

During his life as a slave Douglass stayed at many different locations and met many people, most of which were not kind to him. In his early childhood he lived with his grandparents, but soon he had to leave them and face life on his own. In this time, he makes some relationships with other people, but none of them last very long.

Sophia Auld is the first person who could be considered as a potential parental figure to Douglass. He was around 8 years old when he arrived at Baltimore and at that point had no family whatsoever. According to the novel she treated him with kindness and respect, something he was not used to from white people. She even started to teach him how to read, which could be seen as a motherly behaviour. Nevertheless, she was his owner and even though she was kind to him at the start, she was soon corrupted by the power she held over him and became strict and cruel. Any level of affection Douglass may have held for her at the beginning was soon gone. Even though he was in his situation more privileged than other slaves, this house was not a home to him, it was still a prison.

While in Baltimore he managed to find friends amongst poor children on the streets. They taught him how to read in exchange for food and were nice to him. They felt bad for him about his situation and were assuring him he would somehow get his freedom. From the novel it seems they were almost as brothers to him, considering his situation and the lack of other relationships in his life at that point. He is very grateful to them for teaching him how to read, because otherwise he might have not been able to escape. He says they were those he truly missed when leaving Baltimore and was sad to abandon them as they were the only friends he had.

On William Freeland's plantation he befriends a group of slaves whom he teaches how to read. They become like family to him, bonding over their shared struggles and suffering as well as a secret rebellion against slavery. He obviously trusts them and cares for them deeply. They might be the first family he really had in his life. He even attempts to escape with some of them, but they are unsuccessful.

Finally, there is his wife who he met during his work in the docks and who helped him escape slavery for good. They spent the rest of their lives together and had children so in the end he found himself an actual family. Although later in life they drifted apart due to Douglass's long absences from home amongst other things, as far as the novel goes, he finally found a permanent family. A family he did not have to unexpectedly abandon or who was with him only because of conditions of slavery.

He forged the strongest relationships with those who shared his suffering in some way. Be it poor white boys on the street, his fellow slaves or his wife who even though was free still faced oppression as a Black woman. Some people might be inclined to say that his kinder masters were somewhat of parental figures to him but that does not seem to be true. After all they were his owners and treated him like a property not a human being. The only people he could truly bond with were those at the bottom of society such as himself.