



Text: [Born a Crime](#) (2016)

Author: Trevor Noah

Genre: Memoir

Important: *Do not* purchase the “[young readers](#)” edition of *Born a Crime*

Assignment: Compose three Reading Journal entries responding to passages you select from throughout the book. The purpose of the assignment is to provide a structure for you to delve deeper into Trevor Noah’s ideas, construct several original responses, and become familiar with the three types of AP Lang essays. We will use these responses to launch class discussions and at least one in-class writing assignment.

Your Reading Journal responses will also help your teacher plan lessons that meet the needs of your entire class.

Due: Friday, Aug. 22, 2025 at 11:59 p.m.

Submit your work following your teacher’s instructions. This assignment, like all assignments, must be your own original work. **You must work ONLY in your copy of the “Reading Journal Template” assignment.**

Annotations are strongly recommended but not required.

Bring your copy of *Born a Crime* to class at the start of the school year.

About this Reading Journal assignment

Write three Reading Journal entries, with one entry anchored in each of the three parts of this book. Select a passage to focus on for each entry. Strive to make your entries original, unlike what other students might focus on or write. This will make class discussions more lively and interesting. Your Reading Journal entries don't have to be formal essays — you can write more informally, if you'd like. (That is why we're calling it a Journal.)

So I don't have to annotate? Are you serious?

We strongly recommend you annotate, but your annotations won't be assessed directly. You will be allowed to use your book for the in-class essay, so it is to your advantage to note patterns, look up unfamiliar words (those that you can't figure out based on context), and write other commentary and questions as you read.

How long should each Reading Journal entry be?

Your total word count for all three entries should be approximately 1000 (plus or minus 100 words). Your entries might range between 100 and 400 words per entry.

Should I include, in my word count, the words in the passages I select from the book or my article citation?

No, the assignment asks for 1000 words of your own original commentary, divided among the three Journal entries.

What should each entry look like?

Each entry is a typed response (your original words & ideas) to a passage you select. There are three different types of entries: **ANALYSIS, ARGUMENT, and SYNTHESIS**. See end of this document for samples.

Is there a template for the Reading Journal entries?

Yes! Make a copy of [this document](#).

Keep reading for more details about the three types of Journal entries, including samples.

About the three types of Reading Journal entries

You are required to write one entry per part of Born a Crime.

ANALYSIS¹ ENTRY: Select a passage between a half-page and one page in length that piques your rhetorical or literary curiosity. Think like a writer for this one and choose a particularly rich passage. In your Reading Journal entry, theorize about why Noah made a particular choice as a writer, and analyze how that choice contributes to his overall purpose. Challenge: What other purpose(s) besides “grabbing the reader’s attention” or “entertaining us” might he have? How is Noah challenging readers’ thinking? How does he want to change the world?

ARGUMENT ENTRY: Identify a short (1-4 sentences), controversial statement that Noah makes within the book. State your position on the same topic, then defend your position with evidence and commentary. You do not need to research your evidence; work with what you already know. If you do happen to look something up, always cite your evidence MLA style and put a Works Cited page at the end of your entry.

SYNTHESIS² ENTRY: Listed below are articles written about various topics explored in *Born a Crime*. Select and read at least one article that interests you. Then, **select a passage** from *Born a Crime* that you feel connects to the issue/topic in the article. In your journal entry, do all of the following: **comment** with your own opinion on the issue/topic; **make connections** and comparisons between (1) your opinion, (2) the Trevor Noah passage, and (3) your chosen article(s); and weave, into your commentary, **quotes and perspectives** from both texts. You must incorporate at least two quotes from each source, for a total of at least **four quotes**. Comment upon and analyze the evidence; do not just paste the quotes into your document and call it a day. Cite your evidence in [MLA format](#).

For your article(s), pick from one or more of the following on the next page:

¹ Analysis is “a careful study of something to learn about its component parts, what they do, and how they are related to each other.” Make educated guesses in your Reading Journal, and then we will build on each other’s responses in class discussion.

² Synthesis means “the combining of often diverse conceptions into a coherent whole.”

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Topic	Title	Author
Race/Multiracialism	“My mother spent her life passing as white.”	Gail Lukasik
Race/Whiteness	Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race (excerpt)	Matthew Frye Jacobson
Race/Hispanic Identity	“On The Census, Who Checks 'Hispanic,' Who Checks 'White,' And Why”	Gene Demby
Race/Colorism	“Colorism and the Impact of Skin Tone Discrimination”	Cheryl Grant-Albano
History	“Why is Cecil Rhodes such a controversial figure?”	Justin Parkinson
Language/Psychology	“Is Bilingualism Really an Advantage?”	Maria Konnikova
Language/Education	“South Africa’s classrooms should have a ‘box’ of languages to help children learn: new bilingual education policy is a start”	from <i>The Conversation</i>
--	Synthesize a passage from <i>Born a Crime</i> with an article you find yourself, on a different topic of your choosing. Clearly cite your article and author in your response.	--

See below for examples of the three types of Journal entries.

RUBRIC

ANALYSIS entry		
Does not consistently meet (C or lower) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Literary or rhetorical choice(s) not clearly identified ♦ Insufficient analysis of how choice(s) contribute to overall purpose ♦ Response is too general/vague ♦ Passage not clearly indicated 	Commentary consistently meets MOST expectations (B) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Identifies at least one significant literary or rhetorical choice Noah makes in the passage(s) ❑ Theorizes about why Noah made that choice and analyzes how that choice might contribute to Noah's overall purpose ❑ Focuses on the importance of specific words and details from the passage (or passages, if analyzing a pattern across multiple passages) selected from <i>BAC</i> ❑ Indicates page number of passage(s) 	Entirely meets or exceeds (A) <p>Writing also examines complexities/nuances, shows evidence of consistently vivid and persuasive writing style, or is exceptional in its originality</p>
ARGUMENT entry		
Does not consistently meet (C or lower) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Controversial statement from Noah not clearly identified ♦ Position on the controversial statement is unclear ♦ Evidence and commentary are broad or unrelated 	Commentary consistently meets MOST expectations (B) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Accurately identifies a controversial statement Noah makes within the book ❑ Takes a clear, logical position on the controversy ❑ Provides somewhat specific and/or somewhat relevant evidence with commentary that demonstrates the relationship between the writer's position and the evidence 	Entirely meets or exceeds (A) <p>Writing also demonstrates complexities within the controversy, provides consistently specific, relevant evidence or thorough addresses how evidence supports the position</p>
SYNTHESIS entry		
Does not consistently meet (C or lower) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Does not take a stance on the passage ♦ Connections/comparisons between ideas not clearly identified ♦ Commentary lacks specific detail and evidence from both texts ♦ Missing citations ♦ Passage/article not clearly indicated 	Commentary consistently meets MOST expectations (B) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Identifies and describes a stance on the issue presented within the texts ❑ Examines thinking/reasoning behind at least two different perspectives on the issue/idea/question/claim ❑ Develops commentary on at least two perspectives using specific details and quotations both texts ❑ Cites <i>Born a Crime</i> and outside source ❑ Indicates page number of passages selected from both texts 	Entirely meets or exceeds (A) <p>Writing also examines complexities/nuances, shows evidence of consistently vivid and persuasive writing style, or is exceptional in its originality</p>
SUBMITTING YOUR JOURNAL		
Late deadline/deduction specified in course syllabus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Submit your Journal entries in a single Google Doc by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, August 22nd, 2025 ❑ At least one entry of each type (ANALYSIS, ARGUMENT, & SYNTHESIS) ❑ Entries anchored in each of the 3 parts of the book ❑ A total of approximately 1000 words for all entries 	

On the following pages you will find three sample journal entries. Note that these examples are about *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and that you must, of course, write your entries about *Born a Crime*.

Sample 1 uses **ANALYSIS** by focusing on rhetorical or literary choices in a passage from the book. You can focus on a particular passage or comment on a pattern you see across several passages.

Sample 2 focuses on **ARGUMENT** by taking a position on a controversial claim that the author makes, then providing evidence and commentary to defend that position.

Sample 3 focuses on **SYNTHESIS** by connecting a passage from the book to one of the provided articles.

Your total required word count is 1000 words.

SAMPLE 1: ANALYSIS JOURNAL ENTRY

FOCUSING ON RHETORICAL OR LITERARY CHOICES

Reading Journal — Chapter VII of <i>The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> Entry type: Analysis	
Passage (pp. 25-26)	Response
<p>The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing, and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. When a piece of timber was intended for the larboard side, it would be marked thus - "L." When a piece was for the starboard side, it would be marked thus - "S." A piece for the larboard side forward, would be marked thus - "L.F." When a piece was for starboard side forward, it would be marked thus - "S.F." For larboard aft, it would be marked thus - "L.A." For starboard aft, it would be marked thus - "S.A." I soon learned the names of these letters, and for what they were intended when placed upon a piece of timber in the ship-yard. I immediately commenced copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named. After that, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it." I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any</p>	<p>Frederick Douglass uses figurative language and diction that emphasizes his resourcefulness and tenacity in order to narrate the way he taught himself to write with no knowing help from others. He wants his readers to believe that learning to write is worth sacrificing time, energy, and safety to achieve. Douglass begins this passage by describing how he learned his first four letters. He describes the experience as if he collected these letters from the labeled pieces of timber he came across while he worked. This description implies that no one would assume that a laborer would make an effort to read, so they dangled the letters in front of him as if they expected him to be satisfied with the job he had. Douglass's cleverness continues to be illustrated in the way he taunted young boys to unknowingly teach him to read by bragging that he knew how to write, demonstrating what he knew, and then asking them to "beat that." Learning to read was so important to him that he was willing to trick others into "a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way."</p> <p>Douglass goes on to use figurative language to emphasize the modesty of his learning materials and his resourcefulness as his "copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk." He believed so strongly in the importance of writing that he</p>

<p>other way. During this time, my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I learned mainly how to write. I then commenced and continued copying the Italics in Webster's Spelling Book, until I could make them all without looking on the book. By this time, my little Master Thomas had gone to school, and learned how to write, and had written over a number of copy-books. These had been brought home, and shown to some of our near neighbors, and then laid aside. My mistress used to go to class meeting at the Wilk Street meeting-house every Monday afternoon, and leave me to take care of the house. When left thus, I used to spend the time in writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas's copy-book, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas. Thus after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write.</p>	<p>was willing to learn by any means necessary. He exemplifies this further when he notes that his next steps in learning to read was by collecting the discarded copy-books "little Master Thomas [...] brought home." Douglass's diction at the end of the passage further emphasizes his tenacity to learn as he describes how he finally achieved his goals "after a long, tedious effort for years." Through his figurative language and diction, Douglass is able to characterize himself as a voracious learner who is willing to sacrifice much to defy the expectations society had of him.</p>
	<p>Response word count: 340 words</p>

SAMPLE 2: **ARGUMENT** JOURNAL ENTRY

RESPONDING TO A CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT

Reading Journal — Chapter VII of <i>The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> Entry type: ARGUMENT	
Passage (p.49)	Response
Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman... Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. (Douglass 49).	<p>In this famous passage, Douglass claims that the institution of slavery was as dehumanizing to slaveholders as it was to the enslaved people. Douglass is correct in his assertion, and his analysis applies to other situations as well. As seen in other events from American history, racism and white supremacy harm everyone — even those whom it supposedly benefits.</p> <p>One explanation for this dynamic is the way in which class and race are typically discussed as separate phenomena in the United States. Historian Howard Zinn once claimed, in his <i>A People's History of the United States</i>, that wealthy, 17th-century Virginian landowners feared a populist uprising, with white indentured servants and enslaved Black people forming a formidable united front against the established economic order. So, in response, the Virginian elite sowed racial discord among the working class with miscegenation bans and even laws against interracial fraternization. As a result, the white lower class began to see itself as more aligned with the landowners on the basis of shared skin color, ultimately at the expense of solidarity with their working-class Black peers. It's perhaps beneficial to investigate, in modern situations where political leaders sow racial discord, the extent to which those divisions help prevent a populace from working together in their own best interest.</p> <p>While this comparison has some flaws — slaveholders obviously benefitted economically from slavery and thus did not share class interests with enslaved people — Douglass' observation is still</p>

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	potent today because it's a counterintuitive but important commentary on the nature of racism and oppression. Eliminating oppressive systems not only liberates the oppressed; it can liberate everybody.
	Response word count: 265

SAMPLE 3: **SYNTHESIS** JOURNAL ENTRY

WITH CONNECTIONS TO OUTSIDE SOURCE AND CITED USING [MLA GUIDELINES](#)

Reading Journal — Chapter VI of <i>The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass</i> Entry type: Synthesis	
Passage (p. 25)	Response
<p>Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read (Douglass 25).</p>	<p>Frederick Douglass initially gains some access to literacy through Mrs. Auld, whom Douglass describes as “very kindly” for instructing him (25). It is then Mr. Auld who forbids further instruction. Douglass identifies gendered roles between the Aulds — her as a reluctant participant who is also subject to her husband as master, him as a more cruel enforcer of slavery — illustrating broader gender stereotypes. As stereotypes, those roles are sometimes accurate, as in Douglass’s experience of his own enslavement, and other times are generalized too broadly. Furthermore, when this stereotype is generalized, it lays the blame for slavery on white male slaveowners and politicians, and reduces or even absolves white women from their role in slavery. The context of this incident in Douglass’s life is instructive when placed into context with the rest of his life’s work. The responsibility for his enslavement or early illiteracy is neither the fault nor responsibility of a singular person, even though the Aulds are responsible for their actions. The laws, both societal and governmental, are also responsible, as are all of the men who created and enforced them — as when Mr. Auld describes the humane treatment of Douglass as “unlawful, as well as unsafe” (Douglass 25).</p> <p>White women share that responsibility as well. Although women “were restricted and oppressed by the patriarchal society of the Old South” during Douglass’s lifetime, some women used slave ownership as a method of ensuring their own material wealth or security, according to Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, a professor of history at UC Berkeley</p>

	<p>and author of <i>They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South</i>. Jones-Rogers found accounts of women acting with similar brutality to their male slave-owning counterparts, with “capacity to inflict violence and to cruelly manipulate the lives of others” (Onion).</p> <p>Furthermore, recognition of white women’s roles in the institution and practice of slavery is necessary in breaking down current stereotypes and social dynamics. Recently, several white women have made the news for calling the police on African Americans for essentially no reason. Amy Cooper, a woman breaking the law by walking her dog off-leash in Central Park, called 911 on an African American man who told her to leash her dog. These women, like Cooper, are often willing or able to capitalize on a sense of feminine fear and vulnerability to excuse racist behavior that may endanger the lives of those they erroneously report. Cooper’s apology, that acknowledged her fear, but not her racism, is indicative of how she had been taught her vulnerability, but not the “source of power” afforded her whiteness and the risk that power may pose to the vulnerabilities of others (Onion).</p> <p>Women like Cooper and Auld, although they may be vulnerable, are still culpable when they take racist actions.</p> <p>Source:</p> <p>Onion, Rebecca. “Female Slaveholders Were Once Viewed as an Anomaly. But New Research Reveals They Were Numerous, Greedy, and Brutal.” <i>Slate Magazine</i>, Slate, 14 Feb. 2019, slate.com/human-interest/2019/02/women-slavery-history-south-book-review.html?fbclid=IwAR14uGRDZIsY18nPyHMiKNI1jpsk7Owlu4U4cPI9UZ99-ZeUQp6gkDx4Sas.</p>
	<p>Response word count: 313 words</p>