

Harriet Tubman: Follow the North Star to Freedom

- **Compelling Question**
 - How can you be responsible by helping others?
- **Virtue:** Responsibility
- **Definition** – Responsibility is accountability to myself and others.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will learn about how Harriet Tubman took responsibility for helping many people escape slavery. They will also determine ways that they can help others by being responsible.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will analyze Harriet Tubman’s responsible actions.
 - Students will understand ways that they can be responsible and help others.
 - Students will apply their knowledge to determine ways that they can be responsible.
- **Background**
 - Harriet Tubman was born Araminta Ross around 1820 to enslaved parents in Dorchester County, Maryland. She was six years old when her owner sent her to a neighbor’s house where she was hired to be a house slave and nursemaid, and she would eventually serve in the fields of the plantations. In her twenties she married a free black man named John Tubman; she changed her name from Araminta to Harriet to honor her mother and took the last name Tubman.

In 1849, after twenty-four years in the harsh conditions of slavery and living with the fear of being split apart from family again, Harriet Tubman left her husband and family behind and escaped the bonds of slavery by running away to the North on the Underground Railroad. Upon reaching freedom, she traveled back to the South and became a conductor on the Underground Railroad to help others escape slavery. She traveled back to the South at least 19 times to lead her family and hundreds of other slaves to freedom. “General” Tubman remained active during the Civil War serving as a Union scout, spy, nurse, and guided the Combahee River Raid, an expedition leading to the liberation of hundreds of slaves in South Carolina.

- **Vocabulary**
 - Nursemaid
 - Underground Railroad
 - Liberation
 - Compelled
 - Champion
 - Abolitionist
 - Heroism
 - Advocate
 - Neurological
 - Seizures
 - Horrid
 - Quaker
 - Bloodhound
 - Determination
 - Enacted
 - Fugitive Slave Act
 - Prosecuted
 - Monetary
 - Steadfast
 - Rerouted
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
- **Observation Questions**
 - Who was Harriet Tubman? What was her role on the Underground Railroad?
 - What was Harriet’s purpose?
 - What was Harriet’s purpose?
- **Discussion Questions**
 - Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
 - Larson, Kate Clifford. *Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero: Bound for the Promised Land*. www.harriettubmanbiography.com
 - Danzer, Gerald A. *The Americans: Reconstruction to the 21st Century*. Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2005.
 - Rausch, Monica. *Harriet Tubman*. Milwaukee, WI: Weekly Reader Early Learning Library, 2007.
 - Harriet Tubman Historical Society. <http://www.harriet-tubman.org/facts/>
 - “Tubman: Conductor of the Underground Railroad.” America’s Story from America’s Library. http://www.americaslibrary.gov/aa/tubman/aa_tubman_rail_1.html
 - “Harriet Tubman Home.” The Library of Congress: The American Folklife Center. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/legacies/loc.afc.afc-legacies.200003371/>

Handout A: Harriet Tubman: Follow the North Star to Freedom

Background

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In 1849, after twenty-four years in the harsh conditions of slavery and living with the fear of being split apart from family again, Harriet Tubman left her husband and family behind and escaped the bonds of slavery by running away to the North on the Underground Railroad. Upon reaching freedom, she traveled back to the South and became a conductor on the Underground Railroad to help others escape slavery. She traveled back to the South at least 19 times to lead her family and hundreds of other slaves to freedom. "General" Tubman remained active during the Civil War serving as a Union scout, spy, nurse, and guided the Combahee River Raid, an expedition leading to the liberation of hundreds of slaves in South Carolina.

Narrative

Harriet Tubman believed you either "lived free or died a slave." She was continuously compelled to help others whether they were family, friends, or strangers. She was a champion in the abolitionist movement, and even those who only knew of her through stories of her heroism and fight for justice trusted her. She was an advocate for the elderly, and a woman who believed that others' freedom was more important than her own safety. She believed it was her responsibility to help those that could not rescue themselves. She felt a responsibility to other slaves and to the people that helped her safely remove slaves from the South.

Harriet was exposed to a life of extensive labor and physical punishment that left permanent scars from lashes and neurological damage from unrestrained overseers' punishment. When she was 12, she was sent on an errand to a store by her master. At the store, a man insisted that Harriet restrain a slave boy who was attempting to run away. When she refused, the man threw a two-pound weight and hit her in the head. She never received proper medical treatment for the injury and never fully recovered from the damage. She continued to live with seizures and headaches for the rest of her life. These scars would remind her of the horrid existence as a slave and would be the catalyst to drive Harriet to run from bondage in 1849.

After Harriet made her own escape, she decided to return to the South to help others leave the cruelties of slavery. Members of the Quaker religion, who opposed slavery, helped Harriet on her journeys with a circuit of safe houses called the Underground Railroad. Many Quakers and other abolitionists allowed runaway slaves to stay overnight in hiding places behind bookcases or in false-bottom carriages. They used signals that allowed the slaves to know whether they could safely stop at their station or if they should continue on to another station.

For eight years, Harriet made trips back to Maryland to rescue family and close friends. She would dress up in disguises to avoid being captured. Harriet had to overcome many obstacles to make the journeys. On each trip, Harriet walked for seven weeks and covered nearly ninety miles to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she would find work and save money to make the trip back to save others. Harriet walked by night and rested during the day so as not to be detected by the bloodhound dogs that searched for runaway slaves.

Every time she returned south to rescue another group, she feared for her own safety as well as the safety of the travelers with her. Strength, courage, determination, and her sense of responsibility enabled her to face the constant dangers. In 1865 she said, "and I prayed to God to make me strong and able to fight, and that's what I've always prayed for ever since." She knew that every step forward put the nightmare of slavery behind those she helped. To make matters worse, the government in 1850 enacted a stricter Fugitive Slave Act that stated that all runaway slaves in the North had to be returned and that those who helped slaves escape would be prosecuted. Newspapers described the runaways and offered monetary rewards. Harriet remained steadfast and continued to help slaves escape, but, for a time, she rerouted her legs of the Underground Railroad to Canada so

that the escaped slaves would not be recaptured in states where the Fugitive Slave Act held authority. She was able to lead her children, sister, brothers, niece, and countless others to freedom. She was never caught and never lost a slave.

After the war and end of slavery, Mrs. Tubman continued to feel responsible for others. She sought support from her abolitionist friends like Fredrick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, and she purchased the land from William Seward, former Secretary of State under President Lincoln, in order to open the Home for the Aged in Auburn, New York. When she was too old and ill to run the home anymore she deeded the property to the Church of Zion and they agreed to continue to run the home. At the end of her life, Harriet herself moved into the home to live out her final days. Harriet Tubman never lost sight of her conviction that she was responsible to do as much good as she could for as long as she could.