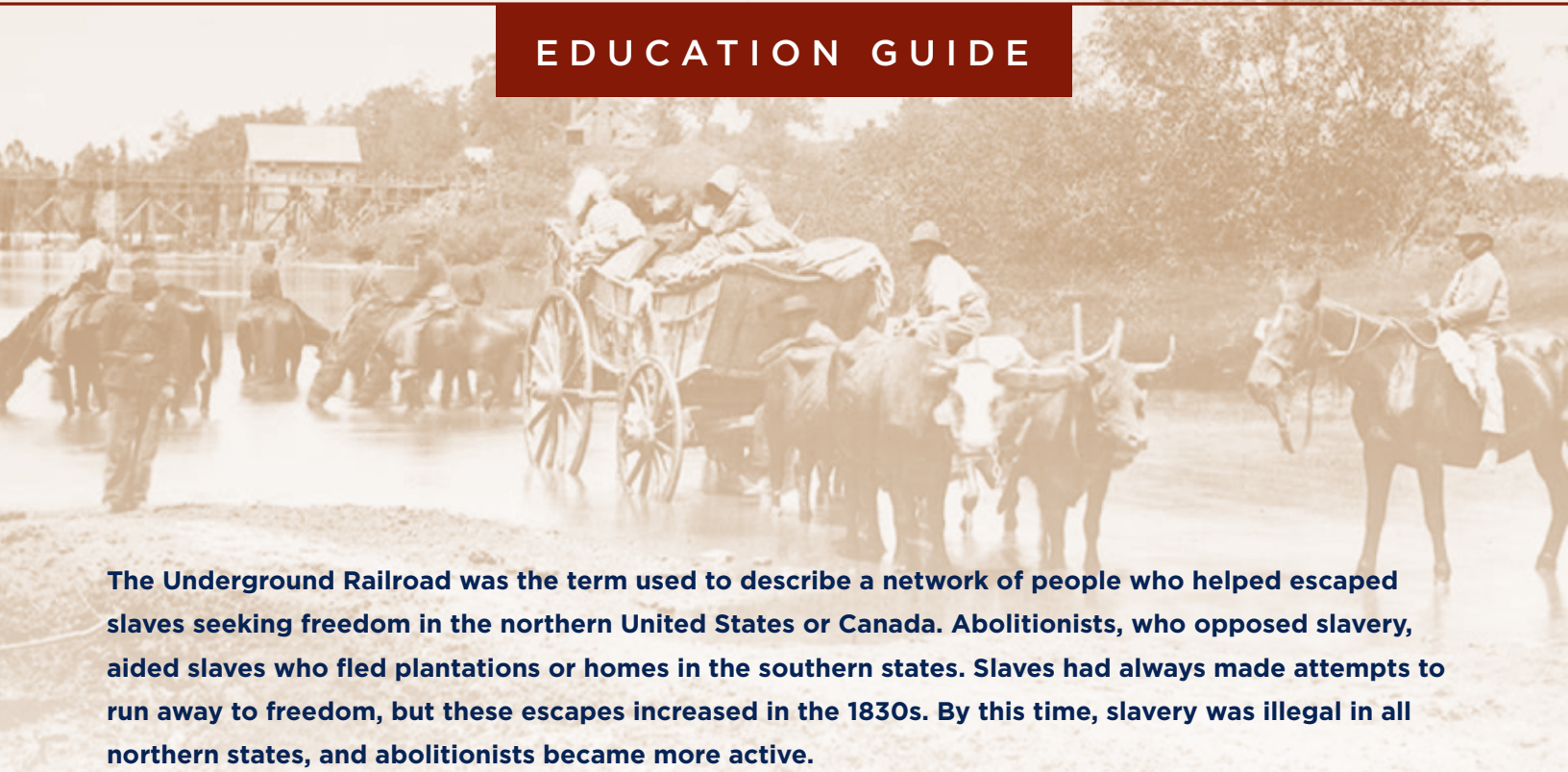


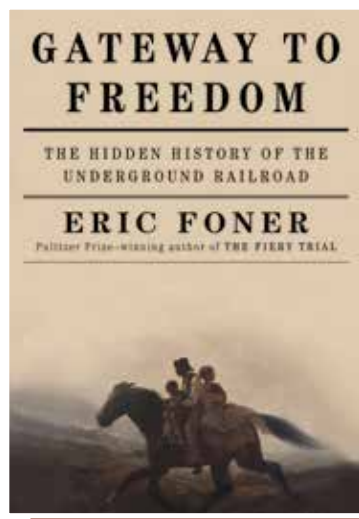
THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

EDUCATION GUIDE



The Underground Railroad was the term used to describe a network of people who helped escaped slaves seeking freedom in the northern United States or Canada. Abolitionists, who opposed slavery, aided slaves who fled plantations or homes in the southern states. Slaves had always made attempts to run away to freedom, but these escapes increased in the 1830s. By this time, slavery was illegal in all northern states, and abolitionists became more active.

The Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad. It got its name because its activities needed to be kept secret or “underground” and because railway terms were used by those to describe how the system worked. For example, those who helped escaping slaves were known as conductors. Many of those who helped slaves flee to freedom were free blacks in the north. They worked together with white abolitionists to help slaves make it to the north, avoid slave catchers and ultimately live free lives. This guide explores the story of the Underground Railroad and some of the brave men and women who fought for freedom.



SHORT VIDEO RESOURCE

HISTORY® has produced a short video featuring Professor Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University. The video draws upon Professor Foner's research for his book *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2015). This short video is an excellent introduction to the Underground Railroad, with a particular focus on the abolitionist movement in New York. Students can watch this video and complete one or more of the activities in this guide to explore the history of the Underground Railroad.

View the video here: www.histv.co/1DPaB7I

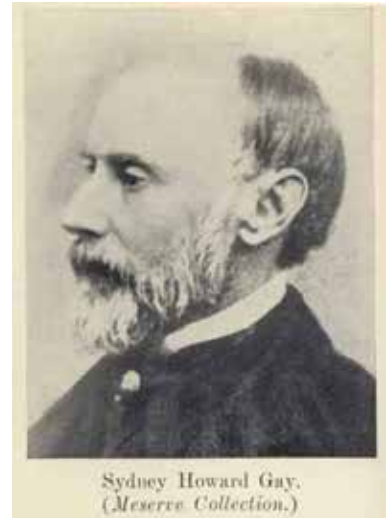
TERMS TO DEFINE

Before or after watching this video, ask students to define the terms below to build context for understanding the Underground Railroad.

Abolitionist **Reminiscence**
Anti-Slavery **Vigilance**
Fugitive

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Professor Foner describe the Underground Railroad?
2. Was the Underground Railroad really a railroad? Why do you think this term was used to describe the system of helping runaway slaves?
3. What do you think slaves risked by running away?
4. What did abolitionists risk by helping runaway slaves?
How do you think this differed if the abolitionist was white or black?
5. Were you surprised to find that African American children in the north could be kidnapped and sold into slavery?
6. Why do you think it is important to study the Underground Railroad?
7. How do you think the Underground Railroad played a role in helping end slavery in the United States?



ACTIVITIES

1. **Record of Fugitives.** Prof. Eric Foner's research on the Underground Railroad draws upon the Record of Fugitives kept by abolitionist Sydney Howard Gay in 1855-1856. This document has been digitized by Columbia University. Visit exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives to view the document, a transcript and other resources. Ask students to choose a passage from the document to analyze, or pre-select a passage for them to read. What kind of information does Gay record in the book? Why do you think he kept this record? What did you learn about fugitive slaves from reading this document? Ask students to answer one or more of these questions in writing or in class discussion.

Below is an example of one passage from Sydney Howard Gay's record, regarding Harriet Tubman. Teachers will need to explain to students that Gay often used abbreviations and shorthand.

“ May 14th. A party of four arrived from Phila It was headed by Captain Harriett Tubman, y subordinates being Ben. Jackson + Jas. Coleman who belonged to Henry Wright of Dorchester Co. Md. Wm. A. Connaway, Laban Hudson, master, + Henry Hopkins John Houston master, of y same neighborhood. They are all young men, of an aggregate market value probably of \$6000.

Harriett Tubman seven years ago was y slave of Edward Brodhurst of Bucktown, Md. Her master dying, y estate to be settled, + two of her sisters having been sold into a 'chain-gang,' she determined to run away. She did so, + made her way to Canada. In a few months, however, she concluded to return. She went back, + sought concealment in y house of a friend who had first advised her escape. She made her arrival known to her friends, + her purpose, which was “to lead them out of Egypt.”

She had four brothers, & two sisters + their children then slaves, to her old mistress. She could only accomplish y release of one child, who was seven years old, + whom she hired a man to carry. She took this to Canada. After again earning money at service, y following year she returned a second time for this child's mother. This woman, from a dread of being sold, had run away from her mistress, + for eighteen months had been in concealment, occasionally with a friend, once anchored off in a boat, in y river, for a day or two, but nearly y whole time in y woods. Harriett got messages to her, + hired a man, y necessary arrangements being made, to take her in a boat from Cambridge to Baltimore.

There Harriett joined her, + they were obliged to remain there for several weeks, during y sister's confinement + recovery. When y child was 5 weeks old, she induced a free coloured man to take her to Phila, as his brother's wife, who was known to be free, a friendly white man, who did not know that she was not y brother's wife, having given y necessary bonds. Harriett went on y day before, + took y sister + child to Canada to y child she had rescued before. There y husband + father, who was free, soon after joined them. ”

ACTIVITIES (cont.)

2. The Underground Railroad: A New Definition. Below is a definition of the Underground Railroad created by historian Matthew Pinsker of Dickinson College. Have students read the definition individually or aloud and lead a discussion of this definition. Students can define key terms or vocabulary words before or after they read the passage.

The Underground Railroad was a metaphor used by northern abolitionists and free blacks to describe and publicize their efforts at helping runaway slaves during the years before the Civil War. While secrecy was often essential for particular operations, the general movement to help fugitives was no secret at all. Underground Railroad operatives in the North were openly defiant of federal statutes designed to help recapture runaways. These agents used state personal liberty laws, which aimed to protect free black residents from kidnapping, as a way to justify their fugitive aid work. Vigilance committees in northern cities such as Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Detroit formed the organized core of this effort. These committees often worked together and provided legal, financial and sometimes physical protection to any black person threatened by kidnappers or slave-catchers. Notable vigilance leaders included William Still in Philadelphia, David Ruggles in New York, Lewis Hayden in Boston and George DeBaptiste in Detroit. There were also thousands of other individuals, usually motivated by religious belief, who helped fugitives in less systematic but still bravely defiant ways during the decades before the Civil War. Though all of these Underground Railroad figures operated with relative impunity in the North and Canada, southern operatives faced grave and repeated dangers and thus maintained a much lower profile. This is one reason why Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave herself, was such a courageous figure. Her repeated rescues inside the slave state of Maryland became the basis for her legendary reputation as “Moses.” Though Underground Railroad agents such as Tubman freed only a fraction of the nation’s slaves (probably no more than several hundred each year out of an enslaved population of millions), their actions infuriated southern political leaders, dramatically escalated the sectional crisis of the 1850s, and ultimately helped bring about the Civil War and the end of slavery in the United States.

(310 words)

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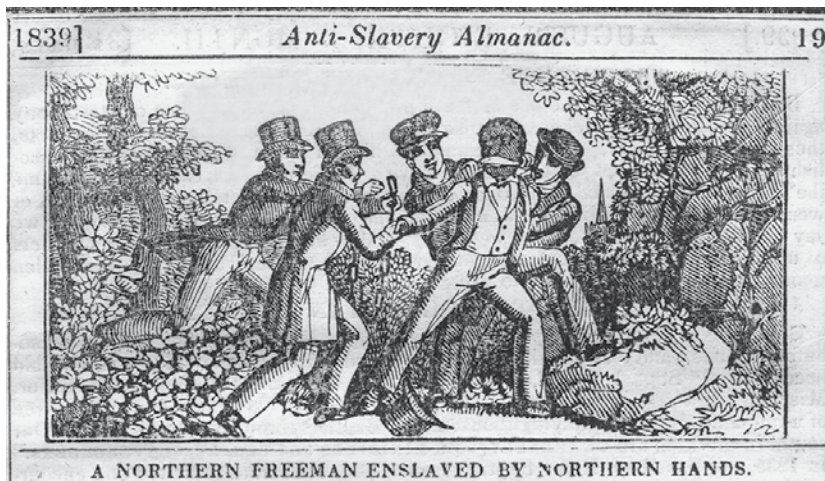
Note: The Dickinson College House Divided website features an excellent set of resources entitled The Underground Railroad Digital Classroom. Visit housedivided.dickinson.edu/ugrr for lesson plans, primary sources, videos and more.

Students can learn about David Ruggles, William Still and other important abolitionists through resources at this site.

3. Visualizing Emancipation. The University of Richmond created a map of emancipation-related events called Visualizing Emancipation. Visit this site dsl.richmond.edu/emancipation/#event/27107 to have students learn more about fugitive slaves and runaways during the Civil War. Students can choose one of these events and view related primary sources, and then discuss their findings with the larger class or group. There are many other resources and lesson plans available at this site to explore runaway slaves and slave resistance.

4. Abolitionist Timeline. Students may be surprised to learn that slavery was not abolished in New York state until 1827. Ask students to research the timeline of abolition in the U.S. and globally and create a timeline of slavery and emancipation in a format of their choice.

5. Anti-Slavery in the Press. The American Anti-Slavery Almanac was an important anti-slavery publication in the mid-19th century. Ask students to analyze the engraving below. The engraving shows the kidnapping of a free black man named Peter John Lee of Westchester County, New York by white members of the Kidnapping Club. The Kidnapping Club went after free blacks and escaped slaves, profiting from their sale into slavery.



(American Anti-Slavery Almanac, 1839).

Note: Teachers may want to adapt this photograph analysis worksheet from the National Archives to have students analyze this engraving:

www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photoanalysisworksheet.pdf



Note:

Students can watch a short video about Harriet Tubman here: www.histv.co/18XvSNR

ADDITIONAL WEBSITES

History.com resources on The Underground Railroad:
www.history.com/topics/black-history/underground-railroad

Sydney Howard Gay's Record of Fugitives:
exhibitions.cul.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/fugitives

Dickinson College: House Divided Underground Railroad site:
housedivided.dickinson.edu/ugrr

The New York Historical Society: Slavery in New York:
www.slaveryinnewyork.org