

Activity 1.2. Analyzing the Text: Answer Sheet

The students' responses should convey at least four points:*

- a. Slavery corrupted the marriage of Edwin and Mary Epps by providing conditions such as the Master having the right to “use” the body of any enslaved woman he owned for his sexual gratification; moreover, any enslaved child the master fathered became his property and increased his work force and therefore his wealth.
- b. Mrs. Epps, blind with jealousy and rage at her husband's chronic infidelity, uses the victim (Patsey) as a scapegoat rather than hold her husband accountable for his transgressions. This illustrates how slavery has so perverted the Epps' marriage that Mrs. Epps becomes an enabler or supporter of her husband's sexual misconduct.
- c. As a white woman herself disempowered by the institution of slavery, Mrs. Epps had very few rights even though she was a white woman and the legal spouse of Edwin Epps. Though she does not suffer nearly as much as Patsey, Mrs. Epps can do almost nothing to assert her rights to a monogamous husband. Since she has no power to curb her husband's infidelity, she exacts her revenge on his humiliation of her by demanding that he punish Patsey, the woman he appears to desire more than his legal spouse. Thus a terrible triangle of desire and revenge perverts the relationships of Epps, his wife, and Patsey, rendering love and mutual respect impossible.
- d. By allowing his wife and children to witness Patsey's beating, Epps enlists his entire family as co-conspirators in the lie he is living. He is unfaithful to his wife and is the sole cause of her humiliation and jealousy. Yet Epps allows Patsey, an innocent young woman, to be blamed for his immorality and to be beaten almost to death for Epps actions. Epps wishes his family to also blame Patsey and to accept the injustice of her beating as justice; in doing so, Epps perverts the trust, honesty, and decency that should be defining characteristics of a healthy, loving family.
- e. Epps had immunity in regard to his sexual violation of Patsy because under slavery Patsey was Epps property. Therefore, he had the right to use her body as he pleased.

* If students have additional responses that support the antislavery argument that slavery corrupted marriage and the family and they can justify their responses with evidence from the text, by all means give credit for their astute inferences.