

LESSON 3: FUGITIVE SLAVES AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

GRADE 5-8

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Objectives

- *Develop an understanding of geographic concepts and locations in relation to slavery in the 19th century.*
- *Acquire map skills*
- *Analyze 19th century primary source documents*

INTRODUCTION

The Underground Railroad, a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the North and to Canada, was not run by any single organization or person. Rather, it consisted of many individuals—many whites but predominantly blacks—who knew only of the local efforts to aid fugitives and not of the overall operation. Still, it effectively moved hundreds of slaves northward each year. According to one estimate, the South lost 100,000 slaves between 1810 and 1850.

An organized system to assist runaway slaves seems to have begun towards the end of the 18th century. In 1786 George Washington complained about how one of his runaway slaves was helped by a "society of Quakers, formed for such purposes." The system grew, and around 1831 it was dubbed "The Underground Railroad," after the then emerging steam railroads. The system even used terms used in railroading: the

homes and businesses where fugitives would rest and eat were called "stations" and "depots" and were run by "stationmasters;" those who contributed money or goods were "stockholders;" and the "conductor" was responsible for moving fugitives from one station to the next.

For the slave, running away to the North was anything but easy. The first step was to escape from the slaveholder. For many slaves, this meant relying on their own resources. Sometimes a "conductor," posing as a slave, would enter a plantation and then guide the runaways northward. The fugitives would move at night. They would generally travel between 10 and 20 miles to the next station, where they would rest and eat, hiding in barns and other out-of-the-way places. While they waited, a message would be sent to the next station to alert its stationmaster.

The fugitives would also travel by train and

boat—conveyances that sometimes had to be paid for. Money was also needed to improve the appearance of the runaways. A black man, woman, or child in tattered clothes would invariably attract suspicious eyes. This money was donated by individuals and also raised by various groups, including vigilance committees, which solicited money, provided food, lodging and money, and helped the fugitives settle into a community by helping them find jobs and providing letters of recommendation.

Records show that more slaves successfully escaped from states that directly bordered free territory, such as Maryland and Virginia, than from the Deep South. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the number of escaping slaves skyrocketed, with fleeing men, women and children seeking refuge behind Union Army lines.



Materials

- *Runaway Slave Broadsides from the "Slavery in Illinois Kit" (and on this CD)*
 - #15 1816 Reward
 - #33 1841 Reward
 - #36 Cape Girardeau Reward
 - #40 1852 Reward
 - #41 1854 Reward
 - #43 1857 Reward
 - #44 1860 Reward
- *Jeanette Winter, Follow the Drinking Gourd (in the "Slavery in Illinois Kit")*
- *"Slave Broadside Questionnaire" (in this lesson plan)*
- *Glennette Tilley Turner, The Underground Railroad in Illinois (in the "Slavery in Illinois Kit")*
- *Topographical United States map*
- *State maps*
- *Internet access (optional)*
- *Rulers*
- *Paper and pencils*



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PROCEDURE

1. Introduce the lesson by reading the story *Follow the Drinking Gourd* by Jeanette Winter aloud to the class.
2. Ask students what they already know about the Underground Railroad in the United States. Note their responses on the chalkboard to create a summary of their views on the subject.
3. Divide class into seven units and distribute the Runaway Slave Broad-sides.
4. Using the Runaway Slave Broad-sides provided, have students complete the "Slave Broadside Questionnaire."
5. Have each of the seven groups present their findings to the class.
6. Have student take note of the location the slave/slaves disappeared from.
7. As a class brainstorm where runaway slaves were escaping to. Was it always North?
8. Assign each unit a run-away slave destination.
9. Using a United States map and individual State maps, have student determine the best route a runaway would take to escape to Canada, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other cities. Refer to *The Underground Railroad in Illinois* for additional information.
10. Have students plot a course of escape using ruler and paper. Students must consider the following:
 - How many miles could a slave travel in a day?
 - Does the slave have to cross a body of water or a mountain range?
 - What additional obstacles might they encounter?
 - Record daily mileage and route by point-to-point stops.
 - Compute the total miles to their destination point.
11. Have students write a descriptive essay of the route and journey from the slave's point of view.
12. Have students map out a constellation or write a song that would reveal their path to other fugitive slaves seeking freedom.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was the motivation for slaves to escape?
2. Was escaping a more difficult decision depending upon one's family situation or employment?
3. Did slaves attempt escape in all seasons and time of day?
4. Did other slaves turn runaway slaves in for the reward?
5. What were the difficulties escaped slaves encountered along the route?
6. Was it difficult to escape with children? Why?
7. What punishment were slaves given if they were caught?
8. After escaped slaves reached their destination, were they safe?
9. Who were the people helping escaped slaves? Were they punished if they were caught aiding runaways?

SLAVE BROADSIDE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is the advertisement for a slave or an indentured servant?

2. How long after the fugitive ran away was the advertisement published?

3. What does the advertisement say about the fugitive's personal characteristics and physical appearance, including:
 - Name
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Complexion
 - Height
 - Hair style
 - Whiskers
 - Clothing
 - Marital status
 - Ailments or disabilities

4. Is the description of the fugitive detailed or vague? Does it seem to reflect a great deal of knowledge about the fugitive?

5. What language does the fugitive speak?

6. Does the fugitive have an African or an English name?

7. Does the fugitive have any special skills? What are they?

8. Does the advertisement offer any clues about the psychology or demeanor? Explain.

9. Does the fugitive have any scars? If yes, how are they described?

10. How did the fugitive manage to escape?

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- I 1. Did the fugitive run away alone or in a group?
- I 2. Who, if anyone, assisted in the escape?
- I 3. At what time of the day and year did fugitive escape?
- I 4. What goods, if any, did the fugitive escape with?
- I 5. Where was the fugitive headed?
- I 6. What reward was offered?
- I 7. Is the fugitive armed?
- I 8. Provide any other details included in the broadside.

Extension Activities:

1. Pretend you are the fugitive described in the broadside.
 - Write a letter to your master about why you are leaving.
 - Write a letter to a friend or family member who has already escaped and tell them your plan to join them
 - Write a journal entry detailing the story of your escape.
2. Draw a picture of the fugitive based upon the description given in the broadside.