

HARRIET TUBMAN TAKES THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Harriet Tubman was a person who was born into slavery. She was owned by Edward Brodess, a Bucktown, Maryland, farmer who also owned Harriet's mother.

Years before her birth, Harriet's grandparents had been kidnapped and taken away from their African homeland, the area now called Ghana. When Harriet's grandparents were brought to this country, they were sold into slavery. That meant their children and their grandchildren would be slaves, too.

Even as a child, Harriet thought slavery was wrong. She was often beaten and whipped by her overseers, the people in charge of the slaves. Once, she tried to stop an overseer from beating another slave. The overseer hit her in the head with a two-pound weight. Harriet lived, but for the rest of her life, she had blackouts and dizzy spells.

Harriet Tubman risked her life to help slaves to freedom.



The Language of the Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad had certain code words. This helped keep abolitionists safe when they talked about the secret escape routes that runaways used.

For example, the abolitionists who helped runaway slaves were called "agents." The safe houses where "agents" lived were known as "stations" on the Underground Railroad. And the people like Harriet Tubman, who helped guide the runaways farther and farther north, were the Underground Railroad's "conductors."

Harriet Runs to Freedom

In 1849, when she was about 28 years old, Harriet heard she was to be sold to an owner in the deep South. She decided she would run away instead. She thought to herself, "There's two things I've a

right to—Death or Liberty. One or t'other I mean to have."

Legend has it that Harriet told her parents she would let them know when she was leaving by walking past where they were



Slaves head north to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

\$100 REWARD!

RUNAWAY

From the undersigned, living on Current River, about twelve miles above Doniphan, in Ripley County, Mo., on 3rd of March, 1860, A. J. TUCKER, about 30 years old, weighs about 160 pounds; high forehead, with a scar on it; had on brown pants and coat very much worn, and an old black wool hat; shoes size No. 11.

The above reward will be given to any person who may apprehend this said negro or of the State; and fifty dollars if apprehended in this State outside of Ripley county, or 200 if taken in Ripley county.

A. J. TUCKER.

This poster announces a reward for the return of runaway slaves.

working while she sang this song: "When that old chariot comes, I'm going to leave you, I'm boun' for the Promised Land. . . ." The words to the song secretly told the listeners that Harriet was leaving. She was going north.

That night, Harriet ran away. Eventually, she found freedom in the free state of Pennsylvania. Years later, Harriet said that when she finally crossed the border into Pennsylvania, "I looked at my hands to see if I were the same person. Now I was free."

Harriet Tubman Helps Others

Harriet Tubman arrived in Philadelphia in 1849. By the end of 1850, though, she was headed back to the South. She was not going back to stay. Instead, she was going to lead other runaway slaves along the paths that she had

followed to freedom. She was going to become a conductor on the Underground Railroad

"Underground Railroad" was the name given to the secret series of routes and safe houses that helped runaway slaves get from the South to the North, where freedom awaited. It is said that the Underground Railroad got its name when a slave owner exclaimed that a runaway had disappeared so suddenly, it was as if he had "gone off on some underground road."

Slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad followed the North Star. That way, they were sure they continued to travel north. In some houses along the way, abolitionists lived. These abolitionists—both white people and black people—offered runaway slaves food and a safe place to rest and perhaps some money and clothes. Sometimes, the slaves could even get a boat or wagon ride to the next safe house on the route.

Every time an abolitionist helped a runaway, that abolitionist was breaking the law. That is because in 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive [runaway] Slave Act. That act made it illegal to give aid to runaway slaves.

Every time Harriet Tubman made the perilous journey on the Underground Railroad, she broke that law, too. She also risked being caught and returned to slavery. In fact, slave owners offered a huge reward for her capture!

For the next ten years, Harriet continued to risk her life and her freedom to help runaway slaves. In 19 trips on the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman guided some 300 slaves to freedom in the North.

Show What You Know

Look at the picture below on this page. It is based on a true story. The white children playing in the snow are only pretending to play. They are the children of abolitionists, and they know that the men going by on horseback are slave catchers. The slave catchers are looking for the family of runaways who are hiding in the snow fort.

What happens next? Does the family escape? Do the abolitionists get in trouble? Use a sheet of paper, and draw a picture of what you think will happen next to the family of runaways. Or, if you wish, you can write a paragraph describing the next thing that happens in the runaways' journey.

