AWESOME stories

SLAVES ESCAPE

0. SLAVES ESCAPE - Story Preface

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"The Underground Railroad," an 1893 painting by Charles T. Webber, depicts the "underground railroad" in action. Three people from Cincinnati - Levi Coffin, Catharine Coffin and Hannah Haydock - help slaves who have escaped. It is believed the setting for this painting is the Coffin farm in Cincinnati. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Underground Railroad routes were located within free states. As though traveling through that territory weren't treacherous enough, consider that escaping slaves first had to make their way through lands where slavery was legal. In other words, they initially had to travel *underneath* the underground railroad.

- An escaped slave named "Peter," whose back bears evidence of terrible beatings, told the person who took his picture (in Baton Rouge, April 2, 1863): "Overseer Artayou Carrier whipped me. I was two months in bed sore from the whipping. My master come after I was whipped; he discharged the overseer."

- Several months later, Gordon - a runaway from Mississippi - made it safely to Union lines in Louisiana. His back bore the scars of his master's whip. After he recovered, Gordon became a Union soldier.

- Thomas Nast, one of the 19th century's best illustrators, captured the degradations of slavery in a composite drawing which, among other events, shows runaways mauled by pack dogs.

- A large group of African-Americans - like most who were leaving behind a life of slavery - carried all their belongings as they traveled at night.

- On 8 November 1863, a group of African-American escapees reached Union lines near Culpeper Court House, Virginia.

- Fugitive African-Americans had to ford the river in order to safely cross the Rappahannock (in Virginia).

- Most escaping slaves, in search of freedom, did not have the luxury of horse-drawn carriages.

- Slaves risked their lives as they sailed in a small skiff to the New Jersey shore.

- Owners looked upon their slaves as chattel and offered huge rewards for their "merchandise." One male slave, for example, was worth $100 if captured outside the state of Missouri and $50 if captured within. (Adjusting for inflation, those values would be more than $2,000 and $1,000 today.)

- People escaping north followed the "drinking gourd" (the "Big Dipper"), which points to the North Star.

- Sometimes the mistress of the house took pity on her slaves, as in the case of Wesley Harris:

> *Wesley's mistress was kind enough to apprise him of the intention of his owner and overseer, and told him that if he could help himself he had better do so.*

Heeding her warning, Wesley and a friend escape from Virginia to Terrytown, Maryland. A man pretending to be a Quaker (members of that religious group often helped runaway slaves) allowed Wesley and his friend to stay in his barn.

It was a setup, however, as Wesley had feared. A serious confrontation in the barn soon followed, and the slaves (after being badly beaten) were recaptured.

Slaves fleeing the south needed help. Some of the most famous "conductors" on the Underground Railroad were former slaves.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SLAVES-ESCAPE-Underground-Railroad

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/SLAVES-ESCAPE-Underground-Railroad

Media Stream



Slavery - Evidence of Beatings
Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.
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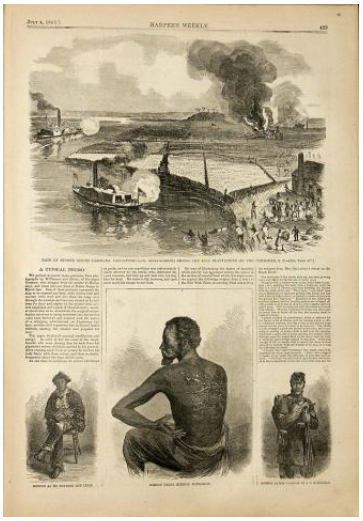

Slavery - Gordon's Scars from a Beating
Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress.
View this asset at:
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Slavery - The Chicago Platform

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress. LC-USZ62-90739.

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Underground Railroad - Slaves Travel at Night

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress. LC-USZ62-105557.

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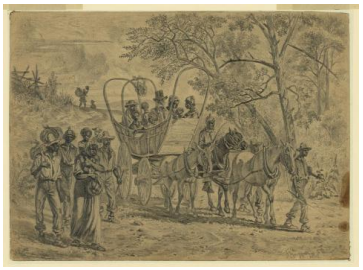

African-American Escapees Approach Union Lines

During America's Civil War, slaves would sometimes approach Union lines for help. This illustration, by Edward Forbes (1839-1895), depicts such an event which took place in Virginia during 1863.

Now part of the Morgan Collection of Civil War Drawings, at the Library of Congress, the image bears this description:

African American refugees coming into the Union lines near Culpeper Court House, Va.
Forbes released this drawing on or about the 8th of November, 1863.
Click on the image for a better view.
Drawing, by Edward Forbes, circa November 8, 1863. Now part of the Morgan Collection of Civil War Drawings, at the Library of Congress, this drawing is also known as "Forbes, no. 113." Online via the Library of Congress. Public Domain.
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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/African-American-Escapees-Approach-Union-Lines



Fugitive Slaves Fording the Rappahannock River

Photo by Timothy O'Sullivan, described above, online courtesy Library of Congress.

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http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Fugitive-Slaves-Fording-the-Rappahannock-River



In Search of Freedom

Image, described above, online courtesy Library of Congress.

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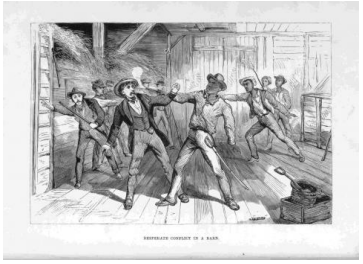

Escaping Slaves - Desperate Conflict in a Barn

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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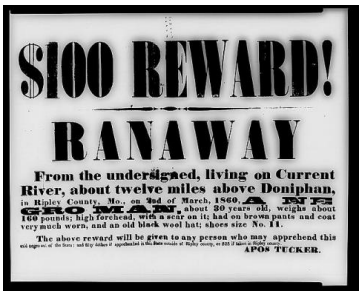

Slavery - Reward Poster

Image online, courtesy the U.S. Library of Congress. LC-USZ62-39380.

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