Excerpt #1 from *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*

**READ THE OPENING PASSAGE BELOW FROM *LIFE OF WILLIAM GRIMES, THE RUNAWAY SLAVE* IN WHICH GRIMES INTRODUCES HIMSELF TO THE READER. THEN, COMPOSE A LIST OF QUESTIONS YOU HAVE ABOUT GRIMES AND HIS LIFE.**

*THOSE who are acquainted with the subscriber, he presumes will readily purchase his history. Those who are not, but wish to know who Grimes is, and what is his history, he would inform them, generally, that he is now living in Litchfield, Connecticut. That he is about 40 years of age. That he is married to a black woman, and passes for a negro, though three parts white. He was born in a place in Virginia, has lived in several different states, and been owned by ten different masters. About ten years since, he ran away, and came to Connecticut, where, after six years he was recognized by some of his former master’s friends, taken up, and compelled to purchase his freedom with the sacrifice of all he had earned. [….] Let any one suppose himself a husband and father, possessed of a house, home, and livelihood. A stranger enter[s] that house; before his children, and in fair day light, puts the chain on his leg, where it remains till the last cent of his property buys from avarice and cruelty, the remnant of a life, whose best years had been spent in misery! Let any one imagine this, and think what I have felt.*

**What questions do you have about Grimes and his life?**

Excerpt from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793

**READ THE EXCERPT BELOW FROM THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT OF 1793.**

In 1793, the U.S. Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act. Focused solely on owners’ rights, the law mandated the return of fugitives of enslavement to their owners, even if the freedom seeker was found in a free state.

*And be in also enacted, that when a person held to labor in any of the United States or in either of the territories...shall escape into any other part of the said States or Territory, the person to whom such labor or service may be due, his agent or attorney, is hereby empowered to seize or arrest such fugitive from labor, and to take him or her before any Judge of the Circuit or District Courts of the United States...and upon proof to the satisfaction of such Judge or magistrate...that the person so seized or arrested, doth, under the laws of the State or Territory from which he or she fled, owe service or labor to the person claiming him or her, it shall be the duty of such Judge or magistrate to give a certificate thereof to such claimant, his agent, or attorney, which shall be sufficient warrant for removing the said fugitive from labor to the State or Territory from which he or she fled.*

**What powers were given to slaveholders and their agents under this law?  
  
  
How would laws like the Fugitive Slave Act affect someone like Grimes, who had escaped slavery and had built a life in Connecticut?  
  
  
How would these laws impact free black residents of Connecticut?**

Excerpt #2 from *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*

**READ THE QUOTE BELOW FROM *LIFE OF WILLIAM GRIMES, THE RUNAWAY SLAVE* AND WORK WITH YOUR GROUP TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.**

In 1814, after thirty years of being enslaved, Grimes escaped. In the following excerpt, Grimes explains how he made his initial flight from enslavement stowed aboard a ship, “The Casket,” headed to New York City.

I have experienced the sufferings of a slave in the Southern States. I have travelled from Frederickstown in Maryland, to Darien in Georgia, and from there to Savannah, from whence I made my escape in the following manner. While I belonged to Mr. Welman, he went with his family to Bermuda, and left me to work for what I could get by my paying him three dollars per week. During this time the Brig Casket from Boston arrived. I went with a number more to assist in loading her. I soon got acquainted with some of these Yankee sailors, and they appeared to be quite pleased with me. Her cargo chiefly consisted of cotton in bales... The sailors, growing more and more attached to me, […] proposed to me to leave in the center of the cotton bales […] a hole or place sufficiently large for me to stow away in with my necessary provisions. Whether they then had any idea of my coming away with them or not I cannot tell, but this I can say safely, a place was left, and I occupied it during the passage, and by that means made my escape.

**What was Grimes doing in Savannah when he made his escape?**

**How did Grimes escape from enslavement in Savannah?**

**What can we learn from this quote about William Grimes’s experience as a freedom seeker?**

Excerpt #3 from *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*

**READ THE QUOTE BELOW FROM *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM GRIMES, THE RUNAWAY SLAVE* AND WORK WITH YOUR GROUP TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.**

As a fugitive, Grimes was at constant risk of recapture – a perpetual concern hanging over his daily life. Despite being a fugitive, Grimes married, started a family, and built a life in Connecticut. He wrote the following after being discovered as a fugitive of slavery and arrested:

*To be put in irons and dragged back to a state of slavery, and either leave my wife and children in the street, or take them into servitude, was a situation, in which my soul now shudders at the thought of having been placed. It would have exhibited an awful spectacle of the conduct and inconsistency of men…yet I was undoubtedly the lawful property of my master according to the laws of the country, and though many would justify him, perhaps aid in taking me back… If there is any man in God’s whole creation, who will say, with respect to himself … that there are any possible circumstances in which it is just that he should be [belong to] a fellow being…that man lies! The soul of man cannot be made to feel it, to think it, to own it, or authorize them to take my life or liberty from me, while innocent of any crime.*

**According to the law in the US at the time, to whom did Grimes belong?**

**What will happen to Grimes’s family if he is returned to his master?**

**What can we learn from this quote about William Grimes’s experience as a freedom seeker?**

Excerpt #4 from *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*

**READ THE QUOTE BELOW FROM *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM GRIMES, THE RUNAWAY SLAVE* AND WORK WITH YOUR GROUP TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.**

For nearly ten years, Grimes lived in New England as a fugitive of slavery. Despite the constant risk of recapture, Grimes married, started a family, and built a life in Connecticut.

In 1823, while living in New Haven, Grimes was discovered by a friend of his owner and arrested. He was able to purchase his freedom and wrote the following after finally securing his freedom:

*Oh! How my heart did rejoice, and thank God! From what anxiety, what pain and heart ache did it relieve me. For even though I might have fared better the rest of life under my master , yet the thought of being snatched up and taken back was awful…to say that a man is better off in one situation, if in the one he is better clothed and better fed, and has less care than in the other, is false.*

**How does Grimes feel about the fear of being returned to slavery?**

**Grimes says that even if he is better fed and clothed in one situation, he would not be better off. What does he mean by this?**

**What can we learn from this quote about William Grimes’s experience as a freedom seeker?**

Excerpt #5 from *Life of William Grimes, the Runaway Slave*

**READ THE QUOTE BELOW FROM *THE LIFE OF WILLIAM GRIMES, THE RUNAWAY SLAVE* AND WORK WITH YOUR GROUP TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.**

While many well-known narrative writers, such as Frederick Douglass, became celebrated speakers, Grimes lived the life of a working-class man, and his book reflects the reality of life in the north for many Black people. In the following, Grimes describes the discrimination and oppression he faced in the North:

*Accustomed as I had been to freedom for years, the miseries of slavery which I had felt, and knew, and tasted, were presented to my mind in no faint image. […] Those slaves who have kind masters, are perhaps as happy as the generality of mankind. They are not aware that their condition can be better, and I don’t know as it can: indeed it cannot by their own exertions. I would advise no slave to leave his master. If he runs away, he is most sure to be taken. If he is not, he will ever be in the apprehension of it. And I do think there is no inducement for a slave to leave his master and be set free in the northern states. I have had to work hard. I have been often cheated, insulted, abused, and injured. Yet, a black man, if he will be industrious and honest, he can get along here as well as any one who is poor, and in a situation to be imposed on. I have been very unfortunate in life in this respect. Notwithstanding all my struggles and sufferings, and injuries, I have been an honest man. There is no one who can come forward and say he knows any thing against Grimes.*

**What reasons does Grimes give for saying that “I would advise no slave to leave his master” ?**

**How does Grimes describe his experience living in a northern state?**

**What can we learn from this quote about William Grimes’s experience as a freedom seeker?**