

Paths to Freedom

Analyze how a secret network supported people seeking freedom.

SS.68.AA.2.4 "Examine the Underground Railroad and its importance to those seeking freedom."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show how the Underground Railroad helped freedom seekers. Circle details that show the risks they faced or why the network was important.

A Secret Network

- ① Before the Civil War, slavery held millions of African Americans in bondage in the South. The Underground Railroad was not a real railroad. It was a secret, changing network of people, routes, and safe places that helped freedom seekers escape slavery. Participants used railroad words as codes: "conductors" guided travelers, and "stations" offered temporary shelter. Because helping fugitives was dangerous and often illegal, people shared information quietly and changed plans when necessary to avoid capture.
- ② Freedom seekers faced painful choices. Leaving could mean separation from parents, children, spouses, or friends, yet remaining meant continued enslavement. They traveled mostly at night, following trusted guides or directions toward free states and Canada. Some traveled by foot, wagon, boat, or train, often hiding during the day. Free Black communities, antislavery activists, and some religious groups provided food, money, shelter, transportation, or warnings. Their support turned individual escapes into a wider effort against slavery.
- ③ The network did not guarantee safety or freedom. Slave catchers, harsh weather, hunger, and betrayal threatened travelers. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 increased the danger by requiring officials and citizens to assist in capturing people accused of escaping slavery, even in free states. In response, some routes led farther north to Canada, where U.S. fugitive slave laws did not apply. The Underground Railroad mattered because it gave people chances to claim freedom while exposing the cruelty of slavery and building resistance to it.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Why did people in the Underground Railroad share information quietly and change plans when necessary?

2 Name two kinds of support that people or groups gave to freedom seekers. How did this support help the larger effort?

3 How did the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 affect freedom seekers, and how did some routes change in response?

4 According to the passage, why was the Underground Railroad important beyond helping individual people escape?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a three-sentence museum label explaining why the Underground Railroad was important to people seeking freedom. Use your own words and include one risk, one kind of help, and one way the Fugitive Slave Act affected routes.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that show how the Underground Railroad helped freedom seekers. Circle details that show the risks they faced or why the network was important. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did people in the Underground Railroad share information quietly and change plans when necessary?	Helping freedom seekers was dangerous and often illegal, so secrecy and changing plans helped people avoid capture.
2	Name two kinds of support that people or groups gave to freedom seekers. How did this support help the larger effort?	Answers may name food, money, shelter, transportation, warnings, guides, or directions. This support helped individual escapes become a wider effort against slavery.
3	How did the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 affect freedom seekers, and how did some routes change in response?	The law increased danger by requiring officials and citizens to help capture people accused of escaping slavery, even in free states. Some routes went farther north to Canada.
4	According to the passage, why was the Underground Railroad important beyond helping individual people escape?	It exposed the cruelty of slavery and built resistance to it, while giving people chances to claim freedom.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Underground Railroad gave enslaved people a secret way to seek freedom, although every journey involved danger. Guides and safe places could provide shelter, directions, and supplies to people traveling north. After the Fugitive Slave Act increased danger in free states, routes to Canada became especially important.

Accept equivalent explanations that use accurate passage evidence. For the museum label, check for all three required ideas: a risk, a form of support, and the effect of the Fugitive Slave Act on routes.