like the narrator couldn’t understand their words. She writes that they made comments “as if I could no more understand their meaning than the dumb beasts”. When the auction began, white people bid on her like property. When she was sold to the highest bidder, bystanders commented that she fetched a great sum. The final act of dehumanization came when she and her sisters were separated from their mother and sent to live with new masters. Therefore, all parts of the slave auction—the anticipation, the inspection, the bidding, the sale, and the breakup of the family—served to dehumanize the narrator and her family.