

Assessing with Primary Sources

Grade Level: High School (Grades 11-12)

Standards or Objectives: [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6](https://www.coreknowledge.org/standards/ELA/CCSS/ELA-Literacy/RI/11-12/6/)
Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

Library of Congress Resources:

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE'S APOSTROPHE TO THE NORTH STAR.

Star of the North! though night-winds drift
The fleecy drapery of the sky,
Between thy lamp and me, I lift,
Ye, lift with hope, my sleepless eye,
To the blue heights wherein thou dwellest,
And of a land of freedom tellest.

Star of the North! while blazing day
Pours round me its full tide of light,
And hides thy pale but faithful ray,
I, too, lie hid, and long for night!
For night;— I dare not walk at noon,
Nor dare I trust the faithless moon,—

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE'S APOSTROPHE TO THE NORTH STAR

The Anti-Slavery Poems of John Pierpont, 1843

<https://archive.org/stream/antislaverypoems00pier#page/28/mode/2up> (p.29-33)

SLAVEHOLDER'S ADDRESS TO THE NORTH STAR

The Anti-Slavery Poems of John Pierpont, 1843

<https://archive.org/stream/antislaverypoems00pier#page/34/mode/2up> (p.34-38)

SLAVEHOLDER'S ADDRESS TO THE NORTH STAR.

Star of the North, thou art not bigger
Than is the diamond in my ring;
Yet every black, star-gazing nigger
Stares at thee, as at some great thing!
Yes, gazes at thee, till the boy
And thoughtless reeve is half wry.

Some Quaker scoundrel must have told 'em
That, if they take their flight tow'rd thee,
They'd get where 'massa' cannot hold 'em;
And, therefore, to the North they flee.
Fools! to be led off, where they can't earn
Their living, by thy lying lantern.

Topic Background:

John Pierpont, who lived from 1785-1866, has the following inscription a monument: "Poet, Patriot, Preacher, Philosopher, Philanthropist, Pierpont," indicating the versatility of his genius and the grandeur of his ideals. In his poems, including "The Fugitive Slave's Apostrophe to the North Star," and many others, he poured out his soul without measure, searching the conscience of his times. A preacher at the time of these poems, the anti-slavery cause divided his people. It was a violation of conventional good taste and ecclesiastical traditions to introduce such "exciting topics" as what he wrote about, into the pulpit; and the result was a controversy within the church which crystallized in an effort to force Mr. Pierpont from the pulpit. Mr. Pierpont was a Caucasian man who came from a well-known New England family. He entered Yale College at the age of fifteen and graduated in 1804.

Excerpted from: <http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/biographies/john-pierpont-1785-1866/>

Source(s) Used:

The sources for this assessment come from Mr. Pierpont's book, entitled *Anti-slavery poems by John Pierpont*, published in Boston in 1843. The two poems selected represent two opposing points of view – that of a slave fleeing secretly to freedom, guided by the North Star, and a slaveholder, resentful of the guidance the North Star provides. Each poem has 14 verses; this assessment focuses on the first two verses of each. The poems can be viewed in their original format on the Library of Congress webpage, via the links given above. They can also be printed out from the University of Michigan website:

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAD1996.0001.001/1:9?rgn=div1;view=toc>

Answer Key:

Question 1 – C
Question 2 – B

THE ANTI-SLAVERY POEMS OF JOHN PIERPONT (1843)

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE'S APOSTROPHE TO THE NORTH STAR (verses 1 – 2)

STAR of the North! though night-winds drift
The fleecy drapery of the sky,
Between thy lamp and me, I lift,
Yea, lift with hope, my sleepless eye,
To the blue heights wherein thou dwellest,
And of a land of freedom tellest.

Star of the North! while blazing day
Pours round me its full tide of light.
And hides thy pale but faithful ray,
I, too, lie hid, and long for night:
For night;—I dare not walk at noon,
Nor dare I trust the faithless moon,—

SLAVEHOLDER'S ADDRESS TO THE NORTH STAR (verses 1 – 2)

STAR of the North, thou art not bigger
Than is the diamond in my ring;
Yet every black, star-gazing nigger
Stares at thee, as at some great thing!
Yes, gazes at thee, till the lazy
And thankless rascal is half crazy.

Some Quaker scoundrel must have told 'em
That, if they take their flight tow'rd
thee,
They'd get where 'massa' cannot hold 'em;
And, therefore, to the North they flee.
Fools! to be led off, where they can't earn
Their living, by thy lying lantern.

Questions:

- Which of the following statements is the *most* correct in describing the mood and emotions of the author as he wrote a particular poem? (CCSS.ELA.RI.11-12.6)
 - In the first poem, the author is happy and excited, as evidenced by the exclamation point following each call out to the North Star.
 - In the first poem, he is apprehensive about the North Star, as evidenced by the mention of distrust for the moon, another object of the night sky.
 - In the second poem, the author is angry and impatient, evidenced by the choice of adjectives and the name-calling.
 - In the second poem, he feels threatened by the North Star, evidenced by the attempt to “tell” the star that he is worth so much more.
- Analyze the author’s use of the word “apostrophe” in the title of the poem on the left and his use of the word “address” in the title of the poem on the right. Which of the following statements best summarizes the perspective towards the North Star in each poem? (CCSA.ELA.RI.11-12.6)
 - In the first poem, he feels as small and insignificant as an apostrophe when thinking about his purpose in life, as well as in comparison to the big, bright North Star he sees each night. In the second poem, he gives little thought to the North Star, as he is much larger and more important than a little star.
 - In the first poem, he has developed a relationship with the North Star, talking to and depending on the star each night. In the second poem, he is addressing the North Star as if he could order it to go away in order to solve his problem of runaway slaves.
 - In the first poem, he has personified the North Star and this star is his lifeline to promised freedom. In the second poem, he has no need for the North Star; the star’s massive size and brightness are insignificant to him and he will expect the star to follow his command to go away.
 - In the first poem, he relates to the North Star because they both hide during the day. In the second poem, he views the star as easily replaceable through the use of a night Lantern.