

Underground Railroad Reenactment

Target Age: 5th grade and older

Overview

The students will experience a slave's journey to freedom and learn about the trek that escaping slaves made through Virginia. It incorporates local history and has a more serious tone to it. The goal is to help students reach a greater appreciation for the slaves who tried to escape. It is a role playing activity where students will observe and interact with different characters along the way.

Principles

- Learn about the trek that escaping slaves made through Virginia and neighboring states
- Reach a greater appreciation for the slaves who tried to escape
- Gain perspective in race relations as it pertains to the Civil War and its after-effects
- Make steps toward a more unified community
- Learn about real people who helped slaves escape oppression

Key Words

- Abolitionist
- Quakers
- Freeman
- Prejudice
- Emancipation
- Fugitive Slave Law
- Conductor
- Stationmaster

Background

It was in Virginia -- with its interwoven waterways and bustling port cities -- that hundreds of African Americans began their secret effort to flee slavery and the South. Fugitive slaves left Norfolk, Portsmouth, Richmond, Alexandria, and other points throughout the state as they sought freedom on the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad was, in reality, neither underground nor a railroad. It was, as its name implies, a highly secretive and complex system of partnerships and transportation routes by which African Americans escaped slavery in the South.

The Underground Railroad was one of the most romanticized aspects of antebellum reform. Dramatic tales were perpetuated by the abolitionists in the 19th century, and later by historians of the late 19th and 20th centuries. These stories have been incorporated into American mythology, featuring selfless White heroes and heroines who guided grateful but relatively passive fugitives to safety. But few historians have acknowledged the significant role African Americans played in the Underground Railroad. All too frequently, Blacks were seen as the dupes of unscrupulous whites who participated only because they were led by heroic white northerners. Thankfully, Black historians like Carter G. Woodson and Charles Wesley researched and published accounts of African Americans who worked as major actors in the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad was a vast system designed to conceal runaways and spirit them to freedom, often over the Canadian border. This was an organized effort between free Blacks and Whites, which put a strain on intersectional relations (the Underground Railroad intensified southern resentment toward outside interference). Financing the Underground Railroad took money because the fugitives needed food and clothing. Quakers and others raised funds, philanthropists contributed, and many of the conductors would hire themselves out to help convey slaves. Despite these difficulties, Governor Quitman of Mississippi declared that between 1810 and 1850 the South lost over 100,000 slaves valued at \$30 million through the Underground Railroad. The origins of the Underground Railroad go back to the 18th century with individuals willing to help fugitives. After the American Revolution, however, a more organized resistance began to emerge (e.g., in 1786, George Washington complained that a group of Quakers helped a slave escape from Alexandria to Philadelphia).

In 1786, Isaac Hopper (of Philadelphia) developed a program for the systematic assistance of slaves escaping the South. Within a few years, a number of antislavery operations spread in various directions in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The name, "Underground Railroad" was coined shortly after 1831 when steam railroads were popular. 1804 was the year of "incorporation" for the Railroad. In that year, General Thomas Boude purchased Stephen Smith and brought him home to Columbia, Pennsylvania, followed by Smith's mother who escaped to find her son. The Boude's took her in but within a few weeks, the owner of Smith's mother arrived and demanded her property, but the Boude's refused and the whole town supported them. Afterwards, the entire town resolved to champion the cause of fugitive slaves. In 1815, this same sentiment was expressed in Ohio, and by 1819 Underground Railroad methods were employed to get slaves out of North Carolina.

In 1967, historian Larry Gara collected evidence to show that many runaway slaves were responsible for planning and executing escapes, sometimes with the assistance of local Blacks or friendly Whites. One such runaway slave who was helped to freedom by northern whites was Charles Peyton Lucas who recorded his escape upon arriving at one of the Underground Railroad stations in Ripley, Ohio. According to Lucas, "I headed north with 2 friends. We reached the Potomac River. That night we swam across to Maryland. For ten days we traveled by night and hid by day. We had almost no food. We grew very weak. One night we stole a little milk. That

helped. One time, some men and dogs chased us. We had to run hard, but we got away from them. We didn't know our way. So we asked a man. He said we were runaways. But he told us which way to go. The next morning, we saw a house. The family who lived there gave us food. At last we reached the northern free states. I found a job. One day, a druggist showed me an ad. The ad offered \$500 for my capture. I went to Geneva, New York. Later I had to go to Canada. I am out of the lion's paw. There is no curse on earth equal to slavery." Thus, through examining accounts such as Lucus's, Gara's assertion was essentially correct in seeing the Underground Railroad as an informal, loosely knit activity in which organized abolitionist groups played an important but minor role. As Gara suggested, the Underground Railroad was staffed informally by people of good will, often Black but sometimes White, most of whom had a personal connection to those enslaved.

However, organized abolitionist groups seldom came into contact with runaways until after they reached the relative safety of the North. The actions of these strong-minded and self-reliant runaways were documented in the records of William Still and other Black abolitionists. In the 1870's, many former abolitionists published books about their Underground Railroad operations. William Still, an ex-slave who worked as an operator in the Underground Railroad, collected and recorded a number of narratives and letters from Norfolk's slaves who became fugitives in the 1850's. Still kept records of the collected slave stories hoping to bring together the former slaves who were in search of long-lost family members. During the slavery and Civil War period, still guarded his accounts and at one point, hid them in a cemetery building.

One such account discussed by Still involved a narrow escape of twenty-one fugitives aboard Captain Fountain's ship which left Norfolk in 1855. It seemed Captain Fountain frequently secreted slaves to the North from southern ports where he traded wheat, grains, and other items. One day, word got around Norfolk that a boat was harboring fugitive slaves. Norfolk's mayor and a posse boarded the ship, and after an amateurish but destructive search, the men departed leaving the Captain and his stowaway cargo in place. Upon leaving Norfolk, the ship headed for Philadelphia where the Vigilance Committee awaited their arrival.

For Blacks in the North and South self-help was a central concern which bonded Blacks--both free and slave--to a commitment of unity and mutual reliance. While there were frictions within that community which, on occasion led to political and social disunity, the bonds of blood, culture, and common experience provided a strong magnet that drew Blacks toward one another for fellowship and safety. These bonds help explain the central role that Blacks, as opposed to whites, played as participants and leaders in the Underground Railroad. Additionally, long-standing distrust of whites was understandable and well-founded. There were numerous examples of betrayal at the hands of those unwilling or unable to defy federal provisions requiring the return of a runaway and promising severe punishment to those who aided fugitives. Some profited from the capture of runaways, earning money by delivering fugitives and sometimes even free Blacks into slavery.

Free Blacks were especially aware that as long as the institution of slavery existed in America, no Black was safe. Slavery reached out from the South to threaten all Black people, not only fugitives. Even legally free Blacks were in danger from kidnappers selling them into slavery. Solomon Northup was one such example of a northern free Black who was kidnapped into slavery by unscrupulous whites. For 12 years Northup struggled to win his freedom, an arduous process which he recounted in his autobiography, *Twelve Years a Slave*. Numerous post-Civil War accounts indicated that Northup was not alone in his kidnapping experiences. The majority of blacks captured as fugitives or kidnapped into slavery during the 1850's were apprehended without the aid of legal authority or due process of law. In approximately 2 out of every 5 cases captured Blacks were given no opportunity for a defense. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 made the legal defense against kidnappers more difficult by denying fugitives the right to a jury trial or the right to testify in their own behalf. Thus, as the level of white persecution increased, so did the level of Black resistance. In the years just prior to the Civil War, Black resistance in the form of running away developed into a fine art thanks to the Underground Railroad and the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act which especially made escaped slaves move to Canada to avoid the reaches of federal law.

Blacks contributed more to the Railroad than is usually reported because experience conditioned runaways to distrust whites. David Ruggles, who has been called the "Father of the Underground Railroad," and William Still were two Blacks in charge of the key Underground Railroad stations in New York and in Philadelphia.

The Underground Railroad in Virginia

Although the institution of slavery is often times seen as a purely rural phenomenon, Virginia's Tidewater region had two large urban slave centers. Norfolk and Portsmouth provided an urban environment for enslaved Africans and African Americans. Many of the slaves lived apart from their masters and were able to move freely throughout the town. This mobility allowed African Americans, especially those who were enslaved and hired out, to segue into a variety of port-related occupations. As slaves moved through the streets of these cities in the 1840s and 1850s, reports came in from newspapers creating the perception that a clandestine organization was making considerable headway in undermining slavery in the Tidewater region. William Still, one of America's most active agents for the Underground Railroad, recorded accounts of runaways who passed through his station. Published in 1871, Still's work, *The Underground Railroad*, recorded 745 accounts with approximately thirty percent (total of 242) given by escapees from Virginia. Of that number nearly half (total of 107) came from Hampton Roads. The book became the most widely circulated work on the anti-slavery network and an important source of information for those studying the operation of the Underground Railroad because of clues it provides of UGRR agents and transportation resources.

Needless to say, Underground Railroad activities were particularly disturbing for slaveholders and slavery supporters in port areas, like Hampton Roads. Rumors circulated that ships captains were secretly rushing slaves out of the area, and that a very active Underground Railroad was in operation in Norfolk and in Portsmouth. So threatening were the efforts of abolitionists that a local newspaper, the Beacon, sarcastically noted the apprehension of three runaway slaves in 1855, claiming that their capture resulted from the Underground Railroad being "out of order."

The source of most of the problems in Hampton Roads was the presence of two of the most active agents, **Henry Lewey** and **William Bagnall**. Lewey was a Norfolk slave who used the nom de plume, "Bluebeard," to hide his identity until he escaped 1856 when word circulated that he was a suspected Underground Railroad agent. Not surprisingly, Lewey's activities were not unusual because accounts mentioned other enslaved African American agents who hired out their own time, thus allowing them the mobility to carry out this type of work. William Bagnall, however, was unusual. Few historical treatises have examined the role Whites had in the operation of the Underground Railroad in the South. Bagnall, a Virginia Bank bookkeeper who may have been married to a light-skinned African American, was credited with assisting in the escapes of numerous slaves and passing correspondence between those who had escaped and enslaved family members still living in Hampton Roads.

Concurrent with agent operatives in Hampton Roads was the identification of steamships listed by Still as providing assistance to escapees. While some runaway slaves secreted aboard vessels, unbeknown to its captain and crew, most received assistance, either by captains and/or stewards of these steamships. William Still's book listed the City of Richmond, the Pennsylvania, and the Augusta steamships, as well as the Kesiah schooner, as vessels that plied the local waterways, transporting runaways to points north. A person named **Minkins** was identified as a steward aboard the City of Richmond and the Pennsylvania who covertly worked as an UGRR conductor, along with **Captains Baylis, Fountain, and Henry Lee**. Still's work also identified departure points in escapee accounts. Most significant were the relatively isolated Higgins and Wrights Wharves in Norfolk and the wharves located near the Gosport Shipyard in Portsmouth.

According to our research, both Emanuel A.M.E. and Monumental Methodist Churches had individuals with abolitionist sympathies and possibly ties with the Underground Railroad. We were able to demonstrate those sympathies, but the Underground Railroad ties are circumstantial, at best. What we uncovered was a network of free Blacks and sympathetic Whites who lived throughout Portsmouth, but in proximity to the areas identified as the departure points for the Underground Railroad by runaway slaves and the 1930s WPA accounts. For example, according to oral accounts, Emanuel A.M.E. Church (formerly the African Church) was used as a station house from which runaway slaves departed to points in the North. The attic was reportedly used as a lookout for the Underground Railroad. Whenever the church was harboring runaways, lookouts were posted in case city officials invaded the church. The area behind the organ was said to be where members hid escaped slaves. Visitors to the church can still see these historic hiding places and access to the tunnel that has been bricked in since the 1860s.

Looking through historical newspaper and court records, it is clear that Underground Railroad activity was suspected. Early maps from the 1850s in Portsmouth show that Emanuel A.M.E. Church was very close to the waterfront. It is quite possible that a tunnel could have reached the wharves without detection because it would not have to have been more than 1000 yards in length. Safe houses and stations on the Underground Railroad were typically located near graveyards and churches, which served as both navigational aids and hiding places. However, what is more likely is that these anomalies were some kind of trenches (perhaps for drainage) that runaways used when making their way from a “safe area” to the wharves where the ships, assisting them in their escape, were berthed. Moreover, we found numerous examples of local **White Methodist anti-slavery sympathizers** and **free Black Methodists** who lived in and around these wharves and churches. Runaway slave accounts (and later in the WPA interviews or former slaves) identified these areas as haunts for Underground Railroad activities. For example, **George Nicholson** (Monumental Methodist Church member) was kicked out of the church for buying a slave without setting up means for emancipation and **William Porter** (a Monumental Methodist charter member) set up a means of gradual emancipation for all slaves born after his death. Although we were not able to establish evidentiary connections between these sympathizers and any direct support for the Underground Railroad, we believe we can make a circumstantial case.

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Introduction

Supplies Needed

- Newspaper clippings & reward posters (**APPENDIX A**)
- Song cards (1 per participant, roughly 10-15 per conductor)

Discussion

1. Ask the students what they know about the Underground Railroad
2. Explain that most escaped slaves travelled by foot
3. Explain that the railroad wasn't an actual railroad, but by way of travel they did use rail terms:
 - Stations or depots were houses for helping, and the homeowners were referred to as "Stationmasters"
 - Stockholders were people who contributed goods or money
 - Conductors were people who helped navigate the path to freedom
 - Frequently escaped or free blacks
 - Referred to the people they were guiding as "passengers" or "cargo"
 - Harriet Tubman, the Moses of her people, conducted 300 passengers to freedom
4. We are reenacting 1858 – the Dred Scott case had been decided that only white people are citizens of the US.
5. In 1850 the Fugitive Slave Act was passed which required all people to return escaped slaves to their owners – just like if you found someone's wallet you would return their property to them.
6. Many slaves escaped in winter; this caused the need for clothes and other items as they journeyed north. Conductors didn't always have items for them.
7. They travelled 10-20 miles between stations over the course of 2 months to a year.

Activity

1. Explain that the students will now have the experience of a living reenactment of the Underground Railroad. They will be kept safe as long as they follow the directions of the conductors.
2. Pass out randomly assorted "song cards" (determined by conductors prior to the start of the program and putting no more than 15 in each group) and let the students know that when they hear that song being sung

After the introduction, excuse yourself. When you leave the campfire circle, Benjamin Davis will enter and begin his part of the story. Take this time to put on a costume (if you will also be playing a part) and communicate to the rest of the group that the process has begun.

Conductors will take groups on the Underground Railroad by singing the song that is on their card. Instruct participants to sneak away from the campfire circle toward the sound as they hear the song.

Songs for Conductors (APPENDIX B)

Follow the Drinking Gourd
Let Us Break Bread Together

Go Down Moses
Swing Low, Sweet Chariot
Wade in the Water

Amazing Grace
Steal Away (to Jesus)

Underground Railroad Master Plan

Site Location	“Location”	Character	Props Needed	Signal to Approach	Signal to Leave
	N/A	N/A – Staff for Intro	Newspaper Clippings Reward Posters Song Cards	N/A	N/A
	Docks on the coast of North Carolina	Benjamin Davis	Riding Crop Account Book	N/A	Conductor Songs
	NC to MA	Henry Lewey	Lantern	Song	N/A
	NC to MA	Minkins	Lantern	Song	N/A
	NC to MA	Mary Elizabeth Grigby	Lantern	Song	N/A
	NC to MA	Ham and Eggs	Lantern	Song	N/A
	Norfolk, VA	William Bagnall	Forged Passage Papers Bundles of Money	“Going to the smokehouse”	From character
	Page County, VA	Zachary Tyson	Rifle Sheriff’s Badge	Leans against the fence	From character
	Loudon County, VA	Theodocia Gilbert	Basket of Quilting Supplies Quilt Chart	Owl Hoot	From character
	Loudon County, VA	Mr. & Mrs. McVee	Bread on a plate	Log Cabin drawn on ground	Attack and/or capture
	Washington, DC	Thomas and Rachel Garrett	Candle	Candle in the window	Bounty Hunter Attack
	The road from Baltimore to Philadelphia	Meredith & Ephraim Jackson	Ropes	Beating on the door/Attack	They reach Mini Golf
	Trenton, NJ	Cornelius Scott	Free Papers	Calling out	From character
	Long Island, NY	Jessica O’Briant	Lantern	Swinging Lantern	From character
	Boston, MA	N/A – Staff for Debrief	(Collect items)	Fire	N/A

Some participants may be captured in these areas.

Benjamin Davis, White Man, Slave Trader

(This role can be doubled by a bounty hunter; a jacket and hat change should be included!)

Supplies Needed

- Riding crop
- Account book

Costume Suggestion

- Generic men's clothing
- Jacket (tails?) and Straw Hat
- Boots

Background

According to the Still Narrative, Benjamin Davis was a man who saw slaves as a commodity only: "In 1854 Charles was owned in the city of Richmond by Benjamin Davis, a notorious negro trader. Charles was quite a 'likely-looking article,' not too black or too white, but rather of a nice 'ginger-bread color.' Davis was of opinion that this 'article' must bring him a tip-top price. For two or three months the trader advertised Charles for sale in the papers, but for some reason or other Charles did not command the high price demanded."

The slave referred to, Charles, was brutally beaten and jailed. He eventually escaped.

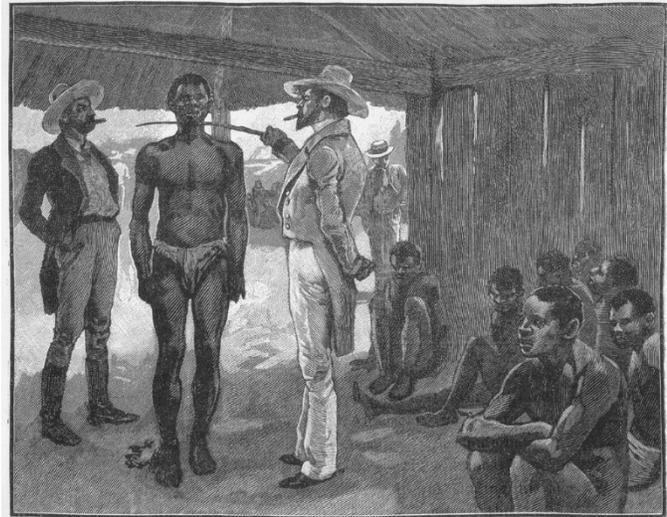
Davis was not a man who liked to be crossed, and took great pride in his business of trafficking slaves. He boasted a great variety of wares, sometimes offering Native American and Caribbean peoples alongside African slaves.

Important Information to Relate

- Slaves were considered property by most white owners, and you are no different. You are a businessman first, and show no compassion for the items you sell.
- It is unacceptable to escape, and you will ensure that they are found if they *do* escape.

Activity/Directions

- You are the first encounter of this experience. Remain in character and get them serious!
- Line up all of the "slaves" and have them perform tasks such as bending over and touching their toes, showing their hands, and telling you what line of work they are in. Contradict them and challenge them any time they do not refer to you as "sir."
- Make sure you are aggressive, but quiet enough so that participants can hear their trigger song and escape effectively. This will involve turning your back and checking your "accounts."



Henry Lewey, Black Man, Former Slave

Supplies Needed

- Lantern

Costume Suggestion

- Stained, repaired clothing; castoff garments
- Very worn shoes

Background

From the website *RaceTimePlace*: “Lewey was a Norfolk slave who used the nom de plume, ‘Bluebeard,’ to hide his identity until he escaped 1856 when word circulated that he was a suspected Underground Railroad agent. Not surprisingly, Lewey's activities were not unusual because accounts mentioned other enslaved African American agents who hired out their own time, thus allowing them the mobility to carry out this type of work.”

Many slaves helped mobilize their peers to freedom. They wrote letters back and forth to each other with pen names. Lewey’s was “Bluebeard.” After many years spent ushering folks along the Underground Railroad, Lewey finally made his own way to freedom. He later returned and, while working on ships, continued to help slaves gain their freedom until Emancipation.

Important Information to Relate

- You are a recently escaped & freed slave, but you could be recaptured and put back into slavery despite your papers at any time.
- The group must stay close to you as you know the best route and can lead them to freedom.
- Signals of the Underground Railroad.

Activity/Directions

- Your job is to lead groups on the underground railroad from start to finish. If a participant is “captured,” you must leave them with their captor and continue on.
- It is imperative that you stay in character. More than any other character the group encounters on the trip, you make this experience a real one.
- It may fall to you to keep the group moving or stall for another group to finish at a station. Use parts of your story or the background to fill the time. You may also safely lead them off-trail to make the trip last longer.



“Minkins”, White Male or Female, Ship Steward

Supplies Needed

- Lantern

Costume Suggestion

- Seaworthy clothing – salt stained (white marks)
- Stocking Cap or boatman’s hat
- Low cut shoes with thin sole

Background

From Still:

“ ‘Our friend Minkins,’ in whose behalf William asks the united prayers of his friends, was one of the ‘scoundrels’ who assisted him and his two companions to escape on the steamer. Being suspected of ‘rascality’ in this direction, he was arrested and put in jail, but as no evidence could be found against him he was soon released. (James Mercer’s Letter)

“With Anthony, as it has been with thousands of others similarly situated, just as everything was looking the most hopeless,

word came to him in his place of concealment that a friend named Minkins, employed on the steamship City of Richmond, would undertake to conceal him on the boat, if he could be crowded in a certain place, which was about the only spot that would be perfectly safe. This was glorious news to Anthony; but it was well for him that he was ignorant of the situation that awaited him on the boat, or his heart might have failed him. He was willing, however, to risk his life for freedom, and, therefore, went joyfully. (Account set by Anthony Blow, alias Henry Levison)

“give my love to Mr. Bagnel [sic.] and Mr. Minkins, ask them if they have heard anything from my brother, tell Mr. Bagnel to give my love to my sister-in-law and mother and all the family. I am now living at Russell’s Hotel; it is the first situation I have had since I have been here and I like it very well. Sir you would oblige me by letting me know if Mr. Minkins has seen my wife; you will please let me know as soon as possible. I wonder if Mr. Minkins has thought of any way that he can get my wife away. I should like to know in a few days. Your well wisher, ISAAC FORMAN.”

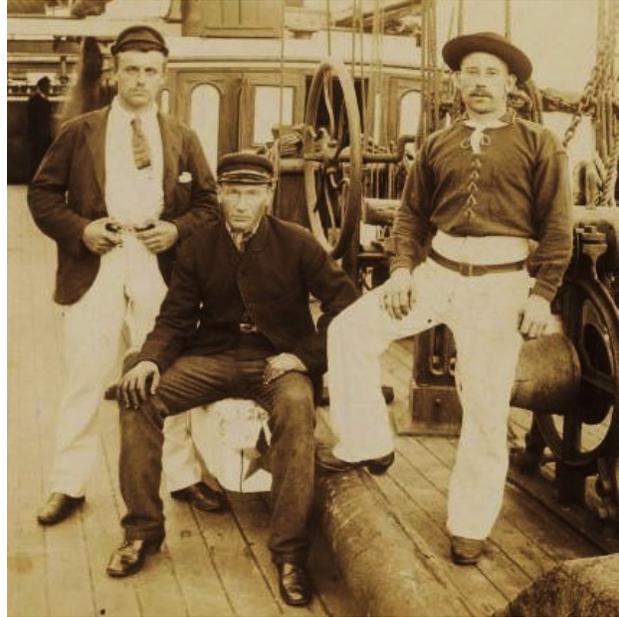
The true identity of Minkins was never discovered, although it can be assumed that working on a ship granted him/her the ability to secrete and smuggle out slaves from the harbors of Virginia to New York, New Jersey, and Canada. This name is referred to only once as male, and other accounts imply that Minkins could have been a woman in men’s clothing to further conceal their identity.

Important Information to Relate

- You are willingly risking your life to take people to freedom.
- The group must stay close to you as you know the best route and can lead them to freedom.
- Signals of the Underground Railroad.

Activity/Directions

- Your job is to lead groups on the underground railroad from start to finish. If a participant is “captured,” you must leave them with their captor and continue on.
- It is imperative that you stay in character. More than any other character the group encounters on the trip, you make this experience a real one.
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Mary Elizabeth Grigby, Black Woman, Escaped Slave

Supplies Needed

- Lantern

Costume Suggestion

- Stained, ripped clothing
- No shoes or very worn shoes

Background

From Still:

“BARNABY GRIGBY, ALIAS JOHN BOYER, AND MARY ELIZABETH, HIS WIFE; FRANK WANZER, ALIAS ROBERT SCOTT; EMILY FOSTER, ALIAS ANN WOOD. (TWO OTHERS WHO STARTED WITH THEM WERE CAPTURED.) All these persons journeyed together from Loudon Co., Va. on horse-back and in a carriage for more than one hundred miles. Availing them-selves of a holiday and their master's horses and carriage, they as deliberately started for Canada, as though they had never been taught that it was their duty, as servants, to "obey their masters." In this particular showing a most utter disregard of the interest of their "kind-hearted and indulgent owners." They left home on Monday, Christmas Eve, 1855, under the leadership of Frank Wanzer, and arrived in Columbia the following Wednesday at one o'clock. As willfully as they had thus made their way along, they had not found it smooth sailing by any means. The biting frost and snow rendered their travel anything but agreeable. Nor did they escape the gnawings of hunger, traveling day and night. And whilst these "articles" were in the very act of running away with them-selves and their kind master's best horses and carriage-when about one hundred miles from home, in the neighborhood of Cheat river, Maryland, they were attacked by "six white men, and a boy," who, doubtless, sup-posing that their intentions were of a "wicked and unlawful character" felt it to be their duty in kindness to their masters, if not to the travelers to demand of them an account of themselves.

My poor mother has been often flogged by master, said Frank. As to his mistress, he said she was "tolerably good." Ann Wood was owned by **McVee** also, and was own sister to Elizabeth. Ann very fully sustained her sister Elizabeth's statement respecting the character of her master. The above-mentioned four, were all young and likely. Barnaby was twenty-six years of age, mulatto, medium size, and intelligent-his wife was about twenty-four years of age, quite dark, good-looking, and of pleasant appearance.”

Important Information to Relate

- You are an actively escaping slave. You fear recapture, although you didn't hate your master.
- The group must stay close to you as you know the best route and can lead them to freedom.
- Signals of the Underground Railroad.

Activity/Directions

- Your job is to lead groups on the underground railroad from start to finish. If a participant is “captured,” you must leave them with their captor and continue on.
- It is imperative that you stay in character. More than any other character the group encounters on the trip, you make this experience a real one.
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“Ham and Eggs”, Black Man, Current Slave

Supplies Needed

- Lantern

Costume Suggestion

- Stained, ripped clothing
- Straw hat
- No shoes or very worn shoes

Background

“Ham and Eggs” was a truly unique Agent on the Underground Railroad. While he never won his freedom, he ushered many people through his own master’s estate to freedom. He referred to the slaves he would carry as “hams,” thus garnering his pen name.

Ham and Eggs was a well-educated slave, something that his master is rumored to have hid from others. (It is not known if his master was also an agent on the Underground Railroad.) Ham and Eggs also had a habit of looking for agents and conductors to be “wide-a-wake” – a term that came to mean that they were paying attention and aware of the injustice toward slaves. A sample of his letters to William Still is below:

“MR. W. STILL:-Dear Sir-I am happy to think, that the time has come when we no doubt can open our correspondence with one another again. Also I am in hopes, that these few lines may find you and family well and in the enjoyment of good health as it leaves me and family the same. I want you to know, that I feel as much determined to work in this glorious cause, as ever I did in all of my life, and I have some very good hams on hand that I would like very much for you to have. I have nothing of interest to write about just now, only that the politics of the day is in a high rage, and I don't know of the result, therefore, I want you to be one of those wide-awakes as is mentioned from your section of country now-a-daye, &c. Also, if you wish to write to me, Mr. J. Brown will inform you how to direct a letter to me. No more at present, until I hear from you; bat I want you to be a wide-a-wake.

Yours in haste, HAM & EGGS.”

Important Information to Relate

- You are currently a slave with a good master, but you could still be punished heavily for the activities you are involved in. This is also why you choose to remain anonymous as “Ham and Eggs.”
- The group must stay close to you as you know the best route and can lead them to freedom.
- Signals of the Underground Railroad.

Activity/Directions

- Your job is to lead groups on the underground railroad from start to finish. If a participant is “captured,” you must leave them with their captor and continue on.
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William Bagnall, Virginia Bank bookkeeper

Supplies Needed

- Forged Passage Papers (APPENDIX C)
- Maps
- Money packets for each group (APPENDIX D)

Costume Suggestion

- “Sack Suit” or starched shirt and slacks
- Wide cravat or vest
- Business shoes
- *Keep in mind that you are at your office after hours. It is ok to have rolled up sleeves and no vest or coat.*

Background

“William Bagnall, however, was unusual. Few historical treatises have examined the role Whites had in the operation of the Underground Railroad in the South. Bagnall, a Virginia Bank bookkeeper who may have been married to a light-skinned African American, was credited with assisting in the escapes of numerous slaves and passing correspondence between those who had escaped and enslaved family members still living in Hampton Roads.”

Important Information to Relate

- You have risked your career and your livelihood to forge these passage papers for the group.
- The papers state that “22” laves will be traveling. They are to tell people that the others have died or, if they need to escape from a captor, the rest are out there.
- By no means should any of them reveal that they can read.
- Remind them to look at the ground, not in the face of anyone, that they should say “sir” and “ma’am” to all.

Activity/Directions

- Signal that you are “going to the smokehouse” and sneak out of the forestry lab (down the stairs).
- Sneak the pack of slaves into the forestry lab, your work room, and explain their passage papers to them.
- Give the papers to a group member and money to another.
- Send them out the side door (onto the porch), reminding them to stay low.
- When you are ready, signal the next group.



Know all these men by these present that I, Robert Matson of Lexington County, South Carolina, owner of Burnt Mill Plantation, do maintain the labor of the field hands and house slaves of Burnt Mill (twenty-two men and women and children of color). I, the said Robert, have released and transported the said twenty-two laborers for fall labor in the orchard groves of Maryland. I do also covenant that I am the legal owner of them, and the person to whom the said twelve owe service as slaves

Zachary Tyson, White Man, Sheriff

Supplies Needed

- Rifle
- Badge

Costume Suggestion

- Simple Clothes
- Belt or suspenders
- Black Hat

Background

It was the job of a sheriff to return stolen or lost property to its owner whenever possible, including escaped or wandering slaves. They were the first resource for owners when a slave had escaped, and as such they were rewarded accordingly.

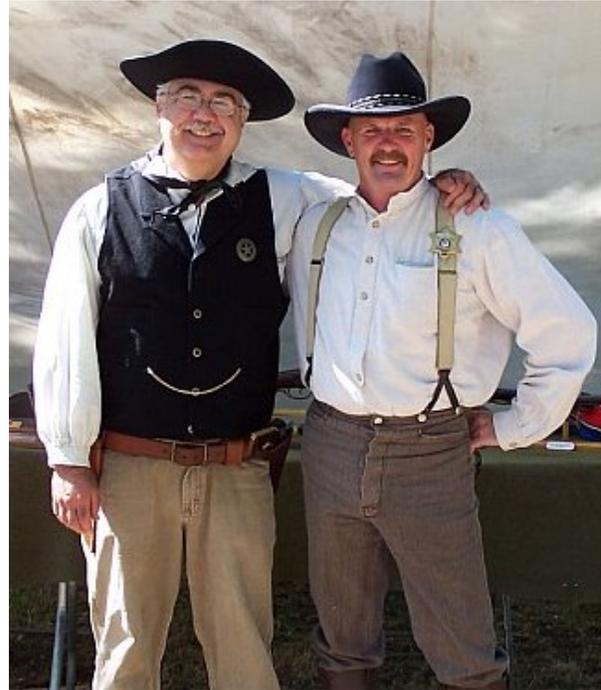
While there are many, many records of slaves being recaptured by a sheriff and his posse, there are no examples of a sheriff knowingly allowing slaves to really and truly escape.

Important Information to Relate

- You are trying to locate 4 escaped slaves, whom you have never seen, from the McVee homestead just up the road in Loudon County.
- What these slaves don't know is that they have gone the wrong way into Page County, VA; you should reveal this with a scoffing attitude.

Activity/Directions

- Signal the group by leaning against a tree and whistling or humming.
- Confront participants. It is up to you to check the reality of the situation. If they are cutting up and giggling, make sure you put them in their place.
- Inspect their papers and allow them to go. If you question their attitudes, you can "bark" at them, but only when necessary should you "arrest" a participant.



Theodocia Gilbert, Mixed Woman, Conductor

Supplies Needed

- Basket of quilting supplies (needle, thread, pieces)
- Stool or chair

Costume Suggestion

- Simple dress
- Apron

Background

Miss Gilbert was an unmarried woman who, due to her light complexion and fine hair, was brought into the home of a middle-class family and raised as one of their own children. In the letter below, she recalls her experience as a child and relates a story of Concklin, who at one time rescued her and others from what must have been a frightening experience. Concklin was a free black who was mistaken for an escaped slave and tortured.

“Dear Friend and Brother-A thousand thanks for your good, generous letter!

It was so kind of you to have in mind my intense interest and anxiety in the success and fate of poor Concklin! That he

desired and intended to hazard an attempt of the kind, I well understood; but what particular one, or that he had actually embarked in the enterprise, I had not been able to learn.

His memory will ever be among the sacredly cherished with me. He certainly displayed more real disinterestedness, more earnest, unassuming devotedness, than those who claim to be the sincerest friends of the slave can often boast. What more Saviour-like than the willing sacrifice he has rendered!

Never shall I forget that night of our extremist peril (as we supposed), when he came and so heartily proffered his services at the hazard of his liberty, of life even, in behalf of William L. Chaplin.

Such generosity! at such a moment! The emotions it awakened no words can bespeak! They are to be sought but in the inner chambers of one's own soul! He as earnestly de-vised the means as calmly counted the cost, and as unshrinkingly turned him to the task, as if it were his own freedom he would have won. Through his homely features, and humble garb, the intrepidity of soul came out in all its lustre! Heroism, in its native majesty, commanded one's admiration and love!

Most truly can I enter into year sorrows, and painfully appreciate the pang of disappointment which must have followed this sad intelligence. But so inadequate are words to the consoling of such griefs, it were almost cruel to attempt to syllable one's sympathies.

I cannot bear to believe, that Concklin has been actually murdered, and yet I hardly dare hope it is otherwise. And the poor slaves, for whom he periled so much, into what depths of hopelessness and woe are they again plunged! But the deeper and blacker for the loss of their dearly sought and new-found freedom. How long must wrongs like these go unredressed? "How longt O God, how long?"

Important Information to Relate

- The story of Concklin.
- You are creating quilts to help slaves who are escaping.

Activity/Directions

- Signal the group by making a hooting sound (like an owl.)
- Tell about yourself and Concklin.
- Explain the quilts and pass one to the conductor to carry to Agnes Willis.
- The conductor will take the group from you.



Mr. & Mrs. McVee, White, Grigby's Owners

Supplies Needed

- Bread on a plate

Costume Suggestion

- Simple clothing
- Hats, aprons, bonnets, etc.
- *Your slaves are inherited; you cannot afford new ones. Dress accordingly.*

Background

This is a general overview. Little is known about the McVees other than they were not part of the elite rich and that they owned inherited slaves. The Grigbys never had any issues with their masters, yet they were hunted after their escape by a posse hired by the McVees.



“In addition to the authority practiced on individual plantations, slaves throughout the South had to live under a set of laws called the Slave Codes. The codes varied slightly from state to state, but the basic idea was the same: the slaves were considered property, not people, and were treated as such. Slaves could not testify in court against a white, make contracts, leave the plantation without permission, strike a white (even in self-defense), buy and sell goods, own firearms, gather without a white present, possess any anti-slavery literature, or visit the homes of whites or free blacks. The killing of a slave was almost never regarded as murder, and the rape of slave women was treated as a form of trespassing.

Whenever there was a slave insurrection, or even the rumor of one, the laws became even tighter. At all times, patrols were set up to enforce the codes. These patrols were similar to militias and were made up of white men who were obligated to serve for a set period. The patrols apprehended slaves outside of plantations, and they raided homes and any type of gathering, searching for anything that might lead to insurrection. During times of insurrection -- either real or rumored -- enraged whites formed vigilance committees that terrorized, tortured, and killed blacks.”

Important Information to Relate

- “Times is hard” – with slaves escaping many white masters *need* them to survive.
- Not all agents could be trusted.
- It *is not* okay for a slave to escape.

Activity/Directions

- Draw a “log cabin” pattern in the dirt. When the group arrives, **a conductor will erase it** so you will have to re-draw it.
- Pretend to be kind and offer all of them a piece of bread.
- You should suddenly turn on the group and capture one or two from each group. **Conductors should encourage the group to leave captured people behind.**

Thomas & Rachel Garrett, White, Quakers

Supplies Needed

- Candle in holder

Costume Suggestion

- Simple black clothes
- Bonnet and apron for Rachel

Background

Born on August 21, 1789 in Upper Darby, PA, Thomas Garrett is one of the most prominent figures in the history of the Underground Railroad. He has been called Delaware's greatest humanitarian and is credited with helping more than 2,700 slaves escape to freedom in a forty-year career as a Station Master.

A white Quaker, whose family hid runaway slaves in its Delaware County farmhouse when he was a child, Garrett credited an experience he characterized as transcendental with directing his life's work toward aiding in the escapes of slaves. The incident, in which a black servant employed by Garrett's family was kidnapped and nearly forced into slavery, was a watershed event for the young Garrett, who would devote his life to the abolitionist cause. It is thought that his move to Wilmington, Delaware from outside of Philadelphia was a strategic choice.

In 1830, Garrett married Rachel Mendenhall, the daughter of a fellow Quaker abolitionist from Chester County, Pennsylvania (some Mendenhalls changed the second 'e' in the name to an 'i' and subsequent generations returned it to its original spelling). They had one child, Eli, together and remained married for 38 years. While maintaining an inconsistently successful hardware business, Garrett acted as a key Station Master on the eastern line of the Underground Railroad. His activities brought him in contact with Philadelphia Station Master William Still. The correspondence between the two men, preserved and published by Still, provides scholars with an intimate perspective of their struggle and those of countless Agents and Conductors on the Eastern Line of the Underground Railroad.

In 1848, Thomas Garrett and a fellow abolitionist John Hunn were tried and convicted for aiding in the escape of the Hawkins family, who had been slaves in Maryland. Both men were given considerable fines which rendered them nearly bankrupt. In his closing address, Garrett regaled those in the courtroom with a redoubled commitment to help runaway slaves. Eyewitness accounts detail the particular contrition of a slave-holding juror from southern Delaware who rose to shake Garrett's hand and apologize at the close of the impassioned speech.

Important Information to Relate

- They are safe with Quakers!

Activity/Directions

- Place a candle in the window of the barn to signal that they may approach. Don't forget to move it to a table when you speak with them!
- Ask them how their journey is going. Encourage them to look at you and speak to you without formalities.
- Pull out one participant, stating that they look "ill." Put them in the barn. **They will not continue with the group.**
- When the bounty hunters beat on the door, usher the group out into the horse pasture through the barn. Advise them to stick to the trees!



Meredith & Ephraim Jackson, White, Bounty Hunters

Supplies Needed

- Ropes

Costume Suggestion

- Ragged Clothing
- Western style hats
- Boots (you will need to run!)

Background

The Norfolk conspiracy led to further crackdowns on the slave population and stringent demands on Virginia's militia. The militia was made up not of paid professional military men but of farmers and planters, many of whom did not own slaves. Armed and mounted, the militia's job was to patrol the countryside in search of suspicious gatherings, a dangerous process so time-consuming that it "has occasioned a good deal of Fatigue to the Militia, and some loss in their Crops, as happening at a time their Labour & Industry were much wanted in their Grounds." This expensive system of policing brought grumbles from the poor whites who owned no slaves themselves and were unable to pay fines for failure to perform the required militia duty. They recognized that the system favored the slave-owning minority who were compensated with tax money for slaves that were executed and who could buy their way out of participating in the patrols. The resentment of poor whites would reach its peak during the Civil War when similar exemptions excused slave owners from the fighting.

For the next one hundred years, Virginia's enslaved and free blacks continued to plot uprisings, but, like Gabriel Prosser's 1800 rebellion near Richmond, all were discovered or abandoned before they could be put into motion. In other colonies from South Carolina to New York, however, major uprisings shook the white population.

One hundred years after the discovery of the Norfolk conspiracy, the worst fears of Virginia's whites were realized. In 1831 in Southampton County, Nat Turner led the first successful slave revolt in Virginia, the largest and most consequential in United States history. Inspired by the success of a Haitian revolution in 1790 that freed the island's slaves and threw off French rule, Turner aimed for no less. The immediate result was about sixty white farmers killed and about twenty captured slaves tried and hanged. But the backlash resulted in the deaths of as many as a hundred more slaves, many who had nothing to do with the rebellion, and laws that made the "peculiar institution" even harsher than it had been.

Important Information to Relate

- You are angry, and will stop at nothing to capture escaped slaves.
- If they are captured, cast doubt about their humanity on them. Remember – they have just been cared for by the Quakers.

Activity/Directions

- 10 minutes after the group enters the "Quakers Home", beat on the door and yell.
- Chase down participants; you may catch a few. **If participants are caught, the entire group must be rounded up.**
- You are not obligated to keep any of them, but if you want to, march them up to the rec shed and keep them there.
- Stop looking for them when they reach Mini Golf.



Cornelius Scott, Free Black Man

Supplies Needed

- Free Papers

Costume Suggestion

- Simple clothes, worn but in good repair
- Derby Hat

Background

Cornelius Scott was a slave until the age of 10, when his owners – staunch abolitionists – sent him to Pennsylvania to live with his aunt and uncle, both freed slaves as well. Cornelius was by no means rich, but he was rather well off. As an adult, he works in the textile industry in Trenton, NJ. He remains on the outskirts of society, living in the outer ring of tenant houses in the city, and this allows him to help slaves as much as possible.

Free blacks in the antebellum period--those years from the formation of the Union until the Civil War--were quite outspoken about the injustice of slavery. Their ability to express themselves, however, was determined by whether they lived in the North or the South. Free Southern blacks continued to live under the shadow of slavery, unable to travel or assemble as freely as those in the North. It was also more difficult for them to organize and sustain churches, schools, or fraternal orders such as the Masons. Although their lives were circumscribed by numerous discriminatory laws even in the colonial period, freed African Americans, especially in the North, were active participants in American society. Free African American Christians founded their own churches which became the hub of the economic, social, and intellectual lives of blacks in many areas of the fledgling nation. Blacks were also outspoken in print. Freedom's Journal, the first black-owned newspaper, appeared in 1827. This paper and other early writings by blacks fueled the attack against slavery and racist conceptions about the intellectual inferiority of African Americans.

African Americans also engaged in achieving freedom for others, which was a complex and dangerous undertaking. Enslaved blacks and their white sympathizers planned secret flight strategies and escape routes for runaways to make their way to freedom. Although it was neither subterranean nor a mechanized means of travel, this network of routes and hiding places was known as the "underground railroad." Some free blacks were active "conductors" on the underground railroad while others simply harbored runaways in their homes. Free people of color like Richard Allen, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, David Walker, and Prince Hall earned national reputations for themselves by writing, speaking, organizing, and agitating on behalf of their enslaved compatriots.

Important Information to Relate

- Although you are free because your owners were abolitionists, you are by no means safe.
- You have to show your papers to everyone that wants to see them.

Activity/Directions

- Signal the group by calling them in and hiding them in/behind the Mini Golf shed.
- Congratulate them on their success, but tell them that they cannot stay here.
- Show them your papers just like you would others and send them on their way.



Commonwealth of Virginia

FRANKLIN COUNTY, sct.

I hereby certify, TO ALL WHOM IT DOTTH OR MAY CONCERN, that it hath been proved to my satisfaction, that the bearer hereof, *Cornelius Scott* aged about *ten* years, of *medium* complexion, *four* feet and *one* inches high, has *a mole on the heel of the left foot and a scar below the right ear due to a mule kick*
Was born a slave in *Franklin* County and State *Virginia*
And freed on this *third* day of *May* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *forty one*

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Seal of Franklin County Court, this *third* day of *May* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *forty one*
Patrick Brennan, Clerk
Roger Ellmore, Esq.

Jessica O'Briant, White Woman, Irish Boatman's Wife

Supplies Needed

- Lantern

Costume Suggestion

- Simple clothes, worn but in good repair
- Apron & Bonnet
- Rough or no shoes

Background

The instances where poor whites helped slaves were not frequent, but sufficient to show the need for setting one group against the other.

Genovese says:

The slaveholders ... suspected that non-slaveholders would encourage slave disobedience and even rebellion, not so much out of sympathy for the blacks as out of hatred for the rich planters and resentment of their own poverty. White men sometimes were linked to slave insurrectionary plots, and each such incident rekindled fears.

This helps explain the stern police measures against whites who fraternized with blacks.

Herbert Aptheker quotes a report to the governor of Virginia on a slave conspiracy in 1802: "I have just received information that three white persons are concerned in the plot; and they have arms and ammunition concealed under their houses, and were to give aid when the negroes should begin." One of the conspiring slaves said that it was "the common run of poor white people" who were involved.

In return, blacks helped whites in need. One black runaway told of a slave woman who had received fifty lashes of the whip for giving food to a white neighbor who was poor and sick.

When the Brunswick canal was built in Georgia, the black slaves and white Irish workers were segregated, the excuse being that they would do violence against one another. That may well have been true, but Fanny Kemble, the famous actress and wife of a planter, wrote in her journal:

But the Irish are not only quarrelers, and rioters, and fighters, and drinkers, and despisers of [negroes] - they are a passionate, impulsive, warm-hearted, generous people, much given to powerful indignations, which break out suddenly when not compelled to smoulder sullenly-pestilent sympathizers too, and with a sufficient dose of American atmospheric air in their lungs, properly mixed with a right proportion of ardent spirits, there is no saying but what they might actually take to sympathy with the slaves, and I leave you to judge of the possible consequences.

You perceive, I am sure, that they can by no means be allowed to work together on the Brunswick Canal.

The need for slave control led to an ingenious device, paying poor whites - themselves so troublesome for two hundred years of southern history - to be overseers of black labor and therefore buffers for black hatred.

Important Information to Relate

- You do not agree that they should be slaves, yet you are afraid your husband will lose his job to them.

Activity/Directions

- Signal the group with a swinging lantern.
- Relate your story, then send them away lest you be caught at the docks.
- Send them to Campfire Circle



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