

## **Slavery, the Civil War & Reconstruction The Underground Railroad**

The Underground Railroad was not a railroad. It wasn't underground either. But it did help show thousands of black men and women the way from the slavery of the south to freedom in the north.

Before the Civil War, it was illegal to help slaves escape because slaves were considered property. However, many people thought slavery was morally wrong. They were willing to put themselves at risk to help slaves escape. The Underground Railroad is the story of men and women who hid slaves in their homes and on their farms as they made their journey to freedom. The stops along the way were called "stations," just like the stations on a railroad train. Each house told the **fugitives**<sup>1</sup> where they would find the next friendly house. The railroad was so secret that each station along the way knew only about the house before it and the house after it. That way no one could tell on the entire system and find out the whole route of the Underground Railroad.

Slaves often traveled only by night to avoid capture. Before they reached their first house, the North Star was their only guide to freedom. The North Star is the first star that appears in the night sky. By following it, slaves could be sure that they were traveling north.

The people who helped slaves escape were called **conductors**<sup>2</sup>. Harriet Tubman is one of the most famous conductors. After she escaped herself, she risked her life again and again to help hundreds of other men and women escape. Harriet Tubman refused to let slaves turn back once they were in her group on the Underground Railroad. White men might capture anyone who left. Then the whole group would be in danger. She would never allow this to happen. Legend says she would pull out a gun and tell the nervous person, "You'll be free or die a slave." No one ever disobeyed her, and they all reached freedom.

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<sup>1</sup> **fugitives** – people who are running away

<sup>2</sup> **conductor** – a person who leads others

She was **selfless**<sup>1</sup> her whole life. During the Civil War she worked as a nurse and a spy for the Union army. She would tell Northern generals where the Southern troops were. The **gravestone**<sup>2</sup> of this truly remarkable woman reads: “Servant of God, well done.”

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<sup>1</sup> **selfless** – not concerned about oneself but instead thinking of others

<sup>2</sup> **gravestone** – a stone placed at a person’s grave as a marker

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Harriet Tubman can be described as
  - a. courageous and lazy
  - b. mean and brave
  - c. courageous and hard-working
  - d. diligent and lazy
  
2. Which of the following is *not* an example of how the Underground Railroad was secretive?
  - a. Fugitives traveled by night.
  - b. Runaway slaves were hidden in homes.
  - c. Each station only knew the station before and after it.
  - d. Harriet Tubman let scared slaves return to their owners.
  
3. It can be said that Harriet Tubman “never lost a passenger.” What does this mean?
  - a. She never got lost.
  - b. She collected money from everyone who traveled with her.
  - c. She guided all of the slaves following her to freedom.
  - d. None of her slaves ever got lost in the dark.
  
4. Why was it illegal to help runaway slaves?
  - a. Runaway slaves were dangerous people.
  - b. At that time, slaves were considered property.
  - c. The masters decided it was illegal.
  - d. The North felt that it should be.
  
5. The passage “The Underground Railroad” is mostly about
  - a. how railroads helped the Union defeat the Confederacy.
  - b. a famous machine built by Harriet Tubman.
  - c. a system that helped slaves escape to the North.
  - d. laws about helping slaves escape to the North.

6. Name two ways that Harriet Tubman risked her life to help others.

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7. Why were conductors important to helping slaves reach the North?

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8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

Many people, \_\_\_\_\_ Harriet Tubman, worked hard to help slaves make it to the North.

- a. in spite of
- b. as a result of
- c. instead
- d. including

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

When Harriet Tubman led slaves to the North, she didn't let them turn back.

Who? \_\_\_\_\_

(didn't) What? let slaves turn back

When? \_\_\_\_\_

10. **Vocabulary Word:** selfless: not concerned about oneself but think of others.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Teacher Guide and Answers

**Passage Reading Level:** Lexile 790

**Featured Text Structure:** Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

**Passage Summary:** The Underground Railroad wasn't a railroad and it wasn't physically underground. It was an important system that helped slaves escape to the north. People who helped slaves escape were called conductors. One of the most famous conductors was Harriet Tubman.

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  - a. courageous and lazy
  - b. mean and brave
  - c. courageous and hard-working**
  - d. diligent and lazy
  
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5. The passage “The Underground Railroad” is mostly about
  - a. how railroads helped the Union defeat the Confederacy.
  - b. a famous machine built by Harriet Tubman.
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  - d. laws about helping slaves escape to the North.

6. Name two ways that Harriet Tubman risked her life to help others.

**Suggested answer:** Harriet Tubman risked her life as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, and as a spy for the Union Army during the Civil War.

7. Why were conductors important to helping slaves reach the North?

**Suggested answer:** Conductors were important to helping slaves reach the North because not all slaves knew exactly how to get to the North without getting caught.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

Many people, \_\_\_\_\_ Harriet Tubman, worked hard to help slaves make it to the North.

- a. in spite of
- b. as a result of
- c. instead
- d. including**

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

When Harriet Tubman led slaves to the North she didn't let them turn back.

Who? **Harriet Tubman**

(didn't) What? let slaves turn back

When? **when she led them to the North**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** selfless: not concerned about oneself but think of others.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.