

Discovering the Story: A City and Its Culture

Fact or Fiction: The Story of the Underground Railroad

A Social Studies Lesson for
Grades 4-8

Based on *The Underground Railroad, 1893*
by Charles T. Webber



Charles T. Webber (1825-1911)
United States (Cincinnati)
The Underground Railroad, 1893
Subscription Fund Purchase, 1927.26

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CONCEPT STATEMENT

The Underground Railroad by C.T. Webber is a narrative painting that gives us a glimpse of just one scene in the story of the Underground Railroad. Upon viewing the painting and further research, using nonfiction texts, students will discuss the scene and whether it is an honest depiction of this time in history. Students will also explore fictional texts and discuss their validity as they pertain to the Underground Railroad.

The teacher will facilitate students in a thorough investigation and study of the Underground Railroad through pre-videoconferencing classroom activities, a [videoconference](#) visit with the Cincinnati Art Museum and post-videoconferencing lesson activities. Student understanding of the objectives will be assessed through a written and oral presentation on the validity of this painting and their chosen fictional text as reputable depictions of the story of the Underground Railroad.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will closely examine the painting *The Underground Railroad* by C.T. Webber and learn that art can portray a moment in history.
- Students will learn/review the history of the Underground Railroad through close examination of the painting, nonfictional and fictional texts.
- Students will learn that often works of art and works of fiction are not always truthful depictions of a historical period.
- Students will compare the painting *The Underground Railroad* and their chosen fictional text. They will create a written report, based on their historical research and opinion, on whether either displays a reputable depiction of the story of the Underground Railroad.

TEACHER PREPARATION

CLASS PERIODS REQUIRED

1 to 2 class periods (40-50 mins.) for Pre-Videoconference Lesson Activities
1 (50-min.) class period for the Videoconference
1 to 2 class periods (40-50 mins.) for Post-Videoconference Lesson Activities. Extra time should be given for student reading.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Refer to Background Information for more on the painting *The Underground Railroad* and the artist who created it. This information also provides an historical background for the Underground Railroad and Cincinnati's involvement in this movement. This resource has been written for teachers to review before the lesson and then share with students.

VIDEO

Share the [video](#) that accompanies this lesson with your students prior to the videoconference. The video depicts the installation of an exhibit at the Cincinnati Art Museum that was inspired in part by C.T. Webber's *The Underground Railroad* and the overarching concepts of courage and freedom.

Video Duration: approx. 6 minutes.

PRE- VIDEOCONFERENCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

VOCABULARY

Definitions can be found in the [Glossary](#) on the [Discovering the Story](#) Website.

Abolitionist
Civil War
Commentary
Fiction
Historical era
Narrative
Nonfiction
Underground Railroad
Validity

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What was slavery?
- What was the Underground Railroad?
- What is an abolitionist?

MATERIALS

Copy of *The Underground Railroad* – class set downloaded and printed from the *Discovering the Story* website

PROCEDURE

Teacher will:

- Divide the class into small collaborative teams (3–4 students each).
- Distribute a copy of C.T. Webber’s *The Underground Railroad* to each team.
- Have each group discuss the painting using the questions provided. One team member should record the team’s responses to each question.
 - What do you see happening in this painting?
 - Who are these people?
 - What time of day is it, and how do you know this?
 - What season is it, and how do you know this?
 - What is the artist telling us about this event?
 - What message is the artist trying to convey?
 - What time in American History does this painting represent?
- Following the team discussions, allow the spokesperson from each group to present their responses to the class. Record all responses on the board.
- Inform the students that often paintings are used to record an historical event, convey a personal story or express a particular point of view. The story that is being told here is that of the Underground Railroad.
- Using the Background Information provided on the *Discovering the Story* website, your history textbook and/or age-appropriate books, introduce/review and discuss slavery and the Underground Railroad with students. Students should only use nonfiction texts at this time to research the Underground Railroad.
 - **Suggested age-appropriate titles include (ages 9–12)** (These are all Nonfiction texts):
 - Bial, Raymond. *The Underground Railroad*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.
 - Buchmaster, Henrietta. *Flight to Freedom: The Story of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Crowell, 1958.
 - Collier, James and Christopher. *Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War*. Tarrytown, New York: 2000.
 - Diouf, Sylvanie. *Growing Up in Slavery*. Brookfield, Connecticut: The Millbrook Press, Inc. 2001.
 - Erickson, Paul. *Daily Life on a Southern Plantation 1853*. New York: Putnam, 1997.
 - Evitts, William J. *Captive Bodies, Free Spirits: The Story of Southern Slavery*. New York: Julian Messner, 1985.

- Fradin, Dennis. *Bound for The North Star: True Stories of Fugitive Slaves*. New York: Clarion, 2000.
 - Gorrell, Gena. *North Star to Freedom: The Story of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Delacorte, 1996.
 - Greene, Meg. *Slave Young, Slave Long: The American Slave Experience*. Minneapolis: Lerner, 1999.
 - Hansen, Joyce. *Freedom Roads: Searching for the Underground Railroad*. Chicago: Cricket Books, 2003.
 - Heindricks, Ann. *The Underground Railroad*. Minneapolis: Compass Point Books, 2001.
 - Kallen, Stuart. *Life on the Underground Railroad*. San Diego: Lucent Books, 2000.
 - Meadows, James. *Slavery: The Struggle for Freedom*. Chanhassen, Minnesota: The Child's World, 2002.
 - Rappaport, Doreen. *Escape from Slavery: Five Journeys to Freedom*. New York: Hyperion, 2000.
 - Rappaport, Doreen. *No More! Stories and Songs of Slave Resistance*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 2002.
 - Sawyer, Kem Knapp. *The Underground Railroad in American History*. Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 1997.
 - Stein, Conrad. *The Story of the Underground Railroad*. Chicago: Children's Press, 1997.
 - Swain, Gwenyth. *The President of the Underground Railroad: A Story About Levi Coffin*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Creative Minds Books, 2001.
- Ensure that, upon completion of the above, students have a better understanding of the Underground Railroad.
 - As preparation for the videoconference with the Museum, ask students to write down any questions they might have about the painting or the Underground Railroad and email these questions to the Cincinnati Art Museum so that the museum representative may address them.

VIDEOCONFERENCE

OBJECTIVES

- Students will interact with the Cincinnati Art Museum staff through a sixty-minute [videoconference](#).
- Students will learn about Cincinnati's contribution to the Underground Railroad.
- Students will use Museum objects to reinforce activities completed in preparation for this [videoconference](#).

CONCEPT

A [videoconference](#) conducted by the Cincinnati Art Museum staff extends student learning through emphasis on the viewing and discussion of art objects. During this [videoconference](#) with the Museum, students will explore Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement and major tristate figures, such as Levi and Catharine Coffin, John Parker and John Rankin.

SCHEDULE

- **5 minutes** Introduction to CAM staff (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)
- **10 minutes** Brief discussion of student pre-videoconferencing activities.
- **10 minutes** Museum staff will lead students in an in-depth investigation of C.T. Webber's painting *The Underground Railroad*
- **15 minutes** Museum staff will lead an interactive discussion with students on Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad movement.
- **10 minutes** Questions and student sharing of art projects.
- **5 minutes** Closing (*This is also buffer time in case of connection complications*)

POST- VIDEOCONFERENCE LESSON ACTIVITIES

MATERIALS

Copy of *The Underground Railroad* – class set downloaded and printed from the *Discovering the Story* website

PROCEDURE

Teacher will:

- Upon completion of the videoconference with the Cincinnati Art Museum, review with students information learned during the pre-videoconference lesson activities and the

videoconference. Before proceeding with the next step, all students should have a firm grasp of the story of the Underground Railroad.

- Look again at the painting *The Underground Railroad* with students. Discuss with students that this painting tells the story of the Underground Railroad as the artist imagined it might have looked, based on stories from friends and writing he had read. Stress upon students that it was created 30 years after the Underground Railroad stopped operating. Tell them that works of art, like fiction, tell the artist's version of a story, and this may not always be the most truthful of depictions.
- In order to better understand this concept, tell students that they are now each going to read a fictional account about the Underground Railroad. It is important that they understand that not everything they read or see is always a truthful depiction of a true story and that it is up to them to decide, based on their research, what is and isn't true as it pertains to the story of the Underground Railroad.
- Students should select from the list of fictional texts below. Each student should be encouraged to choose a different book and should be given time in class to read their book.
 - **Suggested age-appropriate titles include (ages 9–12)**
 - Armstrong, Jennifer. *Steal Away... To Freedom*. New York: Scholastic, 1992.
 - Ayres, Katherine. *North By Night: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Delacorte, 1998.
 - Beaty, Patricia. *Who Comes with Cannons?* New York: Morrow, 1992.
 - Collier, James and Christopher. *With Every Drop of Blood*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1994.
 - Draper, Sharon. *Lost in the Tunnel of Time (from the Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs series)*. East Orange, New Jersey. What year?
 - Gayle, Sharon Shavers. *Escape! A Story of the Underground Railroad*. Norwalk, Connecticut: Trudy Corporation, 1999.
 - Greenwood, Barbara. *The Last Safe House: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. Toronto: Kids Can Press, 1998.
 - Guccione, Leslie. *Come Morning*. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Creative Minds Books, 1995.
 - Hamilton, Virginia. *The House of Dies Drear*. New York: Knopf, 1968.
 - Houston, Gloria. *Bright Freedom's Song: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1998. Nordham, Robert. *The Secret Road*. New York: Holiday House, 2001.
 - Pearsall, Shelley. *Trouble Don't Last*. New York: Knopf, 2002.
 - Ruby, Lois. *Steal Away Home*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.
 - Schwartz, Virginia Frances. *If I Just Had Two Wings*. Toronto: Stoddard Kids, 2001.
 - Siegelson, Kim. *Escape South*. New York: Golden Books, 2000.
 - Wisler, G. Clifton. *Caleb's Choice*. New York: Penguin, 1996.
 - Woodruff, Elvira. *Dear Austin: Letters from the Underground Railroad*. New York: Knopf, 1998.
- Upon completion of their book, have students compare the painting *The Underground Railroad* and their chosen fictional text and discuss whether either displays a reputable

depiction of the story of the Underground Railroad. Why or why not? If not, what could have been changed/included to make either a more valid depiction of this time in history?

- Have students present a written report based on their findings.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

- Students learn /review the history of the Underground Railroad through close examination of the painting, nonfiction and fictional texts.
- Students learn that often works of art and works of fiction are not always truthful depictions of an historical period.
- Students compare the painting and their chosen fictional text and discuss whether either displayed a reputable depiction of the story of the Underground Railroad.
- Students present a written report on his/her findings.

“Mankind's most enduring achievement is art. At its best, it reveals the nobility that coexists in human nature along with flaws and evils, and the beauty and truth it can perceive. Whether in music or architecture, literature, painting or sculpture, art opens our eyes and ears and feelings to something beyond ourselves, something we cannot experience without the artist's vision and the genius of his craft.”

Barbara Tuchman
Pulitzer Prize winning historian

ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

NATIONAL STANDARDS: SOCIAL STUDIES

United States History

Era 4 - Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)

Standard 12: Understands the sources and character of cultural, religious and social reform movements in the antebellum period.

Grades 5-6

Benchmark 2: Understands the major characteristics of the abolition movement in the antebellum period (e.g., different viewpoints within the abolitionist movement, arguments of those opposed to and those who supported slavery, the Underground Railroad).

Grade 7-8

Benchmark 1: Understands perspectives that influenced slavery in the antebellum period (e.g., changing ideas about race, the reception of proslavery and antislavery ideologies in the North and South, arguments used to defend slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries).

Era 5 - Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

Standard 13: Understands the causes of the Civil War.

Grades 5-6

Benchmark 1: Understands slavery prior to the Civil War (e.g., the importance of slavery as a principal cause of the Civil War, the growing influence of abolitionists, children's roles and family life under slavery).

Historical Understanding

Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Grade 5-6

Benchmark 6: Evaluates historical fiction according to the accuracy of its content and the author's interpretation.

Grade 7-8

Benchmark 6: Knows different types of primary and secondary sources and the motives, interests and bias expressed in them (e.g., eyewitness accounts, letters, diaries, artifacts, photos, magazine articles, newspaper accounts, hearsay).

OHIO STANDARDS: SOCIAL STUDIES

History: Students use materials drawn from the diversity of human experience to analyze and interpret significant events, patterns and themes in the history of Ohio, the United States and the world.

Grades 6-8

Benchmark G: Analyzes the causes and consequences of the American Civil War.

Social Studies Skills and Methods: Students collect, organize, evaluate and synthesize information from multiple sources to draw logical conclusions. Students communicate this information using appropriate social studies terminology in oral, written or multimedia form and apply what they have learned to societal issues in simulated or real-world settings.

Grades 3-5

Benchmark A: Obtains information from a variety of primary and secondary sources using the component parts of the source.

Benchmark B: Uses a variety of sources to organize information and draw inferences.

Benchmark D: Uses problem-solving skills to make decisions individually and in groups.

Grades 6-8

Benchmark A: Analyzes different perspectives on a topic obtained from a variety of sources.

Benchmark C: Presents a position and supports it with evidence and citation of sources.

Benchmark D: Works effectively in a group.