

# STEP INTO THE PAINTING

ART, SOCIAL STUDIES, LANGUAGE ARTS  
GRADES: 5<sup>TH</sup> AND UP

## BASED ON

Charles T. Webber (1825–1911) (Cincinnati)  
*The Underground Railroad*  
Oil on canvas.  
Subscription Fund Purchase, 1927.26

## OBJECTIVES

- Students will study the Underground Railroad, especially its impact on Cincinnati.
- Students will read biographical material about “conductor” Levi Coffin.
- Students will read first person accounts of fugitives’ experiences.
- Students will examine the painting, *The Underground Railroad* by Charles T. Webber.
- Students will compose a first person narrative describing the experience of one of the individuals in the painting.
- Students will present or act out narratives to the class (optional).

## CONCEPT

While best as a collaborative, interdisciplinary lesson, this can be used in a single social studies, art, or English classroom. To enhance the understanding of the experiences of fugitives and abolitionists, students will study the painting and relate personally to the human experience of historical figures.

## VOCABULARY

institution  
merchant  
immortalized  
reminiscences  
liberated  
devolved

dejected  
haven  
depicted  
indentured  
prosperous

oppressed/oppression  
designation  
abhorrence  
plight  
aloof

## MATERIALS/PROCEDURE

- reproduction of *The Underground Railroad*
1. Give each student in the group his or her own copy of the focus artwork to explore, or place it on an overhead projector. The teacher should encourage silent/quiet looking, followed by the use of guiding questions to elicit their responses to what they see. Questions should include:
  2. What do you see?
  3. What is happening in this picture? Why?

## **CLASS EXPERIENCE**

4. In the image, point out the figures of Levi and Catharine Coffin. Read brief biography of their life to the class, emphasizing the connection to Cincinnati.
5. Look at the painting again; discuss elements of the painting such as wintry scene, reasons for arriving at dawn, activities of people depicted, and conditions for fugitives; and speculate on their lives in bondage and possible scenarios of their escapes.
6. Review structure of narrative writing and first-person voice.
7. Assign an essay. Students will choose one person from the painting and write a first-person narrative describing that person's experience. Include physical descriptions of settings, thoughts, feelings, and dialogue.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### Narrative Essay Scoring Rubric

- 4 Essay will contain vivid descriptions of setting, characters, and dialogue. Essay will contain specific details of historical events and demonstrate a complete understanding of events and individuals. Writing will be clear, imaginative, and follow conventions of grammar, spelling, and punctuation.
- 3 Essay will contain descriptions of setting, characters, and contain some dialogue. Essay will contain details of historical events and demonstrate a clear understanding of events and individuals. Writing will be clear, imaginative and follow conventions of grammar, spelling, and punctuation with few errors.
- 2 Essay will contain some description of setting, characters, and minimal dialogue. Essay will contain details of historical events and individuals and demonstrate understanding. Writing will be clear and follow most conventions of spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- 1 Writing is unclear and shows little understanding. Writing lacks detail and description and contains many errors.

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS**

### VISUAL ART

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

### ART CONNECTIONS

Standard 1: Understands connections among the various art forms and other disciplines

### LANGUAGE ARTS

Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

Standard 3: Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

### UNITED STATES HISTORY

Standard 13: Understands the causes of the Civil War

Standard 14: Understands the course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people



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