

theatreworksUSA  
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# FREEDOM TRAIN



## Study Guide

### About the Play

Harriet Tubman (1815?-1913), born a slave, devoted all of her time to freeing others. She was a strong and powerful person, and a woman of action. To help her through times of great stress and confusion she turned to prayer. One of the prayers that always gave her great strength was "Lord, you have been with me through six troubles, be with me through the seventh." She repeatedly faced danger and possible death at state boundary lines dividing freedom from slavery and became so famous for doing so that her nickname, "Moses," echoed from the plantations of the South to the free "promised land" of the North. She is one of the few women of her time to have had several books written about her during her lifetime.

Harriet was 25 when she made her perilous escape from a Maryland plantation, leaving her family and all other loved ones behind. During those times a woman -- especially a black woman -- traveling alone was unheard of. Nonetheless, pursued by murderous slave catchers who would do anything to catch her and collect the very large rewards being offered for her capture (including tracking her with dogs), she followed an escape route laid out by a community of people called "Quakers." Secret hiding places along the route included churches, cellars, barns and homes. When she finally arrived in Philadelphia (out of "Egypt" and into the "Promised Land") she said, "I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person now I was free. There was such a glory over everything! The sun came through like gold through the trees and over the fields, and I felt like I was in heaven."

The escape route that Harriet followed was known as the Underground Railroad, and through her skill as a woods woman and her bravery, she quickly became one of its most celebrated "conductors." Up creek beds, through swamps, over hills, through dark and dangerous wooded areas, on a total of nineteen secret trips, Harriet Tubman led more than 300 slaves (including the rest of her family) to freedom. In her papers she wrote, "I never ran my train off the track, and I never lost a passenger."

**FREEDOM TRAIN** tells the story of Harriet Tubman -- the "Moses" of her people -- in an exciting series of highly theatrical scenes that use mime, as well as the language, clothing, and music of the period. **FREEDOM TRAIN** is a story about courage, dedication, equality, and survival against all odds; it is also laced with love, warmth, and a sense of humor that celebrates the human spirit. It is a universal story that speaks to people of all races, religions, and ages.

### BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY:

1. Discuss the concept of slavery, inviting the class to tell, draw, or improvise feelings of being enslaved. Discuss slavery as an institution. Keep notes for a class discussion after the performance.

**Section 2 THEATRES AND PERFORMING ART CENTERS (Schools and spaces with limited technical capabilities please skip ahead to Section 3.)**

1. **STAGE** We require a playing space of 30' X 30' with a minimum stage height of 14'. Masking will be determined by the size of the playing space and should be discussed with the SM during the advance. If there is a main drape we will want to use it and there should be someone available to operate it.
2. **SOUND** We travel with our own sound system that is run by the Stage Manager. Although we are self-contained, if there is a house system available that we can easily tie into, it may be preferable. We will require someone to help with the sound set up, especially if we are using part of the venue's system.
  - a. We travel with 6 wireless body mics. Please make the SM aware of any unusable radio frequencies specific to your area.
  - b. For the mix position, our SM can set up in the wings on either SL or SR. If there is sufficient cabling and/or an option to run sounds and call the show from the front of house it is preferable. Please provide additional lighting if necessary.
  - c. We will require COM from the SM mix position to the lighting person. If it is possible, we like to have an additional on deck stage hand also on COM to help trouble shoot issues during the run.
3. **LIGHTS** We will require 1 person to help set up the looks and run the light board during the show.
  - a. We require only a few simple looks with the possibility of a couple of specials. If colour isn't available, we ask for a bright look with the ability of a Black Out and an option to go dim.
  - b. If colour is available, we simply ask for a warm wash and a cool wash that includes down, front and side light. We may also require a blue out. Please discuss specifics and availability with the SM when advancing.
4. **DRESSING ROOMS** We require a minimum of 2 properly heated/ ventilated dressing rooms close to the stage and containing mirrors and outlets. 2 large chorus rooms should suffice. If only smaller rooms are available, we may require more than the minimum.
5. **FRONT OF HOUSE** We travel with an AEA house board that should be set up in full view of the incoming audience. If you could provide an easel to display said board. (a chair or music stand are also adequate.)

**Section 3. SCHOOLS AND SPACES WITH LIMITED TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES**

1. **STAGE/ PLAYING AREA** We require a playing area of 30' X 30', with a height of 14'. IF your playing space is smaller please let the SM know in the advance so we can make adjustments to the set up and performance.
  - a. If we are playing in a gymnasium, cafetorium, etc. please also make the SM aware. Include information about the specific size of the playing space, and if there is the possibility of wings or other masking. If no masking is available it is fine, we just like to have as much of a plan as possible when heading into the venue.
  - b. We will require 6 or 7 chairs and 2 or 3 tables to help with prop and costume storage during the run. Again, check with the SM during the advance for specifics.
  - c. Windows and doorways should be shaded to keep outside light from coming into the performance area.
2. **SOUND** We travel with a self-contained sound system with 6 wireless mics. We will require regular 110 volt outlets. Please provide additional extension cords if the outlets are not easily accessible or very far from the playing space. We will require an additional table for the stage manager to set up and run the sound system from. This will be in front of the playing space.
3. **LIGHTS** Our needs are very simple. Do not worry if you do not have a sophisticated lighting system. The most important thing for us is that the playing space is adequately lit. Please take time before our arrival to ensure any burned out bulbs have been replaced. We do, however, prefer to avoid fluorescent lighting when possible. Regardless of your systems ability, we will require someone to help work the lights before and during the performance.
4. **DRESSING ROOMS** We require a minimum of 1 extra room close to the stage and bathroom facilities. It needs to be properly heated/ ventilated with available outlets and windows and doors should be covered to ensure the actor's privacy. This room will be where the actors dress and prepare for the performance, but also where they will keep their personal belongings while the show is performing. If an extra classroom is not available, sometimes a faculty room, nurse's office, or other administrative office will work. Band and chorus rooms can also be helpful as they are often closer to the stage. Please ensure there is something available and discuss it with the SM in the advance.
  - a. Storage or janitorial closets cannot be used for this purpose due to Safe & Sanitary restrictions imposed by the union.
5. **FRONT OF HOUSE** We have a "House Board" that will need to be displayed in full view of the incoming audience. We will need you to provide either an easel or chair to display the board. Other suggestions can be made by the SM the day of.
  - a. Make sure all buzzers and bells have been silenced before the start of the performance.

2. How do people become enslaved -- by poverty, by a bad habit, by accident of birth, etc.? How does this expand your definition of slavery?
3. Discuss the old South in words and pictures, giving a representative viewpoint of the period. Compare and contrast the old South with the new South. What are some of the reasons for the differences?
4. What did it mean to be black during the time of slavery? What did it mean to be white? What does each mean today? Ask students of one race what they think it would feel like to be of a different race.
5. Do you think that black people are in some ways enslaved today? If so, how?

#### AFTER SEEING THE PLAY:

1. What was the Underground Railroad? What sort of "underground" systems do we have in our society and why do they exist? Are they necessary?
2. Play and/or discuss some of the traditional music from the period, beginning with the songs in the play (such as "Follow the Drinking Gourd," "Steal Away," and "Get on Board."). Why was this music created? Are there "messages" in more recent music (U2, Nirvana, Public Enemy, R.E.M., Biggie Smalls, Rage Against the Machine, Beastie Boys, etc.)? Are there some styles of music that seem more suited to delivering a message than others?
3. Ask the students why they think Harriet Tubman did what she did. (For herself? For her people? For white as well as black people? For an ideal?) Is it important to develop that same sort of commitment as individuals in today's society? How can we do this?
4. Can you name other people who fight for human rights?
5. Discuss the Supreme Court's Dred Scott Decision (mentioned in the play). How did it affect the quality of life in the North and in the South?
6. Review the students' discussion of the "concept of slavery" and "slavery as an institution" held before seeing the play. After seeing FREEDOM TRAIN, have their ideas been changed?

#### For Further Research

1. What was being a female slave like -- were there specific issues that black women had to deal with in the time of slavery?
2. What were conditions like for blacks in the North during this time period? What does "being sold down South" mean? Why did blacks have this fear?

3. Discuss the abolitionist movement in the United States. What kind of people were abolitionists -- male, female, Northerners, Southerners, of a certain religion? Was the movement totally united? Does it tie in with any other reform movements during that time?
  4. How did the Civil War and the abolition of slavery affect the economic system in the U.S.? Were the effects different in the North and in the South?
  5. Were there other countries that imported slaves from Africa and elsewhere? If so, what were conditions like for these slaves?
  6. Who were some other slaves who made great achievements? (e.g., Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Phyllis Wheatley.)
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### Suggested Bibliography

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# FREEDOM TRAIN

## Word Match

### Word Match

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Match these words with their correct definitions by connecting them with a line.

Posse

Emancipation Proclamation

Bounty Hunter

Fugitive Slave Laws

Plantation

Quakers

Underground Superintendent

Safe Houses

Underground Railroad

Mason-Dixon Line

Spiritual

Abolitionist

Fugitive

Auction

- A. a person who supported the movement to abolish, or end slavery and the slave trade in the United States.
- B. a public sale in which goods are sold to those who offer the most money.
- C. a person who tracks down and captures outlaws in return for a reward.
- D. the proclamation issued by President Lincoln in September, 1862, effective January 1, 1863, by which the Negroes held in slavery in the Confederate States, then in rebellion against the United States were declared to be free.
- E. a person who flees; a runaway.
- F. a number of laws that regulated the return of slaves who had escaped.
- G. the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania, that before the Civil War became known as the border between the slave states of the South and the free states of the North.
- H. a large farm on which crops, such as cotton, tobacco, or sugar, are grown and harvested.
- I. a group of people temporarily organized to conduct a search.
- J. the term used to describe members of a religion called the Society of Friends. It was first used by George Fox, the founder of the religion, who told the members of the church to "tremble at the word of the Lord."
- K. a term used by the Underground Railroad to describe houses belonging to people involved in helping Negro slaves to escape.
- L. a deeply emotional and religious folk song that became a musical tradition among American blacks in the South.
- M. in the United States before 1861, a system set up by certain opponents of slavery to help fugitive slaves from the South escape to free States and Canada.
- N. the head of a certain section of the Underground Railroad.

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