Never Give Up!
Ama’s Journey to Freedom on the Underground Railroad

Multicultural Curriculum
Grades 5 - 10
by Kesa Kivel

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NEVER GIVE UP!
Ama’s Journey to Freedom on the Underground Railroad

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES — In the Never Give Up! Film

1) Slavery is a topic that often makes students uncomfortable because of the difficult nature of the subject matter. African American and white students may feel particularly uneasy because there’s often a narrow representation of each race as either victim or oppressor.
2) It can be difficult for students to understand slavery’s brutal effect on people through textbook study alone.
3) Students may not have reflected on the gender-specific ways in which enslaved people were treated.
4) The interracial, collaborative nature of the Underground Railroad is not always highlighted.

OBJECTIVES
• Students will learn powerful, inspiring everyday ways in which enslaved people, including enslaved young people, courageously resisted slavery.
• Without minimizing the cruelty of white people who owned slaves, students will learn about white people who bravely fought against slavery.
• Students will better understand and empathize with the plight of enslaved people.
• Students will reflect on different ways in which males and females experienced slavery.
• Students will learn about the collaborative nature of the interracial Underground Railroad.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES — In the Bonus Material

1) Slavery in the U.S. is sometimes taught as an isolated historical event with no relevance to racism today.
2) Viewers may want to hear more of the YWCA girls’ reactions to the Underground Railroad project.
3) Teachers may want information about the entire project. The girls’ enactment of the story of Ama (presented in the film) is only the first part of the project.

OBJECTIVES
• Students will discover how slavery relates to Jim Crow laws and practices and to racism today.
• Students will hear the girls’ reactions to the project in the Gallery of Posters, the Debriefing and Art segments, and the Closing Circle.
• Teachers will learn about all facets of the Underground Railroad project.
KEY TERMS

ABOLITION MOVEMENT
An antislavery movement comprised of free blacks, enslaved people, and white people.

ENSURED PEOPLE
Enslaved people is a “people-first” term that is used whenever possible to describe Ama and her friends. People-first language does not define a person solely by that individual’s disability or status. For example, a person is never just “a slave,” but a person with a personality, interests, desires, and beliefs who is enslaved.

FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT of 1850
A congressional law that mandated the capture and return of runaway slaves, even in the North, without due process of law.

MIDDLE PASSAGE
The forced journey of enslaved Africans by ship from Africa to the West Indies and the Americas (North and South) as part of the transatlantic slave trade.

NEGRO
A word used prior to the late 1960s to describe African Americans. At the time, the term was not considered negative and was used by all races.
Note: Someone who had one African or African American parent or grandparent, no matter how white the person’s skin color appeared, would have been identified as Negro.

NORTH STAR
The North Star or Pole Star is the bright star that always points the way north. One way for escaping slaves to locate the direction of north was to find the North Star in the night sky.

NORTH STAR NEWSPAPER
An antislavery newspaper established in 1847 by former slave Frederick Douglass.

RACISM
Racism is discrimination that is based on race. It can take the form of either individual actions or a system of laws, practices, and policies.

RESISTANCE — DURING SLAVERY
Efforts to claim some measure of freedom.

SLAVERY
A system where a person can be owned by another person, treated as property to be bought and sold, and denied rights held by most free people.

TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE
From the 1600s to the 1800s, the transatlantic slave trade forcibly brought Africans to the West Indies and the Americas to be sold as slaves.
Note: The importation of enslaved people to America was legal until 1808. In the film the main character, Ama, was kidnapped and brought to the Americas illegally in 1847.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
A secret network of free Negroes, fugitive slaves, and white people who worked together to help runaway slaves escape slavery. (It was not a real train, and it was not literally underground. It was called “underground” because all movement on the Underground Railroad had to be done in secret.)
Note: Some people consider the Underground Railroad and antislavery organizations together to have been the first interracial social movement in this country.
PRE-VIEWING SUGGESTIONS

WORKSHEETS OR NO WORKSHEETS?
I recommend that you give your students suggestions of what to look for while viewing the film rather than having them fill out worksheets. This will help keep students engaged in the story and better able to retain the facts.

Some examples:

1. Be prepared to share what you might see, hear, and feel if you yourself were one of the main characters in the story.

2. Watch for ways in which Ama and Ben resisted slavery on the plantation — for example, working more slowly than they were supposed to work in the cotton fields.

3. Watch for individual conditions that might have prevented someone from escaping slavery, such as a person’s being too old to travel.

4. Watch for some of the laws, practices, and policies that upheld the institution of slavery, such as the support of slavery by some churches.

5. Watch for nontraditional gender roles that females and males perform in the story, — for instance, the man hanging clothes on a clothesline.

SPECIAL NOTE IN ADVANCE OF SHOWING THE FILM:
Discussing provocative words in the film in advance of showing it may help to diminish any confusion or uneasiness when these words are heard. Some examples:

• It is explained in the film that the word **Negro** is used for historical accuracy. Please also tell students that this word was not, and is not, a negative word. It was accepted as polite and normal by all races until the late 1960s. The word is now considered old-fashioned but is still not considered to be negative.

• Especially for younger/less mature students, you might explain that **rape** is mentioned in the film, and then define the word. **Rape is forced sexual intercourse by a stranger, acquaintance, relative, or friend. The victim is never to blame. At the time of slavery, a person who tried to resist being raped might have been beaten or whipped. People who endured rape were brave beyond measure.**

SHOW FILM CLIPS AT END OF FILM TO YOUR STUDENTS
Make sure to show the film clips at the end of the film in which some of the girls’ reactions are shared. The reactions were included there at the fervent request of youth focus groups for the film who had been enthusiastically following the girls. Your students may be interested, too!

REAL PEOPLE MENTIONED IN THE FILM
Lucretia Mott (abolitionist, later a suffragist); Catherine Harris (abolitionist)
POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS (Film-Related)

1. What prevented Ama from leaving the plantation when she was first taken there? For example, she wasn't familiar with the landscape and didn't yet speak the language.

2. What did Ama and Ben do to resist abuse and slavery in the first parts of the film? An example is Ama’s biting the ear of the sailor in the red shirt during the Middle Passage.

3. How did Ama change during the course of the story in relationship to her mother’s words “Never give up,” and also in her relationship to Ben?

4. Ama and Ben fight back in many ways before they set fire to the master’s shed. What was the importance to the story of showing different kinds of resistance?

5. Why do you think the filmmaker included Ama’s early life in Africa and later life in Canada as parts of the story?

6. Ama fears that she and Ben might be caught by slave catchers even in a “safe” house because of the Fugitive Slave Act. What was this act? Where else besides Canada could Ama have gone to escape slavery?

7. An illustration of the North Star newspaper is shown in the film. Who founded the newspaper, and what was its mission?

8. What does Ama’s joy in being able to try hatmaking, no matter the results, reveal about the nature of freedom?

9. Ama takes eight months for herself before she marries Ben to “…find out what I like, what I don’t like.” What is the value in knowing yourself first before entering into a close relationship with another person?

10. Choose a phrase from the story and then write about how that phrase might encourage you in a difficult time and give concrete examples. Possible choices might be “Never give up, no matter what” from the African village scene or “Finding good things to think about in difficult times gives me strength and hope” from the woods scene.

11. Explain the meaning of Ama’s words in Canada “Your kind acts no matter how small count as well. More than you might ever know.”

12. Research the filmmaker’s websites (www.kesakivelstudios.org) to determine how her interests/bias might have influenced her interpretations of history in telling this story.

Why is it important to investigate source material for bias?
POST-VIEWING QUESTIONS (Topic-Related)

1. What are some ways that you can protest injustices in schools, in the community, and in the government? Were these ways available to enslaved people?

2. Many school textbooks pay little attention to the different ways in which enslaved people resisted slavery. Why is it important to include the different forms of resistance in textbooks and educational films?

3. Can you think of other times in world history besides the time of slavery in the U.S. when a large number of people were overpowered and oppressed by a smaller number of people? What actions helped to fight the oppression in these cases?

4. Do you think that a group of people of a particular race or ethnicity whose ancestors had limited educational opportunities generations ago could still be affected by such limitations today? Present both sides — that is, both “yes” and “no” answers to this question — in two separate paragraphs.

5. How do people develop prejudices? Who has influenced your beliefs about different groups of people? Note: Each of us has some sort of bias — that is, a preference or leaning — based on our own particular life experiences, attitudes, and beliefs.

6. Some social movements such as the civil rights movement took a long time to become effective. What kind of small rewards, such as the satisfaction of meeting compassionate, like-minded people, might be enjoyed along the way?

7. Do you think one person’s actions today can be the seeds of social change in the future? In other words, can our individual actions that may be invisible to others actually affect the larger world we live in? Please explain.

8. Write down your goals for standing up for yourself and helping others. If you haven’t thought about your goals before, think about them now and write them down. What people, real or fictional, inspire your thoughts about this?

Note: For some of the above questions, I have been influenced by the writings of author Howard Zinn, and others.

RESISTANCE FACTOIDS TO SHARE WITH YOUR STUDENTS

There were so many insurrections on Middle Passage slave ships that clauses were introduced into insurance policies to cover losses due to insurrection.*

Resistance on the plantations, including arson, was so common that one Philadelphia company “declined making insurance in any of the slave states.”**

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ART AND WRITING OPTIONS HANDOUT

KENTE CLOTH ART PROJECT
Research the kente cloth mentioned in the film so that you have an understanding of its importance in Ashanti culture. Make a modified art version of the kente cloth to visually represent your own culture:

Select construction paper that is light enough in color that words or images can be easily read on it. Then cut 20 or more 4” x 2” strips of paper. On each strip, write or draw a brief description of your values or code of conduct, your favorite activities, musical interests, political beliefs, friends or family and so on. (Students can brainstorm topics together.)

Glue or tape your 20 strips to a large sheet of paper, and then take turns sharing your own kente “cloth” with the class or in small groups.

"I SEE, I HEAR, I FEEL” POETRY ASSIGNMENT
Write a poem about the film story using the words I see, I hear, I feel in alternate sentences to describe each scene. If you need to refresh your memory about the story, you can watch the film online for free at www.kesakivelstudios.org.

For example:
I see my village with my wonderful family around me
I hear the sounds of goats munching on leftovers
I feel excited that I get to make a pot
I see strangers rushing to grab me
I hear my mother’s screams and the sounds of guns firing
I feel desperate to reach my mother, but she is so far away

PAIRED POEMS TO SHARE MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES*
Pair up with another student and write a “paired poem” about two characters in the film. The voices of the characters alternate: for example, a line that voices the perspective of the plantation overseer is followed by a line voicing the perspective of the same situation by an enslaved person working in the cotton field.

Each beginning and ending stanza will have a line that is spoken by both characters in succession. For example:

Overseer: It’s hot out here in the field.
Enslaved worker: It’s hot out here in the field.

Overseer: They’re all working too slowly today!
Enslaved worker: I can’t work any faster on an empty stomach and hours before dinner.

Overseer: My arm hurts from whipping the slave -- 40 lashes in all.
Enslaved worker: My back hurts from the whipping. I wonder if I will survive the night.

Overseer: It’s hot out here in the field
Enslaved worker: It’s hot out here in the field.

CREATING AN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD PROJECT

Note: Please read the “Safety and Respect Guidelines” (page 12) first to get an idea of some of the situations that might arise for this kind of project.

Students will design, write, and facilitate an Underground Railroad experience for another group of students (perhaps in a younger grade). The goals are to foster teamwork and consensus building, to learn and to share information about the Underground Railroad, and to help participants develop empathy for the plight of enslaved people.

Working with the teacher, students will develop the narrative by modifying the script for *Never Give Up! Ama’s Journey to Freedom on the Underground Railroad* as needed. (Find the script under “Curriculum” at www.kesakivelstudios.org.)

Then, students will divide into six planning groups, with each student choosing a group to participate in. If necessary, the teacher will assign students to groups.

See the “Consensus Guidelines” on pages 10-11 for more information on the decision-making process for each group.

Each of the six groups will do one of the following:

- Using the “Safety and Respect Guidelines” (page 12) as a model, create guidelines appropriate to the students who will be going through the Underground Railroad experience to help ensure that everyone feels emotionally safe.
- Design the physical layout for the Underground Railroad journey to complement the written story by sketching possible models and choosing one.
- Create signage and other visual elements that might be seen on the journey north – for example, “Wanted” posters for runaway slaves, and blue fabric on the floor to indicate rivers.
- Research and select background music, such as spirituals, as well as ambient sounds (for example, bloodhounds barking).
- Create discussion topics and write feedback forms for the participants.
- Brainstorm ways to facilitate discussions with the topics created, such as determining (a) the size of the discussion group, (b) the order of the discussion questions asked by the facilitator, and (c) ways to encourage shy participants to speak.

VENUE SUGGESTIONS

**School library:** Divide the library into “North” and “South,” and clearly indicate the dividing line. Select different sections of the library to represent a plantation, wooded areas, and safe houses. The participants will journey from south to north by traveling under tables and around chairs, stopping at the different sections.

**School gym:** Divide the gym into “North” and “South,” and clearly indicate the dividing line. Large martial arts mats can be loosely taped together to become safe houses. Gym equipment such as steps (for step aerobics) can represent “bridges.”

Make sure and create ways for students with disabilities to participate.
CONSENSUS GUIDELINES INTRODUCTION

For some planning decisions, the student groups may wish to take a quick vote to determine what the majority wants to do (a majority is more than half). For other decisions, the student groups might try using the consensus method.

Consensus is reached after everyone has shared her/his thoughts and there is widespread agreement on the issue being discussed. The discussion needs to continue until everyone can support the decision being made.

A number of very different groups of people — for example, Native Americans, the Quakers, and certain political organizations — have used this method successfully.

People who use consensus usually value the process (that is, the actions taken to get to a particular result) as much as actually arriving at the solution. For instance, many people enjoy the steps taken in cooking (shopping, measuring, mixing, baking, etc.) as much as they enjoy eating what they have made.

Ideally, at the end of the consensus process a strong, overriding point of view — one that represents the group’s best interests — has come to light.
CONSENSUS GUIDELINES HANDOUT

Begin the process by doing a read-around, taking turns reading one of the following sets of sentences aloud.

1. **Be Partners:** Start by assuming that everyone on your team is a partner, and that you are all here as much for the purpose of building strong relationships as for getting a task done.

2. **Voice Your Opinion:** Take a risk and voice your opinion. Encourage anyone who hasn’t shared to let the group know what her/his opinion is. Every voice counts.

3. If an idea that is shared is something you don’t think will help move the project forward -- or is even something that you believe violates a moral standard or that seems potentially harmful in some way — it’s important that you say so.

4. **Listen Well:** Can you repeat back what everyone’s idea was? Everyone will want to feel seen and heard, as well as understood, by the other team members.

5. **Make Your Decision Carefully:** What idea seems to work best? It may be your idea, or it may be an idea offered by your best friend, by someone you don’t know well, or by someone you don’t like very much. It’s important that you do not let your feelings be the basis of your decision making.

6. After everyone has expressed her/his opinion and there has been some discussion, see if any agreement has been reached. Any member of the team can ask: **Can everyone support the decision being proposed, even if some people like it more than others?**

7. If one or more team members answer No to this question, any member of the team can then ask: **Is a compromise possible? Is there a middle ground where some of us can give up something so we can reach a solution that everybody can support?**

8. If the majority of people like the idea to at least some degree and any necessary compromise has been made, use the proposed idea.

9. If you are having difficulty reaching consensus, ask the facilitator to assist you in the process.

10. **After Consensus:** Whether or not your idea has been chosen, each of you has contributed to the final result. One idea often bounces off another; the idea chosen or the decision made has likely been inspired at least partly by the earlier suggestions and ideas of others in the group.

Note: For some of the above ideas, I have been influenced by the writings of authors Howard Zinn and Judy Logan, and by my conversations with theater educator/activist Norma Bowles.
SAFETY AND RESPECT GUIDELINES

The methodology below was used for the original Underground Railroad project so that participants would feel safe and respected (which had the added benefit of helping them to more easily absorb the sometimes difficult material). Please create your own “Safety and Respect Guidelines” that are appropriate for your group of students.

INTRODUCTION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROJECT

• Girls were told at the start of the re-enactment that it is normal if they became emotional. Participants may, at times, feel enraged, troubled, and saddened, or encouraged, uplifted, and inspired.

• Girls were told that some of them might hold their emotions in, and others might not. There is no wrong or right way for them to handle or express their emotions.

GOING THROUGH THE PROJECT

• Resistance efforts were emphasized throughout the script in order to accurately portray enslaved people. These efforts, showing resilience and strength, also made it easier for the girls to “be” the main character, Ama.

• Girls went through the Underground Railroad in groups for support. Each girl in a group re-enacted the role of Ama, so that no one person would be labeled as enslaved while others were not. That is, there was no hierarchy in the roles, which might have induced shame, guilt, or embarrassment. This is very important!

• Journal writing at each stop was included to help the girls debrief en route.

• Volunteer adult “actors” on the Underground Railroad project were given instructions on how to handle any giggling among participants in a non-shaming way. Giggling often indicates anxiety. Volunteers were told to respectfully ask a giggling participant what she was reacting to, and not assume that they (the adult volunteers) knew. Depending upon the girl’s response, the volunteer could affirm that the subject matter was very difficult to take in.

• There was a short stretch break for the girls at the “plantation.”

• The cutting of the slave wristbands at the last stop (Canada) and the Canadian volunteer saying “You are now free” made it more likely that the girls would shed their slave personas. Girls were not allowed to keep the slave wristbands as souvenirs.

• A Debriefing Session (see film’s Bonus Material) was included at the end.

• Artwork (see film’s Bonus Material) at the end of the project was both integrating and healing.

• A Closing Circle (see film’s Bonus Material) brought the volunteers and participants together. Each girl was asked to say one word to describe her experience. Time permitting, participants could be asked to explain why they chose their one word.

• The girls’ artwork was showcased in the center of the Closing Circle on a large, round, black plastic tablecloth, creating a unifying and powerful art piece.

• Evaluation forms at the end of the project provided an additional opportunity for the girls to debrief.
SELECTED RESOURCES

ADULT FICTION AND NONFICTION

MEMOIR
Coming of Age in Mississippi, by Anne Moody. Bantam Dell, 1968.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

GOOD BOOKS MADE INTO FILMS

MAGAZINES
Rethinking Schools magazine and publications: www.rethinkingschools.org.

OTHER RESOURCES (descriptions are taken from the respective websites)
Facing History and Ourselves http://www.facinghistory.org/
Combats racism, antisemitism, and prejudice through educational programs.
Howard Zinn Education Project
http://zinnedproject.org/posts/category/explore_by_theme/slavery
Introduces students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of United States history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula.

Tracing the Trade
http://www.tracingcenter.org/
Brings awareness of the vast extent of complicity in slavery and the transatlantic slave trade for racial and economic justice, healing, and reconciliation.

Understanding Race
http://www.understandingrace.org/
Promotes a broad understanding of race and human variation.

Never Give Up! Ama’s Journey to Freedom on the Underground Railroad (film)
www.nevergiveupfilm.org
Provides excellent, well-researched content on slavery in the United States as well as on everyday acts of resistance by enslaved people. The film can be downloaded online for free or you can order a free DVD at www.nevergiveupfilm.org.

For more free Kesa Kivel social justice resources, please visit www.kesakivelstudios.org.

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