The Underground Railroad in New Jersey

From The Anti-Slavery Record, published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, July 1837.

Grade Level: 3-5

Time: Three 45 minute class periods

Objectives:

Student will be able to explain:

- The harsh conditions of slavery in America
- Why New Jersey's location and physical geography made it a transit point for the Underground Railroad
- Why some people took great risks to help fugitive slaves from the South to escape
- Why discrimination on the basis of religion, race, or ethnicity has been a continuing problem in American society
- What each individual can do to prevent fight prejudice and discrimination

New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Social Studies (2020):

6.1.5.CivicsDP.2: Compare and contrast responses of individuals and groups, past and present, to violations of fundamental rights (e.g., fairness, civil rights, human rights).
6.1.5.CivicsHR.1: Describe how fundamental rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights contribute to the improvement of American democracy (i.e., freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of petition, the right to vote, and the right to due process).
6.1.5.CivicsHR.2: Research and cite evidence for how the actions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other historical civil rights leaders served as catalysts for social change, inspired social activism in subsequent generations.
6.1.5.CivicsHR.3: Cite examples from a variety of sources to describe how national and international leaders, businesses, and global organizations promote human rights and aid individuals and nations in need.
6.1.5.CivicsHR.4: Identify actions that are unfair or discriminatory, such as bullying, and propose solutions to address such actions.
6.1.5.CivicsCM.1: Use a variety of sources to describe the characteristics exhibited by real and fictional people that contribute(d) to the well-being of their community and country.
6.1.5.CivicsCM.5: Investigate the lives of New Jersey individuals with diverse experiences who have contributed to the improvement of society.
6.1.5.GeoSV.2: Use maps to explain the impact of location and place on the relationships between places in New Jersey, the United States and other countries.
6.1.5.EconET.1: Identify positive and negative incentives that influence the decisions people make.
6.1.5.HistoryCC.14: Compare the practice of slavery and indentured servitude in Colonial labor systems.
6.1.5.HistoryCA.1: Craft an argument, supported with historical evidence, for how factors such as demographics (e.g., race, gender, religion, and economic status) affected social, economic, and political opportunities during the Colonial era.

Common Core ELA Standards:

W.4.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
W.4.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
W.4.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
W.4.7 Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
W.4.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
SL.4.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.
RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
RH.6-8.3 Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies
RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies
RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
RH.6-8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
W.8.1.c Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
W.8.1.e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
W.8.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question...
W.8.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
Essential Questions:

- What is fairness or justice?
- What is prejudice and discrimination?
- How have individuals or groups taken actions to promote the dignity and rights of people?
- What can you do as an individual to fight racism and hatred?

Activities/Procedures:

1. Opener: Compare the two images in Handout 1.
   - What is happening in each? African American families are moving during the night.
   - What is the same? What is different?
   - This is how slaves escaped from Southern states to the North before the Civil War.

2. Vocabulary
   - What is a “fugitive”? What is a fugitive slave? A slave running away from his owner in the South to a northern location where there was no slavery.
   - What is an “underground” railroad? The Underground Railroad was an informal escape network that helped fugitive slaves reach freedom. Also called the Liberty Line, this loosely organized system was neither "underground" nor a "railroad." Rather, it was a network of escape routes that originated in the southern slave states in the period of American history that led up to the Civil War. The railroad led the slaves to freedom in the northern free states, Canada, Mexico, the western territories, and the Caribbean.
   - What is a conductor? Someone responsible for moving fugitives from one station to the next.
   - What is a safe house?
   - What were “Operators”?
   - What were “Stations” on the Underground Railroad? homes and businesses where fugitives would rest and eat

3. Historical Background
   - Although Quakers started this anti-slavery movement in the 1780s, the Underground Railroad became legendary after the 1830s, when abolitionists and other sympathizers began helping slaves escape to freedom.
   - The Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 was enacted by Congress to allow slave hunters to capture an escaped slave in any territory or state with only oral proof that the person was a runaway, making an escape from slavery more difficult, and imposed penalties on anyone who aided in their flight.
   - The same year—1793—the New Jersey Society for the Abolition of Slavery was created.
   - In 1804, New Jersey passed an act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery: black children born after July 1, 1804 would be free after serving an apprenticeship to their mother’s owner after 21 years (female) or 25 years (males).
   - Refusing to be complicit in the institution of slavery, most Northern states intentionally neglected to enforce the law. Several even passed so-called “Personal Liberty Laws” that gave accused runaways the right to a jury trial and also protected free blacks, many of whom had been abducted by bounty hunters and sold into slavery.
   - Following increased pressure from Southern politicians, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 as part of the Compromise of 1850, a group of bills designed to quiet calls for
Southern secession. The 1850 Act made it easier to retake fugitive slaves. It also denied slaves the right to a jury trial and increased the penalty for helping fugitives to escape to $1000 (a lot of money in the 1850s!) and six months in jail.

- The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was met with even more impassioned criticism and resistance than the earlier measure.
- The Underground Railroad reached its peak in the 1850s. It is estimated that more than 100,000 slaves escaped to freedom.

4. Map activity

- Look at the Map of the United States (Handout 2) and identify those states from which most of the fugitive slaves escaped to New Jersey. (The coastal states: Georgia, the Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware, but primarily the three upper southern states.)
- Why New Jersey? Look at Handout 3. New Jersey was close to the two most active Underground Railroad cities--New York and Philadelphia--and to Maryland and Delaware.
- Also there were a large number of all-black communities in NJ that served as sanctuaries for fugitive slaves. For example, in the mid 1800's Salem County, NJ had a population of 2,075 free blacks and a large number of Quakers, all who aided them in their escape. No other northern state exceeded New Jersey in the number of all-black communities that served as Underground Railroad sanctuaries for southern fugitive slaves.
- Fugitive slaves crossed the Delaware Bay to New Jersey, travelled across at various safe houses to Jersey City and at the Morris Canal basin fled by boat across the Hudson River (called the “River Jordan”) to go to Canada, New England or New York City.
- How long would it take a fugitive slave to travel from the south (select a location in Virginia or Maryland) to Jersey City? For example, it is 328 miles from Richmond, Virginia, to Jersey City, New Jersey. How fast do you walk? How many hours can you walk, primarily in the dark, each day? How many days would it take to walk 328 miles? Students should calculate that even if they walked 10-12 hours a day, it would take 27-33 days to walk 328 miles (about 12 miles a day). Students can plot on a map how far they could go each day.
- How did the fugitive slaves know what route to follow? *Follow the Drinking Gourd* (Winter, 1988) was a song with lyrics that hid directions for following the Underground Railroad. The “drinking gourd” is the Big Dipper in the sky which points to the North Star. “When the sun comes back and the first quail calls” meant spring. The river that “ends between two hills” was the Tombigbee River. The second was the Tennessee River and the “great big river” was the Ohio River, where fugitives could be ferried across to the free states. The lyrics are listed as Handout 4. For elementary grades the teacher might have the book read aloud to the whole class, have the students sing the song, and explain to them what the words mean. For middle school grades, the students might look at the lyrics in the handout 4 or in the book and list the signs and explain what they mean.

5. Famous “conductors”

- Known as "Moses," after the biblical hero who delivered the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, Harriet Tubman was the most famous conductor of the Underground Railroad. Born into slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland, Tubman escaped and fled to Pennsylvania in 1849. She worked summers in Cape May, NJ and returned to Maryland and rescued members of her family and others. It is believed that she made 19 trips into the South and, over a period of ten years, conducted approximately 300 people to freedom in the North without ever losing any of her charges.
Harriet Tubman

Her formula for success was quite simple: although she frequently changed her routes leading to the North, Ms. Tubman always began the escapes on Saturday nights. This was significant for two reasons. First, slaves were often not required to work on Sunday. Therefore, their owners might not notice their absence until Monday morning. Secondly, newspapers would not be able to report runaway slaves until the beginning of the week. These two facts often gave Tubman and the escapees enough time to get a head start to their destination in the free states.

During the American Civil War, Tubman moved to South Carolina where she served as a nurse, scout, and spy for the Union Army. She also helped prepare food for the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, a heroic band of African-American soldiers who were known as the "Glory Brigade" after the fierce battle at Fort Wagner in 1863. She was never paid for her services, but she received an official commendation for her war effort.

William Still

- Born a free man in Burlington County, NJ, in 1819, to former slaves, **William Still** moved to Philadelphia in 1844 where he became a member of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and director of the General Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia. He managed the committee's finances, which were used to assist Harriet Tubman's rescue efforts. Still also
established a network of safe houses and contacts stretching from the upper South to Canada.

He interviewed the hundreds of fugitives as they made their way North. Although Still had intended to use his interview material to assist other escaped slaves find their loved ones, he decided to compile the accounts of the flights of the fugitives he assisted in Philadelphia into a book, the 1872 classic *The Underground Railroad*.


![](image)

Abigail Goodwin

- The daughter of a Quaker farmer who had freed his slaves during the American Revolution, **Abigail Goodwin** and her sister, Elizabeth, were fervent abolitionists. In the 1830s, Abigail emerged as an active figure in the Underground Railroad movement and the Goodwin home in Salem, NJ became a station on the Underground Railroad.

  When Amy Reckless, a slave for one of Salem County’s wealthiest families, who set herself free (see: “[How one woman set herself free](#)”) returned to Salem, she partnered with the Goodwin sisters in collecting goods and financial contributions to help fugitive slaves escape.

  Because of her frank and eloquent writings, Abigail is better known than Elizabeth. Many of Abigail’s letters and a portrait were published in William Still’s *The Underground Rail Road*, published in 1872. Only Abigail lived to see slavery abolished as they had both desired.

  In 2008, the Goodwin Sisters House on Market Street in Salem was the first site in New Jersey accepted into the National Park Service’s National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. The house is also a site on the New Jersey Women’s Heritage Trail.

- Have students read and report on:
  - one of many excellent books about Harriet Tubman (e.g., *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led her People to Freedom* (Weatherford))
  - and/or view a video such as the History Channel’s at [http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/underground-railroad](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/underground-railroad)
  - and explain why Harriet Tubman was courageous
6. Underground Railroad Sites in New Jersey

- No other northern state exceeded New Jersey in the number of all-black communities that served as Underground Railroad sanctuaries for southern fugitive slaves. Springtown (Cumberland County), Marshalltown (Salem County), Snow Hill (present-day Lawnside, Camden County), and Timbuctoo (Burlington County) were among such places, located mainly in rural South Jersey, in which fugitive slaves also settled.

- Activity: There are many myths about the Underground Railroad. Tales of secret tunnels, trapdoors and secret compartments abound. Many places claim to be sites of the risky operation of moving fugitive slaves from the South to freedom. Since the location of Underground Railroad Stations needed to be kept secret for the operation to be successful, how do we know that certain buildings were secretly used for the Underground Railroad? The existence of certain buildings in New Jersey as sites for the Underground Railroad are often based on oral history, personal letters and the known existence of members of church congregations, primarily AME Churches, as being operators for the Underground Railroad. Divide into groups and have groups research one or more of the following Underground railroad sites and explain why and how they were part of the Underground Railroad:

1) **Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church**, (Springtown) Greenwich (Cumberland Co.)—housed fugitive slaves as they arrived from Maryland and Delaware crossing the Delaware Bay.

2) **Goodwin Sisters House** *(Salem, Salem County)*—By 1838, Abigail Goodwin and her sister, Elizabeth, both Quaker abolitionists, were using their home as an Underground Railroad station. One source of documentation is correspondence between Abigail and William Still, Philadelphia’s famed UGRR operative. Another source of documentation is a diary kept by a nephew of the sisters.

3) **Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church**, Woolwich Township (Gloucester Co.)—area identified as being part of the Underground Railroad network in New Jersey; the residents of this community were runaway slaves; and members of primary-source documentation indicates that two members of this congregation—Pompey Lewis and Jubilee Sharper—were UGRR operatives.

4) **Mott House**, Lawnside Borough (Camden Co.)—Peter Mott was a free black farmer who served as pastor of Lawnside’s Pisgha AME Church. His home provided the only black-owned and -operated UGRR station in an all-black town, Lawnside.

5) **Barcklow House**, Moorestown (Burlington Co.)—Built and owned by Elisha Barcklow, an English Quaker, this house is regarded as an Underground Railroad station according to the oral tradition of the community. It is located on Kings Highway, an early major transportation artery that connected South Jersey to the northern part of the state.

6) **Haines House**, Medford (Burlington Co.)—Dr. George Haines, Medford’s first resident physician and one of its most prominent citizens during the first half of the nineteenth century, built this house in 1826. According to local oral tradition, Haines, who was also a Quaker, abolitionist, and advocate for the cause of temperance, used this house as a safe haven for runaway slaves. The succeeding owner of the house, Dr. Andrew E. Budd, another physician, continued its role in the UGRR.

7) **Burlington Pharmacy**, Burlington City (Burlington Co.)—according to the oral tradition of the local community, this building was used frequently to harbor Underground Railroad runaways. It was owned by William J. Allinson, a Quaker abolitionist and community benefactor, who also used it as a forum for antislavery rallies.

8) **Middleton House**, Hamilton (East Crosswicks Village)(Mercer Co.)—Oral tradition suggests that while Enoch Middleton, a wealthy Philadelphia Quaker merchant, moved to his summer house in Hamilton and helped guide fugitive slaves to Allentown, Cranbury or New Brunswick.
9) The Cranbury Inn, Cranbury (Middlesex Co.)—The inn is located in a community identified by various sources, including a strong local oral tradition, as having been connected to the Underground Railroad. Runaways were brought from Crosswicks Village or Allentown to Cranbury and then on to New Brunswick and places farther north. The nature of an inn—a place where people could stop for food and accommodations at all times of the day—would have made it an ideal place to serve as a UGRR station.

10) Springtown Stagecoach Inn, South Pohatcong (Warren Co.)—a stagecoach stop on the road leading out of Easton, Pennsylvania, through Phillipsburg, NJ, to points east, such as Somerville and Trenton; some of the stagecoaches traveled the New Brunswick Turnpike, there is a very strong local oral tradition that the inn served as an Underground Railroad safe house. The normal trafficking to and from an inn would have provided a perfect cover.

11) Holden Hilton House, Jersey City (Hudson Co.)—David Holden was Jersey City's best-known abolitionist. His home at 79 Clifton Place, the only house on the block during the 1850s, was known as a "safe house." It was used to hide the fugitive slaves in the basement, which had a fireplace for the temporary occupants. As an amateur astronomer, Holden had an observatory on the roof of the house from which he received signals for the movement of the slaves he sequestered in his home. (See Glenn Cunningham, VHS copy of Jersey City Cable TV Documentary, “Hidden Footprints: The African Presence in Jersey City pre-1900,” 1991).

7. Critical thinking activity: Why was helping fugitive slaves so risky?
   - Look at the broadsides from the 1850s (Handout 5). How do they help explain how risky it was to help fugitive slaves escape? Why did fugitive slaves travel mainly at night? (Fugitives traveled at night so they could avoid bounty hunters and other southern sympathizers. They followed the North Star to the northern states. There, "conductors" met them and directed them to freedom)
   - Many New Jersey residents were antagonistic to the abolitionist movement. It became increasingly profitable to kidnap fugitive slaves as well as dangerous for those assisting fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad.
   - New Jersey's enforcement of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law and the Dred Scott Decision made neither New Jersey nor Jersey City the final destination of most fugitive slaves, although some runaways remained in the black communities in New Jersey because they offered some physical safety. There were several instances recorded of slave catchers being run out of town when they were discovered in such communities.
   - The penalty for helping fugitives to escape was $1000 (a lot of money in the 1850s!) and six months in jail under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.

8. How have individuals or groups taken actions to promote the dignity and rights of people?
   - What were responses to slavery by slaves, their masters, abolitionists and upstanders who chose to help slaves escaping north?
   - Read Henry’s Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad (Levine) and/or Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt (Hopkinson) and explain how slaves took heroic measures to free themselves
   - Write a short essay and/or prepare an oral presentation comparing and contrasting the stories in three or more of the following books to explain how prejudice can hurt people; analyze why some people (groups and nations) act like bullies and others act with kindness and caring; and identify different types of resistance.


d. *The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 1944) A poor girl with a difficulty ethnic name is discriminated against by the children in her class because she wore the same dress to school every day. Based on a true story.

- What can you do as an individual to prevent fight racism and hatred?

**Assessment**

**The Hungry Visitors:** Students pretend that they are confronted with hungry, desperate travelers on the Underground Railroad in antebellum New Jersey, and must decide between helping these people and risking their freedom and their homes, or obeying the law and turning the former slaves over to the authorities. Write a letter to a relative explaining the situation, what you did and why. Good score references: the harsh conditions of American slavery, New Jersey’s role in the Underground Railroad, fugitive slave laws, ethical decisions, the inherent worth of human beings.

**Secret Journal:** Write a “secret journal” of a slave who has successfully run away from his master in Virginia and escaped to New Jersey, starting with his or her plans, including what should be taken in the small scarf that will be his or her “baggage”, through the journey, explaining who helped and how he or she felt along the way to freedom. Good score references: the harsh conditions as a slave, the appreciation of the risk involved in running away, what you would need to take to survive, how others helped, the difficulties, your fears and your hopes.

**Extension**

Students visit one or more of the buildings in New Jersey that were part of the Underground Railroad. The following websites might help identify nearby sites:

- **VIDEO:** [Jersey City, The Last “Station” on New Jersey’s Underground Railroad](http://www.pathwaystofreedomtour.com)
- “Pathways to Freedom: A Tour of Underground Railroad Sites in Camden County, NJ”
- Salem County Cultural & Heritage Commission
  [www.visitsalemcountynj.com/](http://www.visitsalemcountynj.com/)
- The Historic City of Burlington Underground Railroad Tour
  [www.tourburlington.org/TourUGRR.html](http://www.tourburlington.org/TourUGRR.html)
- State of New Jersey
  [www.visitnj.org/new-jerseys-underground-railroad](http://www.visitnj.org/new-jerseys-underground-railroad)
Resources

- Emma’s Escape: A Story of America’s Underground Railroad (Smithsonian institution, 2003)
- Follow the Drinking Gourd (Winter, 1988)
- Harriet Tubman: Conductor of the Underground railroad (Petry, 2007)
- Harriet Tubman: The Moses of her People (Bradford, 2004)
- Henry’s Freedom Box: A True Story from the underground Railroad (Levine, 2007)
- Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led her People to Freedom (Weatherford, 2006)
- Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt (Hopkinson, 1995)
- The Hundred Dresses (Estes, 1944)
- The Butterfly (Polacco, 2000)
- The Gold Cadillac (Taylor, 2001)
- The Underground Railroad: Authentic Narratives and First-Hand Accounts (William Still, 1872)
- Through My Eyes (Ruby Bridges, 1999)
- NJ Commission on Holocaust Education [www.state.nj.us/njded/holocaust/](http://www.state.nj.us/njded/holocaust/)
- The Anti-Defamation League [http://www.adl.org/main_Education/default.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_Education/default.htm)
- The Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance project [http://splcenter.org/what-we-do/teaching-tolerance](http://splcenter.org/what-we-do/teaching-tolerance)
Underground Railroad, c. 1860
Underground Railroad Communities in New Jersey
Follow the Drinking Gourd

Chorus

Follow the drinking gourd!
Follow the drinking gourd!
For the old man is a waiting for to carry you to freedom
if you follow the drinking gourd.
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.

The riverbank made a very good road,
The dead trees will show you the way.
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on.
Following the drinking gourd.

Chorus

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

Chorus

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.

Chorus
Handout 5

S100 Reward.

Ran away from my farm, near Buena Vista P.O., Prince George’s County, Maryland, on the first day of April, 1855, my servant MATHEW TURNER.

He is about five feet six or eight inches high; weighs from one hundred and sixty to one hundred and eighty pounds; he is very black, and has a remarkably thick upper lip and neck; looks as if his eyes are half closed; walks slow, and talks and laughs loud.

I will give One Hundred Dollars reward to whoever will secure him in jail, so that I get him again, no matter where taken.

MARCUS DU VAL.

BUENA VISTA P.O. MD.
MAY 18, 1855

Fugitive Slaves
Attention.
The Slave Hunter is among us! Be on your guard! An arrest is planned for to-night. Be ready to receive them whenever they come!

Image at https://encrypted-tbn2.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcQVTfGd2zrpKGmYYnp1dSoogjvbyA1wVpt2wRGoLsIdM468G8GrmKQ

Image at https://encrypted-tbn1.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcTn4sITtoWNtz2FH61fOmWQ44NE1ApC1MOBshQo-CASzJOLiEw