



TEACHING TOLERANCE

A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER
TOLERANCE.ORG

VIOLENCE PREVENTION // RECONSIDERING MALCOLM X

Handout III: Reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

Each set of questions pertains to a chapter of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Reading each chapter of the autobiography in the order given by the questions provides a very different view of Malcolm X than that offered by the movie or popular knowledge. In terms of nonviolence and prejudice reduction, chapters 17-19 provide the most powerful information and, because they are so important, it is very useful to read them first. It assures that we read the chapters with great care and gives us a different perspective on the way Malcolm X tells the rest of his story.

Chapters 1-6

- Why was boxing so important to African Americans?
- How did Malcolm's parents treat him because of his lighter skin color?
- In chapter 2, why was it important that Malcolm got a job?
- How does the stereotypical image of the black male affect Malcolm in school?
- Why was Malcolm considered "the mascot" at his junior high school?
- How did his teacher telling him he wasn't good enough to become a lawyer affect Malcolm?
- Why was it important that Malcolm move to Boston with his sister Ella?
- What did Malcolm realize the difference was between blacks who lived on "the hill" and the ones who lived in the "ghetto"?
- How did Malcolm degrade himself by getting a "conk"?
- Why was dancing so important to Malcolm?
- Why did Malcolm not continue to date Laura?
- What was considered wrong with Malcolm dating Sophia?
- Why was Malcolm amazed by New York?
- What is the significance of "the numbers" Malcolm bet on?
- What about the hustlers fascinated Malcolm?
- Why was Malcolm called "Detroit Red"?
- What caused Malcolm to start selling drugs?
- What were the three things that scared Malcolm?
- What did Malcolm do to stay out of the Army?
- What caused Malcolm to move from job to job so quickly?

Chapter 7

- How was Reginald different from his brother Malcolm?
- What are three of the hustles Malcolm had in Harlem?
- Of what two crimes was Malcolm wrongly accused in chapter 7?

Chapter 8

- What was the true reason West Indian Archie threatened Malcolm?
- How does Malcolm say women want to be treated by men?
- For what hustle did Malcolm finally get arrested?

Chapter 9

- What are two ways Malcolm might have died in chapter 9?
- For what reason were Malcolm and Shorty really sent to prison?
- Why does Malcolm say a man put behind bars will never reform?

Chapter 10

- Who does Reginald tell Malcolm is the devil?
- What was “human history’s greatest crime”?
- According to Elijah Muhammad, how did the white man come to earth?
- What men’s club, according to the nation, is run by the devil?
- Who is the “Original Man”?
- Why do you think Elijah Muhammad told the Mr. Yacub tale about the invention of white people?

Chapter 11

- What does Malcolm’s family tell him to do?
- What practice of Islam was difficult for Malcolm to perform initially?
- What activity does Malcolm begin that makes him feel free and almost forget he is in prison?
- What nations and continents, subordinated by the white man, does Malcolm name?
- What nation’s “chickens will come home to roost” first?
- How many classics or “great books” did Malcolm read? Keep a list while you read the chapter
- Why did Malcolm start wearing eyeglasses?
- Why did Malcolm need to be careful about recruiting for Elijah Muhammad in prison?
- How did Malcolm challenge the Harvard Seminary student instructor of the Bible class in Charlestown prison?
- How did Malcolm “hook” black inmates into listening to his preaching?

*Chapters 12-15 are largely about Malcolm X speaking on behalf of Elijah Muhammad. He explains he was not thinking or speaking for himself; these chapters are really a somewhat dated and distorted depiction of the Nation of Islam (NOI). They definitely misrepresent “True Islam” and focus on racial hatred. Chapter 16 tells how Malcolm got out of the NOI. Unless you are interested in the history of the NOI, you can skip or skim this section.

Chapter 16

- Although Elijah Muhammad told three of his former secretaries that Malcolm was the best, what did he say would happen someday?
- What was Malcolm’s plan for the information regarding Elijah Muhammad becoming public knowledge?
- What happened as a result of Malcolm’s comment regarding “the chickens coming home to roost” after JFK was assassinated?
- The “first direct order for my death” was issued how?
- What famous fighter befriended Malcolm?

Chapter 17

- What important people did Malcolm meet while on his hajj and later travels?
- Why did Malcolm have to go before the Mahgama Sharia, the hajj committee?

- “The _____ of the Muslim world’s religious society and the _____ of the Muslim world’s human society: these two influences had each day been making greater impact, and an increasing persuasion against my previous way of thinking.”
- What was Malcolm talking about when he said, “America needs to understand Islam, because this is the one religion that erases from society the race problem”?
- Who made Malcolm a guest of the state and gave him a chauffeured car?
- What is the “single worst mistake of the American black organizations, and their leaders”?
- How did Malcolm make things “hot” for the white man?
- What was Malcolm given by the high commissioner Alhadji Isa Wali?
- What does Malcolm say is the “national white subconsciousness”?