

Summer Reading – Pioneer Valley Christian School 2008

Entering Grade/Course: Grade 11/United States History

Book/Author: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Required to purchase? No, may be borrowed or purchased. Internet “e-books” are available at www.etext.lib.virginia.edu/collections.

In April 1851, Harriet Beecher Stowe sent her manuscript to an anti-slavery weekly in Washington, where it was published in 41 serial episodes. The following year this very powerful work was published in book form, and over 2.5 million copies were sold.

Uncle Tom's Cabin or *Life Among the Lowly* is important on several literary and historical levels. It was the first major piece of American literature, written by a woman, that has profoundly feminist implications. Secondly, the book's narrative structure and use of dialogue are brilliant, even if somewhat controversial. Lastly, a strong indictment of Ante-Bellum slavery, it brought the abolitionist message to the country in a powerful way, motivating the nation to confront the major issue of the era. We will use the novel as a starting point in studying race relations in American history.

Evaluation: Please review the following list of short essay topics before reading the book. On the first full day of school, you will be required to write two in-class essays, each with a topic that you have selected from the following list. As you read the book, keep in mind the essay topics so that you may read for specific information regarding essays.

Essay choices

- Compare and contrast Tom's three different owners.
- How does Tom compare with other male characters in the book?
- How does Eva's role contribute to the novel's larger message?
- What role do circumstances and “chance” play in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Does the text use either to help explain the existence of slavery?
- In what ways does Stowe present the incompatibility of slavery with the Christian ethic of love and tolerance?
- How do the novel's “Christ” figures underscore its basic Christian message?

Late enrollees (those with admissions meetings after Wednesday, August 12, 2009): Exempt