

**Documents: About John Brown**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Analyze the document and complete the questions.

**Background:** In 1881, Frederick Douglass gave a speech at Storer College at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, to raise money toward the endowment of a John Brown professorship. Also in attendance was Andrew Hunter, the district attorney who successfully prosecuted John Brown in 1859 for murder, servile insurrection, and treason against the state of Virginia. Brown became a martyr to some and a villain to others. Legends spread about Brown, including that he kissed an African American baby on his walk to his execution. At the end of his speech, Douglass summed up the contribution of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry twenty-two years earlier.

**JOHN BROWN**  
**AN ADDRESS BY FREDERICK DOUGLASS**  
**HARPER'S FERRY, WEST VIRGINIA, MAY 30, 1881**

But the question is, Did John Brown fail? He certainly did fail to get out of Harper's Ferry before being beaten down by United States soldiers; he did fail to save his own life, and to lead a liberating army into the mountains of Virginia. But he did not go to Harper's Ferry to save his life. The true question is, Did John Brown draw his sword against slavery and thereby lose his life in vain? And to this I answer ten thousand times, No! No man fails, or can fail, who so grandly gives himself and all he has to a righteous cause. No man, who in his hour of extremest need, when on his way to meet an ignominious death, could so forget himself as to stop and kiss a little child, one of the hated race for whom he was about to die, could by any possibility fail.

"Did John Brown fail? Ask Henry A. Wise in whose house less than two years after, a school for the emancipated slaves was taught.

"Did John Brown fail? Ask James M. Mason, the author of the inhuman fugitive slave bill, who was cooped up in Fort Warren, as a traitor less than two

years from the time that he stood over the prostrate body of John Brown.

"Did John Brown fail? Ask Clement C. Vallandigham, one other of the inquisitorial party; for he too went down in the tremendous whirlpool created by the powerful hand of this bold invader. If John Brown did not end the war that ended slavery, he did at least begin the war that ended slavery. If we look over the dates, places and men for which this honor is claimed, we shall find that not Carolina, but Virginia, not Fort Sumter, but Harpers Ferry, and the arsenal, not Col. Anderson, but John Brown, began the war that ended American slavery and made this a free Republic. Until this blow was struck, the prospect for freedom was dim, shadowy and uncertain. The irrepressible conflict was one of words, votes and compromises.

"When John Brown stretched forth his arm the sky was cleared. The time for compromises was gone – the armed hosts of freedom stood face to face over the chasm of a broken Union – and the clash of arms was at hand. The South staked all upon getting possession of the Federal Government, and failing to do that, drew the sword of rebellion and thus made her own, and not Brown's, the lost cause of the century.

**Central Ideas.** A central idea is the overall topic of the entire piece.

1. What is the central idea that Frederick Douglass is making to his audience?
  - E. John Brown died in vain.
  - H. John Brown failed to end slavery.
  - O. John Brown started the war that ended slavery.
  - Y. The fugitive slave bill started the Civil War.

**Words in Context.** Define words based upon how they are used in the writing.

“The South staked all upon getting possession of the Federal Government, and failing to do that, drew the sword of rebellion and thus made her own, and not Brown's, the lost cause of the century.”

2. What do the words “lost cause” mean as it is used in the quote above?
- E. The North won the war.
  - H. The South tried to maintain its culture and way of life.
  - O. John Brown failed to start a slave rebellion in the South.
  - Y. America failed to avoid a civil war.

“Ask James M. Mason, the author of the inhuman fugitive slave bill, who was cooped up in Fort Warren, as a traitor less than two years from the time that he stood over the prostrate body of John Brown.”

3. What do the words “cooped up” mean as it is used in the quote above?
- E. resting
  - H. taking care of chickens
  - O. imprisoned
  - Y. in authority of something

**Facts vs. Opinions.**

**Fact:** A conclusion that can be proven true and/or is absolutely accurate to all people involved.

**Opinion:** belief or preference about something that cannot be proven or accepted by all people.

According to Frederick Douglass, John Brown's attack on Harper's Ferry caused great anger in the South and started the war that ended slavery.

4. Identify the statement above as fact or opinion.
- A. fact
  - N. opinion

**Questions based on the text.**

5. According to Douglass, John Brown
- E. forced both North and South to take action over the issue of slavery.
  - H. failed to make a difference in the lives of the enslaved people of the South.
  - O. succeeded in ending the Civil War.
  - Y. made the South rethink the idea of secession from the Union.