

Underground Railroad Lesson Plan

Subject:

John Parker and The Underground Railroad

Topic:

Desire for Freedom, Courage, Cooperation, Perseverance

Grade Level:

4th/5th Grade

Lesson Length:

1 hour

Objectives

1. Students will investigate through children's literature four basic themes related to the Underground Railroad:
 - a. Desire for Freedom
 - b. Courage
 - c. Cooperation
 - d. Perseverance
2. Students will relate the four basic themes to John Parker's story.
3. Students will evaluate the four basic themes to determine which theme they feel was most important to Parker's work on the Underground Railroad.

Materials

1. *Freedom River* by Doreen Rappaport.
2. Chart paper and colored markers.
3. Pencil and paper for each student.



Background Information Teacher Resources

1. Underground Railroad Website
<http://www.ket.org/underground/>
2. Underground Railroad Freedom Center Website
<http://undergroundrailroad.org>
3. National Geographic – Interactive Journey
<http://nationalgeographic.com/features/99/railroad/j2.html>
4. Definition of Underground Railroad Terms
 - a. passenger – a slave traveling on the Underground Railroad
 - b. conductor – a guide who led runaway slaves to freedom
 - c. stations – safe houses where the conductor and passengers could stop to find safety, shelter, and food
 - d. route – a specific path of stations that were followed to freedom
 - e. package – code term for runaway slave



Procedures

1. Introduce the children's book *Freedom River* by Doreen Rappaport. The introduction in the front of the book sets the

stage for the story. After reading the introduction, ask the students the following questions:

- ⇒ If you were a slave, what would your life be like?
- ⇒ Why do you think slaves risked their lives to run away?
- ⇒ Why do you think others risked their lives to help slaves run away?
- ⇒ If you were a slave, what would freedom mean to you?

2. Read aloud *Freedom River*. Discuss the following questions:

- ⇒ What qualities did John Parker possess that allowed him to continue to help slaves escape to freedom?
- ⇒ Why did John Parker feel the need to help others?
- ⇒ What obstacles did John Parker face in this story?

3. Using four pieces of chart paper and four different colored markers, write one of the following four themes at the top of each piece of chart paper:

- ⇒ Desire for Freedom
- ⇒ Courage
- ⇒ Cooperation
- ⇒ Perseverance

As a class, list specific events from the story that demonstrate these themes. It is possible that one event may be listed under more than one category. Allow time for discussion.

4. Students will now respond to the following writing prompt:

John Parker was an amazing individual who played an important role on the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad Freedom Center has proposed that escaping slaves were driven by four basic themes:

Desire for Freedom
Courage
Cooperation
Perseverance

Explain which of these characteristics you feel was most important to the *Freedom River* story. Be sure to demonstrate your opinion based on specific examples from the story.

Before allowing students to respond to the writing prompt, use the writing rubric to review the expectations for the writing assignment.

5. After students have completed the assignment, allow them to share their work.



Writing Rubric

| | Mastering | Developing | Beginning |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Content: | | | |
| Choice of Important Theme | 1 important theme is chosen with insightful comments on how it was chosen. | 1 important theme is chosen. | No theme is chosen or it is unable to determine theme. |
| Specific Examples | 3 or more relevant examples are given from the book. | 1 or 2 relevant examples are given from the book. | Examples are irrelevant or there are no examples from the book. |
| Mechanics: | | | |
| Punctuation & Spelling | Strong control with very few errors. | Good control with few errors. | Little control with many errors. |
| Sentence Structure | Varied sentence structure. | Appropriate sentence structure. | Simplistic sentence structure. |
| Vocabulary | Rich language. | Appropriate language. | Simplistic language. |
| Teacher Comments: | | | |
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