LANGUAGE OF THE UNDERGROUND



0. LANGUAGE OF THE UNDERGROUND - Story Preface

1. THE UNDERGROUND IS BORN

2. JOURNEY TO SLAVERY

3. PEOPLE SOLD AT AUCTION

4. SLAVE HOMES

5. SLAVES AT WORK

6. SLAVES ESCAPE

7. LANGUAGE OF THE UNDERGROUND

8. FAMOUS CONDUCTORS

Escaping slaves, depicted in this illustration, arrive at League Island (near Philadelphia). They had escaped by schooner, following an Underground Railroad route to freedom. Image online, NYPL Digital Gallery.

It was extremely difficult for escaping slaves to know who could be trusted. Were sympathetic whites legitimate abolitionists - or - were they merely opportunistic folks looking for award money? How to distinguish those differences was sometimes impossible.

Slaves who owned nothing, but longed to be free, faced incredible risks. How would they leave? What provisions would they need? How far would they travel before someone helped? What would happen if the "master" quickly learned of their departure?

Escaping was a dream, but how would it become reality? And even if escape were possible, the choice between staying or leaving was not as simple as it may seem today.

Individuals working the Underground Railroad - that incredibly important network of people who helped escaped slaves stay in safe places as they journeyed to "free states" in the north (or to Canada where American Fugitive Slave Laws were unenforceable) - used railway terms for what they did:

- Travel routes were called "lines"
- Stopping places were called "stations"
- Escaped slaves were called "passengers" or "cargo"
- Key people who helped were called "conductors"

Harriet Tubman, one of the most important conductors on the Underground Railroad, was once a slave herself. Let's meet her, plus several other leading people who risked serious punishment to do what was right.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/LANGUAGE-OF-THE-UNDERGROUND-Underground-Railroad

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/LANGUAGE-OF-THE-UNDERGROUND-Underground-Railroad

Media Stream



Underground Railroad - Arrival at League Island

William Still (1821-1902) wanted to be sure that African-Americans remembered their history. He collected their narratives and memorialized the troubles of slaves in his book. This image, from that book, depicts a party of escaping slaves arriving at League Island, near Philadelphia. They had traveled by boat to reach freedom.

The New York Public Library's Digital Gallery provides more detail about this image from Still's book:

Heavy weights - arrival of a party at League Island; Fifteen escaped in this schooner.

The NYPL also describes the source material:

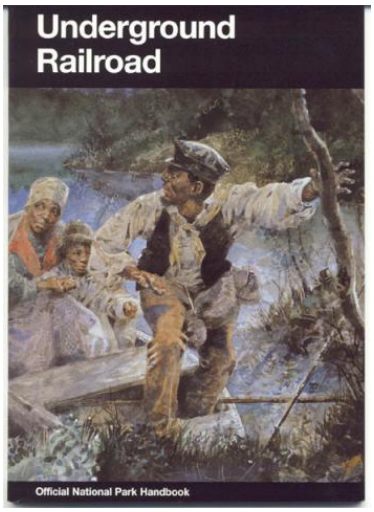
The underground railroad: A record of facts, authentic narratives, letters, & c., narrating the hardships, hair-breadth escapes, and death struggles of the slaves in their efforts for freedom, as related by themselves and others or witnessed by the author: [William Still] together with sketches of some of the largest stockholders and most liberal aiders and advisers of the road.

Still's book is available at Archive.org for online reading.

Click on the image for a better view.

Image online, described above, courtesy NYPL Digital Gallery.

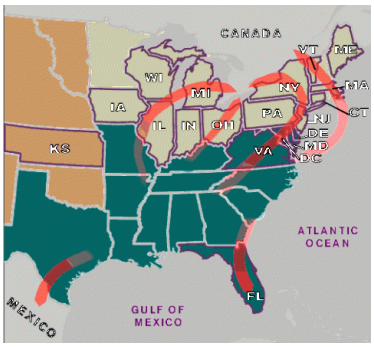
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Underground-Railroad-Arrival-at-League-Island



Underground Railroad - Park Service Handbook

Image online, courtesy the in.gov website.

View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Underground-Railroad-Park-Service-Handbook



Free States - Map

Image online, courtesy the nps.gov website.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Free-States-Map-



Travel Routes

Image online, courtesy the nps.gov website.

View this asset at: http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Travel-Routes