

The Underground Railroad

Reading and Discussion

The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad. It was a network of houses and buildings that were used to help slaves escape from the South to freedom in the Northern states or Canada. The network of escape routes used railroad terms for descriptions. “**Passengers**” were slaves that were fleeing the South. “**Conductors**” were the guides that led these slaves from one stop to another. The stops were referred to as “**stations**” or “**depots.**” These stations were places where those escaping could rest. While resting at one station, a message would be sent to the next station to let that “**stationmaster**” know that the individual or group was on its way.

Most travel was done during the night, and the slaves would typically travel 10-20 miles each night. Most travel was done by foot or by wagon. The travel routes were often indirect in order to confuse anyone who may be trying to pursue those who were trying to escape. Slaves generally escaped individually or in small groups. Once in awhile, there would be a mass escape, wherein larger groups of slaves would escape together. One of these larger escapes was known as the **Pearl Rescue**.

The **Underground Railroad** operated for many years. It started before the Civil War and was still running during the Civil War. The Underground Railroad was most used from 1810 -1850. During this time, over 30,000 people escaped enslavement. Escape routes started in the Southern slave states and stretched north as far as Canada. Some routes also led to Mexico.

Many anti-slavery campaigners risked their lives to help slaves find their freedom by escaping from the South. Those that aided slaves in their escape were also known as **abolitionists**. An abolitionist is a person who supported the movement to end the slave trade and free slaves in Western Europe and the United States.

Harriet Tubman was one of the most famous abolitionists who helped the Underground Railroad. She was a Union spy during the Civil War. After she escaped from captivity, she made thirteen trips on the Underground Railroad to help others escape. She rescued over 70 slaves using the network established by the Underground Railroad.

Another well-known abolitionist was **William Still**. He was often called “the Father of the Underground Railroad.” He helped hundred of slaves escape. Sometimes, he helped as many as 60 per month and even hid escaping slaves in his home in Philadelphia. He even kept records of those escaping, including short biographies, railway terms, and correspondence. He frequently acted as a middleman between those who had already escaped and those who were left behind. In 1872, William Still published a book called ***The Underground Railroad.***

The Underground Railroad is a very important part of our history. There are some places, like Buffalo, NY where portions of the Underground Railroad can still be seen.

Name _____

Date _____

Activities

Activity A: Multiple Choice.

1. A person who supported the movement to end the slave trade and free slaves was called:
 - a. a freedom fighter
 - b. a stationmaster
 - c. an abolitionist
 - d. a supporter

2. Guides that led slaves from one stop to another were called:
 - a. passengers
 - b. depots
 - c. drivers
 - d. conductors

3. One of the larger mass escapes on the Underground Railroad was called:
 - a. the Pearl Rescue
 - b. the Great Escape
 - c. the Mass Exodus
 - d. the Quick Rescue

Activity B: True or False.

- ____ 1. The Underground Railroad was an actual railroad that ran to Canada.

- ____ 2. The Underground Railroad was most used from 1810-1850.

- ____ 3. Travel routes on the Underground Railroad were often indirect in order to confuse pursuers.

Activity C: Fill in the blanks.

1. This man was called the Father of the Underground Railroad: _____.

2. This woman was an abolitionist and made 13 trips on the Underground Railroad:
_____.

Name _____

Date _____

Answer Key

Activity A

1. A person that supported the movement to end the slave trade and free slaves was called:
 - a. a freedom fighter
 - b. a stationmaster
 - c. an abolitionist**
 - d. a supporter
2. Guides that led slaves from one stop to another were called:
 - a. passengers
 - b. depots
 - c. drivers
 - d. conductors**
3. One of the larger mass escapes on the Underground Railroad was called:
 - a. the Pearl Rescue**
 - b. the Great Escape
 - c. the Mass Exodus
 - d. the Quick Rescue

Activity B

- F 1. The Underground Railroad was an actual railroad that ran to Canada.
- T 2. The Underground Railroad was most used from 1810-1850.
- T 3. Travel routes on the Underground Railroad were often indirect in order to confuse pursuers.

Activity C

1. This man was called the Father of the Underground Railroad: **William Still**.
2. This woman was an abolitionist that made 13 trips on the Underground Railroad:
Harriet Tubman.