

*Discovering the Story: A City and Its Culture*

*Painting the Story of the Underground Railroad*

A Social Studies Lesson for  
Grades K-3

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, students will discuss the individuals represented in this work of art and their contributions to the story of the Underground Railroad. Students will also discuss the ways in which art can portray a moment in history.

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. Emphasis will be on student understanding of Cincinnati's place in the story of the Underground Railroad.

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will closely examine the painting [\*The Underground Railroad\*](#) by C.T. Webber.
- Students will discuss the ways in which art can portray a moment in history.
- Students will learn about the Underground Railroad and Cincinnati's place in this historical movement and that this painting captures a moment in this movement.
- Students will work in collaborative teams and create a narrative drawing about a story in each of their lives.

## 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.

## 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.

Civil War  
Era  
Narrative  
Reconstruction  
Slave  
Underground Railroad

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is freedom?
- What is a slave?
- What was the Underground Railroad?

### MATERIALS

- Copy of [The Underground Railroad](#) – class set downloaded and printed from the [Discovering the Story](#) website

## PROCEDURE

### *Teacher will:*

- Distribute a reproduction of C.T. Webber's *The Underground Railroad* to each student or team of students.
- Discuss the following questions with students and record answers on the board. Older students should be encouraged to copy responses in their notebooks or on pieces of paper.
  - 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 are these people wearing? Do they look like clothes we wear today?
  - Can someone tell me a story of what might be going on in this painting?
- Review class responses with students.
- Explain to students that this painting is telling a story and that many works of art tell stories, even their own. Remind them that this painting tells a story as the artist imagined the story might look and that it might be just a little bit different from the way the story looked in real life. (*If students have trouble with this concept, share with them a photo and a drawing of the same thing and discuss the differences in the way each depicts the subject matter--a good source would be a drawing and a photo of Abe Lincoln.*)
- Tell students that this painting is telling the story of the Underground Railroad and that it depicts a scene on a farm that was once located in Cincinnati.
- Using the Background Information provided on the *Discovering the Story* website and/or age-appropriate books, introduce and discuss slavery and the Underground Railroad with students.

### **Suggested age-appropriate titles include (ages 4–8):**

- Ackerman, Karen. *The Tin Heart*. New York: Atheneum, 1990.
- Brill, Marlene. *Allen Jay and the Underground Railroad*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Carolrhoda Creative Minds, 1993.
- Connell, Kate. *Tales from the Underground Railroad*. Austin, Texas: Steck Vaughn, 1993.
- Edwards, Pamela. *Barefoot: Escape on the Underground Railroad*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.
- Hopkinson, Deborah. *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
- Levine, Ellen. *...If You Traveled on the Underground Railroad*. New York: Scholastic, 1988.
- Monjo, F.N. *The Drinking Gourd: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- Nolan, Jerdine. *Big Jabe*. New York: Morrow, 2000.
- Pico, Fernando. *The Red Comb*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Troll Associates, 1991.
- Rappaport, Doreen. *Freedom River*. New York: Hyperion, 2000.
- Riggio, Anita. *Secret Signs Along the Underground Railroad*. Honedale, Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press, 1997.

- Ringgold, Faith. *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1992.
  - Vaughn, Marcia. *The Secret to Freedom*. New York: Lee and Low Books, 2001.
  - Wright, Courtni. *Journey to Freedom: A Story of the Underground Railroad*. New York: Holiday House, 1994.
- Once students understand the concepts of the Underground Railroad, have them look at the painting again. Share with students that some of the people depicted in this painting were real people that lived and worked in Cincinnati. They were all very important contributors to the Underground Railroad. Find and share the biographical information on each of the people one by one.
    - Find the white man in the back of the wagon. His name is Levi Coffin and he is known as the President of the Underground Railroad.
    - Now find the woman right in front helping the elderly man. That is Catharine Coffin, Levi's wife.
    - Next, find the lady and little boy toward the left side of the painting. They are Hannah and Thomas Haydock and they helped Levi Coffin on the Underground Railroad.
  - Tell students that they are now going to have a virtual field trip to the Museum. During this "trip" they will learn more about the painting and the story behind it.
  - Brainstorm a list of questions that they would like to ask the Museum representative about the painting and the Underground Railroad. Email questions to Museum prior to videoconference.

## 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
- Paper
- Pencil
- Drawing supplies (markers, crayons, etc.)

### PROCEDURE

#### *Teacher will:*

- Review with students what they learned about the Underground Railroad from the videoconference with the Museum.
- Choose, if they wish, to read another book from the list given in the pre-lesson to further deepen student understanding of the Underground Railroad.
- Distribute a copy of the C.T. Webber's *The Underground Railroad* to each student or team of students.
- Review with students that this painting tells a story and it was painted in 1893, over 30 years after the Underground Railroad stopped operating. It was painted by the Cincinnati artist C.T. Webber based on a story that he heard from a friend.

- Discuss with students that some aspects of the original story that C.T. Webber heard may have changed or been interpreted differently from the telling of the story to the drawing/painting of the story.
- Divide students into teams of two. Tell them that they are each going to take a turn drawing a picture that tells a story as told to them by their teammate. The teller should not see what the drawer is doing till the picture is finished.
- Have each team present their stories and pictures after both team members have told and drawn a story/picture. First have the storyteller tell their story, then have the artist reveal their drawing.
- Discuss with students that some of the pictures may not look like the story as you imagined it. This is because every person/artist will interpret a story in a different way and that is what art is all about.
- Have students look at *The Underground Railroad* painting again. Discuss with them that this is a depiction of this story as the artist thought it would look. Do you think this is what the story/scene really looked like?

## ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

- Students closely examine the painting *The Underground Railroad* by C.T. Webber.
- Students learn and understand the story of the Underground Railroad and Cincinnati's place in this historical movement and that this painting captures a moment in this movement.
- Students work in collaborative teams and create a narrative drawing about a story in each of their lives.

## ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

### NATIONAL STANDARDS: SOCIAL STUDIES

**Topic 2** – The History of Students' Own State or Region

**Standard 2:** Understands the history of a local community and how communities in North America varied long ago.

**Grades K-2**

**Benchmark 2:** Understands the contributions and significance of historical figures of the community.

### 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 K-2**

**Benchmark D:** Recognizes that the actions of individuals make a difference, and relates the stories of people from diverse backgrounds who have contributed to the heritage of the United States.

**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 K-2**

**Benchmark A:** Obtains information from oral, visual, print and electronic sources.

**Benchmark C:** Communicates information orally, visually or in writing.