

ESCAPING SLAVERY

INTRODUCTION

The long arc of America’s story is all about striving to live up to the ideals set forth in the Declaration of Independence, that “all men are created equal” and “they are endowed with certain unalienable rights and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The story of Harriet Tubman’s struggle to escape from a brutal slavery contrasts the passion for freedom that people yearn for with the abysmal failure to live up to the ideal of American Exceptionalism that the Declaration promises.

Harriet’s personal relationship with the Lord highlights another critical aspect of American Exceptionalism: In God We Trust. With the Lord’s help, Harriet throws off the chains of slavery. And with Him guiding her, she returns to the Slave States again and again to lead others to the Free States and their first taste of the promises set forth in the Declaration.

While Harriet gives all glory to the Lord, her hard (and dangerous) work also illustrates the American Exceptionalism themes of self-reliance and, as part of the Underground Railroad, voluntary associations and community life -- independence and interdependence.

Historically, her story sets the stage for the Civil War. When she escapes slavery in 1849, the Free States and the Slave States are exactly even, 15 states apiece. Tensions between the North and South will rise over the next ten years as Harriet leads more of her people to freedom and Congressional battles erupt over new states entering the Union which might tip the balance towards freedom or slavery.

BOOK

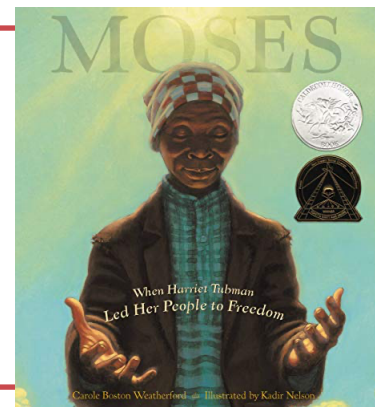
Title: Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom

Author: Carole Boston Weatherford

Illustrator: Kadir Nelson

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Length: 48 pages



ACTIVITY	TIME	FREQUENCY	PREPARATION
Famous American Texts: In God We Trust	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
Political Geography: Slave & Free States	15 minutes	Once	Minimal (if you have puzzle)
Science: Star Gazing	15 minutes	Once	Minimal (download app)
Re-enactment: Underground Railroad	20-40 minutes	Once	20-30 minutes
Civic Culture: Biblical Scripture	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
History: Family Connections	10-15 minutes	Once	Minimal
Art: Find the Hidden Animals	5 minutes	Daily	Minimal
Art: Let There Be Light	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
Language Arts: Similes & Metaphors	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
Language Arts: Italics & Fonts	10 minutes	Once	Minimal
Language Arts: Vocabulary	10 minutes	Once	Minimal



Below is one suggestion for your week with Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom. Note that we did not include all of the activities above in the agenda below (only 8 of 11). Please experiment with what works for your family!

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Art: Hidden Animals (during reading)	Political Geography	L.A.: Vocabulary (before reading)	Re-enactment Prep: Kids make stars	Art: Let There Be Light (during reading)
Famous American Texts	Science: Star Gazing	Civic Culture: Biblical Scripture	Underground Railroad (night)	History: Family Connections
Supplies: Coins & Currency	Supplies: U.S. Puzzle Star Map App	Supplies: Bible	Supplies: Paper, Pens, Tape, Scissors, Blankets, Flashlights	Supplies: N/A

FAMOUS AMERICAN TEXTS: IN GOD WE TRUST

In God We Trust

Time and time again throughout the story Harriet places her trust in God. Ask your children if they know the official motto (motto: “short expression of a guiding principle;” “short phrase indicative of something’s character or use”) of the United States. Show them coins and currency and ask them to find the motto “In God We Trust” engraved on each of them. You can also ask them to find the unofficial mottos of the United States, “Liberty” and “E Pluribus Unum,” (Out of Many, One) on each of the coins. The next time you read Moses, ask them to point out each time Harriet trusted God.

This short phrase can be an easy one for your kids to memorize over the course of this module.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY: SLAVE STATES VS. FREE STATES

*I am Your child, Lord; yet Master owns me, drives me like a mule.
Now he means to sell me south in chains to work cotton, rice, indigo, or sugarcane, never to see my family again.*

The goal of this exercise is to illustrate the geographic nature of the slavery issue. It can be done multiple ways. We used a puzzle of the United States but it can also be used with a paper map of the United States.

Divide the states into three categories:

1. Free States (15): Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Wisconsin



2. Slave States (15): Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas
3. Non-States, as of 1849, the year Harriet escaped (20): the Western states

Outside the puzzle frame, have the children assemble the Free States. Then, below them, have them assemble the Slave States. (Alternatively, have them color the Free States one color and the Slave States a different color). Identify which are the southern states and which are the northern states by showing them a simple compass rose with just the four cardinal directions on it.

Ask your children to find the state of Maryland, where Harriet first lived. Next, ask them to locate the state of Pennsylvania (and the city of Philadelphia) where Harriet found Free Soil. Then push the Slave States and the Free States together so they can see how close Maryland and Pennsylvania are. Finally, point out how far slaves had to go if they wanted to escape from the Deep South – and why Harriet had to escape before she was sold “south.”

SCIENCE: STAR GAZING

*I set the North Star in the heavens and I mean for you to be free.
Harriet sees the star twinkling.*

The North Star guided slaves like Harriet to the Free States. They did not have maps or GPS or road signs – just the stars in the heavens above. But how did they find the North Star out of all the stars in the sky?

They used “pointer stars.” The Big Dipper is one of the most recognizable constellations (technically, an “asterism”) in the night sky. The last two stars of the Big Dipper “point” to the North Star – no matter where in the sky the Big Dipper lies.

For this activity you need a clear night. A star map app (e.g., Sky Guide on iOS) can also be helpful in confirming the North Star (aka, Polaris) and a lot of fun for pointing out other stars and constellations. Many apps (e.g., Google Sky Map) can “time travel” and move the stars at a faster speed. Show how all the stars spin around the North Star, but this one star stays still. Verify with a compass (or compass app) that this star does, in fact, point north.

HISTORICAL RE-ENACTMENT: MAKE YOUR OWN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

*Is this heaven, Lord?
Not heaven, Harriet, FREE SOIL.*

This immersive activity literally brings home the drama of Harriet Tubman’s harrowing escape. This activity combines two simple games that kids love: hide ‘n’ seek and building blanket forts.

Supplies

- Blankets
 - Paper, Scissors, Pen, Tape
 - Flashlights
- 



The first step in building your own Underground Railroad is to identify and/or build secret hideouts throughout your home. Some of them can be blanket forts, others can simply be furniture that the kids can hide behind or under (our most elaborate hideout was a tunnel made from gymnastic mats to imitate the “potato hole” Harriet hid in for seven days – we were out of potatoes so we put some oranges in it and called it the “orange hole”).

The second step is to create a series of North Stars to guide the kids from hideout to hideout. If your child does not know how to draw a five-pointed star this can be a fun time to teach them. If they do, make at least enough of them to match the number of hideouts. Number the stars and attach them in the order you want the kids to follow the Underground Railroad. If your kids get carried away making North Stars (like ours did) you can scatter them on the floor to help indicate the direction they should go.

Finally, when it gets dark, give each child a flashlight. Then, with one parent acting as the Conductor, assemble in your first hiding place and wait for “midnight.” The other parent (the Patroller) can turn off all the lights in the house, with the last one being the room with the first hideout, simulating daytime turning to night. When it is “midnight” the Conductor helps lead the kids to the next hideout, emphasizing the need for quiet so they don’t get caught by the Patroller.

As the Conductor and kids “ride” the Underground Railroad, the Patroller “pursues” them, making appropriate comments and noise – stomping around their hiding places, howling like a bloodhound, shining a flashlight like a searchlight, simulating daytime/night time while they hide in the “potato hole.” And perhaps being right behind them when they make the final dash to “Free Soil” (“liberty” cookies at the final station can remind the kids of the rewards brought by “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”)

We field tested this exercise with our three-year-old (“We made it to Freedom!”) and our five-year-old (“Daddy almost got us but we made it to Free Soil!”) and they both loved it.

CIVIC CULTURE: BIBLICAL SCRIPTURE


*But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”
And God said, “I will be with you.” (Exodus 3:11-12)*

If your children are not familiar with the classic Biblical story of Moses leading his people out of slavery and to the Promised Land, this is the perfect opportunity to share it with them. Then you can help them draw the obvious parallels with Harriet Tubman and how God called her to lead her people out of slavery.

HISTORY: FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Risking her own life, Harriet returns to the dreaded South and rescues her family.

History comes alive when presented via a heroic tale with exciting graphics. Dry recitation of names, dates, places and events can’t compare to showing the personal relationship with the Lord that led Harriet Tubman to freedom.





Another way to connect children (and adults) to historical events is through their family history. Harriet's escape from slavery happened a long time ago. But we all have ancestors who lived through that period. Do you know who they were? Did they live in the North, South, or West? Or were they in another country? Do you know if they played any role in the historical events covered in the story? Were there any similarities between your ancestors and Harriet Tubman or the people who helped her as part of the Underground Railroad?

ART: FIND THE HIDDEN ANIMALS

*In the underbrush, Harriet sinks into a deep sleep.
God cradles her.*

When Harriet sleeps in the woods, she is surrounded by many woodland creatures. See if your kids can find:

- Three foxes
- Three raccoons (one in a tree)
- Two rabbits
- One possum
- One owl
- Eight fireflies

Ask your kids to draw an animal that might live in the woods -- either one from the story or a different one.


ART: LET THERE BE LIGHT!

In the Promised Land, Philadelphia, the sun shines gold in the trees, and Harriet feels light as a cloud.

An important artistic decision is how the artist wants to illuminate the subjects he or she is painting. Where is the source of light? How bright is it going to be? Where are the subjects placed relative to the light source?

Much of the story takes place at night, as Harriet travels in the darkness to both avoid detection and to use the North Star to guide her. Kadir Nelson, the illustrator, uses the moon's light reflected on water as the light source at times and the moon's light directly at others. During the day, Nelson uses the sun at different times to highlight his main subject, Harriet. She is backlit, silhouetted at sunset, and with the sun shining down on her from above.

Ask your children to identify the source and direction of the light in each picture. What is their favorite picture? Why? Where is the source of light for it?





LANGUAGE ARTS: SIMILES AND METAPHORS

Fly, Harriet. Your faith has wings.

Carole Boston Weatherford uses two powerful metaphors throughout her story. She introduces us to the first one in the title when she calls Harriet Tubman “Moses;” later, Weatherford has God telling Harriet, “Be the Moses of your people.” The second metaphor Weatherford uses extensively is the Underground Railroad.

Metaphors (and similes) are literary devices for comparing one thing to another. These comparisons provide a richer, more colorful way to describe things: rather than saying "very busy" we can say "as busy as a bee", or instead of "very quick" we could say "quick as a bunny." To describe someone sleeping deeply we can say they "slept like a log." Comparisons using "like" or "as" are called similes. Encourage your children to think of some similes of their own. If you've observed your children making comparisons of their own, be sure to point these out.

Find the similes in the book (or point them out next time you read it):

1. "flew like a bird", (which leads to a metaphor on the next line "your faith has wings")
2. "rises like a sapling"
3. "light as a cloud"
4. "blanket of night"

Sometimes we leave out "like" or "as" and just say something "is" what it's compared to. At the end of the book, God directly calls Harriet "Moses" rather than saying she's "like" Moses. This is a metaphor. Ask your children to think of ways that she was like Moses.

Another metaphor in the book is the Underground Railroad, which is neither underground nor a railroad. What does “Underground Railroad” conjure up in their minds when they hear it? How is it a metaphor for the escape routes used by escaping slaves? It's like a railroad by having stations and conductors, and it's like it's underground because it's dark at night and is hidden from casual observers.


LANGUAGE ARTS: ITALICS AND FONTS

*Lord, don't let nobody turn me 'round. I'd rather die than be a slave.
Harriet, keep going. You have already glimpsed the future.*

Authors can use different words to convey emphasis, but they can also write the same word in different styles. These are called fonts. Look at a few sample pages of the book and identify the three primary fonts used by the author.

Almost every page includes a dialogue between Harriet and God. In a typical dialogue, the spoken words are indicated by setting them off with apostrophes. Because the dialogue between Harriet and God is unspoken, the author uses different typefaces to mark the conversation. Whenever Harriet speaks to God, the author uses italics, where the typeface is slanted, to indicate Harriet's words. Whenever God speaks to Harriet, the author uses a typeface consisting only of capital letters.

The next time you read the book, ask your children to count how many lines of italic text are on each page and how many lines are All Capitals.





Finally, you can sit down at a computer with your children and open up a blank document with word processing software. Type your children's names in different fonts and sizes. If they are old enough, give them the opportunity to type some letters or names themselves, changing fonts whenever they want. Make sure you demonstrate the most common ways authors use emphasis in their fonts: italics, bold, and underline. And have fun with the wackier fonts (recommendation: save fonts like Wingdings till the end because you may lose control at that point :-)

LANGUAGE ARTS: VOCABULARY

While the plantation sleeps, Harriet prays.

The author uses a handful of words that may not be familiar to the young reader: plantation, dusk, refuge, haven, upriver, sapling, woes. If they don't ask what these words mean, after a couple of readings ask them to describe what they think they mean. For the words they are unclear about, re-read the context surrounding the words to see if that helps: "The woman points Harriet to safe havens -- hiding places for runaways -- and Harriet steals away into darkness."

- Plantation: place where a large group of plants or trees are being grown
- Dusk: the darker part of twilight; transition to darkness
- Refuge: safe place; sheltered, protected; haven
- Haven: safe place; refuge
- Upriver: against the flow of the water in a river; toward the source
- Sapling: baby tree
- Woes: troubles, problems

