SUNDOG THEATRE PRESENTS

Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad



School Show Study Guide

SUNDOG THEATRE



Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman
Illustrated by John G. Darby

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SUNDOG THEATRE

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Dear Educator,

This study guide offers suggested learning activities for a variety of grade levels to enhance your students' theatre experience. Please select the activities that best align with your curriculum and classroom goals. *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad* is appropriate for grades 3 through 12.

The production supports New York State Learning Standards in English Language Arts and Social Studies while promoting critical thinking, reading comprehension, communication, and collaboration skills.

We are delighted to welcome you and your students and hope you enjoy this engaging theatrical experience.

Susan Fenley
Executive Director

About Sundog Theatre

Sundog Theatre is a nonprofit arts organization based on Staten Island. We are dedicated to enriching our community through arts education programs, original and contemporary theatre, acting classes for young people, and educational touring productions.

Our Arts in Education (AIE) programs bring learning to life in K-12 classrooms and educational venues. By integrating theatre, dance, music, and visual arts with classroom curriculum, our programs strengthen academic learning while encouraging critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Every AIE program is designed to make learning engaging, meaningful, and fun.

What is a Sundog?

A sundog is the reflection of the sun through ice crystals. This reflection bookends the sun in the sky like companions or dogs. Just as a sundog reflects the sun, it is the artist's calling to hold a mirror to the world.

Sundog Theatre's many in-school and educational touring programs support its mission to create lasting, positive change in young people's lives through the arts.

About Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in the early 1820s in Dorchester County, Maryland to Harriet and Benjamin Ross. They named her Araminta Ross. She was one of many children. In 1844, Araminta Ross married a free Black man, John Tubman, taking his last name and changing her first name to Harriet.

In 1849, Harriet's master died, leaving her and the other slaves to be sold. Harriet resolved not to be enslaved any longer and made the choice to free herself. She set off with two of her brothers, using the North Star as their guide to freedom. Harriet reached Philadelphia alone, her two brothers having turned back in fear.

Once in Philadelphia, Harriet got a job and earned money before joining the Abolitionist Movement and becoming a conductor on the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad, but a network of safehouses run by abolitionists for runaway slaves. Harriet became one of the most successful conductors, freeing roughly 300 people and risking 19 trips to Maryland.

The Civil War began in 1861 and Harriet became a scout, spy, and a nurse for the Union army in South Carolina. In 1863, Harriet became the first woman in American history to leave her nursing role to serve on the front lines with eight men. Harriet never gave up on fighting for freedom for those who were enslaved or for women, adding suffragist to her many titles. Harriet died in her home on March 10, 1913. She would have been in her 90s.

About the Show

Our drama opens with Harriet Tubman's friend, Sarah Bradford, author of *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, seeking a publisher willing to bring her book to life. At first, the publisher is hesitant, but as he begins reading about Harriet's life, he can't stop.

As the story unfolds, we follow Harriet's journey from her childhood in slavery to her escape to freedom and her extraordinary work as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. This secret network provided a vital path to freedom for enslaved people, and Harriet became one of its most courageous and celebrated conductors. Her work earned her the nickname "Moses."

During the Civil War, Harriet continued her fight for freedom by serving the Union Army as a spy, nurse, and scout. Even as the war ended, Harriet's mission was far from over. She turned her attention to the fight for women's suffrage, continuing her lifelong commitment to justice, equality, and freedom for all.



Before You Go

To help your students get the most out of their theatre experience, we encourage you to complete these activities before the performance:

Introduce the Performance

Explain that students will be attending a live theatrical production about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. Through acting, music, and dance, Harriet will come to life, teaching them about the struggles of enslaved people and the resilience of those who long for freedom.

Explore the Underground Railroad

Look at maps of the Underground Railroad and compare the various routes. What conditions did runaway slaves experience? Where might they have come from? Where were they going? Discuss how each runaway slave was chasing freedom and how their experiences varied.

Discuss Harriet Tubman

Ask students what they already know about Harriet Tubman. Where have they heard about her before? How would they describe her?

Abolitionist Avenue

Discuss other famous abolitionists. Have students research these figures and write bios for them. How did they express their abolitionist beliefs? Have students write newspaper articles or speeches like their abolitionists would have.

Prepare Students for Live Theatre

Encourage students to relax, use their imaginations, and fully engage with the performance. Remind them that live theatre is an interactive experience, and they are welcome to respond naturally with laughter, applause, and thoughtful attention as they connect with the story unfolding on stage.

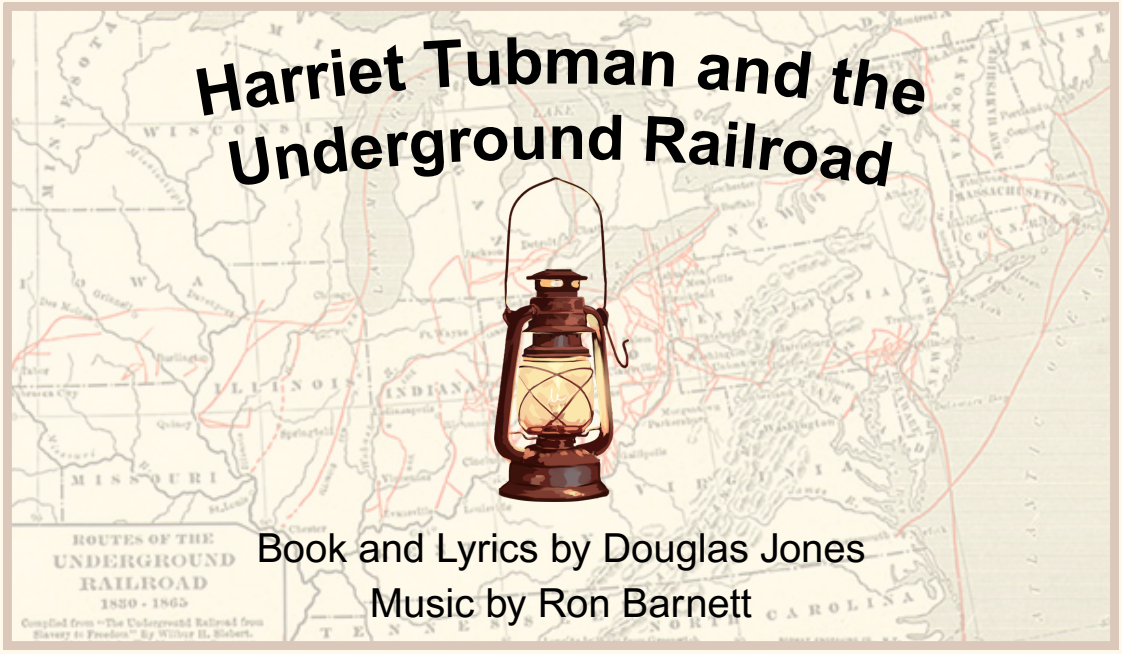
Theatre Etiquette

A live theatre performance is a shared experience between the audience and the performers. Every audience member plays an important role in creating an enjoyable experience for everyone in the theatre. By practicing proper theatre etiquette, students help the actors perform at their best while ensuring that everyone can fully enjoy the show.

Please review these theatre expectations with your students before attending the performance:

- Remain seated throughout the performance unless there is an emergency.
- Use the restroom before the show begins, as restroom visits during the performance can be distracting to both the audience and performers.
- Photography, video recording, and audio recording are not permitted during the performance.
- Give the performers your full attention. Your focus and energy help create a more engaging experience for everyone.
- Please do not talk during the performance unless audience participation is invited. Even whispering can be distracting to those around you and to the performers on stage.
- Silence all electronic devices, including cell phones and smartwatches, before the show begins. Please do not check devices during the show.
- Avoid calling out or interrupting the performers, unless they specifically invite audience participation.
- Show your appreciation by applauding at appropriate times, especially at the conclusion of the performance.

Thank you for helping us create a respectful, enjoyable, and memorable theatre experience for all!



Scene Breakdown & Musical Numbers

Scene 1: A Quaker Home - 1856

Scene 2: Publisher's Office - 1868
"Calendar Changes".....The Company

Scene 3: Exterior of a Home - 1849
"Goodbye".....Harriet & Company

Scene 4: Philadelphia - 1849
"This Railroad".....Sarah, Publisher, Harriet, & Still

Scene 5: The Ross Cabin - December 1849
"Mama".....Harriet & Company

Scene 6: The Mason Dixon Line - 1850s
"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot".....The Company

Scene 7: A Train Station - mid 1850s
"Wake Up".....First Man

Scene 8: A Union Hospital, Hilton Head - 1860s

Scene 9: A Train Station - After the Civil War

Scene 10: Interior of a Church - 1880s
"Finale".....The Company

Key Terms

- Abolitionist - a person who wanted to or advocated for the end of slavery in the United States.
- Civil War - a war or conflict between opposing groups of citizens of the same country. The American Civil War (1861-1865) was between the Union, or the Northern states, and the Confederacy, or the Southern states, over slavery, economics, and states' rights.
- Conductors - a person who led runaway slaves to freedom along the Underground Railroad.
- Enslaved People - human beings who are forced under the control of another to do unpaid labor. These people have limited or no personal freedom and can be bought, sold, and exploited by someone else.
- Enslavement - the violent process or crime through which free people are stripped of their liberty and forced into bondage. Enslavement emphasizes that a person is not willingly making this choice.
- The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, or the Freedom Seeker Law - mandated freedom seekers, or runaway slaves, be returned to enslavers once caught.
- Fugitive - a person who runs away from or flees a dangerous situation.
- Hero - a courageous person who goes above and beyond to do the right thing, even at great personal risk.
- The North Star, or Polaris - is a bright star in the constellation Ursa Minor (The Little Dipper). Because it is only visible in the Northern Hemisphere, runaway slaves would use it as their guide to free Northern states.
- Plantation - a piece of property dedicated to growing and selling a specific crop. These were predominantly in the American South, where coffee, sugar, and tobacco were harvested mostly by enslaved people.
- Quakers - a Christian-rooted religious group who believe in social equality. They were staunch abolitionists and aided many conductors and runaways on the Underground Railroad.
- Resilience - an ability to recover or adjust easily to change or challenges.
- Slavery - the established legal, economic, and social institution or state of owning human beings as property. Slavery has existed globally and for thousands of years.
- Underground Railroad - a network of routes used to free enslaved people. While it was not an actual railroad nor underground, the name implied secrecy. Those seeking freedom could rely on the Underground Railroad and its conductors to take them someplace free. In its time, the Underground Railroad freed roughly 100,000 enslaved people.

Critical Thinking Questions

- Why was Harriet also called ‘Moses’?
- How did coded songs aid runaway slaves and their communication?
- Why is Sarah the one to write and bring the book to the publisher?
- Why was Harriet a great conductor on the Underground Railroad?
- Why do you think some slaves turned back even though they knew they would be held accountable?
- Why did Harriet fall asleep at random times?



Think Theatrically

- Describe the sets. How did they establish the scenes and settings for different parts of the story?
    - What did you really see, and what did you see with your imagination?
- How did music and dance add to the story?
- What did the different costumes tell you about each character?
- Have you ever been to a live stage show before?
- What role did the audience play in the production?
- If you could be in the show, which role would you want to play?
- What other stories do you think would be good to see as a play?

Interdisciplinary Activities

Write Your Own

In the late 1860s, Harriet was in danger of losing her home. A committee was devised to find someone who could publish a biography about her. Sarah Bradford, through a series of interviews, became this author.

Choose a classmate to interview:

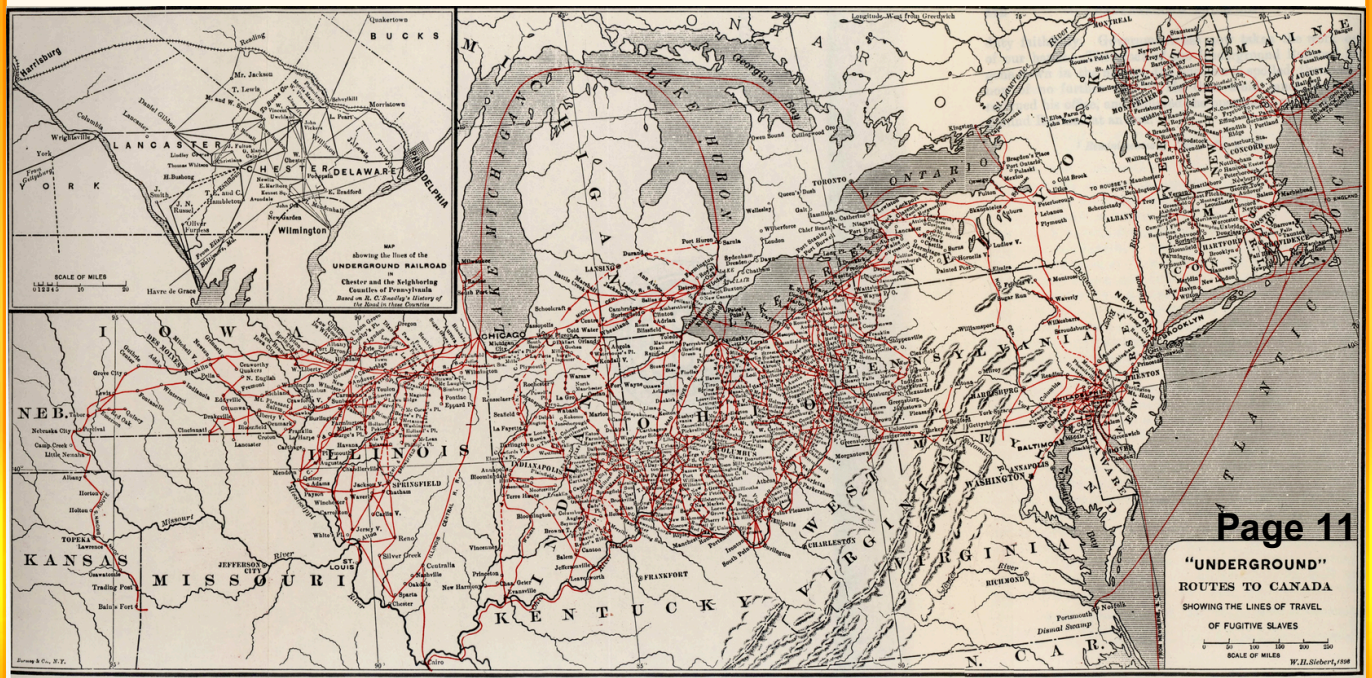
- When were you born?
- Who are your parents?
- Where were you born?
- How would you describe yourself as a child?
- What is a story about yourself you'd like to share?

Now take what you've learned about your classmate and begin writing their biography!

Map it Out

After looking at maps of the Underground Railroad, devise a route you might take. Which state are you escaping from? Will you be by a river? Where are you headed?

Draw it out! Use different colors to represent your starting point, ending point, and planned route. Draw potential obstacles like rivers and safe houses you can find along the way.





Harriet Tubman
Painted by William H. Johnson

Take a Closer Look

William H. Johnson (1901-1970) was an African American artist born in South Carolina. He took an interest in art at an early age and moved to New York City when he was just 17. His style can be described as modernist with roots in folk tradition. His painting, *Harriet Tubman*, was part of a series called *Fighters for Freedom*.

- What does Johnson's painting make you feel?
- What symbols are hidden in the painting that allude to her story?
- Why do you think Johnson included two Harriets; one older and one younger?
- What elements stand out to you? Colors? Lines? Shapes?
- Compare the Harriet in the painting with the Harriet you saw on stage. What is similar? What is different?

What's the Hidden Meaning?

As you learned in the musical, runaway slaves often used codes to communicate with each other as they traveled. Harriet often used songs. Look at the lyrics to the song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Use the lyrics and your knowledge of the Underground Railroad to decipher the hidden messages.

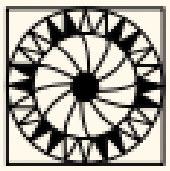
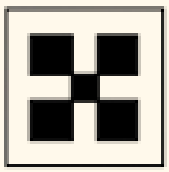
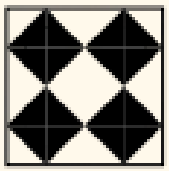
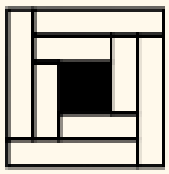
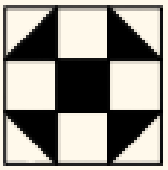
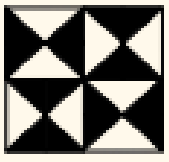
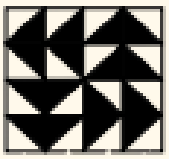
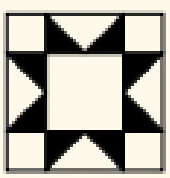
Use the chart below to track your discoveries!

LYRICS	LITERAL MEANING	"CODED" - SECRET MEANING
Refrain:		
Swing low,	Come down	
Sweet chariot,	Heavenly vehicle	
Comin' for to carry me home..	Taking me to heaven	
Verses:		
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?	I looked over the River Jordan, and what did I see?	
A band of angels coming after me	A group of angels coming after me	
If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming too	If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming too	
I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down	I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down	
But still my soul feels heavenly bound	But still my soul feels heavenly bound	

Freedom Quilts

We've discussed codes in song lyrics, but that wasn't the only way coded messages got through. Quilts were also used to help runaway slaves navigate their way to the north. Coded quilts were believed to be hung on porches or fences to help freedom seekers navigate the Underground Railroad.

Ozella McDaniel Williams, a woman from South Carolina, recalled her grandmother telling her stories of these quilts. Ozella remembered this code:

The monkey wrench  *turns the wagon wheel*  *toward Canada on the bear's paw trail*  *to the crossroads.*  *Once they got to the crossroads, they dug a log cabin*  *on the ground. Shoofly*  *told them to dress up, put on cotton and satin bowties,*  *go to the cathedral church, get married, and exchange double wedding rings. Flying geese*  *say stay on the drunkard's path*  *and follow the stars.* 

Using http://mathwire.com/quilts/freedomtemplates.pdf to create your own freedom quilts.

Code Key

Use this code key to create your quilts. Discuss each symbol and use the questions to guide your discussion.

- Monkey Wrench - begin collecting tools you will need for your journey.
    - What tools would you pack for your journey? Why?
- Wagon Wheel - once you have everything, you can begin to travel.
    - Would you hide in a wagon to travel? How would you begin your journey?
- Bear's Paw - use this path made by a bear because it will lead you to food and water.
    - How would following an animal's movements help?
- Crossroads - head to Cleveland, Ohio which serves as a juncture of many routes to freedom.
    - Look at the map you drew earlier: why does Cleveland work as a juncture between routes?
- Log Cabin - draw a symbol to let others escaping know that this area has a safe house or safe people to communicate with.
    - Why would someone use ground symbols over other codes?
- Shoofly - a name to represent all free African Americans who could aid in escape.
    - Why was it important for African Americans to help others even if they were already free?
- Bowties - change your clothes and someone will help you remove any chains you may still have on.
    - What clothes would you put on to disguise yourself?
- Geese - symbolizes all freed slaves traveling north just as geese do.
    - How are birds in flight and escaping to freedom similar? How would you be inspired by a flying bird?
- Drunkard's Path - create a zig-zag path to avoid detection or to confuse anyone coming after you.
    - What else would you do to avoid being caught?
- Stars/North Star - use the North Star in the sky to lead you to Canada and to freedom.
    - How does looking at the stars help someone as they travel?

Answer Key

What's the Hidden Meaning?

LYRICS	LITERAL MEANING	"CODED" - SECRET MEANING
Refrain:		
Swing low,	Come down	Come into slaveholding states
Sweet chariot,	Heavenly vehicle	The Underground Railroad
Comin' for to carry me home..	Taking me to heaven	Take me to freedom in the Northern states or Canada
Verses:		
I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?	I looked over the River Jordan, and what did I see?	I looked over the Mississippi or Ohio River, and what did I see?
A band of angels coming after me	A group of angels coming after me	Workers on the Underground Railroad coming to help me
If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming too	If you get there before I do, tell all my friends I'm coming too	If I have escaped friends or family, please tell them my escape plan
I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down	I'm sometimes up, I'm sometimes down	I have good days and bad days
But still my soul feels heavenly bound	But still my soul feels heavenly bound	But I know I will soon escape North on the Underground Railroad