



INTERNATIONAL  
STORYTELLING CENTER

**Curriculum Guide for Freedom Stories Discussion  
“Stories of the Underground Railroad”**

*Notes about this guide:*

*First, it is just that—a guide. It is meant to offer suggestions for how you might approach these important yet sensitive topics in your classroom, as well as ideas for how you might augment existing curriculum in your classroom. Please adapt it as necessary to fit your classroom’s needs.*

*Second, while it is aimed for 10<sup>th</sup> grade, many of the activities can easily be adapted both for lower and higher grades, and we encourage you to do so.*

*Third, since the International Storytelling Center is based in Tennessee, we have used the Tennessee state academic standards for Social Studies as our guide, but have also included Common Core standards where appropriate in an attempt to provide some reciprocity between and among state curriculums. Please feel free to use your own state standards in place of Tennessee’s or Common Core’s.*

*Fourth, our collective understanding of the subject matter covered in this and the other Freedom Stories Curriculum Guides is ever-evolving as we unearth forgotten narratives and seek out more complete truths. As such, there may be instances where certain instructional approaches are no longer useful, or where certain resources are no longer applicable. We encourage you to keep this in mind as you use this guide and adapt activities with new information as it becomes available.*

*Last, we welcome your feedback about this guide and its role in your classroom. Please reach out to us at [FreedomStories@StorytellingCenter.net](mailto:FreedomStories@StorytellingCenter.net) with comments, questions, and suggestions.*

Lesson Title	Stories of the Underground Railroad
Grade Band	10th Grade
Standard(s)	<p><u>Tennessee Social Studies Standards AAH.08:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the role slavery played in the development of nationalism and sectionalism, including the fugitive slave laws.</li> </ul> <p><u>Tennessee Social Studies Standards AAH.10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain the Underground Railroad, and assess its impact on slavery in the U.S.</li> </ul> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1, Key Ideas and Details</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.</li> </ul> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4, Craft and Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.</li> </ul>

	<p><u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6, Craft and Structure</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.</li> </ul>
Lesson Objective(s)	<p>The students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a key route of the Underground Railroad that passed through Appalachia and ways in which that route is preserved today.</li> <li>• Explain how songs, stories, and the overall strength of oral tradition influenced people’s willingness to attempt to escape from enslavement via the Underground Railroad; increased their understanding of how to make their journeys toward freedom; and provided a source of cultural memory that can help people of today better understand the experiences of both enslaved and free people who lived in Appalachia in the antebellum period.</li> <li>• Explain some of the motivations of people who were part of the underground railroad that would make them willing to face danger to help people escape to freedom.</li> <li>• Evaluate how civil disobedience was a key component of the working of the Underground Railroad and eventually influenced more widespread attitudinal and structural changes in surrounding society.</li> </ul>
Essential Understanding/ Essential Question	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How can stories influence the way we understand the world?</li> <li>2. How do the arts (including music, stories, visuals arts, and more) impact our ability to make change in the world around us?</li> <li>3. How does civil disobedience, such as that enacted by those who were part of the Underground Railroad, lay the groundwork for broader legal and societal change?</li> </ol>
Lesson Activities	<p><b>Warm-up Activity</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Before students come to class, write the word “freedom” on the board.</li> <li>2. At the beginning of class, ask students to take out a piece of paper and writing utensil for a freewriting activity; an overview of freewriting can be found at <a href="#">here</a>.</li> <li>3. Invite students to write for 5 minutes whatever comes to mind when they consider the word “freedom.”</li> <li>4. At the end of the 5 minutes, collect students’ papers before transitioning to the body of the lesson.</li> </ol> <p><b>Activity 1: Longing for Freedom</b></p> <p><i>Key idea: People throughout history have longed for freedom, and that longing was a reality for enslaved people who lived in Appalachia in the nineteenth century.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inform students that, for the next few minutes, they will hear a story and songs associated with the Underground Railroad in Appalachia.</li> <li>2. Show the story that Reverend Robert Jones, Sr., shared in “<a href="#">Stories of the Underground Railroad</a>” (9:37-40:31).</li> </ol>

3. Build on the story that Reverend Robert Jones, Sr., told by beginning discussion about the Underground Railroad in and around Appalachia.
  - a. Using the [comprehensive map of Appalachia](#) from the Appalachian Regional Commission, inform students that Appalachia is a region that extends throughout parts of Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.
  - b. If you have previously completed the lesson “What You Don’t Know (But Should) About Appalachian Slavery,” briefly review identifying factors that differentiated slavery in Appalachia from slavery in other parts of the antebellum United States; if you have not, use the PowerPoint presentation and/or a portion of that lesson, found [here](#), to briefly introduce that material.
  - c. Referencing the previously-shown map, initiate conversation about the landscape of Appalachia and its potential influence on attempts to escape to freedom.
    - i. Divide students into groups of three to four.
    - ii. If technology is available, instruct students to visit websites that discuss the landscape of the Appalachian branch of the Underground Railroad from the perspective of current-day travelers on the [Appalachian Trail](#) and the [National Park Service](#). If technology is not available, provide printed copies of the content found at these two pages.
  - d. Ask students to consider questions such as the following:
    - i. What preparation does a person typically make to travel the Appalachian Trail today?
    - ii. Were those preparations possible to enslaved people in the nineteenth century?
    - iii. How were conditions on the trail north similar to today, and how were they different?

### **Activity 2: Getting to Know the Underground Railroad**

*Key Idea 1: Remind students of and/or introduce students to key pieces of knowledge of the Underground Railroad, both within and without Appalachia.*

1. Using the slides found at the beginning of the session “Stories of the Underground Railroad” (2:25-7:10) or as a standalone PowerPoint presentation (both of which can be accessed [here](#)), begin overview discussion about the Underground Railroad.
2. There were three main routes of the Underground Railroad: The Eastern route; the Central, or Appalachian, route; and the Western route.
3. The Underground Railroad was made up of people and procedures that helped enslaved people escape to freedom.
  - a. *Conductors* were people who helped enslaved people escape.
  - b. *Stationmasters* were people who were in charge of safe houses, stations, and depots.

- c. *Safe houses, stations, and depots* were various names for stopping places along the Underground Railroad.
  - d. Codewords were often used as signs of safety.
4. Many people traveling the Underground Railroad through Appalachia escaped through Ohio to Canada.
- a. If time and your classroom conditions allow, invite students to participate in a limited role-playing activity.
    - i. Divide students into groups of 3-4.
    - ii. Assign each group a starting location within Appalachia.
    - iii. Using the already-mentioned map of Appalachia, the PowerPoint presentation, and the website resources about the Appalachian Trail from earlier in the lesson, invite students to consider how a journey on the Underground Railroad might have been accomplished from their assigned location, answering questions such as the following:
      - 1. Where might the journey have begun?
      - 2. What dangers and/or helps might the physical landscape have provided?
      - 3. Was there a season that might have proven more advantageous to travel?
      - 4. What bodies of water might need to be crossed?
      - 5. Are there people along this route who may have provided help?

*Key Idea 2: Traveling along the Underground Railroad was dangerous, as was being a conductor or stationmaster.*

- 5. The [Fugitive Slave Act of 1850](#) increased the danger engendered by various already-existing laws.
- 6. Enslaved people who were caught risked severe punishment, as did those who were providing help.
  - a. Either ask students to access the webpage in their previously-formed small groups or distribute a paper copy to those groups.
  - b. Ask students to read the Act and to consider the potential implications of this law.
  - c. Enslaved people who were caught risked severe punishment, as did those who were providing help.
  - d. Those involved in the Underground Railroad were routinely practicing civil disobedience, which is defined by [Lexico](#) as “the refusal to comply with certain laws or to pay taxes and fines, as a peaceful form of political protest.”
  - e. Show the story of Seth Conklin and Peter Still’s family, told by storyteller Sheila Arnold in “[Freedom Stories at the National Storytelling Festival](#),” (39:27-58:33).

### **Activity 3: The Role of Stories and Songs**

*Key Idea: As shown by both storytellers so far in this lesson, stories and songs often served multiple purposes for those considering escaping to freedom.*

#### Important notes:

- Stories, or snippets of stories, helped people to know what was possible.
- William Still's [The Underground Railroad](#), gives numerous accounts of stories and how they were transmitted through word of mouth.
- Stories were told about people who had successfully escaped to freedom.
- Stories were told about what life could be like if people were able to reach freedom.
- Stories were told about what life could be like if people were able to reach freedom.
- Stories—whether personal, traditional, literary, or biblical—provided hope.
- Songs were valuable tools.

#### Activity:

1. Ask students to return to their groups.
2. Provide each group with a song such as “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” “Steal Away,” or “Wade in the Water.” These can be found at the [Library of Congress](#) and at the [Harriet Tubman website](#).
3. Invite students to explore the texts together, asking questions such as the following:
  - a. How might these songs have provided an idea of how to escape?
  - b. How might these songs have spoken in a code that was safe from the ears of those who wanted to prevent enslaved people from escaping?
  - c. Why might the singing of these songs have been encouraged by those who would have discouraged communication about the Underground Railroad had they known it was happening?

#### Concluding Activities

##### Activity 1: Arts Research Activity

1. Ask students to prepare for an artistic research activity.
2. Have students break into their groups of 3-4.
3. Instruct students to select a song or story associated with the Underground Railroad for further research, asking students to specifically look for ways the song or story may have been used as part of actions of civil disobedience during the time of the Underground Railroad and up to the present day.
4. Provide students with research time within or outside of class.
5. Instruct students to prepare a way of presenting their research artistically, such as singing the song and providing commentary; telling the story together and providing background of the story; or some other way which best fits classroom needs.

##### Activity 2: Individual Research Project

- Ask students to prepare for an individual research activity.
- Ask students to select a person or place that was associated with the Underground Railroad in Appalachia for further research.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instruct students to search for primary source documents to utilize in this project and to use the observe, reflect, question system advised in the Library of Congress’s <a href="#">“Analyzing Primary Sources”</a> resource.</li> <li>• Provide students with research time within or outside of class.</li> <li>• Instruct students to prepare a short presentation to share with their classmates about the person or place they researched, making at least one connection with the present (e.g., how that person’s choices influenced today, how pieces of history can still be found in that location, etc.) and indicating where they identified the role of civil disobedience in the life of that person or place.</li> </ul>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Writing Process: <a href="#">Freewriting</a>. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource provides key information for the warm-up activity in this lesson.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• International Storytelling Center’s Event, <a href="#">“Stories of the Underground Railroad”</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The recording of this session, along with associated materials found at the website, are key resources for use at a variety of points throughout this lesson.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">Appalachian County Map</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource provides a visual display of the size and scope of Appalachia.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• International Storytelling Center’s recording, <a href="#">“What You Don’t Know (But Should) About Appalachian Slavery”</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The PowerPoint presentation, available as a standalone resource and as a video at the beginning of the recording of this session, and the lesson can be used to review or provide initial instruction about slavery in Appalachia.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">“A Hike Through History”</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource documents the experience of a group of people who followed the Underground Railroad’s route along the Appalachian Trail.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">“A Hike ‘Thru’ The Appalachian Trail”</a> at the National Park Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource provides an overview of the Appalachian Trail.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The <a href="#">Fugitive Slave Act of 1850</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource supplies the text of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and provides opportunity for discussion and referencing of a primary source during the lesson section focusing on the experiences of people affiliated with the Underground Railroad.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">“Freedom Stories at the National Storytelling Festival”</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This recording provides both a story and songs that shed light on the dangers and possibilities of the Underground Railroad.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">The Underground Railroad</a> by William Still, available from Project Gutenberg <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource gives primary source documentation about the stories of the Underground Railroad.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">“Songs Related to the Abolition of Slavery”</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource gives insights into songs that were affiliated with the Underground Railroad.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">“Songs of the Underground Railroad”</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource gives insights into songs that were affiliated with the Underground Railroad.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Teacher’s Guide: <a href="#">Analyzing Primary Sources</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ This resource provides a system by which students can best utilize primary source documents for one or more of the culminating activities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Accommodations	<p>In addition to discussion (as noted above in the lesson plan), there are the following options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. use of photographs and other images;</li> <li>2. the provision of written sources to be read aloud or otherwise shared in an audio format; and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ allowing for culminating activities to be shared in alternate ways that are appropriate for students’ needs, such as one-on-one conferences with the teacher or through a written essay instead of an oral presentation.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>