

Resources: “The Underground Railroad and Curriculum Enhancers”

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Research by Carol Montgomery (2011)

[www.ReadersTheaterAllYear.com](http://www.ReadersTheaterAllYear.com)

### **Books/Magazines:**

There are too many books/magazines to list. Check the J973.7 section of the library. Here are a few to consider:

Bound for the Northstar: True Stories of Fugitive Slaves by Dennis Brindell Fradin (new York: Clarion Books, 2000)

Although I borrowed this from the library, there are so many amazing stories in this unusual volume that I hope to get a copy someday. These are true accounts of escaped slaves—sometimes in their own words. Grade 6 and up.

Cobblestone (Feb.2003) Theme: “The Underground Railroad and the Anti-Slavery Movement” (This was in our county library.)

Of course Cobblestone is a magazine, so the format is attractive to students. This issue on discovering American history includes general information on the Underground Railroad as well as sections on “The Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850,” “The Rise of the Antislavery Movement,” a map of free and slave states with flight routes, “Spiritual Songs in Code,” and much more. Grade 4 and up.

The Underground Railroad for Kids—From Slavery to Freedom with 21 Activities by Mary Kay Carson (Chicago Review Press, 2003)

This well-organized wide paperback includes tons of information, photographs, and resources (e.g., more websites and books). The index makes it easy to locate specific information. Some students will enjoy it, but it has a lot for teachers. Grade 5 and up.

\* This next book may or may not be available in your county library. I had to first special order it from another library. I ordered a used copy online because I was so enthralled with what I had read about Harriet Tubman; I wanted to get as close to her original words as possible for our scripts. Since Harriet told her story to Sarah Bradford and Sarah wrote it down to raise money for Harriet, this is probably the closest you’ll come to knowing the truth about Harriet Tubman:

Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People by Sarah Bradford (You’ll find many publishers for this book. It appears to be under public domain.)

The first edition appeared in 1869. The second edition in 1886 was expanded to raise more money for Harriet. The original edition is online. (See “Curriculum Links.”)

### **Readers Theater All Year Scripts (as of Jan. 2011):**

- “Underground Railroad Codes”—Free Scripts:  
[http://rtallyear.live.subhub.com/articles/20101211\\_1](http://rtallyear.live.subhub.com/articles/20101211_1)
- “The Drinking Gourd”—Free Scripts:  
[http://rtallyear.live.subhub.com/articles/20101019\\_1](http://rtallyear.live.subhub.com/articles/20101019_1)
- “Harriet Tubman: Joe’s Journey”—Free Scripts  
[http://rtallyear.live.subhub.com/articles/20101011\\_3](http://rtallyear.live.subhub.com/articles/20101011_3)
- “Harriet Tubman: The Swamp Mystery”—Script Buffet (for members)
- “Civil Rights Meddle” (mentions slavery, but not the Underground Railroad)—Script Buffet (for members)

### **Curriculum Links (compiled from three of our scripts):**

<http://www.42explore2.com/undergrd.htm>

Lovely site with lots of extra links to explore on the Underground Railroad including: general information, news links, history of “The Drinking Gourd,” quilt history (secret messages in them) , Harriet Tubman, and a variety of creative activities (e.g., writing song lyrics, doing a webquest). Plus, there are even links to “websites by kids for kids” and special websites for teachers. Whew! This site could last a month of lessons easily! (Note: Sorry, I didn’t check to make sure all of their links worked.)

<http://www.freedomcenter.org>

This site from the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center has a section on “**Slavery Today**” as well as a **wealth** of information on The Underground Railroad. Some of what you read here will be unique. (They mention that there isn’t proof that quilts were used for secret messages. I assume that’s because it was oral tradition.)

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bradford/bradford.html>

Link to the original story of Harriet Tubman as told by Sarah Bradford, published in 1869. (Note: The story of Joe is told starting on page 27.)

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/tubman/>

Library of Congress list of online resources related to Harriet Tubman. Includes a black and white digital portrait of her that can be printed or downloaded. (Program cover?)

<http://myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=harriettubman>

Information and links on Harriet Tubman from The My Hero Project, celebrating “the best of humanity” and empowering young people to recognize their potential “to effect

positive change in the world.”

<http://jfredmacdonald.com/rddf/railwaytofreedom.htm>

Script from Richard Durham’s Destination Freedom—scripts from Radio Black Legacy 1948-1950 “Railway to Freedom” originally broadcast July 4, 1948. This radio script includes songs and covers Harriet Tubman’s life. It’s very mature; appropriate for high school. (Note: Harriet was injured in her head and had periodic blackouts. This script creatively mentions her hearing voices—voices of slaves, voices of her people, and the voice of God. She says in the script, “I was Moses. I answered them.”) The script could be used to rewrite and adapt as a Readers Theater script in small groups. Give each group a part if you like the script.

### **Bonus Student and Teacher Link:**

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/j9.html>

This site contains a “game” where the student can pretend to be a slave. There is a picture and a paragraph of information the student should read (or have read to him/her). The student then answers questions like “Do you want to continue your escape?” There is no animation, but a few of the slides have sound effects or clips of spirituals. There’s more for students to explore in the “For Kids” section, including a **photo of a secret hiding place** in a cupboard. A timeline puts events in perspective for your students.

The “Classroom Ideas” section has suggestions for grades K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. In grades 5-8 one of the suggestions is for groups of students to develop brief skits depicting part of an escaping slave’s journey. Hmm...maybe it would be easier if the students actually saw one of our Readers Theater All Year scripts on Harriet Tubman? It’s not always intuitive to include a narrator or two in a play. (Note: I am currently working on a curriculum for writing Readers Theater scripts.)

### **Songs of Freedom—Spirituals with Secret Messages**

<http://www.osblackhistory.com/songs.php>

Since singing was often a part of slave life, songs were used as secret communication. Songs could have double meanings as this site shows, listing seven spirituals and their lyrics. Unfortunately, there are no audios.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songs\\_of\\_the\\_Underground\\_Railroad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Songs_of_the_Underground_Railroad)

Students could explore this Wikipedia link, review the lyrics from the above link, and discuss whether or not they believe some of the spirituals had secret messages in them (i.e., “urban legend or truth”). Apparently some historians don’t believe the songs presented literal help for fugitive slaves—probably because they don’t have documented historical “proof”. Let your students build their critical thinking skills and vote or debate.

<http://www.wqln.org/main/Television/Original%20Productions/Safe%20Harbor/Film/InterviewTranscripts/Dobard/HiddenMeanings.htm>

There is a section in the 40-minute documentary about fugitive slaves, “Safe Harbor,” on the Underground Railroad that covers the hidden meaning in spirituals. I have not seen this documentary, but I’m interested in checking the library resources for it. You may order it for about \$25.00 online. Let me know if you like it. Here’s their home page: <http://www.wqln.org/main/television/original%20productions/Safe%20Harbor/index.htm>

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<http://www.authentichistory.com/1600-1859/spirituals/index.html>

Finally, a website that has a few of the audios for the spirituals sung during the time of the Underground Railroad (e.g., “Steal Away”...). I haven’t done the research to know how many of these songs are believed to have been used with the Underground Railroad, but perhaps your students could do the research on the time period, review the lyrics, listen to the songs, and present their findings? Consider letting them work with a buddy or a small group.

NOTE: Students could do research or check the local library Cds to locate specific songs that are not included in the audios in the link above.

### **You Tube (from links on one of our scripts):**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PohCmDe7klY>

Wonderful, four-minute slide show on Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. done by students reading their script.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePJajGdbEug&feature=related>

“A Woman Called Moses” is a well-done, one-minute slide show on Harriet Tubman by a student reading her script.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCy-c4EQVWQ&feature=related>

**A fully dramatized one-minute film clip entitled “A Part of Our Heritage—Underground Railroad.” Let this clip load all the way before you play it.** The drama could make some cry, but there is no violence. You really must see this and see if it’s appropriate for your students. There is nothing like experiencing history with your own emotions.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlwDAwKNfTU>

Well-done 6 1/2 min slide show by another student entitled, “**Digital Story: Secrets and Codes of the Underground Railroad.**” The author even dips slightly into the secret codes on some quilts hung out to air.

### **Bonus Link on “Songs of Slavery” by Latino Students**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAs\\_ZmtuKOg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAs_ZmtuKOg)

Narrated by Latino students, this slide show recounts part of the history of slavery in the United States. “Wade in the Water” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd”—two songs from the Underground Railroad—are briefly explained with the songs playing in the background. Perhaps your students would want to write and produce a similar video documentary?