



HEROES OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Length: 5 days - Each approximately one hour in length.

Grades 3 – 4 / (8 – 10 year olds)

Five Sessions –Sessions focus on:

1. Building Background Knowledge
2. Peg Leg Joe and “Follow the Drinking Gourd”
3. John P. Parker
4. Harriet Tubman
5. Comparison of HEROES/Culminating Activities

Scope of Curriculum:

The objectives for this unit are to introduce students to the Underground Railroad and to develop an awareness of the risks taken and the sacrifices made by those who took part in the movement. The concept of HEROES will be an integral part of each lesson.

DAY 1 (One hour session)

Objectives:

- 1) Students will summarize what character traits they feel make a person a hero.
- 2) Students will recognize that the Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad, but a group of people that took great risks in order to be free from slavery and to help others be free.

Materials/Technology:

- 1) Any and all materials relating to the Underground Railroad, (tradebooks, maps, photographs, newspaper articles, notices of escaped slaves, etc.). Try to have enough for students to use in groups of two or three with all groups having materials. (See Resources for suggestions.)
- 2) Access to the Internet if possible. (See Resources for websites.)
- 3) Paper
- 4) Pencils

Procedures:

- 1) Begin a whole group discussion by asking, “What makes someone a hero?” Accept and discuss all answers.
- 2) Have students write a paragraph describing either what makes a person a hero or who they feel is a hero and why.
- 3) As students finish, have volunteers take turns sharing what they wrote with the whole group.
- 4) Reconvene whole group. Tell students that, since they are beginning to think about heroes, you are going to tell them about some of the HEROES of the Underground Railroad.
- 5) Assess background knowledge by asking, “What was the Underground Railroad?” “What was it all about?”
- 6) Discuss answers and clarify information for students. Stress the following key points and vocabulary:
 - a. The UGRR was not an actual railroad.
 - b. The UGRR was made up of people: those who wanted to be free, called “Freedom Seekers,” and those who wanted to help people seeking freedom.
 - c. The Ohio River played a very important part in the UGRR. Once Freedom Seekers crossed the river, they were getting close to freedom, (Canada), and there were even more people to help them.
 - d. VOCABULARY

Abolitionist – A person who was against slavery.

Agent - A person who helped fugitives know where to go and who would help them.

Conductor – A person who took slaves along the path to freedom.

Drinking Gourd – The North Star. Fugitives followed it on their way north.

Jordan River – The Ohio River (the geographical divide between free and slave states).

Promised Land – Canada, which symbolized the land of freedom for fugitives.

Station – Safe houses, churches, or any place of safety along the route to freedom.

Passenger – A runaway slave, also called a Freedom Seeker.

- 7) For the remainder of the hour, allow students to work in groups of two or three. They are to look through the UGRR materials they choose. Assign some students to use the Internet websites, (see Resources).

Student Assessment:

Assess and evaluate students' ability to state or write what character traits make a person a hero. Determine comprehension during discussion of UGRR background knowledge. Observe students as they locate and analyze information in the UGRR materials.

DAY 2 (One hour session. One and one half hour if show the video.)

Objectives:

- 1) Students will recall information they learned during the prior lesson.
- 2) Students will recognize who Peg Leg Joe was and how he helped Freedom Seekers by writing the song, "Follow the Drinking Gourd."
- 3) Students will analyze the words to "Follow the Drinking Gourd" to interpret their hidden meanings.
- 4) Students will associate Peg Leg Joe's actions with those of heroes.

Materials/Technology:

- 1) Follow the Drinking Gourd by Jeanette Winter (TRADEBOOK)
- 2) "Follow the Drinking Gourd, A Story of the Underground Railroad" Told by Morgan Freeman, Music by Taj Mahal, Illustrated by Yvonne Buchanan (VIDEO)
- 3) Chart tablet page with the lyrics to "Follow the Drinking Gourd" written out.
- 4) Black or navy construction paper, one piece for each child.
- 5) Gel pens or light colored crayons.
- 6) Small star stickers, seven for each child.

Procedures:

- 1) Begin by having students write down, individually, three things they learned about the UGRR during the last session. Have a few students share what they wrote. Collect papers.

- 2) Prepare students by telling them that they will be learning about a man named Peg Leg Joe and the important song that he wrote.
- 3) Read aloud, Follow the Drinking Gourd by Jeanette Winter
- 4) Show students the chart of the lyrics to the song. Have them read through the lyrics with you. Discuss the lyrics, asking students what they think they mean and clarifying as you go through the verses. The meaning of the lyrics is as follows:

REFRAIN

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

[This verse told slaves when to leave and start their journeys. At the beginning of winter and spring, the sun is higher at noon and the migrating quail are passing through. The drinking gourd is the Big Dipper, which is next to the Little Dipper. The Little Dipper contains the star called Polaris, or the north star. The old man was Peg Leg Joe himself. He traveled ahead of the slaves and would wait to help them cross the rivers to freedom.]

The river bank makes a very good road,
The dead trees will 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 left foot and peg foot were Peg Leg Joe's trademark.]

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

[This verse told slaves to follow the Tombigbee River until they reached its headwaters. They were to travel over the hills until they came to another river, the Tennessee. Many southern escape routes came to the Tennessee River.]

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.

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

- 5) If possible, show students the video, “Follow the Drinking Gourd, A Story of the Underground Railroad.” The video is 26 minutes long, which was not included in the one-hour estimation for this lesson.
- 6) Give students one piece of black or navy construction paper. Have them fold it in half “hamburger style.” Using gel pens or light colored crayons, have them write the refrain from the song on the outside “cover.” On the top half of the inside, have students list three things that Peg Leg Joe did that made him a hero. On the bottom half, have them use seven star stickers to create the Little Dipper with the north star on the end of its handle. Using the gel pens or light crayons, have them connect the stars together.

Student Assessment:

Assess and evaluate students’ ability to write three things they learned from the prior lesson and three things that Peg Leg Joe did that made him a hero. Determine comprehension during discussion of the lyrics to “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” Ask questions that require students to analyze the lyrics and interpret their meaning.

DAY 3 (One hour session)

Objectives:

- 1) Students will paraphrase the meanings of UGRR vocabulary learned during the first session.
- 2) Students will recognize John P. Parker’s role in the UGRR.
- 3) Students will infer what risks were taken by characters in the story.
- 4) Students will justify their position as to whether they would have run if they were slaves during the 1800’s.

Materials/Technology:

- 1) UGRR Vocabulary (words only) listed on separate index cards. (See words in ***DAY 1***). Repeat words as needed until there are enough for each student to have one card.
- 2) Large white paper (11” x 17”)
- 3) Markers
- 4) Freedom River by Doreen Rappaport
- 5) Writing prompt (See next page)

- 6) Paper
- 7) Pencils

Procedures:

- 1) Review UGRR vocabulary by distributing the index cards with vocabulary terms written on them, (one word on each card). Have students form cooperative groups by finding others in the room with their same word. Have groups use markers to write their vocabulary word and everything they know about that term on a large piece of white paper. Encourage them to make it visually appealing. Provide help when needed. Ask questions such as, “What does this term mean?” “Why was it important?” “Can you think of any examples?” When all groups finish, hang the papers to create a bulletin board or UGRR word wall.
- 2) Prepare students by telling them that they will be learning about a very brave man named John P. Parker.
- 3) Read Freedom River by Doreen Rappaport.
- 4) Discuss the story by asking the following questions, “Which character(s) in this story would you consider a hero?” “What was John P. Parker risking by helping this family?” “What was the family risking?”
- 5) Have students respond in writing to the following question: “If you were a slave during the 1800’s in America, would you have run away or stayed? Give three reasons for your decision.” SEE WRITING PROMPT ON NEXT PAGE.

Student Assessment:

Assess and evaluate students’ ability to work with group members and create an appropriate definition for their vocabulary word. Assess students’ ability to state a position, (running away or staying), and give three appropriate reasons why they chose that position.

The Underground Railroad

Over the last several days, you have learned about the hardships faced by slaves as they tried to escape on the Underground Railroad. Think about how hard it was for them on their journey. They risked their lives when they ran to freedom.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION:

If you were a slave during the 1800's in America, would you have run away or stayed with your master? Give three reasons for your decision.

(Write your answer in paragraphs, one paragraph for each reason. You will have to describe each reason with more than one sentence.)

DAY 4 (One hour session)

Objectives:

- 1) Students will recognize Harriet Tubman's role in the UGRR.
- 2) Students will create a booklet depicting Harriet Tubman's acts of heroism.

Materials/Technology:

- 1) A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman by David A. Adler
- 2) One "booklet" for each student. Using two pieces of plain white paper, fold one down from the top about one third of the way. Fold the other about two thirds of the way down. Insert one into the other to create a "flip book" with four flaps. Staple at the top.
- 3) Chart tablet, dry erase board or overhead projector.
- 4) Markers for teacher use
- 5) Pencils
- 6) Crayons

Procedures:

- 1) Prepare students by telling them that they will be learning about one of the most famous heroes of the UGRR, Harriet Tubman.
- 2) Read A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman by David A. Adler.
- 3) Have students help you create a list of the things Harriet did to help others. Use the book to help you. Write responses on a class list.
- 4) Explain to students that they are going to make a flip book about Harriet Tubman's life. Demonstrate how the book will be set up. The top flap is for the title and the student's name. The other three flaps are for sentences describing how Harriet Tubman helped people on the UGRR. Students can use the ideas generated by the class to help them. After writing the three sentences on the flaps, students are to open the pages and illustrate the sentences.
- 5) If possible, display the flip books in the hall on a table, or in the school library so that others can see and read them.

Student Assessment:

Assess and evaluate students' ability to cite passages from the story that depict how Harriet Tubman helped others. Assess students' ability to use that information to create a flip book with appropriate sentences and illustrations.

DAY 5 (One hour session)

Objectives:

- 1) Students will compare the character traits of UGRR heroes to those of September 11, 2001.
- 2) Students will create a poster that depicts heroism.

Materials/Technology:

- 1) Chart paper, dry erase board, or overhead projector with space big enough for a large, two circle Venn diagram.
- 2) Markers, dry erase markers, or chalk for teacher use
- 3) Medium or large, poster size paper (one for each student)
- 4) Markers or crayons for student use

Procedures:

- 1) Draw a two circle Venn diagram large enough for the whole group to see. Label the circles “UGRR Heroes” and “September 11th Heroes.”
- 2) Ask students the following question, “What do you remember about September 11, 2001?” (The day terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.) “Who were some of the heroes from that day?”
- 3) Explain to students that you want them to think about the UGRR heroes they have learned about and the heroes they read or heard about from September 11, 2001. Have students give responses that can be written into the Venn diagram. “How were those heroes the same?” “How were they different?” Discuss responses.
- 4) Explain to students that they will work either alone or with a partner (they get to choose) to create a poster about heroism. This poster will be hung in the hall for the student body to see. The purpose of the poster is to make other kids realize that they can be heroes just like adults. It may help to ask, “What can kids do at school to help others?” “What can kids do to help their families or people in their neighborhood?” Students can use any words or pictures they choose to convey this message.
- 5) Display students’ work in the halls.

Student Assessment:

Assess and evaluate students’ ability to give appropriate responses for the Venn diagram. Assess students’ ability to convey a message about heroism in their poster. (Students should demonstrate an understanding that heroes are everyday people who go out their way to help others. Heroes do not fly around wearing costumes and rescuing people like Superman.)

RESOURCES

(Tradebooks used in the above lessons.)

Adler, D. (1992). *A picture book of Harriet Tubman*. New York: Holiday House.

Rappaport, D. (2000). *Freedom river*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children.

Winter, J. (1988). *Follow the drinking gourd*. New York: Random House.

(Additional tradebooks that could be used.)

Bial, R. (1995). *The underground railroad*. Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company.

Hopkinson, D. (1993). *Sweet Clara and the freedom quilt*. New York: Dragonfly Books.

Monjo, F. (1970). *The drinking gourd: A story of the underground railroad*.
HarperTrophy.

Osborne, M. (2000). *Civil war on Sunday*. New York: Random House.

Ringgold, F. (1992). *Aunt Harriet's underground railroad in the sky*. New York: Crown
Publishers, Inc.

Schroeder, A. (1996). *Minty: A story of young Harriet Tubman*. New York: Puffin
Books.

Woodruff, E. (1998). *Dear Austin: Letters from the underground railroad*. New York:
Scholastic, Inc.

(Videos)

The Rabbit Ears American Heroes and Legends Series, (1992). *Follow the drinking
gourd: A story of the underground railroad*. Uni Distribution Corp.

Animated Hero Classics. *Harriet Tubman*. Nest Entertainment, Inc.

(Websites for Teachers)

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/lp2.html>

<http://www.marcopolo-education.org/>

<http://www.ket.org/underground/resources/>

(Websites for Students)

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

(Take a journey on the UGRR)

<http://www.nyjournalnews.com/blackhistory/main.html>

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

<http://www.foresthills.edu/maddux/undrgrnd.html>

(Websites for Teachers and Students Together)

<http://www.undergroundrailroad.org>

(National Underground Railroad Freedom Center)

<http://www.graceproducts.com/tubman/index.html>

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/>

