

# ON SLAVERY

1850s

----- *Harriet Tubman* -----

Harriet Tubman was born a slave around 1815. She escaped bondage in 1849, but returned to the South at least 19 times to help others escape slavery. Tubman's statement on slavery appeared in an 1856 abolitionist text. Abolitionists published accounts by or about escaped slaves in an attempt to generate political support for the abolition of slavery.

## **THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Hypothesizing**

If you were a Northern reader of this account in 1856, how would it influence your opinion of slavery? What if you were a Southern reader?

-----

I grew up like a neglected weed,—ignorant of liberty, having no experience of it. Then I was not happy or contented: every time I saw a white man I was afraid of being carried away. I had two sisters carried away in a chain-gang,—one of them left two children. We were always uneasy. Now I've been free, I know what a dreadful condition slavery is. I have seen hundreds of escaped slaves, but I never saw one who was willing to go back and be a slave. I have no opportunity to see my friends in my native land. We would rather stay in our native land, if we could be as free there as we are here. I think slavery is the next thing to hell. If a person would send another into bondage, he would, it appears to me, be bad enough to send him into hell, if he could.

Source: *The Refugee: Or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*, edited by Benjamin Drew (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), p. 30.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY : ANSWER**

Students may answer that Tubman's account might have influenced Northern readers to oppose slavery. They may cite as evidence Tubman's description of her fear at being sold and the forced separation of slave families through sale. Students may also answer that Southern readers might have read Tubman's account and argued that most slaves were content with their situation and that escaped slaves had been lured away with false promises.