

## Strategy 8: Activating and Using Prior Knowledge Implementation Guide

### Overview

Strong readers know that asking questions and thinking about ideas while reading helps them understand and remember text. Students who begin reading a text with no preparation and no thought about the topic at hand can often complete an assignment, but do not seem to remember much about what they read. One useful method for helping students over this hurdle is by using the KWL+ strategy. KWL stands for What I Know, What I Want to Know, and What I Learned.

### The Strategy in Action

Students should complete the following steps to practice the strategy. Be sure to pass out copies of Activity Guide 8 before students begin their work.

**Step 1: Fill Out the First Two Columns of the KWL Chart.** That is, students should write down everything they know for sure about the topic. Then, have them write down everything they want to know about this topic in the middle column. Students are identifying what they know for sure and what they think they know about a topic. There is no set of correct answers, but misconceptions or wrong information can be flagged for further discussion. What students want to know should be phrased as questions. If students construct these two columns individually, they can then work in small groups to elaborate on their lists. For this activity, students should write down everything they know about *slavery* and everything they think they know or want to know about *slavery*.

**Step 2: Read the Text.** Have students read the selection from Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

**Step 4: Fill Out the Learned Column.** Once students have finished reading, have them complete the third column of the chart. Students should work in small groups to elaborate on their answers.

### Discussion

Once students have finished the activity, you may want to have a brief discussion with them about the assignment. Encourage students to probe how what they learned compared to what they knew or thought they knew before they read. As an extension, you may guide students in using what they learned to construct a concept map and then write a summary of what they now know about the topic.

### Answers to the Student Activity Guide

**Part A:** Answers will vary, but students will probably state that they know that almost all slaves came from Africa, that they were mistreated by white slaveholders,

and that most of them lived in the South. They may think or want to know more about their everyday conditions, and/or how they survived such conditions.

**Part B:** Answers will vary, but students should capture the most important points in the text such as the following: slave narratives help us understand more about the everyday lives of slaves; poor whites behaved differently than wealthy whites; slaves were at times beaten for no reason; many slaves lived in fear for their lives.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Strategy 8: Activating and Using Prior Knowledge Activity Guide

**Part A:** This is the KWL chart. Write down all the things you know for sure about slavery and all the things you think you know or want to know about slavery.

Slavery		
What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned

**Part B:** Now read the text, which is an excerpt from an autobiographical work by Harriet Jacobs called, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Once you have finished reading, go back and fill in the Learned column on the KWL chart.

### ***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl***

Not far from this time Nat Turner's insurrection broke out<sup>1</sup>; and the news threw our town into great commotion. Strange that they should be alarmed when their slaves were so "contented and happy"! But so it was.

It was always the custom to have a muster<sup>2</sup> every year. On the occasion every white man shouldered his musket. The citizens and the so-called country gentlemen wore military uniforms. The poor whites took their places in the ranks in every-day dress, some without shoes, some without hats. This grand occasion had already passed; and when the slaves were told there was to be another muster, they were surprised and rejoiced. Poor creatures! They thought it was going to be a holiday. I was informed of the true state of affairs, and imparted [told] it to the few I could trust. Most gladly would I have proclaimed it to every slave; but I dared not. All could not be relied on. Mighty is the power of the torturing lash.

By sunrise, people were pouring in from every quarter within twenty miles of the town. I knew the houses were to be searched; and I expected it would be done by country bullies and the poor whites. I knew nothing annoyed them so much as to see colored people living in comfort and respectability; so . . . I arranged every thing in my grandmother's house as neatly as possible. I put white quilts on the beds, and decorated some of the rooms with flowers. When all was arranged, I sat down at the window to watch. Far as my eye could reach, it rested on a motley [diverse] crowd of soldiers. Drums and fifes were discounting [playing] martial [warlike] music. . . . Orders were given, and the wild scouts rushed in every direction, wherever a colored face was to be found.

It was a grand opportunity for the low whites, who had no negroes of their own to scourge [punish]. They exulted in such a chance to exercise a little brief authority, and show their subserviency to the slaveholders, not reflecting that the power which trampled on the colored people also kept themselves in poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation. Those who never witnessed such scenes can hardly believe what I know was inflicted at this time on innocent men, women, and children, against them there was not the slightest ground for suspicion. Colored people and slaves who lived in remote parts of the town suffered in an especial manner. In some cases the searchers scattered powder and shot among their clothes, and then sent other parties to find them, and bring them forward as proof that they were plotting insurrection. Every where men, women, and children were whipped till the blood stood in puddles at their feet. . . . The dwellings of the colored people, unless they happen to be protected by some influential [powerful] white person, who was right [near] at hand, were robbed of clothing and every thing else the marauders [attackers] thought worth carrying away. All day long these unfeeling wretches went round, like a troop of demons, terrifying and tormenting the helpless. At night, they formed themselves into patrol bands, and went wherever they chose among the colored people, acting out their brutal will. . . . The consternation [fear] was universal. No two people that had the slightest tinge of color in their faces dared to be seen talking together. . . .

The day patrol continued for some weeks, and at sundown a night guard was substituted. Nothing at all was proved against the colored people bond or free. The wrath of the slaveholders was somewhat appeased [calmed] by the capture of Nat Turner. The imprisoned were released. . . . Visiting was strictly forbidden on the plantations. The slaves begged the privilege of again meeting at their little church in the woods. . . . Their request was denied, and the church was demolished. They were permitted to attend the white churches, a certain portion of the galleries [balconies] being appropriated to their use.

From: Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Harvard University Press, 1987.

<sup>1</sup>Nat Turner's rebellion began August 21, 1831, in Southampton County, Virginia, near Jacobs's owner's plantation.

<sup>2</sup>military inspection