

Unconventional Maps and the Underground Railroad

Mapping the Beat

Fifth Grade

Lesson Objective

To study the significance of coded maps in the form of quilts and songs in the success of the Underground Railroad.

A guest performer who specializes in African American spirituals or gospel music would be ideal for this lesson

This lesson may be divided into two sessions.

Standards Addressed

National Geography Standards

Standard 1: **How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective.**

How: Students create their own coded maps.

Standard 3: **How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places and environments.**

How: Students have to interpret the spatial organization of their school and translate that organization into a coded map.

Standard 13: **How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface.**

How: Students study the opposing forces of the Underground Railroad.

California Content Standards for Music

Standard 3.5: **Describe the influences of various cultures on the music of the United States.**

How: Students study the influence of African Slaves on music in the United States.

California State Board of Education History and Social Science Standards

Standard 5.4: **Students understand the political, religious, social economic institution that evolved in the Colonial Era.**

How: Students learn the importance of the Underground Railroad in helping Africans to escape slavery in America.

Teacher Prep

Prepare timeline cards
Obtain copy of *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*
Copy lyrics to *Follow the Drinking Gourd* to overhead transparency

Materials Needed

Colored Pencils
Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt by Deborah Hopkinson. Alfred A Knopf, New York, NY, 1993.
Timeline cards
 Harriet Tubman escapes and sets up the Underground Railroad-1849
 Slavery abolished-1865
Internet access to play sample of *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
Overhead projector
Overhead transparency
 Lyric to *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

Vocabulary

If teaching the whole Mapping the Beat unit, you may want to keep a chart of vocabulary up in the classroom or have students write the words & definition in a portfolio.

Underground Railroad- The name of the system of routes slaves took to escape to the North (Canada) to gain freedom.

Lesson Plan Sequence

5 min *Introduction*

The Underground Railroad is said to have gotten its name when, in 1871, a slave named Tice Davids escaped from Kentucky and swam across the river to Ripley, Ohio. The owner apparently saw Davids swim across the river but after Davids reached the shore he completely vanished. The owner is known to have said, "He must have gone on an Underground Railroad".

The Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad; it was a route set up by Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave, and other abolitionists. This route helped about one hundred thousand slaves to escape to freedom in the North between the American Revolution and the Civil War.

Discussion question:

What does “Underground” and “Railroad” describe in this context?

Answer: Underground= secret or not seen

Railroad= system of helpers and places to hide that often ran smoothly.

Quilts as Coded Maps

20-30 min *Reading Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*

Summary of book: Enslaved Clara has been taken away from her mother to work in a different plantation. Afraid Clara will never survive the heavy fieldwork, the woman who cares for Clara, Aunt Rachel, manages to get Clara work as a seamstress in the main house. Clara overhears travelers talking about all the slaves that have run away using the Underground Railroad. The travelers are also worried, saying that if there were maps of the Underground Railroad, more slaves would run away. Clara’s sewing evolves and the stitches appear to be footprints and path. She vows that she will make a map that can lead people to freedom.

30 to 35 min *Making a Quilt Map*

Give each student a piece of drawing paper. Have them divide the paper into four blocks by folding the paper in half twice. Each square represents one block. Ask them to draw a coded quilt map that takes them from their classroom to their homes. Students can incorporate the 9-square pattern Clara used in two of the blocks. The other two blocks should have symbols that represent the school, their home, neighborhood landmarks and some indication of a path from school to home.

If teaching this lesson in two sessions, break here.

Folk Songs as Coded Maps

25 min- *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

Start by playing online example of *Follow the Drinking Gourd* with lyrics on the over the overhead.

Online accompaniment:

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~kypendle/blackundergroundrailroad.htm>

Or

<http://www.tngenweb.org/tncolor/gourd.htm>

Sing *Follow the Drinking Gourd* as a class.

Review coded messages as below.

"Follow the Drinking Gourd"

Follow the drinking gourd!

Follow the drinking gourd.

For the old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom

If you follow the drinking gourd.

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,

Follow the drinking gourd.

For the old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom,

If you follow the drinking gourd.

“When the sun comes back’ means late winter and spring when the altitude of the sun at noon is higher each day. Quail are migratory bird wintering in the South. The Drinking Gourd is the Big Dipper. The old man is Peg Leg Joe. The verse tells slaves to leave in the winter and walk towards the Drinking Gourd. Eventually they will meet a guide who will escort them for the remainder of the trip.

Most escapees had to cross the Ohio River, which is too wide and too swift to swim. The Railroad struggled with the problem of how to get escapees across, and with experience, came to believe the best crossing time was winter. Then the river was frozen, and escapees could walk across on the ice. Since it took most escapees a year to travel from the South to the Ohio, the Railroad urged slaves to start their trip in winter in order to be at the Ohio the next winter.”

*The riverbank makes a very good road,
The dead trees show you the way,
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on
Follow the drinking gourd.*

“This verse taught slaves to follow the bank of the Tombigbee River north looking for dead trees that were marked with drawings of a left foot and a peg foot. The markings distinguished the Tombigbee from other north-south rivers that flow into it.”

*The river ends between two hills,
Follow the drinking gourd.
There's another river on the other side,
Follow the drinking gourd.*

“These words told the slaves that when they reached the headwaters of the Tombigbee, they were to continue north over the hills until they met another river. Then they were to travel north along the new river, which is the Tennessee River. A number of the southern escape routes converged on the Tennessee.”

*Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is a-waiting to carry you to freedom
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.*

“This verse told the slaves the Tennessee joined another river. They were to cross that river (which is the Ohio River), and on the north bank, meet a guide from the Underground Railroad.”

Source: <http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/planetarium/ftdg1.htm>

30 min-*Writing a Coded Song*

Have the students set their escape route from school for summer vacation to music. Offer them a list of melodies to choose from like “Happy Birthday” and “Twinkle, Twinkle” and have them write coded lyrics depicting their escape route. Have the students work in groups of 5 or 6 and have each group perform their song.

Give students an example to work from:

To the tune of Happy Birthday tell a coded story of leaving for summer break:

When the sun makes us hot, (summer)
and we’ve learned quite a lot. (end of the school year)
Pass the one with the orange flag (cross guard)
Leave the one who has taught. (teacher)

Selecting a Guest Performer

Invite a performer who specializes in African American spirituals and gospel music. Someone who could address coded messages in other gospel songs like “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” would be ideal. A local church may have singers that would be willing to visit your classroom for relatively low cost.

Web Resources

National Geographic Society’s Underground Railroad site

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/index.html>

“Taking the Train to Freedom” by the National Park Service

<http://www.nps.gov/undergroundrr/contents.htm>