INTRODUCTION TO THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

What was the Underground Railroad?

OVERVIEW

Students learn about the Underground Railroad and why slaves used it.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit: http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/introduction-underground-railroad/

DIRECTIONS

1. Activate students' prior knowledge about slavery.
Display for students the interactive The Underground Railroad: The Journey. Read aloud the text of The Journey as students follow along. Ask: What is a slave? Elicit from students that a slave is someone who is legally owned by another person and forced to work for that person without pay. Have students share their impressions of slavery. Discuss some of the conditions of the slaves, such as harsh working conditions, hunger, and separation from family members.

2. Introduce the phrase “Underground Railroad.”
Ask students to define the terms underground and railroad as they are used in everyday language. Then explain the historical meaning of this phrase. Tell students that the Underground Railroad was a group of people who secretly helped slaves travel from states where people kept slaves to states or areas
where they would be free. Show students the map Underground Railroad: Routes to Freedom. Ask students to define each term in this historical context. Elicit from students that:

- *Underground* means “hidden.”
- *Railroad* means “path” or “route.”

Tell students that once slaves escaped, they had to keep their experience a secret or they might be caught and returned to their lives as slaves.

3. **Navigate the Underground Railroad interactive.**
Continue to navigate through the Underground Railroad interactive. Read aloud the text as students follow along. Ask students to describe the dangers they hear about. Have students vote to choose which decisions to make as you move through the interactive.

4. **Have students brainstorm questions about the Underground Railroad.**
Ask students: *What are you curious about? What would you like to learn more about?*

**Extending the Learning**

Move on to the next activity in this series: *The Underground Railroad Route.*

**OBJECTIVES**

**Subjects & Disciplines**

- *Geography*
  - *Human Geography*

**Learning Objectives**

Students will:
• define the phrase
describe an escaped slave's journey to freedom

Teaching Approach

• Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

• Brainstorming
• Discussions
• Multimedia instruction

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

• Critical Thinking Skills
  • Remembering
• Geographic Skills
  • Acquiring Geographic Information
  • Asking Geographic Questions

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

• Theme 2:
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

• **Standard 1:**
  How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

• **Standard 17:**
  How to apply geography to interpret the past

PREPARATION

What You’ll Need

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

• Internet Access: Required
• Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector, Speakers
• Plug-Ins: Flash

PHYSICAL SPACE

• Classroom

GROUPING

• Large-group instruction

RESOURCES PROVIDED: MAPS

• [The Underground Railroad](#)

RESOURCES PROVIDED: INTERACTIVES
BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

The Underground Railroad helped people escape slavery. It was made up of secret routes, safe houses, and guides to lead slaves to places where they could be free. The Underground Railroad is a symbol of the struggle for freedom.

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- How Slaves Found Their Way North
- The Underground Railroad Route

Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>slave</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>person who is owned by another person or group of people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slavery</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>process and condition of owning another human being or being owned by another human being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground Railroad</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>system used by abolitionists between 1800-1865 to help American slaves escape to free states.</td>
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For Further Exploration

Picture Books

Websites

• PBS: The Underground Railroad
• National Parks Service: Aboard the Underground Railroad
• Maryland Public Television: Pathways to Freedom—Maryland & the Underground Railroad

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