

Historic Impressions

The Promised Land: John Parker and the Underground Railroad

Lesson and Curriculum Guide

Travel back in time and experience the important abolitionist movement and struggle for freedom within the Underground Railroad. Meet John Parker, ex-slave, inventor, entrepreneur, and conductor of the Underground railroad. Learn all about the songs, signs, and dangers of escaping the “wretched” institution of slavery. John Parker will have audiences on the edge of their seats as he recalls his experiences helping hundreds of enslaved men, women, and children cross the Ohio River into a new life of freedom. After John Parker tells his story to convince the audience to help the abolitionist movement, return back to the present and discuss the legacy of the Underground Railroad.

Ohio’s New Learning Standards and Correlating Content Statements

(The subject of slavery and the Underground railroad covers many learning standards throughout many grades; below are the most direct connections.)

Social Studies

Grade Four

Theme: Ohio in the United States

Strand: History

Topic: Heritage

Content Statement: 7. Sectional issues divided the United States after the War of 1812. Ohio played a key role in these issues, particularly with the anti-slavery movement and the Underground Railroad.

Grade Eight

Theme: U.S. Studies from 1492-1877: Exploration through Reconstruction

Strand: History

Topic: Civil War and Reconstruction

Content Statement: 11. Disputes over the nature of federalism, complicated by economic developments in the United States, resulted in sectional issues, including slavery, which led to the American Civil War.

Vocabulary

Abolitionist	Freedom	Safe House
Baggage	Fugitive Slave	Skiff
Bounty	Patrollers	Slave
Escape	Rescue	Slavery
Foundry	Reward	Fugitive Slave Law

Pre-Program Activities

1. Study vocabulary words.
2. Read suggested books below.
3. Have small groups pick a slave narrative or assign a slave narrative for small groups to read and discuss. Consider the following questions:
 - a. What was life like as a slave? What did they or their parents do on the plantations or small farms?
 - b. What happened if a slave was disobedient or did something contrary to the wishes of his/her owner?
 - c. Where did they move to when they were free? How did they or their parents make a living?
 - d. Each group can share their narrative with the rest of the class.

Slave narratives can be found at the following websites:

- a. <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html> (Library of Congress)
 - b. www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/resources/wpa.html (PBS, Slavery and the Making of America)
4. Have students research and learn about other Ohioans (besides John Parker) who were active with the Underground Railroad.

Post-Program Activities

1. Have students work together to develop a plan to help runaways. Use maps of Ohio and/or the Ohio Kentucky border.
2. Have students write a journal entry or short story chronicling a fugitive slave escaping through the Underground Railroad.
3. In the classroom, students can write their own biography of John Parker based on the information they heard during the program.
4. Students can develop their own oral presentation designed to convince others to participate with helping runaways.

Supplemental Reading

- Carson, Mary Kay. *The Underground Railroad for Kids*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2005
- Gaines, Edith M. *Freedom Light*. Cleveland: New Day Press, 1991
- Porter, Connie Rose. *Meet Addy: An American Girl, vol 1*. New York, Pleasant Company Publications, 1993
- Hagedorn, Ann. *Beyond the River*. New York, Simon & Schuster 2002

- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. New York, Sterling Publishing Co, 2012
- Seibert, William. *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom: A Comprehensive History*. Mineola, New York, Dover Publications, 2006