Discussion Guide

Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. What kind of man wrote this letter?

2. When was it written? What did Anderson claim was his purpose in writing it? Describe Anderson's tone. Do you believe he expects compensation? If not, why does he include that language in his letter?

3. What events does he describe that give you clues about what his life as a slave was like?

4. Go through the narrative and circle each occurrence of a term, or variations of a given term, that is repeatedly used. Identify the term. What theme emerges in Anderson's repeated use of this word?

5. What does Anderson mean by “the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to”? How would you define the term “justice” in this context?

6. To what does Anderson refer with this statement: “surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire”? How does this relate to your response to question 4?

7. Anderson says of his family: “the great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.” What kinds of virtuous habits might he mean? What is the relationship between education and justice?

8. Think of justice in the context of other virtues. Do other virtues depend on just purposes? For example, can courage in defense of an evil cause rightly be called courage? Explain whether justice should be considered a primary virtue.

9. What effect might Anderson's understanding of justice have had on his family? On the recipient of the letter? On the person who transcribed it for him?

10. How is Anderson's vigilant stand for justice effective a “snapshot” of the role of individual people in maintaining a republic based on inalienable rights, liberty, and equality?

11. Do you think Anderson's response to his old master was just? Explain.

12. Who is V. Winters, Esquire? What role did he play in this situation? Identify and tell about a time you aided someone else in their pursuit of justice in a similar way (or when you witnessed it).

13. What, in human nature, leads to injustice? What, in human nature, leads us to desire justice?

14. List three or four specific ways you can act justly.