

Learning Guide



Underground Railroad

We hope you enjoyed learning all about the Underground Railroad and the courage for Harriet Tubman, one of its most famous conductors. Extend your learning with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen:

Check your knowledge before and after listening to the episode by determining if statements are TRUE or FALSE.

Vocabulary

Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.3

Writing Prompts and Extension Projects

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.8

Timeline of Resistance: Activity & Template

NCSS: Standards 2, 5, & 10; C3 Framework: D2.His.1.3-5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.5.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.5.7

Make a Freedom Map

NCSS: Themes 2, 3, 5, & 10; C3 Framework: D2.Geo.1.3-5, D2.Geo.2.3-5, D2.His.1.3-5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.5.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1

Interview Harriet Tubman

NCSS: Themes 2, 5, & 10; C3 Framework: D2.His.3.3-5 & D2.His.12.3-5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.5.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.5.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3

Underground Railroad Role-Play

NCSS: Themes 2, 5, & 10; C3 Framework: D2.Civ.2.3-5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1

Kindness & Equity Challenge

NCSS: Themes 1, 5, 6, & 10; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1

Freedom Quilt Project

VA:Cr1.2.5; NCSS Themes 2, 5, & 10

Additional Resources and Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio



Get Set to Listen

1. Before listening!

Read each statement and write TRUE or FALSE based on what you already know.



2. After listening!

Based on what the experts said in the episode, write TRUE or FALSE.



Before Listening	TRUE or FALSE?	After Listening
	1. Harriet Tubman was born in Maryland between 1820 and 1821.	
	2. Harriet Tubman's nickname as a child was Mary.	
	3. When Harriet was six years old, she was sent to work far away from her parents.	
	4. Harriet helped tie down a runaway slave to prevent him from escaping.	
	5. Harriet used the stars and moss on trees to help navigate the North.	
	6. Harriet Tubman only made one trip on the Underground Railroad.	
	7. Harriet worked as a spy and a nurse for the Union Army during the Civil War.	

What did you learn?



Get Set to Listen

Answer key

1. TRUE
2. FALSE. Her nickname was “Minty”.
3. TRUE
4. FALSE. She *refused* to help tie him down.
5. TRUE
6. FALSE. She made 13 trips and helped many people escape.
7. TRUE



Vocabulary

Listening for Words

1. Make a four-column chart and label the columns “I don’t know,” “I’ve seen or heard, but don’t know the meaning,” “I think I know the meaning,” and “I know the meaning.”
2. Write the vocabulary word in the column that describes how well you know the meaning of the word.
3. Listen to [the episode](#). Note how the speaker uses the words.

Matching Words with Definitions

1. Print and cut apart the word and definition cards.
2. Spread out the word cards so you can see them all. One by one, attach a definition card to each word card.

Writing with New Words

After working with the words and definitions, write a one-page essay or story that uses at least three of the words.

slave

A person who is forced to work for someone else and is not free.

enslaver

A person who owns slaves.



Vocabulary

overseer

Someone who watches and controls the work of slaves.

sulfur

A chemical element that gives skunk spray its strong, rotten-egg smell.

Underground Railroad

A secret network of people who helped enslaved people escape to freedom.

conductor

A person who helped guide enslaved people along the Underground Railroad.



Vocabulary

station

A safe place where escaping enslaved people could hide.

Quaker

A member of a religious group that believed in peace and helping others.

Civil War

A war between groups in the same country; in the U.S., it was fought over slavery.

abolitionist

A person who worked to end slavery.



Discussion Questions

1. How did slavery treat children like Minty (Harriet) differently from children today?
2. Why do you think Harriet kept helping others escape even when it was very dangerous?
3. What does it mean to stand up against unfair rules or systems? Can you think of examples today?
4. How do you think Harriet felt when she returned to help her family and others?
5. What are ways we can be brave like Harriet and help others who are treated unfairly?
6. Why is it important to learn about stories of people like Harriet Tubman?
7. What risks did Harriet take when she escaped from slavery?
8. What does Harriet's story teach us about strength beyond physical strength?
9. Why do you think the Underground Railroad had secret codes, songs, and disguises?
10. How did ordinary people (farmers, families, neighbors) help make the Underground Railroad work?
11. Are there people today who need help or protection? What are safe ways we can support them?

Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner's answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group's ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Writing Prompts

Narrative Prompts

1. Imagine you are Harriet Tubman on your first mission to guide someone to freedom. Write a story about your journey and the challenges you face.

Extension: Illustrate your story with a map showing your route and safe houses.

2. Write a diary entry from the perspective of someone Harriet helped escape. How do they feel about her bravery?

Extension: Share your diary entry with a classmate and discuss how courage can help fight unfairness.

3. Write and perform a short skit about standing up against unfair rules or bullying.

Extension: Compare your story with Harriet's actions and reflect on similarities.

4. Make a comic strip showing Harriet Tubman helping people escape and highlight acts of bravery.

Informative/Explanatory Prompts

1. Explain what the Underground Railroad was and how it helped people escape slavery.

Extension: Include a diagram or flowchart showing the roles of conductors, station masters, and safe houses.

2. Write about the different ways Harriet Tubman resisted unfair treatment and racism.

Extension: Create a "hero board" highlighting actions that show courage and fairness.

3. Compare the Underground Railroad to modern-day efforts to help people in danger around the world.

Extension: Write a letter to someone today who is fighting for fairness or equality, sharing encouragement.

Opinion/Persuasive Prompts

1. Should children today learn about slavery and racism in school? Explain your opinion with reasons and examples.

Extension: Conduct a mini-survey with classmates and compare opinions, then write a reflection.

2. What qualities made Harriet Tubman a good leader? Convince a friend that these qualities are still important today.

Extension: Create a "Leadership Qualities" poster showing traits like courage, kindness, and fairness.



Timeline of Resistance

Create

a visual timeline that shows important moments in Harriet Tubman's life, her acts of courage and resistance to slavery, major Civil War events, and the end of slavery in the United States.

Guidelines

Your timeline must include:

- ✓ At least 8–10 events
- ✓ Events from Harriet Tubman's life
- ✓ At least 2 acts of courage or resistance
- ✓ At least 2 major Civil War events
- ✓ The end of slavery
- ✓ Dates or approximate years
- ✓ Pictures, symbols, or drawings
- ✓ Short captions explaining why each event matters

Timeline Format Options

Choose one:

- Poster paper timeline
- Foldable paper timeline
- Digital timeline (slides, Canva, etc.)
- Accordion or scroll-style timeline

Suggested Events to Include

(Choose from these or add others)

- Born enslaved in Maryland (1820–1821)
- Refused to help capture an escaped enslaved person
- Head injury from overseer
- Learned navigation using stars and nature
- Escaped to freedom (1849)
- Became a conductor on the Underground Railroad
- Led people to freedom on multiple rescue missions
- Worked as a Union nurse and spy during the Civil War
- Combahee River Raid (1863)
- Slavery abolished in the U.S. (1865)

Reflect

Which moment on your timeline shows the most courage? Why?

Extensions

- Add a second color to show Harriet's life vs. U.S. history events
- Include symbols (chains breaking, stars, footsteps)
- Write a short paragraph titled: "What Harriet Tubman Teaches Us About Standing Up for Others"
- Compare Tubman's strategies to other historical figures who resisted oppression.

Resources

- [Part 1: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad](#)
- [Tips for Teaching and Learning with Timelines](#)
- [Harriet Tubman Timeline from Britannica](#)
- [Harriet Tubman: Timeline of Her Life, Underground Railroad Service & Activism](#)
- [Civil War Timeline](#)



Visual Idea:
(drawing, symbol, or image)

What Happened: (1-2 sentences)

Why This Shows Courage or Is Important:



Make a Freedom Map

Imagine traveling by night through dangerous territory to escape from slavery, with only courage and clever clues to guide you. As you listen to The Children's Hour episode "Underground Railroad," you'll learn how Harriet Tubman and others used coded messages, songs, stars, and secret safe houses to help people escape slavery. Then, you'll become a mapmaker and trace the brave routes that led to freedom.

Listen

[Part 2: How the Underground Railroad Worked](#)

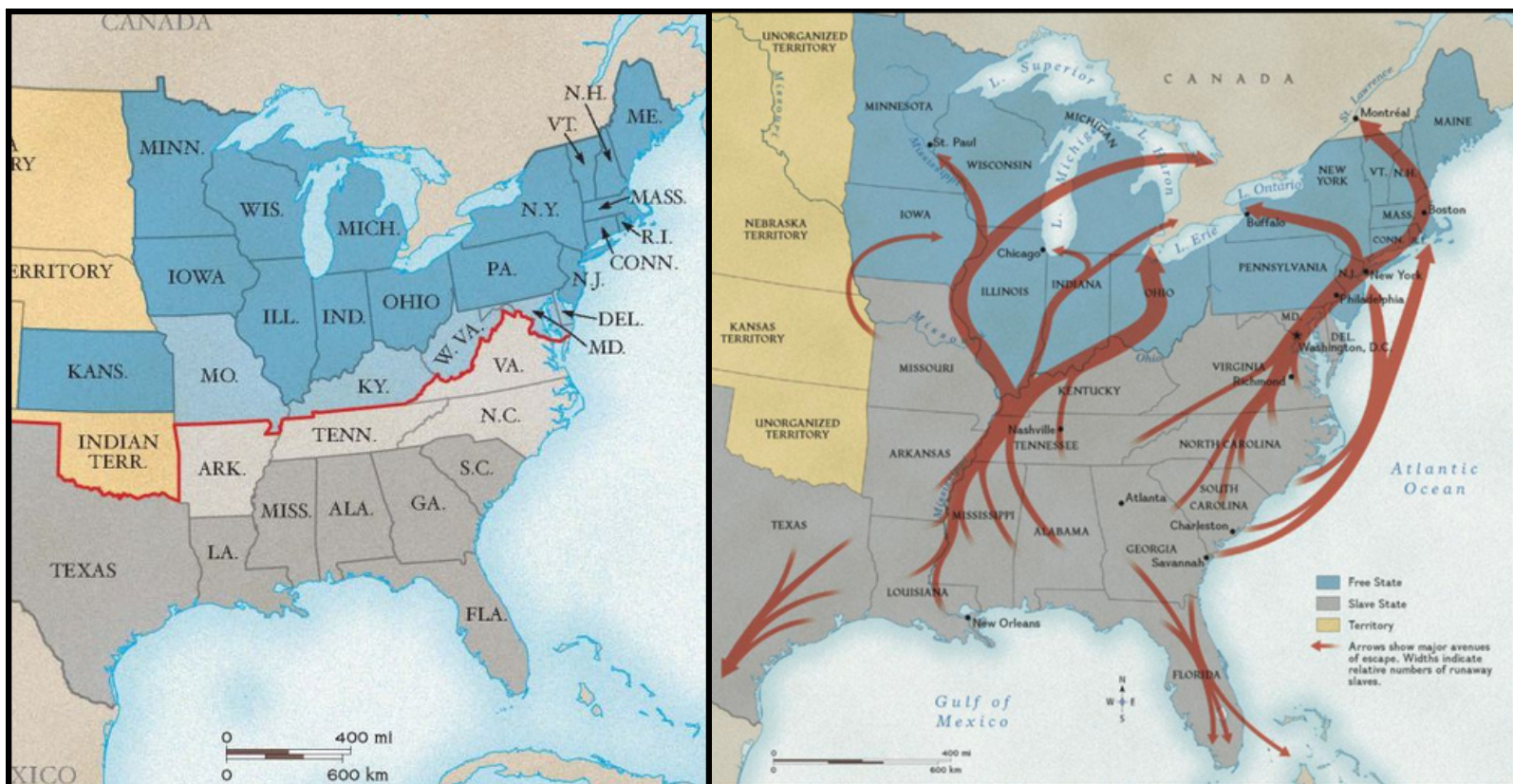
Discuss

What risks did black people in the South and North face?

Teacher Tips

Be sure to check out these [free digital Civil War Maps](#) and [great tips on how to analyze maps and use them in the classroom!](#)

Download the [digital version of this map and the "Analyze a Map" worksheet.](#)



[Image source](#)

[free downloadable Google Slides version here](#)



Make a Freedom Map

Examine

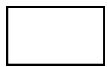
the [digital version of the Underground Railroad Routes map](#).

Make a Map

Using the map below, **add the following to make your own map** of Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad. *Be sure to add your symbols and colors to the map legend.*

1. Label the states. (Use [this map for reference](#).)
2. Color the **free states blue**, and the **slave states grey**.
3. Draw the **Mason-Dixon Line**, which separated the two sides.
4. Add **major rivers, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico**. What role do you think these played in the Underground Railroad?
5. Harriet Tubman conducted her passengers starting near where she grew up in Maryland. Mark her starting point on the map. Use the [Underground Railroad Routes map](#) to mark her route.
6. Add symbols for where you know or imagine safehouses or "stations" might have been along the route. Add your symbol to the map legend.

Legend



free state



slave state

Mason-Dixon Line

river



ocean

Harriet's starting point

Underground Railroad Route

station





Interview Harriet Tubman

Pretend to interview Harriet Tubman, an escaping slave, safehouse helper, or another person involved with the Underground Railroad.

Listen

- [Part 1: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad](#)
- [Part 2: How the Underground Railroad Worked](#)

Write

1. Come up with questions you would like to ask Harriet Tubman or another person about their experiences on the Underground Railroad, including how and why they escaped.

Question 1: _____

Question 2: _____

Question 3: _____

2. Use what you learned from listening to the episode and additional research to write responses from Tubman or another participant's perspective.

Participant's Answer 1: _____

Participant's Answer 2: _____

Participant's Answer 3: _____



Underground Railroad Role-Play

Explore how the Underground Railroad worked by role-playing key support roles (conductors, station masters, helpers) while building empathy, understanding cooperation, and recognizing resistance to injustice—without reenacting harm or trauma.

Materials

- Role cards
- Symbol cards
- Unknown person cards
- Obstacles (river, imaginary slave catchers, open space, lack of food, etc.)

Important Teacher Note (Read Aloud or Paraphrase)

Today's activity helps us learn about people who worked together to resist slavery. We will not pretend to be enslaved people, and we will not act out harm. Our focus is on helpers, problem-solvers, and brave choices, and we will treat this history with respect.

Listen

[Part 2: How the Underground Railroad Worked](#)

Discuss

- *Why did people need teamwork to stay safe?*
- *What risks did helpers take?*

Set-Up

- Place obstacles around the room, including “unknown person cards”.
- Pass out symbol cards or place them at safehouses or throughout the room.
- Assign role cards. (Rotate roles so everyone participates.)

Read Scenario Aloud

“It is nighttime. You are helping guide people toward freedom. You must decide where to go next, how to stay safe, and whom to trust.”

Groups:

- Use symbol cards to decide routes
- Solve challenges (crossing a river, finding shelter, avoiding danger)
- Communicate clearly and work together

Important: Focus language on helping, guiding, and protecting—not pretending to be enslaved.

Reflect

- *What was a hard decision your group faced?*
- *How did working together help?*
- *What qualities did helpers need?*

Observers share what they noticed about teamwork and leadership.



Underground Railroad Role-Play

What Is the Underground Railroad?

The Underground Railroad was not a real train. It was a secret network of people who helped enslaved African Americans travel to freedom. Helpers worked together, took risks, and used clever strategies to stay safe.

Listen

[Part 2: How the Underground Railroad Worked](#)

Role-Play Activity

You will take part in a role-play to understand how people worked together to resist slavery. *Important: We focus on helpers and teamwork, not on acting out harm. We treat this history with respect.*

Roles You Might Play

- Conductor – Guides the group
- Station Master – Provides shelter and help
- Navigator – Uses maps and symbols
- Messenger – Shares coded messages
- Observer – Notices teamwork and courage

Tools People Used

- ★ North Star
- 🏠 Safe houses
- 🌊 Rivers and landmarks
- 🎵 Songs and coded messages
- 🗺️ Maps and memory

Think About This During the Activity

- How did teamwork help?
- What choices were hard?
- What risks did helpers take?
- Why was courage important?

Reflect (Choose One)

Write: One way people showed courage was _____

Draw: A scene showing cooperation and helping others

Discuss: How can we show courage and kindness today?

Ordinary people can make a big difference when they work together to stand up for what is right.



Underground Railroad Role Cards



CONDUCTOR

Your Job: Guide the group safely.

You Help By:

- Leading the group using clues and maps
- Making careful decisions
- Helping everyone stay together

Remember: A conductor was a brave helper who guided people toward freedom.



STATION MASTER

Your Job: Provide safety and support.

You Help By:

- Offering safe places to rest
- Giving directions for the next part of the journey
- Deciding when it is safe to move on

Remember: Station masters took big risks to help others.



NAVIGATOR

Your Job: Find the way.

You Help By:

- Using symbols like the North Star, rivers, or landmarks
- Reading maps carefully
- Helping the group choose the safest route

Remember: Navigators used nature and knowledge to guide others.



MESSENGER

Your Job: Share important information.

You Help By:

- Sending coded messages or signals
- Sharing warnings or helpful clues
- Communicating clearly and quietly

Remember: Messages helped people stay safe.



OBSERVER/ REPORTER

Your Job: Watch and reflect.

You Help By:

- Noticing teamwork and problem-solving
- Writing or sharing what went well
- Thinking about courage and kindness

Remember: Observers help us learn from the experience.



Underground Railroad Symbol Cards

Students can collect, trade, or use cards during role-play.



NORTH STAR

Meaning: The North Star helped people know which direction was north. Traveling north could lead to freedom.



RIVER

Meaning: Rivers were used as guides and travel routes. They could help people find their way or hide their tracks.



SONG/CODE

Meaning: Songs and codes shared secret messages, like when it was safe to move or where to go next.



MAP/ROUTE

Meaning: Maps and remembered routes helped conductors plan safe paths to freedom.



BIRD CALL

Meaning: Bird sounds were used as signals to communicate without being noticed.



DISGUISE

Meaning: Disguises helped people avoid suspicion and stay safe while traveling.



WINTER NIGHT

Meaning: Winter nights were longer and darker, making it easier to travel without being seen.



HELPER

Meaning: A helper was someone who chose to help others reach freedom, even though it was risky.



COURAGE

Meaning: Courage means doing what is right, even when it is scary or dangerous. It helped people trying to escape.



SAFE HOUSE

Meaning: A safe house was a place where people could hide, rest, and get food. Helpers kept these places secret.



Underground Railroad Unknown Person Cards

Write either “helper”, “slave catcher”, or “neutral person” on the back of each card. Then place them face down around the room for students to flip over or avoid as they encounter them.

UNKNOWN PERSON



*Flip this card over
if you decide to
trust this person.
Leave it alone if
you decide not to
risk it.*

UNKNOWN PERSON



*Flip this card over
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UNKNOWN PERSON



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Kindness & Equity Challenge

Harriet Tubman didn't only fight injustice in big ways. She also helped people every day—by protecting them, caring for them, and standing up for what was right.

Discuss

- What does **kindness** mean?
- What does **equity** mean?
- How can kindness help fix unfair situations?

What are acts of kindness and equity?

Brainstorm examples and record them on chart paper.

Examples:

- Including someone who is left out
- Speaking up when something is unfair
- Helping someone who needs support
- Standing up for someone being treated unkindly
- Respecting differences and listening to others

Note: Kindness and fairness should include everyone, not just friends.

Make a Commitment

Choose one act of kindness or fairness to complete during the week. Use the worksheet on the next page.

Track Your Challenge

Tracking options:

- Sticky notes with short descriptions
- Tally marks by category (kindness, fairness, helping, speaking up)
- Journal
 - Record your own actions
 - Notice and record acts you see others do

Reflect

- What kinds of actions did we see most often?
- How did these actions affect our community?
- Did any small actions make a big difference?





Kindness & Equity Challenge

Inspired by Harriet Tubman, we are learning that small actions can help make the world more fair and kind.

Kindness means caring about others.

Equity means helping make sure everyone is treated fairly.

My Commitment

This week, I will help make my classroom or community more fair by: _____

My Act of Kindness or Equity

Describe what you did (or plan to do): _____

Check one or more:

- ☐ I helped someone
- ☐ I included someone
- ☐ I spoke up for fairness
- ☐ I showed respect
- ☐ I listened and cared



Reflect

1. How did this action make someone feel? _____

2. How did it make you feel? _____

3. Why do small actions matter? _____

Looking Ahead

One way I will continue to show kindness or fairness is: _____



Freedom Quilt Project

Discuss/Write

Explain how quilts were used to communicate secretly on the Underground Railroad.

Draw

Design a quilt square representing freedom, courage, or justice.

Extension

Combine squares into a "Freedom Quilt" and display it with an explanation of the symbolism.



Upload your design to our Instagram [@tchradio](#), TikTok [@thechildrenshourradio](#), and [Facebook page](#), and check out others' designs!

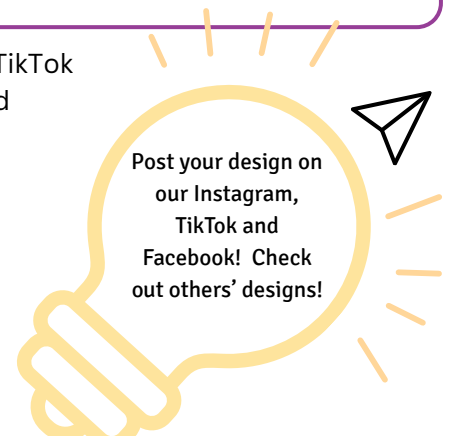


Mail your design to:
The Children's Hour
PO Box 70236
Albuquerque, NM 87197



[Record a Voice Message](#)

This might be used on The Children's Hour!



Post your design on our Instagram, TikTok and Facebook! Check out others' designs!



Additional Resources

[National Park Service – Harriet Tubman National Historical Park](#)

History, photos, and virtual tours.

[National Geographic's Underground Railroad](#) article.

[National Underground Railroad Freedom Center](#)

Online learning resources, including a video library, online exhibits, educator resources, and information and resources about modern-day enslavement.

[Teaching Tolerance / Learning for Justice](#)

Anti-racist lesson plans and discussion guides.

[5 Free Civil War Map Worksheets](#)

Plus, *great* tips on how to analyze them and use them in the classroom.

[Tips for Teaching and Learning with Timelines](#)

[Harriet Tubman Timeline from Britannica](#)

[Harriet Tubman: Timeline of Her Life, Underground Railroad Service & Activism](#)

[Civil War Timeline](#)

Videos

[Liberty's Kids: "Harriet Tubman" Episode](#)

Short animated history episode for kids.

[TED-Ed: The Story of the Underground Railroad](#)

Watch an animated– Kid-friendly video explaining how it worked, then take a multiple choice quiz, discuss, and dig deeper with additional resources.

[WGN's Underground Episode 2, "Minty"](#)

Watch this hour-long tribute to Harriet Tubman, played by Aisha Hinds.

- Listen to historical songs used to communicate on the Underground Railroad, like ["Wade in the Water"](#) or ["Follow the Drinking Gourd"](#).



Book List

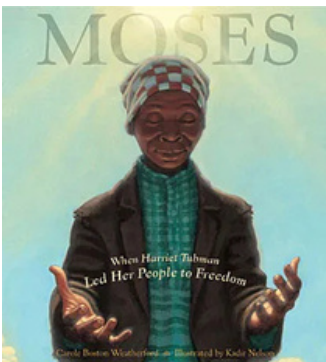


Follow the Drinking Gourd

by Jeanette Winter

Learn about the story of the drinking gourd, the inspiration for the famous folk song about how the stars helped escaping slaves find their way north on the Underground Railroad. [It's featured on Reading Rainbow.](#)

age 5-10

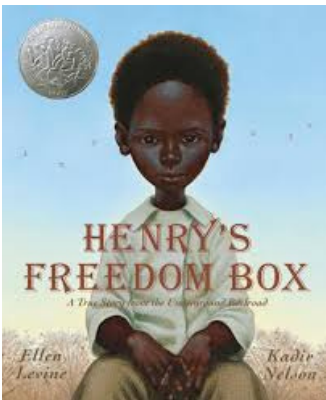


Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom

by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Kadir Nelson

This beautifully illustrated Caldecott Honor and Coretta Scott King Award-winning biography highlights Tubman's courage and leadership.

ages 4-8

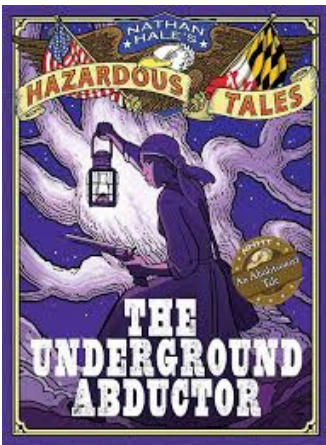


Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad

by Ellen Levine, illustrated by Kadir Nelson

A stirring, dramatic story about a slave who mails himself to freedom!

ages 6-9



The Underground Abductor

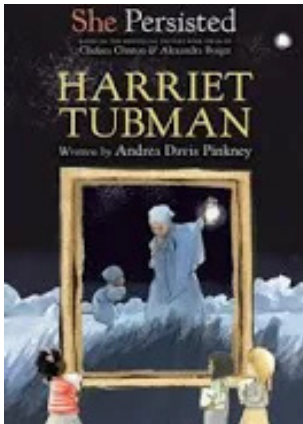
by Nathan Hale

In this thrilling graphic novel (#5 in *Nathan Hale's Hazardous Tales* series), we learn about the remarkable life of Harriet Tubman, told as a story filled with danger, espionage, and even humor!

ages 9-11



Book List

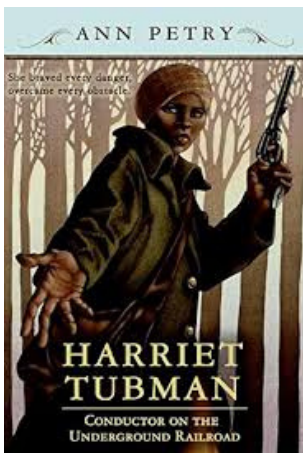


She Persisted: Harriet Tubman

by Andrea Davis Pinkney & Chelsea Clinton, illustrated by Alexandra Boiger & Gillian Flint

This biography focuses on justice and how Tubman's courage and persistence helped hundreds of people escape from slavery. It includes a list of ways that readers can follow in Tubman's footsteps and make a difference, too.

age 6-8

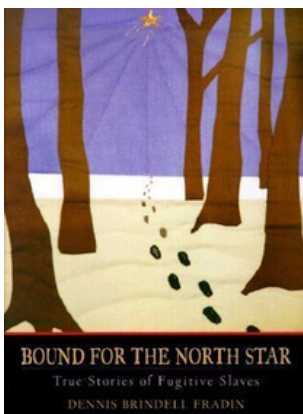


Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

by Ann Petry

This award-winning classic biography is great for middle-grade readers.

ages 8-12



Bound for the North Star: True Stories of Fugitive Slaves

by Dennis Brindell Fradin

This collection of twelve stories of people who fled the American South in search of freedom vividly depicts the horrors of slavery, including accounts from primary sources.

age 11+