

RESOURCE LIBRARY
ACTIVITY : 40 MINS

The Underground Railroad Route

Students will identify slave states and free states during the time of the Underground Railroad, explore the challenges of escaping, and choose the route they would have taken.

GRADES

1, 2

SUBJECTS

Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography

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OVERVIEW

Students will identify slave states and free states during the time of the Underground Railroad, explore the challenges of escaping, and choose the route they would have taken.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/underground-railroad-route/>

DIRECTIONS

1. Have students identify slave states and free states during the time of the Underground Railroad.

Provide each student with a copy of the map "Routes to Freedom." Tell students that the Underground Railroad helped enslaved people as they moved from the South to the North. Explain the map key to students. Then have students pinpoint each slave state on the map as you say its name:

- Alabama

- Arkansas
- Delaware
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana (Note that this state does not appear on the map. Use a wall map of the United States to have students pinpoint Montana.)
- North Carolina
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Virginia

Tell students that enslaved people did not have maps, compasses, or GPS units. Most enslaved people were never allowed to receive an education, and so could not read or write. Ask: *How do you think enslaved people knew they were going in the right direction?* Tell students that enslaved people relied on guides in the Underground Railroad, as well as memorization, images, and spoken communication.

2. Discuss the challenges of the journey.

Explain to students that escaping enslaved people using the Underground Railroad were always in danger of being caught. Ask students to look at the map and notice the physical features of the land that made the journey difficult. Have them highlight the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Model for students how to shade the area where the Appalachian Mountains lie—starting in Alabama and extending northeast through Maine and into Canada. Have students shade their own maps. Ask: *What else do you think made the journey hard?* Have them brainstorm challenges, such as:

- being cold and outside in winter
- not having enough food
- being tired but not able to rest
- having to swim or cross bodies of water
- having to travel long distances
- running from people or animals

3. Have students choose the route they would have taken.

Divide students into small groups. Ask each group to look at the map and pick the route they would have taken to freedom. Students should choose based on the states, rivers, or mountain ranges they would have to cross. Have each group describe the route they would have taken and why.

Informal Assessment

Have students share what they consider the greatest challenges to escaping enslaved people, such as distance, weather, mountains, wildlife, bodies of water, or populated areas. Ask them to describe how their chosen route would have helped enslaved people to avoid those challenges.

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography

- [Human Geography](#)
- [Physical Geography](#)

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- identify slave states and free states during the time of the Underground Railroad
- describe the challenges of the journey
- describe the route they would have taken and explain their reasoning

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Discussions

- Hands-on learning

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Remembering
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Acquiring Geographic Information
 - Analyzing Geographic Information

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

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Highlighters
- Paper
- Pencils
- Pens
- Wall map of the United States

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

- Internet Access: Optional
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom, Projector

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

GROUPING

- Large-group instruction

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

As enslaved people escaped through the Underground Railroad, they moved from one region of the United States to another. Looking at their routes helps you to understand some of the difficulties of the journey.

Prior Knowledge

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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

Interactives

- [National Geographic Education: The Underground Railroad](#)

Websites

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

