Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Directions: The 60 short essay questions listed in this section require a one to two sentence answer. They ask students to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the text. Students must describe what they've read, rather than just recall it.

Short Essay Question - Chapter 1

1. Compare and contrast Mr. Shelby's and Mr. Haley's opinions on how slaves should be treated.
2. What does the reader's first impression of Harry reveal about him?
3. How does the reader know that Mr. Shelby regards his wife's happiness as important?
4. How does the reader know that Eliza trusts Mrs. Shelby?

Short Essay Question - Chapters 2 and 3

5. How does the treatment of George by his master compare or contrast with how Eliza is treated by her owners?
6. What does the reader learn in Chapters 2 and 3 about Eliza's past as a mother?
7. What effect has studying the Christian religion had on Eliza?
8. How does Harry's tolerance for being a slave compare or contrast with Eliza's?

Short Essay Question - Chapters 4 and 5

9. What is the effect of describing the actual cabin of Uncle Tom as a place where flowers grow and people worship and eat together?
10. What is unusual about Young Master Shelby teaching Tom how to write?
11. When Mrs. Shelby speaks of this sale of her slaves being a curse from God, her husband accuses her of sounding like an abolitionist. Why is that such a harsh accusation?
12. Why is Uncle Tom's loyalty to his master such a subject of harsh criticism and ridicule?
**Short Essay Question - Chapter 6**

13. What is it that offers Mrs. Shelby a moment of worry, then relief, at the beginning of Chapter 6?

14. How does one detect a difference in the manners between Mr. Shelby and Mr. Haley?

15. Why do black people in the novel freely use the "n" word?

16. What provides the comic relief in Chapter 6?

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 7 and 8**

17. What are two good reasons that "The Mother's Struggle" is an appropriate title for Chapter 7?

18. Why does the author write that "Sam was in wonderful spirits," when each of his possible sightings of Eliza turn out to not be her?

19. What do you think the author's purpose is in having a man help Eliza escape even though he is a friend of Mr. Shelby's?

20. What is the author's purpose in having Sam tell the story of Eliza's escape and Mr. Haley's failed attempts to catch her?

**Short Essay Question - Chapter 9**

21. The author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, feels it is important for her readers to know the substance of the Fugitive Slave Act. What does she do inform the reader of this law?

22. How is the theme of religion versus politics explored in Chapter 9?

23. What is the significance of John Von Trompe being described as a former "land-holder and slave owner in the state of Kentucky?"

24. What are the two things in this historical fiction that were real and introduced in Ch. 9?
**Short Essay Question - Chapter 10**

25. How might the modern reader interpret Mr. Shelby's plan to be absent from the plantation when Tom is to be taken away?

26. How does this chapter about Tom's leaving further the theme of Christianity versus the law that has been developed so far?

**Short Essay Question - Chapter 11**

27. What character says, "don't quote the Bible at me that way," and what does this quotation reveal about his character?

28. What character speaks about laws and says, "we have nothing to do with them; all they are for is to crush us, and keep us down."

**Short Essay Question - Chapter 12**

29. What is the author's intent by contrasting Mr. Haley's sole interest in thinking of slaves in terms of their physical strength and how he will be able to resell them and Tom's continued pondering on the Bible and a "pitying Jesus?"

30. Why might the author so frequently speak directly to the reader and asks the reader questions as she does in the last four to five paragraphs at the end of this chapter?

**Short Essay Question - Chapter 13**

31. How does the reader learn that Quakers are anti-slavery?

32. What is effect of the description of life at the Hallidays?
Short Essay Question - Chapters 14, 15 and 16

33. In spite of the differences between Tom and Eva's life situation, what character traits do they have in common?

34. How are Miss Ophelia's views of blacks more complicated than the racial views of other whites we have met so far?

Short Essay Question - Chapter 17

35. How is the character of Phineas contrasted with that of Halliday?

36. When and how do George and Eliza show their true religious nature?

Short Essay Question - Chapters 18, 19 and 20

37. What purpose does Augustine St. Clare's defense of slavery serve to the reader?

38. How does Miss Ophelia's feelings about "training" Topsy reveal what the problem is for people who attempt to control their servants or slaves with violence?

Short Essay Question - Chapter 21

39. What are the similarities between Aunt Chloe And Mrs. Shelby which are emphasized?

40. What is Mr. Shelby's objection to Mrs. Shelby having taught religion to the slaves?

Short Essay Question - Chapters 22, 23 and 24

41. How does the author use color and/or physical characteristics to symbolize the difference between Augustine and his daughter, Eva, and Alfred and his son, Henrique?
42. Explain how the following passage is foreshadowing: "the rays of the sun formed a kind of glory behind her [Eva], as she came forward in her white dress, with her golden hair and glowing cheeks, her eyes unnaturally bright..."

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 25, 26 and 27**

43. What do readers learn about the development of a person from the relationship between Eva and Topsy?

44. What event triggers the turning point in Augustine's religious beliefs and who is responsible for his religious education here?

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 28 and 29**

45. What is ironic about how and why Augustine St. Clare dies?

46. What does the death of Augustine emphasize about the lives and futures of their slaves?

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 30, 31 and 32**

47. How do the physical descriptions of Simon Legree himself and his plantation symbolize his character?

48. What is the ironic about Emmeline's being brought up "by the Bible?"

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 33, 34, 35 and 36**

49. Why might Simon Legree "secretly dislike" Tom and why was it so important for him to get Tom to whip a person?

50. Why is Cassy a key character in through whom Stowe explores Simon Legree's temperament and treatment of slaves?
**Short Essay Question - Chapter 37**

51. How does the language of Eliza and George's escape to freedom reflect the mood of this journey?

--"The blue waves of Lake Erie danced, rippling and sparkling in the sunlight. A fresh breeze blew from the shore, and the lordly boat ploughed her way right gallantly onward."

52. Why might Stowe ends this chapter speaking directly to the reader about what might it feel like to be free for the first time?

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 38, 39 and 40**

53. What happens in Chapter 38 where Tom is left along often that actually foreshadows Tom's death?

54. How is Cassy and Emmeline's "escape" from Legree bittersweet?

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 41 and 42**

55. How is Tom's death the epitome of selflessness and forgiveness?

56. How do the events on the boat suggest that the novel is nearing a conclusion of a story?

**Short Essay Question - Chapters 43 and 44**

57. Why might Stowe have had the significant black characters who are now free end up going to Africa to do missionary work?

58. With all the happy endings in the book, why might Stowe have chosen to have Tom, the most beloved character, beat to death?
Short Essay Question - Chapter 45

59. As the loose ends of the story are tied up in Chapter 44, what is the purpose of Chapter 45, the final chapter?

60. What does Stowe insist that Northerners do to truly live by their Christian beliefs?