

"Traveling on the Underground Railroad"

Objectives:

- 1) To evaluate the cruelties of slavery that resulted in slaves taking dangerous risks to run away.
- 2) To examine the various consequences of caught runaways.
- 3) To describe the way the "Underground Railroad" operated (i.e. abolitionists, modes of transportation, etc.)

Procedures:

1. The students will be given notes on the cruelties of slavery along with oral accounts:
 - a) long working hours
 - b) little food/poor diet
 - c) inadequate clothing
 - d) poor treatment of women
 - e) whippings
 - f) break-ups of families

2. The students will be given notes on the consequences of a caught runaway slave with oral accounts:
 - a) whippings
 - b) immediate death (hangings)
 - c) limbs mutilated/amputated
 - d) sold to another slave owner

3. The students will research the life of one of the most famous conductors of the Underground Railroad: Harriet Tubman via the internet. Website: www.camalott.com/~rsmith/Moses.html
*Describe the following:
 - a) young life
 - b) conflict on the plantation
 - c) result of the conflict
 - d) resolution to escape and how

Harriet Tubman: Moses of the Civil War

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By Russell Smith

A mystic railroad without tracks wound its way across America over one hundred and fifty years ago. The railroad, nicknamed the Underground Railroad, was a misnomer because it was neither underground nor a railroad. The name was a secret codeword invented for the escape route used by southern slaves in the pre-Civil War days.

The slaves were aided by thousands of "conductors" who used covered wagons or carts with false bottoms to carry slaves from one "station" to another. With the help of 3,000 conductors over 100,000 slaves escaped to freedom. Escaping slaves were called "passengers" or "merchandise" on their journey to freedom.

One enterprising slave really did qualify for the nickname of merchandise. Henry "Box" Brown had himself nailed in a wooden box and mailed from Richmond to Philadelphia on a real train. He mailed himself to a well-known "brakeman," William Still, the author of a book entitled "Underground Railroad." Despite a hard trip (for part of the journey Brown's box was set upside down which made for less than ideal traveling comfort!), when Still opened the box, out popped Henry Brown.

Among the more famous conductors were: Salmon P. Chase, who as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court would later preside over Andrew Johnson's impeachment and is also the portrait on the \$10,000 bill; Elijah F. Pennypacker; Lucretia Mott; Levi Coffin; the ill-fated John Brown; the charismatic Frederick Douglass; and the legendary Harriet Tubman.

Harriet Tubman was the greatest single conductor in the history of the Underground Railroad. An escaped slave herself, Tubman earned the nickname "Moses" for her heroic exploits in leading slaves to the promised land. Returning nineteen times to the dangerous South, Tubman led more than 300 slaves to freedom, including her own aged parents.

Enraged Southern planters offered \$40,000 for her capture without success. The wily and fearless Tubman carried a pistol on her freedom raids and if a slave had second thoughts about escaping she pulled her gun and said: "You'll be free or die!"

Tubman was widely read about and talked about, although she herself was unable to read or write. Two of her most famous sayings were: "Lord, you have been with me through six troubles. Be with me in the seventh." And "I nebber run my train off de track and I nebber lost a passenger."

Tubman's amazing successes sprang in part from her quick and inventive mind. On one occasion, fearing pursuers were close at hand, she and her fugitives boarded a southbound train to avoid suspicion. On another rescue mission, Tubman had just purchased some live chickens when she saw her former master. She threw down the chickens and chased after them before he could recognize her.

She also had a wry sense of humor. By 1851 the Fugitive Slave Law was forcing conductors to lead slaves all the way to Canada. On one such trip a very frightened slave would not say a word or even look at the scenery while crossing into Canada with Tubman on a real train. But when the man realized he was on free soil, he began to sing and shout so loud that no one could shut him up. An exasperated Tubman finally cried out, "You old fool, you! You might at least have looked at Niagara Falls on the way to freedom!"

Like another famous American, Andrew Jackson, Tubman was a victim of brutality at an early age. While young Jackson was slashed across the face with a sword for refusing to wipe mud off a British officer's boots, Tubman received a fractured skull at age 13 while defending another slave from a cruel master.

Harriet Tubman continued her courageous exploits during the Civil War. She became a nurse, scout, and spy for the Union armies. In one campaign she personally led 750 Southern slaves to freedom. General Saxon reported she "made many a raid inside the enemy lines, displaying remarkable courage, zeal, and fidelity."

Harriet "Moses" Tubman lived into her nineties and died in 1913 (her birthdate has never been verified and estimates range from 1816 to 1823 for her birth year). Millions of slaves admired her brave life and the many escaped slaves who owed their freedom to Tubman probably felt as Harriet Tubman did when she said, "I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person now I was free. Dere was such a glory trou de trees and ober de fields, and I felt like I was in heaven."

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