

Harriet Tubman & The Underground Railroad A home-based lesson plan

Historical Background

Harriet Tubman was born in Dorchester County, Maryland around 1820. Her parents were Harriet Green and Benjamin Ross. They named her Araminta Ross. Araminta and her eight siblings were born into slavery. At the age of twelve, Araminta got in between an enslaved man who tried to escape and her master who was about to beat him. During the incident, she was hit in the head with a heavy object. As a result, she suffered from **Narcolepsy** and headaches for the rest of her life. There were laws that prohibited slaves to be legally married, but they still entered into ceremonial marriages. In 1844, Araminta married John Tubman, a free black man. She took his last name and changed her first name to Harriet.

Harriet was best known for helping **enslaved people** gain their freedom by escaping using the **Underground Railroad**. The Underground Railroad was created by white and black **abolitionists**. In 1849, Harriet and her two brothers escaped to the north using the Underground Railroad's network of escape routes and safe houses. Harriet was unusual because historians believe 80 to 90 percent of runaway slaves, or **fugitives**, were male. Most fugitives were young, single men in their twenties.

After her escape, she returned to the south nineteen times to help other enslaved people escape along the Underground Railroad. She helped hundreds of enslaved people gain their freedom. Harriet was a political activist, an abolitionist, and she served as a spy and nurse for the Union army during the American Civil War. She is considered the first African-American woman to serve in the United States military. In her later years, she was an activist for **women's suffrage**.

In 1896, she established the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged on land near her home. Harriet died in 1913 and was buried with military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York.

Key Words

Narcolepsy - A chronic sleep disorder that causes overwhelming daytime drowsiness.

Enslaved People - The first enslaved Africans arrived in colonial America in 1619. Between 1619 and 1865, when enslaved people were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, around four million Africans and African-Americans were enslaved in America. They were bought and sold and treated as property, not human beings, and did not have rights. The majority of slaves were farm laborers, but some slaves were house servants, worked in small businesses and factories, and held skilled occupations like carpenters, blacksmiths, and cooks. Slave owners could sell enslaved people separating them from family members and punish slaves that disobeyed.

Fugitives - Enslaved people sometimes sought to run away from their slave owners. These runaways were called fugitives. They could be captured and returned to their owners. Running away was dangerous. If a fugitive was caught, they would be severely punished.

Underground Railroad - The Underground Railroad was an informal network of white and black abolitionists that was formed in the early 19th century. It was not an actual railroad. The Underground Railroad was a series of safe houses, called "stations," that sheltered runaways on their journey north where they could pose as a free black person. Enslaved people would be given shelter and food by the "station master." Journeys between stations were usually made at night and could be up to 10 to 20 miles long. From 1800-1860, it's estimated that 1,000 to 1,500 people escaped through the Underground Railroad each year.

Abolitionist - An abolitionist was a member of the abolitionist movement, a movement to end slavery. Many abolitionists provided money to support the Underground Railroad or to help escaped slaves settle in new areas. Some were station masters and hid runaway slaves.

Women's Suffrage - Women's suffrage is the right of women to vote in elections. Beginning in the mid-19th century, women began working to change laws to allow women to vote. In 1920, the 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in elections.

Discussion Questions

Why was Harriet Tubman important?

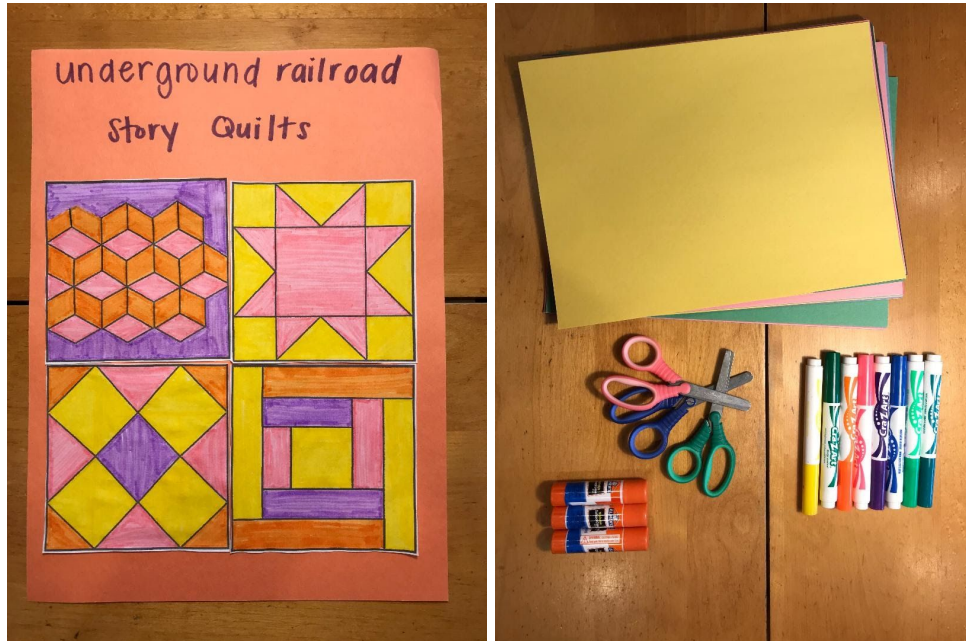
What was the Underground Railroad?

What was an abolitionist?

Why do you think most runaway slaves were young men?

Activity: Story Quilt Making Activity

Many enslaved people did not know how to read because it was illegal to teach slaves. So they used symbols based on African stories to communicate. They sewed these symbols into quilts that could be hung in windows to share information about how to prepare to escape and what steps to take on their journey on the Underground Railroad.



Supplies:

- Printable quilt square templates
- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Gluesticks
- Markers, crayons, etc.

Instructions:

1. Print-out the quilt square templates and cut out the squares.
2. Color the individual squares.
3. Once you are finished coloring glue the squares to construction paper to make your paper quilt.
4. You are finished! You have made a paper Underground Railroad Story Quilt. Share your quilt with your family members and tell them what the different symbols mean.