

Becoming Kansas: The People and the Struggles

The Underground Railroad in Kansas: Angels of Freedom

Wakarusa River Valley Heritage Museum
The Underground Railroad in Kansas: Angels of Freedom
High School Lesson Plan

History, Government, and Social Studies Standard(s)

Standard #1: Choices have consequences.
Benchmarks:

- 1.1 The student will recognize and evaluate significant choices and consequences that have impacted our lives and futures.
- 1.2 The student will analyze the context and draw conclusions about choices and consequences.
- 1.3 The student will investigate and connect examples of choices and consequences with contemporary issues

Standard #2: Individuals have rights and responsibilities.
Benchmark:

- 2.1 The student will recognize and evaluate the rights and responsibilities of people living in societies.
- 2.2 The student will analyze the context and draw conclusions about rights and responsibilities.
- 2.3 The student will investigate and connect the rights and responsibilities of individuals with contemporary issues.

DOUGLAS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY-WATKINS MUSEUM OF HISTORY NEH AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN GRANT PROJECT: UNITED STORIES: REVITALIZING HERITAGE FIELDTRIPS IN DOUGLAS COUNTY, KANSAS



Overview



This plan is designed to support classroom instruction in history, government, and social studies at the intermediate and high school level. It can be completed in 1-3 hours depending upon how many pre and post activities and which displays you choose to include. The specific theme of this lesson is *The Underground Railroad: Angels of Freedom*.

Prior to arriving at the museum, review the key vocabulary with the class. Follow that by reviewing the foundation information with students. It may help to focus the conversation on the guiding questions:

How are you planning on making choices about your future?

What is the biggest change you have seen in the world in your lifetime?

Do you feel free? Why or why not?

Foundation Information:

A responsibility is a duty or obligation to perform or complete.

- Identities are who we are, the way we think about ourselves, and how we view the world.
- Beliefs are considered or accepted by individuals as true, and impact behaviors and reactions.

The classroom teacher should review the information in the Overview prior to arriving at the museum. Ensure that students understand the terms choice and consequence as well as how they are connected.

Key vocabulary to front load:

Stations – the places on the Underground Railroad that sheltered runaway enslaved persons, often these were homes, barns, churches and businesses of anti-slavery sympathizers.

Conductor – a person who guided runaway slaves from place to place along the routes of the Underground Railroad.

Border ruffians – a group of proslavery Missourians who crossed the border into Kansas to vote illegally, raid towns and intimidate anti-slavery settlers.

By 1854, when the Kansas-Nebraska Territories were opened for settlement, underground railroads had been in operation for decades and had helped tens of thousands of enslaved people escape to freedom. Whether highly organized or loosely planned, these men and women assisted freedom seekers northward to escape slavery. When these territories opened, not only did they offer new opportunities for underground railroad operations, but they also created prospects for the expansion of slavery on the frontier. Of course, the Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad. It was given that name because its activities were conducted in secrecy and because railroad terms were used in the conduct of the system.

Clandestine - kept secret or done secretly
Abolitionist – a person who sought to end the practice of slavery in the United States. A majority of early abolitionists were white, but some of the prominent leaders of the movement were escaped or freed black men and women.

Freedom seekers – an enslaved person who takes action to obtain freedom from slavery, either by attempting escape on their own or through the Underground Railroad; also known as “passengers” or “cargo”

It consisted of networks of ‘stations’ kept by ‘conductors’ or ‘station keepers’ who provided food, shelter and wagon transportation from one station to another along the line of travel to freedom. Those who were members of the Underground Railroad put themselves and their families at great risk. It was a dangerous, clandestine undertaking. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made helping freedom seekers a federal crime punishable by six months in prison and a \$1,000 fine. Five years later, the proslavery Kansas territorial government enacted legislation saying any person who spoke, wrote or printed materials for the purpose of assisting escaped enslaved people would be found guilty of a felony and sentenced to death.

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DISCUSSION/TOUR

Do a quick prior knowledge check by asking students to share what the Underground Railroad was and how it operated.

Allow students to browse the main room at the front of the museum. After they have had time to look at the variety of exhibits, ask them the leading questions below and then move to the Hand On Activity on the right.



LEADING QUESTIONS

What do you see in this room that interests you?

What do all the exhibits have in common?

How many times do you think you saw the term “Underground Railroad”? (Provide students with a minute to review the exhibits and count if time allows.)



HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

Divide students into small groups.

Provide each group with a copy of slide 7 – the information about the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.



LEADING QUESTIONS

Ask students to read and discuss the information on the handout in their groups. Once they have completed their reading call on a group to answer each of the following questions:

What were the implications of the Act for the slaveholding states?

What were the implications of the Act for the free states?

What moral dilemma existed around helping fugitive enslaved people?

Student Support

Printed copy of slide 7 for each group.

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DISCUSSION/TOUR

Move the students as a group to the Angels of Freedom display. Be sure to share that the inspiration for the display came from the book *Angels of Freedom*, researched and written by Martha Parker, the museum's founder. Explain that this book tells the story of the men and women of the Wakarusa Valley who showed a commitment to the anti-slavery movement.

One-by-one or as whole families, free staters came to the Wakarusa Valley from Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Iowa and other states after the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. They may have come for free land or to make Kansas a free state. Those who settled in and around the Wakarusa Valley were predominantly anti-slavery men and fought along with those they were trying to free from bondage. Some of the early white settlers expressed their view on slavery in letters, books or oral testimony to their children and grandchildren.

Some divulged their Underground Railroad activities. Others expressed anti-slavery sentiments but did not go so far as to state they were involved in the Underground Railroad. The degree of involvement varied. Some served as actual "conductors" while others as friends of those trying to escape.

Ask the leading question below then move to the Hands-On Activity to the right.



LEADING QUESTION

What do you now know about the Wakarusa Valley that made it attractive to those who were members of the Underground Railroad?



HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

Provide each group with a copy of the book *Angels of Freedom*. Ask each group to locate a quote or story from Ms. Parker's book that they think represents why people became members of the Underground Railroad.

Once each group has made their selection have a member of the group read it out loud. Ask another group member to share why they chose that selection.



LEADING QUESTIONS

What character traits are represented by your selection?

What do you think prompted Martha Parker to write the book *Angels of Freedom*?

Student Support

One copy of the *Angels of Freedom* book for each group.
Notecards, pens, paper

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DISCUSSION/TOUR

Have students take one last scan of the room looking for persons, families, towns or displays that are related to the Underground Railroad. Explain that they will be using the information from the displays used in the next hands-on activity. They may also find that some facts listed below may be useful as they complete the hands-on activity.

- Although it is impossible to know exact figures, the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program estimates as many as 2,000 people escaped slavery or the threat of the return into slavery from 1854 to 1865 because of the availability of the Underground Railroad in Kansas.
- Nationally, the number of freedom seekers who used the Underground Railroad is estimated to be more than 100,000.
- Because Kansas was a new frontier, farms and towns were few and far between and it was increasingly difficult to send freedom seekers from station to station quickly.
- The 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution abolished slavery in 1865, and the operations of the Underground Railroad — once so secretive — were revealed. Today, more than 80 sites in Kansas — homes, churches, forts, cemeteries, museums — help tell the story of the Underground Railroad.



LEADING QUESTION

Why would a freed person return to the Wakarusa Valley to make their home after 1865?



HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

Give each group several notecards, pens and paper.

Have each group select one of the following to work with:

- Two persons, from the Angels of Freedom display
- One family display from the Angels of Freedom display
- One other display that contains information related to the UGR

AND

Have each group select one of the following tasks to complete and share with the group:

- Write interview questions to ask one of the Angels of Freedom on a notecard and the answers to those on another.
- Write a newspaper article relating the story of your selected person or topic.
- Create a wanted poster for your chosen person or family.

Be sure to allow enough time for each group to share their finished product.

When each group completes their presentation allow other students to respond and ask questions.

Student Support

Notecards, pens, paper



Wrap Up Activity

Remind the students of the topic of their tour today: The Underground Railroad: Angels of Freedom.

Ask students to share which was their favorite exhibit or artifact, and why.



Leading Questions

- Would you have gone against the law and your family to help as the Angels of Freedom did?
- Are there any social issues in our society today that would cause you to break the law for moral issues?
- Why is the Underground Railroad considered the first civil rights movement in the United States?

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

The United States had recently acquired a vast territory ~ the result of its war with Mexico. Should the territory allow slavery, or should it be declared free? Or maybe the inhabitants should be allowed to choose for themselves?

Washington, D.C. - not only did the nation's capital allow slavery, but it was also home to one of the largest slave markets in North America.

The Fugitive Slave Act, which was a part of the Compromise of 1850, was the most controversial bill in Congress at that time. It required citizens to assist in the recovery of fugitive enslaved people. It denied a fugitive's right to a jury trial. (Cases would instead be handled by special commissioners who would be paid \$5 if an alleged fugitive were released and \$10 if he or she were sent back to their owner.) The act called for changes in filing for a claim, making the process easier for slaveowners. Also, according to the act, there would be more federal officials responsible for enforcing the law.

For fugitives attempting to build lives in the North, the new law was disaster. Many left their homes and fled to Canada. During the next ten years, an estimated 20,000 Black people moved to the neighboring country. For Harriet Jacobs, a fugitive living in New York, passage of the law was "the beginning of a reign of terror to the colored population." She stayed put, even after learning that slave catchers were hired to track her down. Anthony Burns, a fugitive living in Boston, was one of many who were captured and returned to slavery. Free Black people, too, were captured and sent to the South. With no legal right to plead their cases, they were completely defenseless.

Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act made abolitionists even more resolved to put an end to slavery. The Underground Railroad became more active, reaching its peak between 1850 and 1860. The act also brought the subject of slavery before the nation. Many who had previously been undecided about slavery now took a definite stance against it.