

I WAS BORN A SLAVE

My name is Salma. I was born a slave in Mauritania in 1956. My parents were slaves, and their parents were slaves of the same family. As soon as I was old enough to walk, I was forced to work all day, every day of the week. Even if we were sick, we had to work.

When I was still a child, I started taking care of the first wife of the head of the family and her 15 children. Later, even if one of my own children was hurt or in danger, I didn't dare help my child because I had to care for the master's wife's children first. I was beaten very often with a wooden stick or a leather belt. One day they started beating my mother, and I couldn't stand it. I tried to stop them. The head of the family got very angry with me. He tied my hands, branded me with a burning iron and hit me across the face. His ring cut my face and left a scar.

I was never allowed to go to school or learn anything more than some religious verses and prayers. But I was lucky, because the eldest son of my master had gone to school away from our village and had different ideas from his father. This eldest son secretly taught me to speak French and to read and write a little. I think that everyone thought he was raping me, but he was teaching me and doing it well.

Other slaves were afraid of liberty. They were afraid they wouldn't know where to go or what to do. But I always believed that I had to be free. I tried to escape about ten years ago. I didn't know how close I was to Senegal, so I walked for two days in the wrong direction. I was found and sent back, and then punished. My wrists and ankles were bound first, then I was tied to a date tree in the middle of the family compound, and left there for a week. The head of the family cut my wrists with a razor, and as a result I bled terribly. I still have scars on my arms.

Finally I met a man in the market who told me that Senegal was just across the border. I decided I had to try again. I ran to the river, where a man with a small wooden boat agreed to take me to Senegal. There I made my way to a safe house run by a former slave from Mauritania. I stayed in Senegal for a few weeks, earning my keep by doing housework. But I never felt safe. I was always afraid that the master of the family I had escaped from would pay people to find me and bring me back to his house.

When I got to the U.S., I worked braiding hair. The first time I was paid for work I had done. I cried. I had never seen a person paid for her work before in my life. It was a very good surprise.

(From the press. Adapted)

to brand: marcar amb ferro candent / marcar con hierro candente

compound: clos, recinte / cercado, recinto

earn my keep: treballar per pagar el menjar i l'allotjament / trabajar para pagar la comida y el alojamiento

to braid: trenar / trenzar

Série 1 - A

PART ONE: READING COMPREHENSION

Choose the best answer.

[0,5 points each correct answer]

1. Salma and her parents were forced to work all day and every day...
 - a) except when they were ill.
 - b) no matter if they were ill or not.
 - c) when their own children were in danger.

2. The head of the family got very angry with Salma...
 - a) the day she hit him across the face.
 - b) when she once tried to defend her mother.
 - c) when she refused to learn some prayers.

3. «I think that everyone thought *he* was raping me». Who was *he*?
 - a) Her master's son.
 - b) Her master's father.
 - c) Her master.

4. Salma was different from the other slaves because...
 - a) she could read and write good French.
 - b) they were happy to be slaves.
 - c) she was not afraid of freedom.

5. The first time Salma escaped, she...
 - a) followed a wrong path.
 - b) couldn't walk very far.
 - c) found the border closed.

6. From Salma's story we can guess that in Senegal...
 - a) there was no slavery.
 - b) everybody would help slaves from Mauritania.
 - c) Salma bought her freedom.

7. How many people were kind and helpful to Salma altogether?
 - a) Two.
 - b) Four.
 - c) Five.

8. What was a very good surprise for Salma when she got to the U.S.?
 - a) She didn't have to do any more housework.
 - b) Americans did not know about hair braiding.
 - c) She was paid money for the work she did there.