

Lesson Plan Title: Slaves: Running to Freedom

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Course/Grade Level: 8th Grade Social Studies

Disclaimer: This unit involves the examination of sensitive material such as photographs of abused slaves, as well as graphic details of the punishment of escaped slaves. I would **not** recommend this unit for elementary students.

Overview of the Lesson: In this Internet based lesson, students will research and analyze the difficult decisions faced by runaway slaves, and the dangers they faced on their journey.

TEKS/TAKS

(8.1)(C); **(8.7)**(B),(C); **(8.8)**; **(8.11)**(A); **(8.30)**(A), (B), (C) (D); **8.32** (A), (B)

Objectives: The learner will

- View a map of the Underground Railroad to explain how geography created difficulties for those slaves who escaped.
- Read and analyze selected slave narratives to discover the tough decisions and conditions facing runaway slaves.

Time Required: 1-3 class periods

Materials Needed:

Transparency of Gordon, the runaway slave
Map of the Underground Railroad (group sets)
Slave Narrative (group sets)
Computers with Internet Access

Procedure

■ Introduction

1. Project the image of Gordon, the runaway slave.



Gordon, the runaway slave

From photographs by McPherson & Oliver.

Illus. in: Harper's weekly, 1863 July 4, p. 429.

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?fsaall,app,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,bbcards,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi:7:/temp/~pp_ep6m::displayType=1:m856sd=cph:m856sf=3b44593:@:@@mdb=fsaall,app,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,bbcards,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi

2. Have your students complete the following photo analysis worksheet from the Library of Congress. <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/98/dime/pguide.html> (This guide sheet is from another LOC lesson, but will work perfectly for this photograph.)

At first, expect your students to struggle with the questions, but encourage them to use their visual skills to make their best guesses about the photographs. Once everyone has had time to complete their analysis, have your students share their ideas, feelings, beliefs and interpretations of the photographs.

3. Pose the following questions:
 1. Who is this individual?
 2. What happened to him?
 3. How are the three photographs different? Why are they different?
 4. Why was this man beaten?
 5. Why would the prospect of freedom lead slaves to escape, particularly knowing the consequences they would face if captured?
 6. Have your students share any other comments/feelings.

While this image is disturbing, studying slave photographs as well as reading and analyzing slave narratives will allow students the opportunity to explore the dangerous decisions faced by runaway slaves.

Information to share with your students:

This article presents the incredible story and pictures of the Runaway Slave Gordon. Gordon escaped slavery in Mississippi by rubbing himself with onions, to foil the plantation owner's hounds, which had been sent to track Gordon down. Gordon effectively made it to Union forces stationed at Baton Rouge. The picture at the left shows Gordon in tattered clothes, showing the poor shape he was in upon finding refuge with the Union army. The center illustration shows Gordon's back, scared from endless brutal whippings at his master's hand. The third illustration shows Gordon in Union uniform, after joining the Union Army.

▪ **Activity #1**

In groups of 3 -4, have your students view the map of the Underground Railroad. Besides fearing slave catchers, what aspects of the geography might have posed difficulties for slaves trying to escape?



<http://education.ucdavis.edu/NEW/STC/lesson/socstud/railroad/Map.htm>

Map from "The Underground Railroad" Written and illustrated by Raymond Bial (1995).

After discussing the geographic issues facing runaway slaves, each group will read the Francis Fredric letter. After reading the transcribed letter, students should discuss the letter in order to complete the Written Document Analysis sheet.

NARA Written Document Analysis sheet: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/>
Click on the analysis sheet for documents – the worksheet will come up in pdf format.

Francis Fredric, *Fifty Years of Slavery* (1863)

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASrunaways.htm>

I had been flogged for going to a prayer-meeting, and, before my back was well, my master was going to whip me again. I determined, therefore, to run away. It was in the morning, just after my master had got his breakfast, I was ordered to the back of the premises to strip. My master had got the thong of raw cow's-hide; when off I ran, towards the swamp.

He saw me running, and instantly called three bloodhounds, kept for the purpose, and put them on my track. I saw them coming up to me, when, turning round to them, I clapped my hands, and called them by name; for I had been in the habit of feeding them. I urged them on, as if in pursuit of something else. They instantly passed me, and flew upon the cattle. I saw my master calling them off, and returning. No doubt, he perceived it was useless to pursue me, with dogs which knew me so well.

I now hurried on further, into a dismal swamp, named the Bear's Wallow; and, at last, wearied and exhausted, I sat down at the foot of a tree, to rest, and think what had best be done. I knelt down, and prayed earnestly to the Almighty, to protect and direct me what to do. I rose from my knees, and looked stealthily around, afraid that the dogs and men were still in pursuit. I listened, and listened again, to the slightest sound, made by the flapping of the wings of a bird, or the rustling of the wild animals among the underwood; and then proceeded further into the swamp. My path was interrupted, every now and then, by large sheets of stagnant, putrid, green-looking water, from which a most sickening, fetid smell arose; the birds, in their flight, turning away from it. The snakes crawled sluggishly across the ground, for it was autumn time, when, it is said, they are surcharged with their deadly poison.

When awake in the morning, I tried to plan out some way of escape, over the Ohio River, which I knew was about thirty miles from where I was. But I could not swim; and I was well aware that my master would set a watch upon every ferry or ford, and that the whole country would be put on the alert, to catch me; for the planters, for self-protection, take almost as much interest in capturing another man's slaves, as they do their own.

At length, driven by hunger and desperation, I approached the edge of the swamp; when I was startled by seeing a young woman ploughing. I knew her, and called her by name. She was frightened, and shocked at my appearance - worn, from hunger, almost to a skeleton; and haggard, from the want of sound sleep. I begged of her to go to get me something to eat. She, at first, expressed her fears, and began to tell me of the efforts which my master was making to capture me. He had offered \$500 reward - had placed a watch all along the Ohio River - had informed all the neighbouring planters, who had cautioned all their slaves not to give me any food or other assistance, and he had made it known, that, when I should be caught, he would give me a thousand lashes.

The woman went, and fetched me about two ounces of bread, of which I eat a small portion, wishing to keep the rest to eat in the swamp, husbanding it, as much as possible. When she told me that I should receive a thousand lashes, I felt horrified, and wept bitterly. The girl wept also. I had seen a slave, who had escaped to the Northern States, and, after an absence of four years, had been brought back again, and flogged, in the presence of all the slaves, assembled from the neighbouring plantations. His body was frightfully lacerated. I went to see him, two or three weeks after the flogging. When they were anointing his back, his screams were awful. He died, soon afterwards--a tall, fine young fellow, six feet high, in the prime of life, thus brutally murdered.

After each group has completed their analysis, ask students from each group to share their impressions of their letter. Due to the graphic details contained in the letter, allow time for the students to debrief their personal feelings and emotions. The completion of activity #1 will prepare student for the decisions they will make while traveling the Underground Railroad themselves in Activity 32.

▪ **Activity #2 – Computer Lab Assignment**

The website used for this activity is:

The Underground Railroad at the National Geographic website

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/features/99/railroad/j1.html>

Before logging on to the website, have your students create a 2 column chart. The first column should be labeled “Dangers Slaves Faced,” and the second column should be labeled “Things that Helped Slaves.”

Students should log on to the website and choose “Yes, I want to go.” As they following the trail, your students need look for the dangers as well as the things that helped escaping slaves that traveled the Underground Railroad in order to complete their charts. When the students have completed their journeys, allow them time to visit the other parts of the website (on the first page, above the picture of the field hands, click the arrow). Then, discuss their research – what were the dangers, how were the dangers approached, who helped the slaves, how were the slaves helped, etc.

▪ **Assessment – Journal Entry**

After the completion of the introduction, activity #1, and activity #2, the students are ready to write about their own journey as an escape slave. Each student will create a slave identity – name, family, where they work and live, etc. In addition to their personal information, their journal entry should include the following information:

- Why they chose to escape?
- What dangers did he/she face along the way?
- What things helped them in their journey?
- How did geography affect your travels?
- Did you arrive at your destination?
 - If you did not arrive, what happened?
 - If you did arrive, what happened?

After the completion of the assignment, give your students to opportunity to share their journal entries.

TAKS Test Question:

Abolition, the Underground Railroad, and the Dred Scott Case would all be included in a discussion of

- (a) banking
- (b) foreign affairs**
- (c) slavery
- (d) transportation

Document Source

Library of Congress

Picture of Gordon the Runaway slave

http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?fsaall,app,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,bbcads,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi:7:./temp/~pp_ep6m::displayType=1:m856sd=cph:m856sf=3b44593:@@mdb=fsaall,app,brum,detr,swann,look,gottscho,pan,horyd,genthe,var,cai,cd,hh,yan,bbcads,lomax,ils,prok,brhc,nclc,matpc,iucpub,tgmi

Photo Analysis Worksheet

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/98/dime/pguide.html>