

Game rules:

How to play the game:

Teacher/Group Conference (possible suggestions)

# Follow the Drinking Gourd



According to the experts at

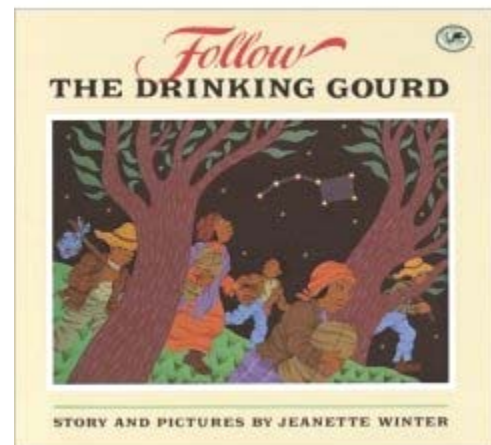
<http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/planetarium/ftdg1.htm>,

"Follow the Drinking Gourd" is a coded song that gives the route for an escape from Alabama and Mississippi. This is what they have to say about the codes in the song:

Of all the routes out of the Deep South, this is the only one for which the details survive. The route instructions were given to slaves by an old man named Peg Leg Joe. Working as an itinerant carpenter, he spent winters in the South, moving from plantation to plantation, teaching slaves this escape route. Unfortunately, we know nothing more about Peg Leg Joe. The song and its translation are as follows:

**When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,  
Follow the Drinking Gourd.  
For the old man is waiting for to carry you to freedom,  
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.**

"When the sun comes back" means winter and spring when the angle of the sun above the horizon at noon is getting higher each day. Quail are migratory birds which winter in the South. The Drinking Gourd is the Big Dipper. The old man is Peg Leg Joe. The verse tells slaves to leave in the winter and walk towards the Drinking Gourd. Eventually they will meet a guide who will escort them for the remainder of the trip. Most escapees had to cross the Ohio River which is too wide and too swift to swim. The Railroad struggled with the problem of how to get escapees across, and with experience, came to believe the best crossing time was winter. Then the river was frozen, and escapees could walk across on the ice. Since it took most escapees a year to travel from the South to the Ohio, the Railroad urged slaves to start their trip in winter in order to be at the Ohio River the next winter.



Jeanette Winter's *Follow The Drinking Gourd*

**The river bank makes a very good road,  
The dead trees show you the way,  
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on  
Follow the Drinking Gourd.**

This verse taught slaves to follow the bank of the Tombigbee River north looking for dead trees that were marked with drawings of a left foot and a peg foot. The markings distinguished the Tombigbee from other north-south rivers that flow into it.

**The river ends between two hills,  
Follow the Drinking Gourd.  
There's another river on the other side,  
Follow the Drinking Gourd.**

These words told the slaves that when they reached the headwaters of the Tombigbee, they were to continue north over the hills until they met another river. Then they were to travel north along the new river which is the Tennessee River. A number of the southern escape routes converged on the Tennessee.

**Where the great big river meets the little river,  
Follow the Drinking Gourd.  
For the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom if you  
follow the Drinking Gourd.**

This verse told the slaves the Tennessee joined another river. They were to cross that river (which is the Ohio River), and on the north bank, meet a guide from the Underground Railroad.

## Follow the Drinking Gourd

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Follow the drinking gourd!  
Follow the drinking gourd.  
For the old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom  
If you follow the drinking gourd.

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,  
Follow the drinking gourd,  
For the old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom  
If you follow the drinking gourd.

The riverbank makes a very good road,  
The dead trees will show you the way,  
Left foot, peg foot traveling on,  
Following the drinking gourd.

The river ends between two hills,  
Follow the drinking gourd,  
There's another river on the other side,  
Follow the drinking gourd

You can hear The Weavers sing this song at:

<http://www.math.nus.edu.sg/aslaksen/gem-projects/hm/0203-1-20-follow/drinkinggourd/decoding.html#self>

The image shows a musical score for the song 'The Drinking Gourd'. It consists of six staves of music in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The first two staves are labeled 'CHORUS' and contain the lyrics: 'Fol - low \_\_\_\_\_ the drink - ing gourd! Fol - low \_\_\_\_\_ the drink - ing gourd. — For the old man is a - wait - ing for to'. The next four staves are labeled 'VERSE' and contain the lyrics: 'car - ry you to free - dom If you fol - low the drink - ing gourd. When the sun comes back, and the first quail calls, — Fol - low \_\_\_\_\_ the drink - ing gourd. — For the old man is a - wait - ing for to car - ry you to free - dom If you fol - low the drink - ing gourd.' The lyrics are written below the notes, with some words hyphenated and some lines starting with a dash.

*(Repeat chorus)*

The riverbank makes a very good road,  
The dead trees will show you the way,  
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on,  
Follow the drinking gourd.

*(Repeat chorus)*

The river ends between two hills,  
Follow the drinking gourd.  
There's another river on the other side,  
Follow the drinking gourd.

*(Repeat chorus)*

When the great big river meets the little river,  
Follow the drinking gourd.  
For the old man is a - waiting for to carry you to freedom  
If you follow the drinking gourd.

### The Drinking Gourd.

From: <http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/planetarium/ftdgsong.pdf>

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## What Does this Song Really Say?



### Lesson Overview:

Students listen to, sing, and read the lyrics to various African-American spirituals. They discuss the coded messages in the songs, and the purpose of these codes. Students then write original coded messages, and present their work in a performance format.

**Length of Lesson:** Three 45-minute periods

**Notes:** This lesson is suitable for grade 4-8.

### Instructional Objectives: Students will:

- Sing and/or listen to songs that are representative of spirituals sung by slaves.
- Read lyrics of songs, and interpret the meaning of the lyrics, in terms of their cultural significance
- Write coded messages, and include interpretation.
- Create an opportunity to share their coded messages through reading, drawing, a PowerPoint presentation, or another medium.

### Supplies:

- Piano or guitar for accompaniment or a CD or tape player
- Audio recordings or sheet music for the spirituals "This Train" and "Wade in the Water" (see Sources) "Wade in the water" can also be found at <http://cattailmusic.com/LyricsandNotes/WadeintheWater.htm#>

### Instructional Plan:

This is the first of two lessons however, the lesson can be taught in isolation with minor adaptation.

### *Activity A*

The goal of this activity is to explore the experience of a slave trying to escape through the Underground Railroad. Initiate a discussion about slavery. Have students imagine what it would be like to be a slave. Discuss how it would feel to be a slave—to lose one's freedom and become the property of someone else, and to be separated from friends and family.

Present the interactive activity at the National Geographic site, **The Underground Railroad**.

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/features/99/railroad/>

This activity can be completed with one computer, or presented on a large screen with an LCD projector as a whole class activity. It can also be completed in a computer lab with students working together as partners.

If the Underground Railroad interactive activity is presented to the class as a whole, have a student read the introductory paragraph from the website...

**<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/features/99/railroad/>**

When the students are given a choice (i.e., choose to escape, choose to stay), pick a student to make the choice, and ask for them to articulate why they made that choice. Allow approximately 20 minutes to complete the activity as a group.

If the activity is presented in the computer lab, group the students in pairs. Let them explore the activity, making as many choices as possible. Tell students that they will be asked to name one thing they learned on the site. Allow approximately 20 minutes to complete the activity

Close this class period by asking students to state one thing they learned. Tell students that they will learn a musical secret message the slaves used to escape through the Underground Railroad during the next class period.

### **Activity B**

The goal of this activity is to learn a spiritual, discuss its significance during slavery time, and begin to learn the “coded messages” embedded in the song.

As a warm up, list the following code words on the board: freedom train, gospel train, conductor, station, station master, and agent. Give students one minute to read the list and determine what the words have in common.

Once the class determines that all of the words are related to trains, ask students how they would feel if they were not allowed to ride on a train. Ask them why they think spirituals would describe leaving on a train. Lead a discussion to explore answers to these questions for about five minutes.

Tell students that the words discussed were codes used by slaves to communicate so the slave masters would not understand their plans for escape. Slaves were not allowed to talk, but they could sing; therefore, many slaves disguised their communications through song. The spiritual is a type of song that served many functions for slaves. These songs reflected their desire to be free, and often told other slaves how they could escape.



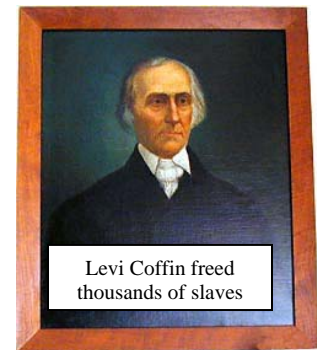
The Underground Railroad has been described as "silent and secret" and "running on silent rails in the dark of night." People developed codes, passwords, and secret signals, to be used by runaways and "investors" in the Underground Railroad. Give students a list of code words and phrases (**some examples can be found in *The Underground Railroad Codes* – page 223**). Ask students to

discuss the meaning of each Underground Railroad code word/phrase. Ask them to share their responses, and then clarify any misinterpretations.

Distribute copies of the **The Lyrics of Spirituals handout**. (Page 56) Tell students to read the lyrics and search for code words and phrases, while you play the spiritual entitled "This Train." Play the song two to three times, either via a recording or on the piano or guitar. Ask the students to tell you what the lyrics of "This Train" mean. Students can interpret individual words (i.e., train, glory, sleepers, etc.), or they can describe the phrases (i.e., "this train don't carry sleepers, this train"). **The assessment rubric can be found on page 57.**

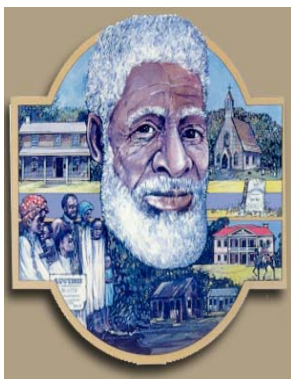
Clarify any confusion. For example, "sleepers" could refer to a sleeping car, but in the context of this song, it means someone who wants to escape, but doesn't want to endure the hardship (i.e., "wake me up when it's over"). "Righteous peoples" refers to people who are doing what is right, in spite of the difficulties involved.

Teach "This Train" to the class. Sing each phrase in the first verse and have the class repeat after you. Now sing the second verse in the same way. Finally, sing the entire song. For variation, have the boys sing one line, and the girls the next, or have a small group stand and sing a phrase or a verse, then alternate with another small group.



(Note: You may substitute any spiritual or freedom song for "This Train." Songs that have a simple and direct tune and lyrics that repeat three or more times would be the easiest to learn and/or song. "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands" and "This Little Light of Mine" may be used. MP3's of these songs can be found at <http://www.negrospirituals.com/song.htm>

Give students five minutes to look for coded messages in the lyrics. Discuss findings as a class. Tell students they will listen to another spiritual during the next class period, and begin working on their own coded messages.



### **Activity C**

The goal of this activity is to have students interpret the coded message in another spiritual, and begin to write their own coded messages to share with the class. Sing "This Train" as a warm up activity.

Listen to "Wade in the Water." ... which can be found at

<http://cattailmusic.com/LyricsandNotes/WadeintheWater.htm#>

In this style of spiritual, there is a chorus (music and words that repeat throughout a song). The words repeat three times, with an explanation at the end. Explain to students that when the words repeat in a song, this means they are very important, and something for the slave to remember—it could be the difference between life and death. For example, the phrase "wade in the water" is repeated several times. Ask students to consider this phrase. Why would slaves need to wade (go into) the water? (Slave owners used dogs to "sniff out" the trail of their escaped slaves; the dogs could not follow the scent into the water.)

Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute the **What Does this Song Really Say?** (Page 58) handout. Assign each group a different phrase from the song "Wade in the Water." Give the groups five minutes to write an interpretation of the assigned phrase. (It is okay if more than one group has the same phrase, depending on the size of your class.)

Ask groups to share their interpretations with the entire class, in the order of the song. Record each interpretation on the board as it is articulated. When all groups have shared their findings, read the entire interpretation of the song.

### ***Closing Activity***

In this activity, students will write their own coded messages. Choose the variation of the activity that is most appropriate for your class:

Keep students in the same small groups, and have them write their own original coded message. It must be three to five sentences, using the code words and phrases given. They can even make up their own, but it must follow the general "clues," using words that have meanings from the religious and railroad terminology. They must also write the interpretation. Students will have the rest of this period and part of the next (if needed) to complete this activity. Then each group will share their coded messages with the rest of the class, and the class is tasked with interpreting the meaning.

Keep the students in groups; however, give them the messages they need to put in code. For example: "I plan to escape tonight. Meet me by the river. The leader will show us the way." Provide students with three or four different messages, and the students should figure out how to convey the same meaning in code. Each group should share their codes with the class, and the class is tasked with interpreting the meaning.

For either variation of the activity, students must work cooperatively and write their coded messages using correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

**Assessment:** Assess student work using the Assessment Rubric on page 59.

### **Extensions:**

Have students illustrate their codes, phrase by phrase. The pictures should have the phrase distinctly written on the bottom of the picture. You may wish to scan the pictures into the computer or on disc, and present the pictures in PowerPoint, with the spirituals playing in the background. Have the students could write additional verses to "This Train" and/or "Wade in the Water." You may also wish to have them perform their songs for other classes.

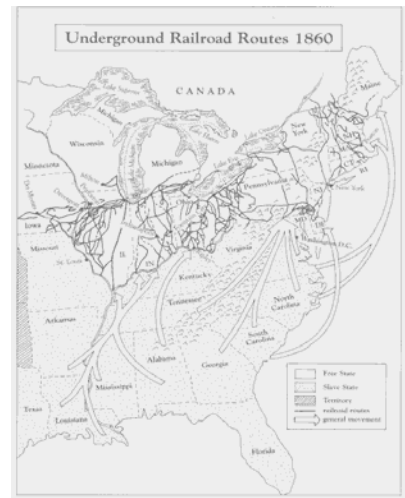
**Sources: Print: Johnston, Richard. *Folk Songs North America Sings*. Toronto: Kirby, 1984.**

**Sources: Media:** The Florida A&M Concert Choir, The Howard University Chamber Choir, and The Fisk Jubilee Singers. *Wade In the Water, Volume I: African American Spirituals: The Concert Tradition*. Smithsonian Folkways [40072](#).

# The Underground Railroad in Action: Communication and Codes

The freedom seekers took freedom wherever it could be found, whether a maroon society in Spanish Florida, a whaling ship cruising the Alaskan coast, a mining claim in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains, or Boston in 1850. Liberty could be found in any number of directions.

This 1898 map of Underground Railroad routes, created by Professor Wilber H. Seibert of Ohio State University, highlights some of the hundreds of routes freedom seekers used to reach Northern states and Canada. However, any map can only demonstrate the routes which historical evidence, both oral and textual, can corroborate. In the case of the Underground Railroad, no amount of research will ever uncover the multitude of ravines, back roads, trails, creek beds, canyons, rivers and valleys that freedom seekers used as passages to liberty.



The secretive nature of the Underground Railroad, the very reason for its success, precludes researchers' generations later from reconstructing every route. Seibert himself realized the shortcomings of such a map, but as he himself pointed out, "However much the map may fall short of showing the system in its completeness; it will be found to help the reader materially in his attempt to realize the extent and importance of this movement."

The vast majority of individual acts of bravery and resilience, which make up the fabric of the Underground Railroad, will likely remain secrets of history. What exploits are known continue to fascinate and inspire modern Americans. These success stories, however, are forever framed against family left behind, children sold away from parents and acts of horrible brutality scarcely imaginable to modern sensibilities. The freedom seekers that were chased down by slavers, perhaps just moments from freedom, will never be known, but all of these events make up the story of the Underground Railroad.

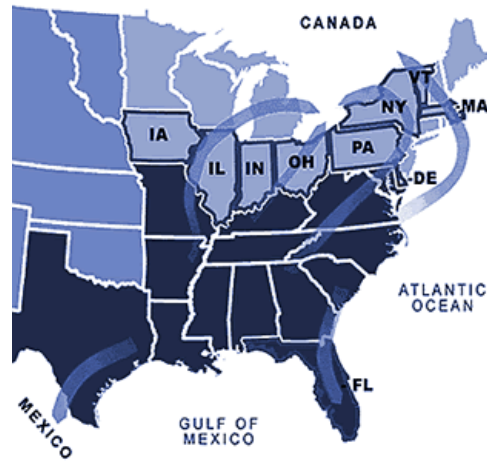
"Helping the freedom seeker" was a subject that fascinated many North Americans. Many people who did not consider themselves abolitionists aided freedom seekers from spontaneous impulse, perhaps thinking of the Biblical pronouncement that aid to the "least of these" was aid to the divine. No maps with arrows pointed out trails, or favored river or sea routes. The freedom seeker could not depend on individual acts of assistance. Further, "safe" routes do not factor in the betrayal, exhaustion, or carelessness that might have occurred along the way. Indeed, the fact that there were (in many cases) no predetermined trails was chief reason for success.

In order to reduce the number freedom seekers, owners attempted to disempower African Americans by keeping them ignorant of the country around them. That task proved impossible, as African American labor, vital to the Southern economy, was not limited to isolated plantations. Communication between enslaved African Americans flowed freely. Bonds people knew perfectly well that freedom lay generally to the north, and they knew how to travel northward by locating the North Star. Elders often taught children how to locate the star. So,

freedom seekers headed North by simply walking in the stars direction. However, freedom seekers often risked walking through dangerous or impassable terrain due to unfamiliarity with a path and the inability to plan a specific route.

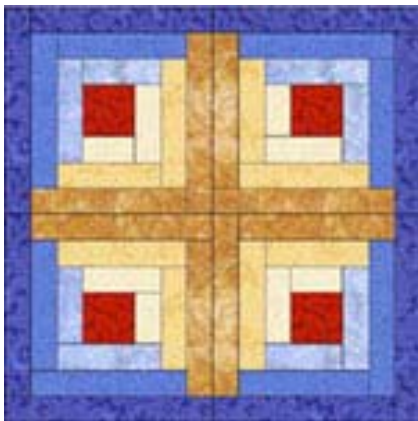
### By stars and songs

The North Star became a symbol of freedom to enslaved African Americans, as well as a guide. Children were taught to locate the North Star by using the stars of the Big Dipper. Of course, foul weather that obscured the stars often inhibited travel northward. On a larger scale, slaves often passed travel instructions from plantation to plantation by song, evidence of a vital oral tradition tied to roots in Africa. Much like Native American culture, African societies passed much of their history down through oral tradition and folklore. Africans brought from Africa the custom of creating songs to transmit factual information. In North America, Africans turned the songs into code that secretly transmitted information they wished to keep from whites.



In North America, Africans turned the songs into code that secretly transmitted information they wished to keep from whites.

"Follow the Drinking Gourd" is a coded song that provided the route for an escape from Alabama and Mississippi. Of all the routes out of the Deep South, this is the only one for which the details survive in song. A portion of the song and the translation are as follows:



**When the sun comes back and the first quail calls, Follow the drinking gourd For the old man is waiting to carry you to freedom, if you follow the drinking gourd.**

"When the sun comes back" means winter when the altitude of the sun is higher each day. Quail are a migratory bird that winter in the South, and the drinking gourd is the Big Dipper. Most freedom seekers had to cross the Ohio River, a swift and powerful river difficult to cross most of the year. The song urged freedom seekers to begin their journey in winter, which would enable them to reach the Ohio when it was still frozen and easier to cross.

The riverbank makes a very good road. The dead trees show you the way Left foot, peg foot, traveling on Follow the drinking gourd.

This verse taught freedom seekers to follow the bank of the Tombigbee River north looking for dead trees that were marked with drawings of a left foot and a peg foot. The markings distinguished the Tombigbee from other rivers that flowed into it.

## Grape-vine telegraphs



Virtually all freedom seekers preferred traveling at night, and much of the communication freedom seekers used on organized segments of the Underground Railroad existed in coded language. These modes of communication have been referred to as the "grape-vine telegraph," and often consisted of signals, whispered conversations, passwords, and messages coloured with figurative phrases were the common ways of conveying information about freedom seekers, or about parties in pursuit of African Americans.

The safety of freedom seekers while lay mainly in their ability to conceal themselves while on the move. For example, when freedom seekers traveled overland or on waterways, these wagons or vessels were often covered or closed, or had deep beds which concealed the freedom seeker from onlookers. Conductors often took various precautions to conceal the real reason behind their travels, often using business commitments as a reason for travel. A conductor might load a wagon with produce or grain bound for market; that product would conceal the fugitive on their way to the next station. Some methods were more unorthodox. One conductor arranged for a parade of wagons and carriages, in a mock funeral procession, which actually carried freedom seekers to their next rendezvous.

Sometimes, freedom seekers were hidden in plain site using disguises, demonstrated most spectacularly by William and Ellen Craft. African American men were provided with tools and the apparel of a laborer, and walked through a settlement as if simply heading to work. Freedom seeking women were sometimes outfitted with expensive clothing to avoid detection by slavers who would have a different description of the freedom seeker. Disguise also took many forms. In the Hunt-Phelan home, enslaved African American children were secretly taught to read and write. In public or around slave-owners, the children pretended to be illiterate.

Freedom seekers and their conductors often traveled zigzag or circuitous routes designed to confuse pursuit. The goal was always freedom, whether that lay in a free territory to the west, a ship bound for Mexico, a northern city or Canada, but a safe path was always preferable to a predictable straight route. Conductors often had a choice of lines to the next station, thus the intricacy of the network and the difficulty for later generations in identifying the whole of the Underground Railroad.

Once at a station, the freedom seeker was often provided with food, clothing if required, and a hiding place, which they usually remained in for the duration of their stay. Caves, barns, cellars, haystacks, hidden rooms, attics, forest thickets, remote cabins, church belfries and galleries, crates on seagoing vessels all qualify as only some of the hiding places on the Underground Railroad. Hideouts were located wherever ingenuity and necessity emerged.

While unsung escapes by freedom seekers guiding themselves by the stars made up the majority of Underground Railroad escapes, there were many other celebrated escapes which demonstrated the ingenuity and determination of those held in bondage, as well as those dedicated to securing freedom for all.

## HE'S GOT THE WHOLE WORLD IN HIS HANDS

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He's got the whole world in His hands  
He's got the big round world in His hands  
He's got the whole world in His hands

He's got the wind and the rain...

He's got the little baby...

You got you and me, sister...

He's got you and me, brother

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## THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE

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This little light of mine  
I'm going to let it shine  
Oh, this little light of mine  
I'm going to let it shine  
Hallelujah

This little light of mine  
I'm going to let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Ev'ry where I go  
I'm going to let it shine  
Oh, ev'ry where I go  
I'm going to let it shine  
Hallelujah

Ev'ry where I go  
I'm going to let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

All in my house  
I'm going to let it shine  
Oh, all in my house  
I'm going to let it shine  
Hallelujah

All in my house  
I'm going to let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

I'm not going to make it shine  
I'm just going to let it shine  
I'm not going to make it shine  
I'm just going to let it shine  
Hallelujah

I'm not going to make it shine  
I'm just going to let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

Out in the dark  
I'm going to let it shine  
Oh, out in the dark  
I'm going to let it shine  
Hallelujah

Out in the dark  
I'm going to let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine

## The Lyrics of Spirituals

### Instructions:

Read through the lyrics to “This Train” and “Woke Up This Mornin’.” Underline words and phrases that might have been used to transmit information related to the Underground Railroad.

### “This Train”

#### Verse 1:

This train is bound for glory, this train. (Repeat.)  
This train is bound for glory, I'm not telling you a story.  
This train is leaving, get on board.

#### Verse 2:

This train don't carry sleepers, this train. (Repeat.)  
This train don't carry sleepers, its got none but righteous peoples.  
This train is leaving, get on board.

### “Woke Up This Mornin' ”

#### Verse 1:

I woke up this mornin' with my mind, it was stayed on freedom. (Repeat three times.)  
Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia.

#### Verse 2:

Walkin' and talkin' with my mind, it was stayed on freedom. (Repeat three times.)  
Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia.

#### Verse 3:

Devil can't get me when my mind, it was stayed on freedom. (Repeat three times.)  
Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia.

## The Lyrics of Spirituals Group Participation Rubric

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Overall Level: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 1</b>
<b>Participation</b>	Student participated in all activities.	Student participated in most of the activities.	Student participated in some of the activities.	Student participated in no activities.
<b>Preparation</b>	Student came to class with all necessary materials.	Student came to class with some of the necessary materials.	Student came to class with few of the necessary materials.	Student did not come to class with the necessary materials.
<b>Cooperation</b>	Student worked cooperatively during all group activities.	Student worked cooperatively during most group activities.	Student worked cooperatively during some (limited) group activities.	Student did not work cooperatively during group activities.

## What Does this Song Really Say?

### Instructions:

Read the lyrics to the spiritual “Wade in the Water” and look for code words and phrases that may have been used to transmit information. Write an interpretation of the lyrics based on your findings.

### “Wade In The Water”

#### Chorus:

Wade in the water (children).  
Wade in the water.  
Wade in the water.  
God's gonna trouble the water.

#### Verse 1:

If you don't believe I've been redeemed,  
God's gonna trouble the water.  
I want you to follow him on down to Jordan stream.  
(I said) My God's gonna trouble the water.  
You know chilly water is dark and cold.  
(I know my) God's gonna trouble the water.  
You know it chills my body but not my soul.  
(I said my) God's gonna trouble the water.  
(Come on let's)

Repeat Chorus

#### Verse 2:

Now if you should get there before I do,  
(I know) God's gonna trouble the water.  
Tell all my friends that I'm comin' too.  
(I know) God's gonna trouble the water.  
Sometimes I'm up Lord and sometimes I'm down.  
(You know my) God's gonna trouble the water.  
Sometimes I'm level to the ground.  
God's gonna trouble the water.  
(I know) God's gonna trouble the water.

Repeat Chorus two times



## ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

### What Does This Song Really Say?

Criteria	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
<b>Participation</b>	Student participated in all activities	Student participated in most activities	Student participated in some activities	Student did not participate in any activities
<b>Preparation</b>	Student came to class with all necessary materials and ready to learn	Student came to class with most of the necessary materials and ready to learn	Student came to class with some of the necessary materials and ready to learn	Student came to class with none of the necessary materials and ready to learn
<b>Cooperation</b>	Student worked cooperatively during all group activities	Student worked cooperatively during some group activities	Student worked cooperatively during a few group activities	Student worked cooperatively during none of the group activities