

Lesson Title: Being a Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Overview:

Narrative

This lesson offers students the opportunity to take on the role of a conductor for the UGRR. Through primary narratives, students will be able to develop ideas and knowledge of how this system of stops, stations and routes, gave fugitive slaves an opportunity to seek their freedom in the North.

Objectives

- *Students will be able to describe what an active role in the UGRR would have been like.*
- *Students will develop a greater understanding of the UGRR and the hardships and dangers faced by those involved.*

3 – H3.0.8 Use case studies or stories to describe how the ideas or actions of individuals affected the history of Michigan.

*3 – G4.0.2 Describe diverse groups that have come into a region of Michigan and reasons why they came.
(push/pull factors)*

W.GN.03.01 write a cohesive narrative piece such as a fable, folktale, or realistic fiction using personification, setting, actions and thoughts that reveal important character traits.

4 – H3.0.7 Use case studies or stories to describe the ideas and actions of individuals involved in the Underground Railroad in Michigan and in the Great Lakes region.

4 – G4.0.1 Use a case study or story about migration within or to the United States to identify push and pull factors (why they left, why they came) that influenced the migration.

W.GN.04.03 write an informational comparative piece that demonstrates

understanding of central and supporting ideas using an effective organizational pattern (e.g., compare/contrast) and informational text features.

5 – U2.3.3 Describe colonial life in America from the perspectives of at least three different groups of people (e.g., wealthy landowners, farmers, merchants, indentured servants, laborers and the poor, women, enslaved people, free Africans, and American Indians).

5 – U2.3.4 Describe the development of the emerging labor force in the colonies (e.g., cash crop farming, slavery, indentured servants).

5 – U2.3.5 Make generalizations about the reasons for regional differences in colonial America.

W.GN.05.03 write a position piece that demonstrates understanding of central ideas and supporting details (e.g., position/evidence organizational pattern) using multiple headings and subheadings.

- Time Required – *2- 30 minute sessions for younger students, and 1- 50 minute sessions for older students.*

Grade level

Upper Elementary Students, 3rd-5th grade

Topic or Era

The Underground Railroad-Early to mid 1800's

Preparation

The reading of “Freedom Crossing” by Margaret Goff Clark is very helpful fictional account that assists in establishing a context for the UGRR.

- **Materials** –Escaping slave painting, *firsthand accounts of slaves, Bound for the North Star by: Dennis Brindell Fradin, paper, pencils, projector or document camera, outline for writing narrative, text book with background information,(if available).*

Resources

LC control 00029052

no.

Bound for the North Star True Stories of Fugitive Slaves by Dennis Brindell Fradin.

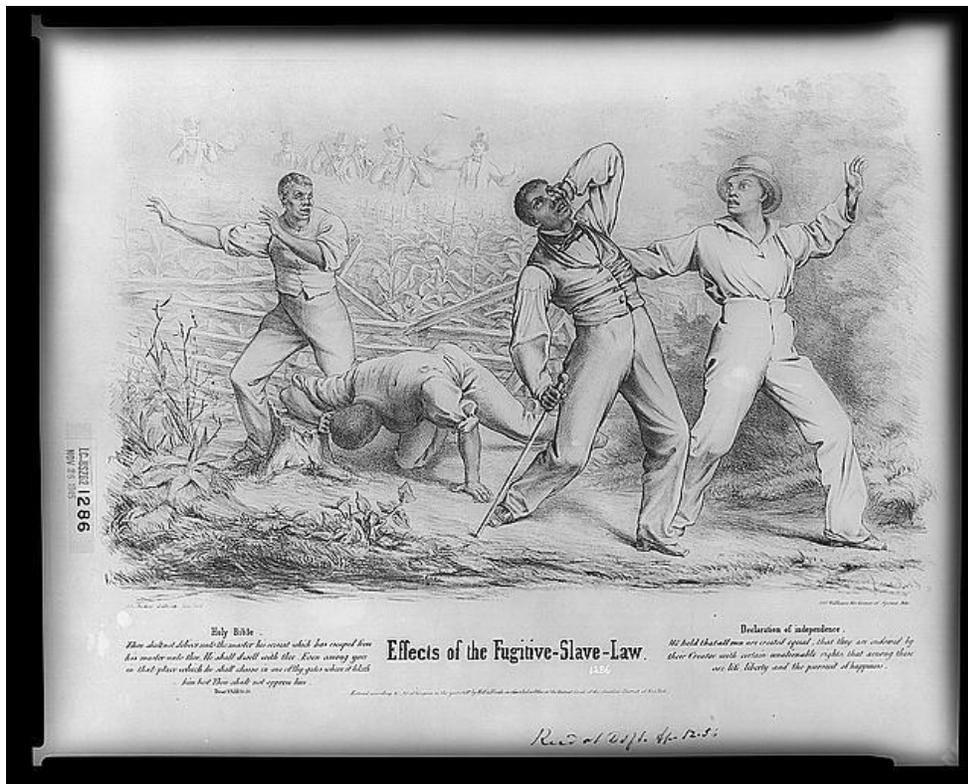
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snintro02.html>

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/narratives-slavery/>

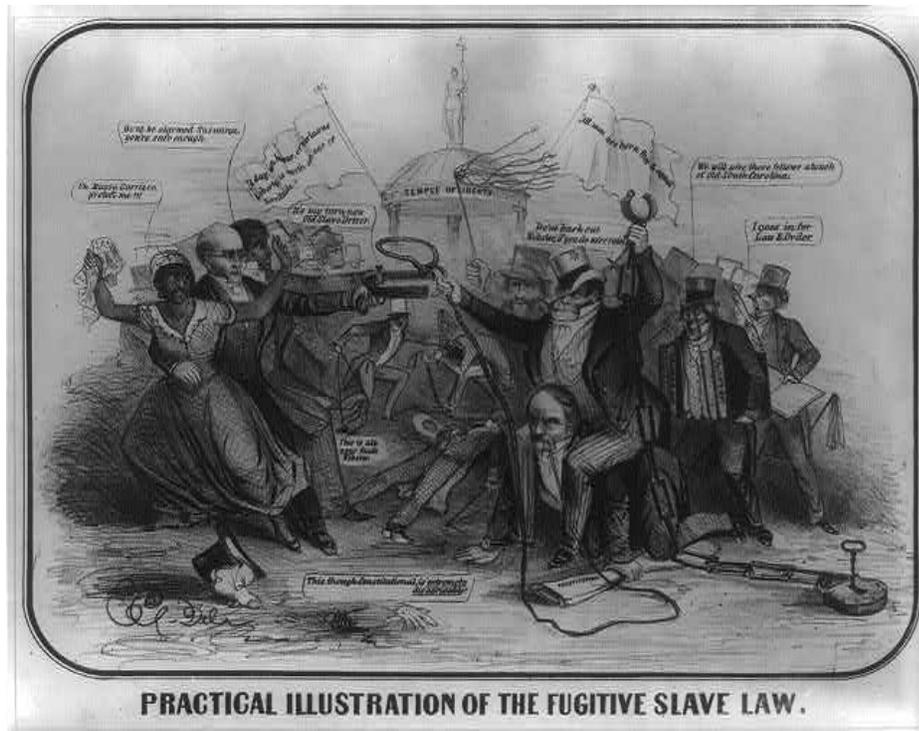


Slaves traveled along the Underground Railroad, depicted in this painting

CREDIT: Webber, Charles T. (reproduction of a painting in the Cincinnati Art Museum). The underground railroad." C1893. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Effects of the Fugitive Slave Laws <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661523/>



Practical Illustration of the Fugitive Slave Law <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3a29452/>

Procedure:

Display the painting of slaves traveling along the Underground Railroad. Have students study the painting, help them to develop ideas and discuss their thoughts about what they see. Some may note the ages, the season, the rushed look of the travelers, how some appear to have wealth while others are dressed poorly, etc....

Have students make predictions about what it must have been like to be on the run. Discuss why people would want to run away from the plantations and farms of the Southern states. Discuss how Fugitive Slave Laws looked on these slaves as property and that their lives were restricted with every movement controlled. End of day one for younger students.

To develop this into a cross curricular activity, integrate the ELA by using the story “Freedom Crossing” by Margaret Goff Clark. This story is about a young girl and how her role to assist a fugitive slave develops.

Guide student understanding of what life was like in the slave holding southern states. Using excerpts and materials from the following, help build student understanding of the dangers, problems and issues that conductors in the UGRR faced as they assisted fugitive slaves in their quest for freedom.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/narratives-slavery/>

The following are excerpts from the book, “Bound for the North Star True Stories of Fugitive Slaves” by Dennis Brindell Fradin. These may be used or any other narrative that the teacher selects.

“Under Missouri law, a white man was expected to stop any suspicious looking black person and was eligible for a \$5 reward if that person proved to be a runaway slave.” Pg. 133

“Digges ordered his slaves to help him catch John. Everyone involved later told a different version of what occurred. Apparently, Digges and his slaves armed themselves with clubs and encircled the runaway. ‘If you come near me, I will kill you!’ John warned, pulling out his knife. Seneca Digges threw

an ax at John, who dodged it and ran past his attackers, heading for a fence.” Pg. 133-134

“The UGRR helped John Anderson on his journey. One night, an English settler fed and sheltered him. At another farmhouse he received a loaf of bread.” Pgs. 136-137

“...abolitionist sent him via the UGRR to Detroit, Michigan. He crossed the Detroit River and entered Windsor, Canada in November 1853, after a two-month, seven-hundred-mile journey. At last he believed he was safe, because any slave catcher who pursued him would be breaking the laws of Canada and the British Empire.” Pg. 137

Following the readings of the firsthand accounts, discuss with students what they think might happen if someone is caught assisting a fugitive slave. Display the primary document of the Fugitive Slave Laws. Continue the discussion about how scared the fugitive and those who worked to help free them must have felt. This should give students a sense of apathy in regards to the roles everyday people played in making the UGRR a way to freedom for many fugitive slaves.

Next display the cartoon print Effects of the Fugitive Slave Laws. Have students discuss what they are seeing. The link to the art work includes a synopsis of the law and its effects on the free states and their responsibility in apprehending fugitive slaves. Following the discussions, assign the students the task of developing and writing a narrative from the point of a conductor on the UGRR and how they felt in regards to the laws and their role in helping escaped slaves find freedom in the North. To differentiate the activity or supplement it, have students create an illustration of themselves as a conductor assisting a fugitive slave to hide and escape capture.

Evaluation:

- *Students will create a narrative describing what life was like as a conductor on the UGRR.*
- *Have students illustrate a scene depicting a conductor assisting fugitive slaves in their escape.*