

## **Compare-Contrast Essay** ***Can Art Reveal the Truth about Slavery?***

### **Objective**

For this assignment, you will be writing a Compare-Contrast essay in which you examine the depictions of slavery in the American Museum of Photography's on-line gallery "The Face of Slavery & Other Early Images of African Americans," comparing them with either Twain's portrayal of Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*.

### **Requirements**

Your essay should be well organized. You may choose to follow one of the three strategies to organize compare-contrast papers, as stated in the Compare-Contrast guide:

- Whole-to-Whole, or Block
- Similarities-to-Differences
- Point-by-Point

Your essay should provide at least 3 specific references to each piece, and an explanation about how these references support your main thesis statement.

#### **As you start organizing your essay, consider the following questions:**

- How are the depictions of slavery similar in the two pieces?
- How are the depictions of slavery different in the two pieces?

#### **Consider the following questions while developing your thesis statement:**

- Based on your Venn Diagrams, which piece – the photographs or the literary accounts – do you think presents a more reliable portrayal of slavery? Why? What is it about this piece that seems more "real" to you? What is each work of art trying to "say" to its audience about slavery?

#### **Consider the following questions in your introduction and conclusion:**

- Twain wrote, "The sun never looks through the photographic instrument that it does not print a lie. The piece of glass it prints it on is well named a "negative" - a contradiction- a misrepresentation- a falsehood."

To what extent do you agree with him? Is it possible for an artist (writer, photographer or otherwise) to ever really capture "reality" in their art? Or do you agree with Twain, that photographs, and in turn, all art, is simply a "misrepresentation" or "falsehood"? Do you think that artists or writers can ever really represent truth in their art? Why or why not?

- To what extent does photography, even in its earliest form, tell the truth about the world? How does it present lies about the world?
- What role does art play in society? Should the primary purpose of an artist be to comment on social wrongs? Why or why not?