

Can Words Lead to War?

Supporting Question 2: **What led Harriet Beecher Stowe to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*?**

Directions: Read Source A and Source B to complete the chart and answer the question about motivation below. This writing is from the 1850s. You may need to read it multiple times to understand.

Organizing Quotes Chart

	Text from the conclusion of <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> and Harriet Beecher Stowe's letter to Lord Denman	Text in students' words
Quote 1	<i>"... when she heard, with perfect surprise and consternation, Christian and humane people actually recommending the remanding escaped fugitives into slavery, as a duty binding on good citizen ... she could only think, These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is ..."</i>	
Quote 2		
Quote 3		
Quote 4		

Motivation	<p>Prompt: Given the quotes you identified, what was Stowe's motivation for writing <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>?</p>

Featured Sources

Featured Source A is a selection taken from the conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Written by the author in the third person, this excerpt reveals much about why Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the book. In this passage, she points to the Compromise of 1850, mainly the Fugitive Slave Act, as the major impetus for writing her novel. Christianity is a common theme in Stowe's writing, and she mentions it several times in Featured Source A. Stowe often wrote about the immoral nature of slavery and included frequent references to it in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Supporting Question 2

Source A: Harriet Beecher Stowe, concluding remarks, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852

The writer has often been inquired of, by correspondents from different parts of the country, whether this narrative is a true one; and to these inquiries she will give one general answer.

*The separate incidents that compose the narrative are, to a very great extent, **authentic**, occurring, many of them, either under her own observation, or that of her personal friends. She or her friends have observed characters the counterpart of almost all that are here introduced; and many of the sayings are word for word as heard herself, or reported to her.*

...

*For many years of her life, the author avoided all reading upon or **allusion** to the subject of slavery, considering it as too painful to be inquired into, and one which advancing light and civilization would certainly live down. But, since the legislative act of 1850, when she heard, with*

perfect surprise and **consternation**, Christian and humane people actually recommending the **remanding** escaped fugitives into slavery, as a duty binding on good citizens,—when she heard, on all hands, from kind, **compassionate** and **estimable** people, in the free states of the North, **deliberations** and discussions as to what Christian duty could be on this head,—she could only think, These men and Christians cannot know what slavery is; if they did, such a question could never be open for discussion. And from this arose a desire to exhibit it in a living dramatic reality. She has **endeavored** to show it fairly, in its best and its worst phases. In its best aspect, she has, perhaps, been successful; but, oh! who shall say what yet remains untold in that valley and shadow of death, that lies the other side?

...

The writer has lived, for many years, on the frontier-line of slave states, and has had great opportunities of observation among those who formerly were slaves. They have been in her family as servants; and, in default of any other school to receive them, she has, in many cases, had them instructed in a family school, with her own children. She has also the testimony of missionaries, among the fugitives in Canada, in coincidence with her own experience; and her deductions, with regard to the capabilities of the race, are encouraging in the highest degree.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1st ed., conclusion XLV. Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1852. Public Domain.

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/203/203-h/203-h.htm#link2HCH0045>.

Featured Source B is a letter Stowe wrote to Lord Thomas Denman before she traveled to England in 1853. Lord Denman was an admirer of Stowe who served as lord chief justice. The letter is a second source where Stowe explains her motivation for writing the book, describing her motivation coming from the injustice of slavery and the need to speak for those who have no voice. Stowe passionately proclaims that slavery is immoral and unjust. The entire letter is included with this inquiry along with recommendations for how to use an excerpt from the letter.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source B

Source B: Harriet Beecher Stowe, letter to Lord Thomas Denman, January 20, 1853

Excerpt from Stowe's Letter to Lord Denman, January 20, 1853

My Lord

I wrote what I did because as a woman, as a mother, I was oppressed & heartbroken with sorrows & injustice I saw—because, as a Christian I felt the dishonor to Christianity, because as a lover of my country I trembled at the coming day of wrath. It is no merit in the sorrowful that they weep, or to the oppressed & smothering that they gasp & struggle nor to me that I must speak for the oppressed who cannot speak for themselves.

...

The hope therefore which I conceive from seeing such men in England as Bishop Whateley, The Earls of Carlisle & Shaftesbury, Arthur Helper, Kingsley & your Lordship interested in our movements is great. Each man of any distinction in England has weight with a certain circle of minds here & by their distance from the evil & entire disconnection can present it in a light very different from which any native born American can. Any one here can be hushed down for all the capital, all the political power & much of the Ecclesiastical

is against the agitation of this subject- but you can force them to agitate.

...

Standing as I do, between the Living & the Dead feeble in health, oppressed with labour & often very sorrowful, I have little realisation of anything personal in this matter further than the consciousness of struggle & labour.