

## **Activity 2. Editor's Preface: Answer Sheet**

Question:

1) Why is it important to know how Wilson and Northup worked together on the narrative?

Answer: Understanding how they worked on the narrative affects its credibility, because Wilson as a ghostwriter didn't experience any of the things he writes about in the first person as if he were Northup. This raises questions about how much the narrative actually reflects what Northup experienced and felt as opposed to Wilson's feelings and views about what happened. The more readers are convinced that Wilson is being faithful to Northup's account, the more they will believe the narrative is true. The more accurate they think it is, the more they will be affected by its antislavery messages.

Question:

2) Identify at least four statements of Wilson, the ghostwriter, designed to convince the reader that the narrative is true.

Answer: (Any four of these):

"In order ... to present all the facts which have been communicated to him, it has seemed necessary to extend it to its present length."

"Many of the statements contained in the following pages are corroborated by abundant evidence ..."

"That he has adhered strictly to the truth the editor, at least, who has had an opportunity of detecting any contradiction or discrepancy in his statements, is well satisfied."

"He has invariably repeated the same story without deviating in the slightest particular, and has also carefully perused the manuscript, dictating an alteration wherever the most trivial inaccuracy has appeared."

"Unbiased, as he conceives, by any prepossessions or prejudices, the only object of the editor has been to give a faithful history of Solomon Northup's life, as he received it from his lips."

Question:

3) Why do you think Wilson addresses the character of Northup's former masters?

## ***Twelve Years a Slave: Analyzing Slave Narratives***

Answer:

This requires a considerable amount of inference so students should be given credit for reading between the lines and “outside of the box.” However, the responses shouldn’t be fanciful and “too far out there” but well-reasoned. One inference is that Wilson may have thought that Edwin Epps’ behavior was so extreme that readers would perceive it to be exaggerated or too offensive. Another inference is that Wilson, by pointing out that there are good and humane whites in the narrative as well as thoroughly corrupted individuals, presents himself to be fair and balanced. The more Wilson presents himself to be a reasonable person, the more the narrative will be believed.

4) Does the Editor’s Preface convince you that the narrative is true? What statements convince you the most? The least?

Answer: This is a personal opinion; the key is that it should be supported by quotes from the Editor’s Preface.