

***Slavery and the Underground Railroad***  
***Suggested Grades: K-3***  
***Lesson by: Meagan McCormick***

(Be sure to contact the Castellani Art Museum for a copy of the teacher resource guide containing the images, activities, and additional information associated with this lesson plan.)

**Disciplines: NYS Learning Standards**

◆ **Social Studies**

**Standard 1:** History of the United States and New York

**Performance Indicator (1):** The study of New York and the United States history requires an analysis of the development of American culture, its diversity and multicultural context, and the ways people are unified by many values, practices, and traditions.

**Performance Indicator (2):** Important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions from New York State and United States history illustrate the connections and interactions of people and events across time and from a variety of perspectives.

**Performance Indicator (3):** Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

**Standard 3:** Geography

**Performance Indicator (1):** Geography can be divided into six essential elements which can be used to analyze important historic, geographic, economic, and environmental questions and issues. These six elements include: the world in spatial terms, places and regions, physical settings (including natural resources), human systems, environment and society, and the use of geography. (Adapted from *The National Geography Standards, 1994: Geography for Life*)

**Performance Indicator (2):** Geography requires the development and application of the skills of asking and answering geographic questions; analyzing theories of geography; and acquiring, organizing, and analyzing geographic information. (Adapted from: *The National Geography Standards, 1994: Geography for Life*)

**Standard 5:** Civics, Citizenship, and Government

**Performance Indicator (1):** The study of civics, citizenship, and government involves learning about political systems; the purposes of government and civic life; and the differing assumptions held by people across time and place regarding power, authority, governance, and law. (Adapted from *The National Standards for Civics and Government, 1994*)

**Performance Indicator (2):** The state and federal governments established by the Constitutions of the United States and the State of New York embody basic civic values (such as justice, honesty, self-discipline, due process, equality, majority rule with respect for minority rights, and respect for self, others, and property), principles and practices and establish a system of shared and limited government. (Adapted from *The National Standards for Civics and Government, 1994*)

**Performance Indicator (3):** Central to civics and citizenship is an understanding of the roles of the citizen within American constitutional democracy and the scope of a citizen's rights and responsibilities.

**Performance Indicator (4):** The study of civics and citizenship requires the ability to probe ideas and assumptions, ask and answer analytical questions, take a skeptical attitude toward

questionable arguments, evaluate evidence, formulate rational conclusions, and develop and refine participatory skills.

### ◆ English Language Arts (ELA)

**Standard 1:** Language for Information and Understanding

**Performance Indicator (1):** Listening and reading to acquire information and understanding involves collecting data, facts, and ideas; discovering relationships, concepts, and generalizations; and using knowledge from oral, written, and electronic sources.

**Performance Indicator (2):** Speaking and writing to acquire and transmit information requires asking probing and clarifying questions, interpreting information in one's own words, applying information from one context to another, and presenting the information and interpretation clearly, concisely, and comprehensibly.

**Standard 3:** Language for Critical Analysis and Evaluation

**Performance Indicator (1):** Listening and reading to analyze and evaluate experiences, ideas, information, and issues requires using evaluative criteria from a variety of perspectives and recognizing the difference in evaluations based on different sets of criteria.

**Performance Indicator (2):** Speaking and writing for critical analysis and evaluation requires presenting opinions and judgments on experiences, ideas, information, and issues clearly, logically, and persuasively with reference to specific criteria on which the opinion or judgment is based.

**Standard 4:** Language for Social Interaction

**Performance Indicator (1):** Oral communication in formal and informal settings requires the ability to talk with people of different ages, genders, and cultures, to adapt presentations to different audiences, and to reflect on how talk varies in different situations.

### ◆ The Arts- Visual Arts

**Standard 1:** Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts

**Performance Indicator (1):** Students will make works of art that explore different kinds of subject matter, topics, themes, and metaphors. Students will understand and use sensory elements, organizational principles, and expressive images to communicate their own ideas in works of art. Students will use a variety of art materials, processes, mediums, and techniques, and use appropriate technologies for creating and exhibiting visual art works.

**Standard 2:** Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

**Performance Indicator (2):** Students will know and use a variety of visual arts materials, techniques, and processes. Students will know about resources and opportunities for participation in visual arts in the community (exhibitions, libraries, museums, galleries) and use appropriate materials (art reproductions, slides, print materials, electronic media). Students will be aware of vocational options available in the visual arts.

**Standard 3:** Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

**Performance Indicator (3):** Students will reflect on, interpret, and evaluate works of art, using the language of art criticism. Students will analyze the visual art characteristics of the natural and built environment and explain the social, cultural, psychological, and environmental dimensions of the visual arts. Students will compare the way in which a variety of ideas, themes, and concepts are expressed in other disciplines.

**Standard 4:** Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts

**Performance Indicator (4):** Students will explore art and artifacts from various historical periods and world cultures to discover the roles that art plays in the lives of people of a given time and place and to understand how the time and place influence the visual characteristics of the art

work. Students will explore art to understand the social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of human society.

## **Descriptive Title:** Slavery and the Underground Railroad

### **Context (Rationale):**

This lesson is important to help students understand the concept of slavery and what it meant to be a slave with no freedoms or rights and why some individuals would be willing to risk their lives to escape from this oppressive way of life. Slavery had been part of the American landscape since 1619 when the first slaves were brought to the Virginia colony. They worked as cheap labor on tobacco and later cotton plantations. They were not considered as human beings but property bought and owned by slave owners. Men, women, and children often worked under deplorable conditions leading some to attempt escape to freedom. Eventually a vast network of people consisting of many individuals, many white but most predominantly black, formed the Underground Railroad which moved hundreds of slaves northward as they fled their way to freedom. As they become familiar with this organized system to assist runaway slaves, students will be made aware of the importance of Upstate New York and the Niagara region as an escape route leading slaves to eventual freedom in Canada.

### **Performance Task:**

The student will be able to:

- Describe what it meant to be a slave
- Explain what type of work slaves performed on plantations
- Identify artwork that represents the type of work performed by slaves on plantations
- Describe how some of the artwork represents the Underground Railroad
- Understand why upstate New York became a major route used by the “conductors” to lead escaping slaves to freedom
- Describe how slaves traveled along the route of the Underground Railroad
- Identify and be able to correctly use vocabulary terms connected to the Underground Railroad
- Identify Harriet Tubman and describe her importance to the success of the Underground Railroad
- Imagine that they are a slave escaping on the Underground Railroad. They are to draw a picture illustrating a station that they stopped at along the way. They will also be expected to write and relate their experiences as they fled the plantation up to the time they stopped at the station which they have drawn.

### **Art Resources:**

- Untitled from the Stations installation 1988 (sculpture), Houston E. Conwill, Castellani Art Museum
- Skillet Study: Mavis 1999, Alison Saar, Castellani Art Museum
- The Great International Railway Suspension Bridge, Niagara Falls, NY 1859, Ferdinand Richardt, Castellani Art Museum
- Path to the Whirlpool 1985, John Pfahl, Castellani Art Museum

- Harriet Tubman (left) at her home in Auburn, NY, ca. 1887, photographer unknown, courtesy Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts

## **Art Materials:**

- Pencil
- Lined Paper
- White Drawing Paper
- Eraser
- Colored Pencils
- Crayons

## **Motivation:**

The teacher will motivate the students by asking them to describe what it means to be free. The teacher will also ask them to describe the difference between a free person and a slave. The teacher will also ask them to list all the freedoms that they and their families enjoy because they live in America. The teacher will ask them if they think it is fair to tell someone what he or she can or can't do. The teacher will also ask them how they would feel if they were separated from their families and forced to work. Would they be willing to risk danger to win freedom? The teacher will use the example of the Underground Railroad to illustrate the lengths that some individuals took to be free.

## **Presentation:**

1. Once the students arrive at the Museum the teacher will bring them into the gallery housing the exhibition *Freedom Crossing the Underground Railroad in Greater Niagara*.
2. The teacher will ask them to describe what they know about slavery and do they understand slavery was a way of life in the United States many years ago.
3. The teacher will ask them to tell me where slaves came from and how did they get to the United States?
4. The teacher will ask them where slaves lived and what type of work they performed.
5. At this point the teacher will describe briefly the different economic activities between the North and South stressing the plantation system in particular that operated in the South and southern dependence on cheap labor.
6. The teacher will also ask the students to describe how slaves were treated; what it meant to be a slave and what would make someone risk their life to escape to freedom.
7. The teacher will tell students that some slaves did flee plantations on their own but that eventually a more organized movement developed that helped slaves escape to the North and eventually to Canada and this was called the Underground Railroad.

8. At this time the teacher will explain briefly how the Underground Railroad operated so that the students understand that it was not an actual railroad nor was it underground but a means to move people.

9. At this point, the teacher will ask students to leave their seats and the teacher will guide them through the gallery pointing out the artwork on display.

10. After they have carefully studied each piece the teacher will explain how that piece of art relates to either slavery or the Underground Railroad.

11. The teacher will then ask students to point out artwork that shows Western New York as part of the Underground Railroad.

12. The teacher will then tell them why Western New York was so important to the Underground Railroad.

13. The teacher will especially focus attention to the *Stations Installation* by Houston E. Conwill which represents the safe houses and tell them a short story about Tryon's Folly.

14. The teacher will also direct their attention to the print that includes the presence of Harriet Tubman, the most famous of the Underground Railroad "conductors" and speak briefly about her life.

15. At this point the teacher will give students their assignment which involves drawing their station and describing their experiences.

16. Time permitting at the end of the session the teacher will read one of two books: *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold or *The Drinking Gourd* by F. N. Monjo.

## **Assessment Tools and Evidence:**

- **Tools:** At the end of the session the teacher will ask students to volunteer to share their station drawings and relate their slave experiences. The teacher will ask questions about the design of their stations.
- **Evidence:** The evidence of whether or not the students understood the concept of slavery and the Underground Railroad will be apparent by the station drawing they create and the experiences that they relate.
- **Teacher Reflection/Follow Up:** Do the students understand the meaning and the reason why slavery existed in the United States? Do they understand the reason and purpose for organizing the Underground Railroad? Are they aware of the importance that Western New York played in moving slaves to freedom? The teacher will make decisions based on their work and level of class discussion as well as feedback from their classroom teacher.