

# WEB-BASED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



## 1. The Slave Escape Route

Introduce students to The Underground Railroad by reading to them, or having them read, some of the background text on the subject at:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/j1.html>

Show them the map of The Underground Railroad routes and explain that slaves often had to find their own way to the North, at which point they would meet people working on The Underground Railroad who assisted them on their way to Canada. Even though they were in the North, they had to remain in secrecy or they might be caught and returned to their lives as slaves in the South.

Ask students how they think the escaping slaves would have known how to get to the North if they had never been off their plantations or slave homes. What signs would they look for? What would your students do if they wanted to start walking north? Since slaves didn't have compasses, they needed another method of finding their way north.

Ask students if they've ever seen the Big Dipper, which points to the North Star. They can look at the Big Dipper at:

<http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/Launchpad/1364/Constellations.html>

Point out that the two outer stars that form the bowl of the Big Dipper point to Polaris, the North Star, which is always in the north. Read to the class, or have them read, the lyrics to "Follow the Drinking Gourd" at:

<http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/tubman/gourd.htm>

Ask students if they have figured out what the drinking gourd is. How did it help slaves find their way north? Explain the background and importance of this song (for your reference, read the "History of the Drinking Gourd" at



<http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/tubman/gourd1.html>

Ask students to pretend that they're living back in the time of slavery and want to help slaves reach the North. Divide the class into five groups and assign each group one verse of "Follow the Drinking Gourd." Then have each group illustrate the lyrics to its verse on a piece of construction paper. How would they draw the pictures to make it even easier for the slaves to understand where they needed to go? After they've finished drawing, have each group come to the front of the class and show its poster while the class recites the lyrics to that verse.

Explain to the class that once slaves made it to the North, they were by no means free. Have them look at the three posters at:

<http://education.ucdavis.edu/new/stc/lesson/socstud/railroad/SlaveLaw.htm>

to see that escaped slaves still faced danger in the North due to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and explain the implications of these signs. Discuss as a class the various difficulties that confronted the escaping slaves, and ask students to explain why the slaves were willing to tolerate these difficulties in order to find freedom.

## **2. Heroes of The Underground Railroad**



Ask students to list the qualities of a hero. Who are their heroes? What makes these people special? Do they think that there were many heroes working on The Underground Railroad? What qualities do they think these workers would have needed to possess? Discuss these questions and list student responses on the board.

Have students go through the journey on National Geographic's Underground Railroad site ([nationalgeographic.com/features/railroad](http://nationalgeographic.com/features/railroad)) to gain an idea of what it was like to be traveling along the Underground Railroad. Ask them to describe the conditions in which slaves lived and some of the dangers that an escaping slave faced. Do students think that slaves could have successfully made it over this route all by themselves, or did they need help?

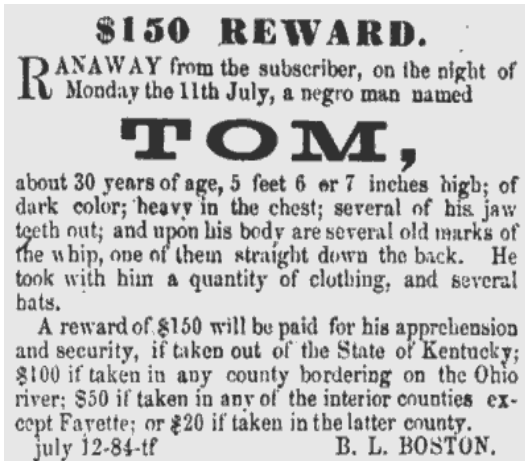
What helpers appear in this online journey? List on the board the names that they encounter: Harriet Tubman, Thomas Garrett, William Still, Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony. Explain that all of these individuals, plus many more, helped the slaves on their journey over The Underground Railroad. Were these people heroes? What dangers did they face while doing their secret work? Have students discuss these questions as a class. Students can find more information on Harriet Tubman at the Pocantico Hills School Harriet Tubman page:

<http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/tubman/tubman.html>.

Have them go through the time line of Tubman's life, created by second graders.

Have students imagine that they are living in the time of slavery. Ask them to think about the things they know about slave life and about the heroes who helped the slaves. Then, either orally, in writing, or in pictures, ask them to explain what they would have done to help the slaves. How would they have made themselves heroes for the slaves?

### 3. Acting out a scene on The Underground Railroad



Read to the class the personal account of runaway slave Linda Brent at:

<http://education.ucdavis.edu/new/stc/lesson/socstud/railroad/BrentEsc.htm>

While you're reading, ask students to close their eyes and imagine they're present in the scenes. After reading the excerpt, pose the following discussion questions to the class: What were Linda's biggest fears? What conditions did she have to endure? Why was she disappointed with what she found in New York?

Divide the class into small groups and inform them that they'll be gathering information about the Underground Railroad to develop brief skits about what it was like for the escaping slaves. Explain that their goal will be to try to gain an appreciation for what escaping slaves had to endure in order to achieve freedom in the North. Have each group go through the journey at nationalgeographic.com's Underground Railroad site and take notes on the specific people, obstacles, and conditions that the escaping slaves encountered.

<http://education.ucdavis.edu/new/stc/lesson/socstud/railroad/Ford.htm>

Each group should incorporate specific information from these narratives and from the online journey to create a three to five minute skit depicting one part of an escaping slave's journey. They should decide where their skits will take place and show these locations on a map. There can be several characters in a skit, but students must maintain realism by remembering that slaves usually traveled alone or with just a few others. One group member may be a narrator. They should also explain to the class, either before or after their performances, what they believe would have been the most difficult part or parts of this person's experience.

### 4. Would you have helped?

Ask students to discuss whether they think they would have assisted in helping the slaves to freedom if they had been free individuals living at the time. Ask them to consider the pros and cons of their decisions, including the dangers for themselves if they decided to help. Have them read about the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and look at the posters at

<http://education.ucdavis.edu/new/stc/lesson/socstud/railroad/SlaveLaw.htm>

How would this act have influenced their decision?

Have them read information at the following Web sites about some famous people who helped in the abolition movement: Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Harriet Tubman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Abraham Lincoln, and Levi Coffin.