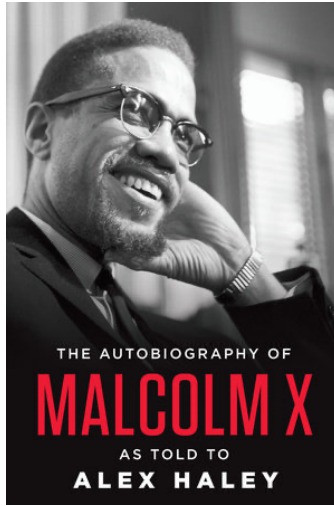


The Autobiography of Malcolm X

By Malcolm X



TEACHING GUIDE

About the Book

Malcolm X is a powerful voice in American history. In his short lifetime he went through several significant shifts in his lifestyle and philosophy. The hardships that Malcolm endures as a child led to his fascination with life in the fast lane, where he used his wits as a hustler and thief. However, the tenacity and intellect of Malcolm X the human being propelled him from his prison cell to the extraordinary stature with which the world recognizes him today.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X is an opportunity to observe many examples of human strengths. The children of the Little family survived in spite of the death of their father and institutionalization of their mother. Ella, the sister in Boston, tried to keep the connection to her less fortunate relatives by providing them with new starts. As a hustler, Malcolm continued to feel a sense of protectiveness for his younger brother. As an inmate, Malcolm realized the critical importance of an education and became a literal sponge for knowledge. Malcolm's family did not give up on him when he went to prison but instead rallied to support him by bringing hope through Islam.

Among the points of interest regarding this book are its original printing date, its co-author, and the man about whom the book is written. The first printing of ***The Autobiography of Malcolm X*** dates back to 1964, thirty years ago. Life in America has changed dramatically in many ways and, in others it has unfortunately remained pretty constant. When Malcolm X told his story to Alex Haley, no one could have possibly imagined that Alex Haley would become one of the

most famous authors of all time with the publication and subsequent televising of **Roots**. The life of Malcolm X continues to be a source of both controversy and awe to people around the globe as the struggle for human rights and equality remains an issue. Before your students begin the book, have them discuss what they have already heard and know about the life of Malcolm X. Ask them to write down their impressions about how he lived, what he stood for, the changes he underwent in philosophy, how he dies, and the manner in which people continue to keep his memory alive.

Teaching Ideas

I. Have your students keep a notebook as they read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Provide structure for each reading assigned by identifying either a particular theme, series of events, or conflict that can be the focal point of the reading. This will enable students to have a common frame of reference for discussion and will give students something to look out for as they read. Listed below are some themes that might be useful:

1. the commitment to what one believes in
2. improving the quality of life for one's family
3. the devastating effect of a family breakup
4. the extended family
5. the criminal life
6. interracial relationships
7. coping with disappointment
8. the enlightenment of education
9. venturing into the unknown
10. family support
11. the role of police in the community
12. friendship
13. going from popular to unpopular
14. expanding one's view of the world
15. sensing that the end is near

II. Divide the life of Malcolm X into 7-10 sections. These sections should be listed in the notebook. Once each section is completed, have students write one-page summaries in the notebook. Each student should include his or her summary points that they would pass on to another young person about Malcolm X.

Suggested sections:

1. Growing up
2. Life with Ella
3. Adopting a New Lifestyle
4. Paying the Price
5. The Conversion
6. The Rise to Prominence
7. A New Perspective on People
8. The Final Days

III. A number of famous people are mentioned throughout **The Autobiography of Malcolm X**. Ask students to keep a running list of names as well as page numbers where these people are located. Instruct students to look up information about each person. Is that person still alive? If so, what is that person doing now? If the person is deceased, what was the cause? What was each person's claim to fame?

Comprehension & Discussion Questions

1. After students have completed the **Autobiography**, ask them to express how they personally feel about Malcolm X and his philosophies about the plight of African Americans. Be sensitive to the fact that there may be a number of students in your class who disagree with his approaches. Also remind students that many African Americans were opposed to Malcolm X's philosophy.
2. Discuss the role that Ella played in Malcolm's life. Describe her as a person. How was she a positive influence?
3. How did Malcolm get "off track" as a young person? How could he have handled his early years differently?
4. Discuss the role of the welfare workers in the Little family after the death of the father. Were they effective? What would have been some other alternatives that might have been more appropriate for the family?

5. How is hair an expression of one's self? Ask each student to write an essay that expresses why he or she has chosen to wear his or her hair in its current fashion.
6. Many of the people Malcolm X preached to about the Nation of Islam were turned off by the strict code of discipline. How is strict discipline an advantage in developing moral character and fortitude? How is strict discipline a disadvantage?
7. Explain how travel helps a person become more well rounded.
8. Why are many young people drawn into criminal lifestyles?
9. Compare and contrast Civil Rights as a movement in the 1960s and 1990s. Identify specific situations and events that have shaped civil rights in both time periods.
10. What are the characteristics of a leader? How would you rate Malcolm X as a leader and why?
11. Malcolm X was disappointed by the actions of Elijah Muhammad that were inconsistent with their Muslim principles. How would you have handled your disappointment with this situation?
12. Malcolm X, the father and husband, presented a number of challenges. What were they? What are the risks associated with being the spouse of a public figure? Is the risk the same or different when the public figure is a woman and the spouse is a man?

Activities

1. Betty Shabazz became a widow with six daughters at a very young age. Assign a group of students to research what life was like for Betty Shabazz and her children after the death of Malcolm X. Take a close look at the 1999 foreword by Attallah Shabazz. What is life like today for this family? What are the daughters doing? What makes their story a story of success?
2. Instruct a group of students to research the life of Alex Haley. What was the motivational force behind the writing of **Roots**? What are some other writings by Alex Haley?
3. Take the class to the library. Have the librarian help you to acquire as many magazines and books as possible that depict life in Harlem in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Encourage the students to observe and comment on hairstyles, clothing, cars, and other lifestyle elements.
4. Instruct students to investigate the alternatives that are available to families who are in distress. What are the agencies in your community that provides assistance? What are examples of families in distress? Is there a hotline number? Is there a fee structure? What kinds of professionals are available to assist with the problems? Ask each student to gather at least two news articles that describe problems or situations involving social service agencies.
5. There are many facets to social work. Ask your students to research careers in social work. What are the various areas? What are the educational requirements? What is the salary

structure? What are some of the professional organizations to which people in social work belong? What are the special skills that a career in social work requires? Invite a social worker to the class to speak about the field.

6. As a result of the Hajj, Malcolm X learned about Islam as it is practiced in other parts of the world. Assign a group of students to research Islam and its basic tenets. What is daily life like in a Moslem nation? Ask the group to draw a world map that shows the areas where Islam is practiced. The group should also construct a graph that shows the major religions of the world and the number of followers of each.

7. What are the differences between the Nation of Islam as practiced by Minister Louis Farrakhan and Islam as practiced in the Middle East, Africa, and other parts of the world?

8. Travel is one of the best ways for people to learn about other people. Ask your students to develop a five-year plan for at least five places that they would like to visit. Tell them to schedule the month and year that they would go to each country or region and to explain why they chose the places that they chose. They should also explain why they chose the order that they chose for the visits. Have them locate pictures in magazines of each of the areas. For each area or country they should prepare a profile that includes countries, cities of interest, language(s) spoken, religion, geography, climate, and five interesting historical facts.

9. It is useful for students to place people within the context of the time in which they lived. Ask your students to construct a time line that depicts other significant events that took place in the United States during the lifetime of Malcolm X. Include points of interest from science and mathematics, arts and entertainment, economics and politics. Expand the exercise by asking students to select at least one other religion of the world for which they can research events that took place during the same period of time. Individual students can do the assignment. In order to structure a group assignment, divide the class into groups and have each group research events for a different religion of the world. Then the class can come together to show a "World History During the Life of Malcolm X."

10. Direct your students' attention to the epilogue. In this final section of the book, author Alex Haley discusses the many ways the media reported the death of Malcolm X. Ask students to read how reports around the world treated the assassination. Then ask them to select a recent major newsworthy event. They are then to go to the library to look at the variety of ways that different newspapers and magazines have reported on this same event. Ask students to discuss the pros and cons of how the media can report the facts and/or distort events.

11. Go to your local video store and rent one of the videos about Malcolm X. Share the video with the class and use it as a springboard for discussion. Ask the class to react to what it is like to actually see the real Malcolm X.

12. Ask students to identify the person who is currently the head of the Nation of Islam. They should prepare a report on this person's life, including whether or not he knew Malcolm X. Students are to use books as well as news articles and if possible should obtain a copy of the newspaper from the Nation of Islam. Is this person highly regarded as a leader? Why or why not?

13. Carter G. Woodson has the distinction of being the "Father of African American History." Assign three students to research and report his life history to the class.

14. In February 1999, the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp in honor of Malcolm X. Have the class discuss why this is a significant event. Which other figures from recent history deserve to have a stamp issued on their honor?

15. Malcolm X's travels outside the United States served as the catalyst for change in his entire thinking. Through his travels he became exposed to varying cultures and religions. This exposure made him realize that there were broader perspectives and points of view. Have students identify each of the following on a world map:

Jedda, Saudi Arabia
Cairo, Egypt
Frankfurt, Germany
Accra, Ghana
Indonesia
China
Algiers, Algeria
Cuba
Uganda
Guinea
Mecca, Saudi Arabia
Beirut, Lebanon
Nigeria
London, England
Japan
Afghanistan
Mali
Tanzania
Kenya

16. As a homework assignment, instruct each of the students to select one country or region and to prepare a cultural profile. They should list various aspects including: language spoken, religion, major source of income, interesting historical events, customs, currency, major ethnic groups, source of past and current conflicts.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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