

RESOURCE LIBRARY
ACTIVITY : 30 MINS

Introduction to the Underground Railroad

Students learn about the Underground Railroad and why enslaved people used it.

GRADES

1, 2

SUBJECTS

Geography, Human Geography

CONTENTS

2 Resources

OVERVIEW

Students learn about the Underground Railroad and why enslaved people 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 an enslaved person?* Elicit from students that a enslaved person 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 enslaved people, 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 enslaved people travel from states where people kept enslaved people 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 enslaved people escaped, they had to keep their experience a secret or they might be caught and returned to their lives as enslaved people.

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 enslaved person'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:](#)

Time, Continuity, and Change

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

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

Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
enslaved person	<i>noun</i>	person who is owned by another person or group of people.
slavery	<i>noun</i>	process and condition of owning another human being or being owned by another human being.
Underground Railroad	<i>noun</i>	system used by abolitionists between 1800-1865 to help enslaved African Americans escape to free states.

For Further Exploration

Picture Books

- [Winter, Jeanette. Follow the Drinking Gourd. New York: Knopf, 1988.](#)

Websites

- [PBS: The Underground Railroad](#)
- [National Parks Service: Aboard the Underground Railroad](#)
- [Maryland Public Television: Pathways to Freedom—Maryland & the Underground Railroad](#)

