

# Roadmaps to Freedom

**Subject:** American Studies/American History  
**Grade Level:** 9-12  
**Topic:** Underground Railroad and Freedom Quilts  
**Lesson Length:** 2-3 Days



Monkey Wrench



Wagon Wheel



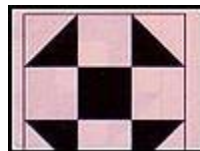
Bear Paw



Cross Roads



Log Cabin



Shoofly



Bow Ties



Double Wedding Rings



Drunkard's Path



Flying Geese



Stars

## Objectives:

1. Students will learn how quilts were used to aid runaways on the Underground railroad.
2. Students will research and become familiar with symbols and quilt patterns that were used on the Underground Railroad "Freedom Quilts".
3. Students will create quilt tiles in the Underground Railroad "Freedom Quilt" tradition.
4. Students will share their group creations and explain their "quilt maps" to the class.

## Materials:

- *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*
- *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* (optional, children's story)
- Internet Access to research quilt designs, patterns, and symbols
- Construction Paper – standard size
- Color Pencils
- Markers
- Tape

## Procedures:

(Activity can be modified to fit your school setting or classroom environment)

1. Students must have a general knowledge base of the Underground Railroad. Before starting this particular lesson we had discussed the Underground Railroad for four or five days in class.
  - a. I also recommend reading the children's book, *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*.
2. Students will have the opportunity to research Underground Railroad "Freedom Quilts" via the internet.
3. Students need to have a general understanding of the symbols used on the "Freedom Quilts".
4. Teacher must present a mini-lesson explaining the significance of the quilt symbols. I found that Jacqueline Tobin's book, *Hidden in Plain View: The Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, an excellent resource.
5. Students need to be divided into groups of four.
6. Each group is responsible for designing 4-6 quilt tiles that could be used to navigate a "runaway" through our school's campus to "freedom".
  - a. Groups were given different locations throughout our school's campus to start from, but each group had the same destination, home plate on our baseball field. Home plate represented freedom for our class.
  - b. Starting and end points can be designed to fit your own school environment.
7. Each group needs to depict landmarks, buildings, or any other clues that any person could use to get from the starting point to "home base".

8. Each group must also use at least two symbols or designs that were used in traditional "Freedom Quilts" during the Antebellum Era.
9. Students are permitted to walk the course that they are required to plan out on their quilts. Students need to take mental notes while on their journey and discuss their group's design. This should take 15-20 minutes.
10. After taking notes on their journey, each group needs to return to class and begin designing their quilts.
11. Each square design should help a "runaway" navigate the road that must be traveled to freedom.
  - a. Each group must use construction paper to design their quilt.
    - i. It is helpful if the construction paper has been cut into squares. The final product is easier to construct if all the tiles have the same width and length. I learned this the hard way.
  - b. Each quilt tile must contain color.
  - c. Each quilt tile must be the same size.
  - d. At least two quilt tiles should emulate the symbols used on traditional "Freedom Quilts".
  - e. Students are encouraged to stick to traditional geometric quilting designs.
  - f. Students are also encouraged not to make the quilt designs too obvious, after all, traditional "Freedom Quilts" were secret codes for runaways.
12. After each group has designed their mini-quilt, they should present the finished product to the rest of the class and explain the journey one should take while using their quilt as a roadmap.
13. After the presentations, all group mini-quilts will be put together to form one huge freedom quilt from the class.

### **Assessment:**

1. Student Assessment is on-going throughout the quilt design.
2. Students need to adhere to the quilt design requirements.
3. Teacher needs to assess the quality of the quilts, and determine if a runaway could actually use the quilt to successfully navigate the escape route to freedom, home base.

### **Related Links:**

<http://www.womenfolk.com/historyofquilts/abolitionist.htm>

Americas quilting history: Abolition Quilts and the Underground Railroad

[http://www.oberlin.edu/EOG/threads\\_of\\_freedom/threads2.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/EOG/threads_of_freedom/threads2.html)

Threads of Freedom: The Underground Railroad Story in Quilts

<http://www.beavton.k12.or.us/greenway/leahy/ugrr/quiltsdebate.htm>

Underground Railroad: Quilts Debate

<http://www.fortunecity.com/victorian/magenta/14/id16.htm>

Hart Cottage Quilts

[http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr\\_quilting\\_blocks/article/0,,HGTV\\_3299\\_1374077,00.html](http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr_quilting_blocks/article/0,,HGTV_3299_1374077,00.html) -

Clues in the Quilts: Home and Garden Television



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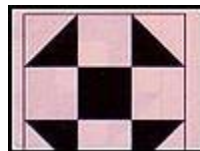
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## RESOURCES:

*Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*

by Jacqueline L. Tobin, Raymond G. Dobard, Cuesta Ray

Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing

c/o Random House Customer Service

**Title: Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt**

by Deborah Hopkinson

with illustrations by James Ransome

(Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY, 1993)

**Quilt Designs on this page were taken from:**

[http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr\\_quilting\\_blocks/article/0,,HGTV\\_3299\\_1374077,00.html](http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/cr_quilting_blocks/article/0,,HGTV_3299_1374077,00.html)

Clues in the Quilts: Home and Garden Television