



TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Freedom Train

Evelyn Coleman

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

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Evelyn Coleman

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, brainstorming, problem solving, creative thinking, critical thinking, compare/contrast, decision making, attributes, multiple perspectives

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing, foreshadowing, cause/effect, inference, summarizing

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, charades, oral presentation

Vocabulary

Group activities, word maps, definitions, parts of speech

Writing

Personal writing, creative writing, poetry, essays

Literary Elements

Theme, plot, setting, characterization, similes, metaphors, figurative language

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—maps, historical research, time lines, cultures, religion, geography;
Science—botany, animals;
Math—measurement;
Music—composing lyrics, lyrical interpretations; Art—illustrations, dramatization;
Health—diet, nutrition

Genre: biographical fiction

Setting: Eastern United States and Canada, 1800s

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: courage, friendship, love, trust, power, perseverance, freedom

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. nature, person vs. society

Date of First Publication: 1954

Summary

Harriet Tubman is born into slavery in the early 1800s in Maryland. She has a difficult life, first serving in the Master's house and then being thrust into field work. She seems destined for a life of hard labor alongside her mother, father, and many siblings, but Harriet Tubman has another vision—a vision of a star that will guide her to freedom. Harriet meets Jim, a rebellious slave who tells her about Quakers and other people in the north who think slavery is wrong, and her quest for freedom is set in motion. She marries John Tubman, a free man, but quickly discovers that he is lackadaisical and cares little about her plight. Leaving her indifferent husband and her home behind, she travels the Underground Railroad to the Pennsylvania state line and her own freedom. She takes weekly jobs and raises money so she can travel back to free her family and friends. She has help from Quakers and the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. She eventually leads over 300 slaves to freedom, including her entire family, and joins the war effort by serving in the Union Army as a spy and a nurse during the Civil War. In her later years, Harriet helps run schools and hospitals, and often takes the homeless and sick into her own home. In her old age, Harriet dies surrounded by friends and loved ones grateful for her hard work.

About the Author

Dorothy Sterling, born November 23, 1913, in New York City, is a writer, journalist, and historian. She attended Wellesley College and graduated from Barnard College in 1934. She became a journalist, eventually writing for *Life* magazine. Sterling developed an interest in writing about civil rights, women, and anti-slavery issues, and has written over 30 books. She has won numerous awards for her writing, including the Carter G. Woodson Award.

Background Information

(A) Harriet Tubman is often referred to as a “Moses” figure who led her people to freedom. Throughout the book, comparisons are made between the plight of Israelites from biblical times and Africans enslaved and brought to America against their will.

As told in the Old Testament, Moses was born at a time when his people were enslaved and prosecuted in Egypt. Moses escaped from Egypt, but after receiving inspirational visions from God, he returned and set his people free. Depending on their prior knowledge, students may make some of these comparisons on their own.

(B) Slavery began in America soon after the first colonists settled in Virginia. Though early settlers used Native Americans as slaves, many died from disease, so people were shipped to the New World from Africa. At first, Africans were considered indentured servants who worked for a certain number of years and were then set free, but wealthy settlers gradually decided having indentured servants was not profitable and kept the Africans as slaves. Though the vast majority of slaves lived and worked in the south, slavery was widespread throughout the rural United States. Rhode Island banned importing slaves from Africa in 1774, and other states soon followed, though Georgia later repealed its importation ban.

Few slave owners or traders cared about keeping the families of slaves intact. Profit was their primary objective, and many families were torn apart suddenly and forever. Though many slave owners professed their slaves were happy and well cared for, the treatment of slaves was often both ruthless and inhumane, and slaves were clothed, fed, and housed in the most meager and pitiful fashion. Throughout the history of slavery in America, owners openly admitted that punishment was the primary method used to keep their slaves submissive and working.

Anti-slavery feelings grew throughout the 1800s, and events such as John Brown’s rebellion and the Dred Scott case served as rallying calls by abolitionists to end slavery. As the 1860 presidential election drew near, the issue of slavery was one of the primary issues dividing southern states and the federal government. Southern states wanted the ability to create and enforce their own laws, including pro-slavery laws, while the federal government demanded that all states abide by the federal laws set forth by Congress and the President. Abraham Lincoln objected to the expansion of slavery into the western states. After Lincoln became President, a civil war erupted over the issue of state’s rights versus the power of the federal government. The war did not start out to end slavery, as five slave-holding states (Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and West Virginia) officially sided with the northern Union Army, but it helped to achieve that goal. President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 did not free slaves in the states helping the Union fight the southern Confederate Army, but it did declare the end of slavery in the Confederate states. This statement committed America to an eventual policy of anti-slavery nationwide, and the 13th Amendment of 1865 led to the freedom of all slaves in the United States.

(C) The Underground Railroad was a series of secret routes and safe houses used to smuggle slaves out of southern states and into northern states and Canada. Some routes led to Mexico, or overseas to Europe. Former slaves, free-born African Americans, white abolitionists, and Native Americans, as well as religious groups such as the Quakers and Amish, served as the support network for the Underground Railroad. Many of those involved with the Underground Railroad only knew about their own “station” and connecting “stations” and did not know the whole route. This helped keep the railroad from falling apart if a member was discovered.

Those traveling with the Underground Railroad moved at night to avoid being seen or heard. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 allowed bounty hunters to travel north to capture escaped slaves or capture free slaves and return them to slavery in the south. This law inspired even more northerners to join the Underground Railroad.

Little Girl, Little Girl!–The Train Whistle Blows

Born into slavery, Harriet lives in a cruel cycle of performing thankless chores and receiving beatings, whippings, and inhumane mockery from her masters. She serves in the house at first, but after angering her masters, Harriet is sent to work in the fields alongside her brothers. When she meets Jim, a rebellious slave who tells her about the Underground Railroad, Harriet becomes inspired to run away. Jim runs away in the night, and Harriet is injured when a man tries to stop Jim's escape by throwing a heavy weight that strikes Harriet instead. She suffers blackouts and sleeping spells because of the injury. Even so, she begins to make her own plans to escape slavery.

Vocabulary
crooned
fretful
vessel
brooded
sullen
despairingly
parched
discontented
liberation
gawking
abolished

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Harriet talk roughly to the baby? Why is Harriet's task almost impossible? *(Answers will vary but may include that she is tired of being treated badly and is thinking out loud; There is little anyone can do to keep a baby from crying because babies naturally cry for many reasons.)*
2. What does Harriet associate with the word "north"? *(lies told to her by her master, that it is bitterly cold and all Yankees have horns; Others say that everyone in the north is free, there is school for all children, and no one is ever whipped.)*
3. What about the night sky fascinates Harriet? How might this foreshadow what Harriet will accomplish in the future? *(Harriet is mesmerized by the North Star and how it never seems to move while the rest of the stars move across the night sky. The North Star will point her way to freedom, and it will serve as her guide later in the book.)*
4. What treasure does Harriet's family possess? Why is this treasure so important? *(a patchwork quilt; It is the one possession they have that is not worn out, ragged, or in disrepair.)*
5. Where does Harriet hide after she runs away, and who comes to bring her home? What reason is Harriet given to make her believe she will not be sold away? *(the pig pen; her father, Ben; Ben is considered valuable property, and Master will keep Harriet because of Ben.)*
6. Describe Harriet's punishment for running away and what she does afterward. *(She is whipped but does not cry out; She ambles home in a daze and collapses inside her door until her mother comes home to put her in bed.)*
7. What does, "We work from can to can't," mean (p. 25)? *(It means the slaves work steadily until they are unable to take another step, but are forced to continue regardless of how tired they may be.)*
8. Why are laws created forbidding slaves to have meetings, beat drums, assemble, or have church without a white man present? What causes these laws to be created? What do the slaves do instead? *(to keep slaves from communicating or planning revolts; a slave revolt led by Nat Turner, resulting in the death of many white slave owners; sing work songs to communicate and meet in the woods in secret to hear Old Cudjoe read from the Bible and share news from his grapevine)*
9. Who is Jim, and how does he influence Harriet? *(a slave who is known as a rebel and a former runaway; tells Harriet about a "railroad" and the methods slaves can use to escape)*

10. Who helps the slaves as they travel on the Underground Railroad? Why do you think these groups help the escaped slaves? (*ministers, Quakers, and working-men, both white and black; Answers will vary but might include that ministers and Quakers feel a religious obligation to help those in need and are morally opposed to the evils of slavery. Ex-slaves and working-men likely help because they know the horrible working conditions slaves must endure and feel sympathy for the escaping slaves.*)

Supplementary Activities

1. Writing: Write a journal entry titled “A Day in the Life of Young Harriet Tubman.” What kinds of things would she have done as a small child? What toys might she have played with? Who would have taken care of her while her family was away working?
2. Science: Research hornworms and the damage they can do to crops. Create a poster or write an essay presenting your findings.
3. Research: Search the Internet to locate information about David Walker’s *Appeal*. Read his words, and write a statement supporting or denouncing his beliefs. What parts do you agree or disagree with? The purpose of the *Appeal* was to embolden slaves to stand up for their right to freedom. Do you think the *Appeal* accomplished this goal? Explain your answer.

Not Worth a Sixpence—Riding on the Railroad

As Harriet grows older and stronger, her master tries to sell her, but Harriet pretends to be dumb and fakes sleeping spells so no one will buy her. Her master says she can work for herself, and she begins saving money. She purchases two steers to help her do more work and eventually meets and marries John Tubman. Tubman spends all of her money and is indifferent to Harriet’s difficult life as a slave, so Harriet uses her knowledge of the Underground Railroad and flees slavery forever.

Vocabulary	
vowed	
defiance	
extravagance	
vigorously	
gravely	
glumly	
wharves	
dismay	
desirous	
wretches	

Discussion Questions

1. What does Harriet realize about herself as she recovers from her wound? Do you agree? (*She realizes she has fought against slavery and survived. In spirit, she knows she’s free and is no longer a piece of property. She has changed and notices that her master also looks at her differently; Answers will vary.*)
2. What does Harriet purchase with the \$40 she earns? Why? (*two steers; She knows she can do more work and make money faster with the steers than if she worked by herself.*)
3. Whom does Harriet marry? Compare his lifestyle to Harriet’s, and explain how marriage becomes a problem for Harriet. (*John Tubman, a free man; does nothing to earn money, laughs and jokes, is not a slave, and spends his time fishing and hunting; Harriet takes care of him, but his indifferent attitude concerning Harriet’s miserable situation and his careless spending cause Harriet to use all of her savings, and her love for John wanes.*)

Character Web

Directions: Complete the chart below. Cite evidence from the story as you fill in information.

