

HARRIET TUBMAN: A PORTRAIT OF CHARACTER AND COURAGE



Harriet Tubman (born **Araminta Ross**) was born in 1822. She is one of the most famous American abolitionists and humanitarians. Born into slavery, Tubman escaped in 1849 and then subsequently made approximately fifteen missions along **The Underground Railroad** to free enslaved families and friends. A staunch Christian throughout her life, she experienced strange visions and waking dreams that would occur in her life as premonitions from God. She had a number of nicknames including “General Tubman” and “Moses” and became known for never losing a fugitive along the

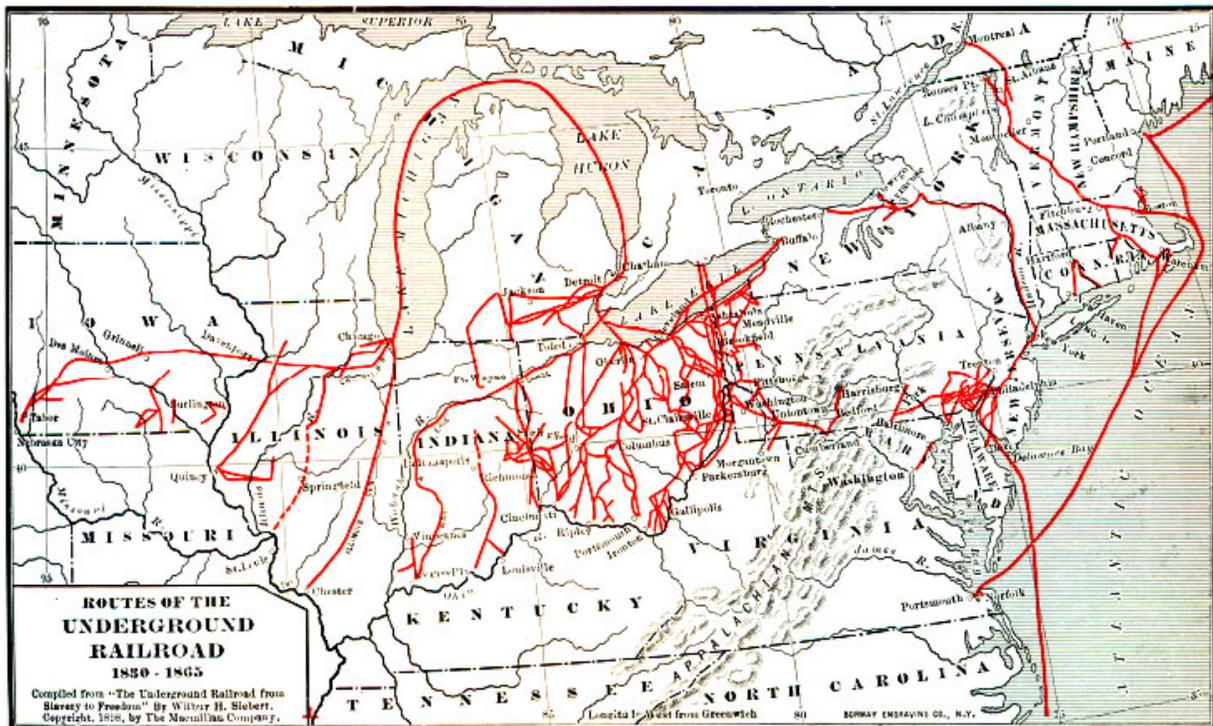
Underground Railroad or allowing a fugitive to turn back. After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, she helped guide runaways further north into what is now known as Canada. She would also help newly freed slaves find work.

After serving as a spy and nurse in the Civil War, she retired to her home in Auburn, NY to care for her aging parents. She was an ardent advocate for the women's suffrage movement as well as the African-American Civil Rights til her death in 1913.

For Students:

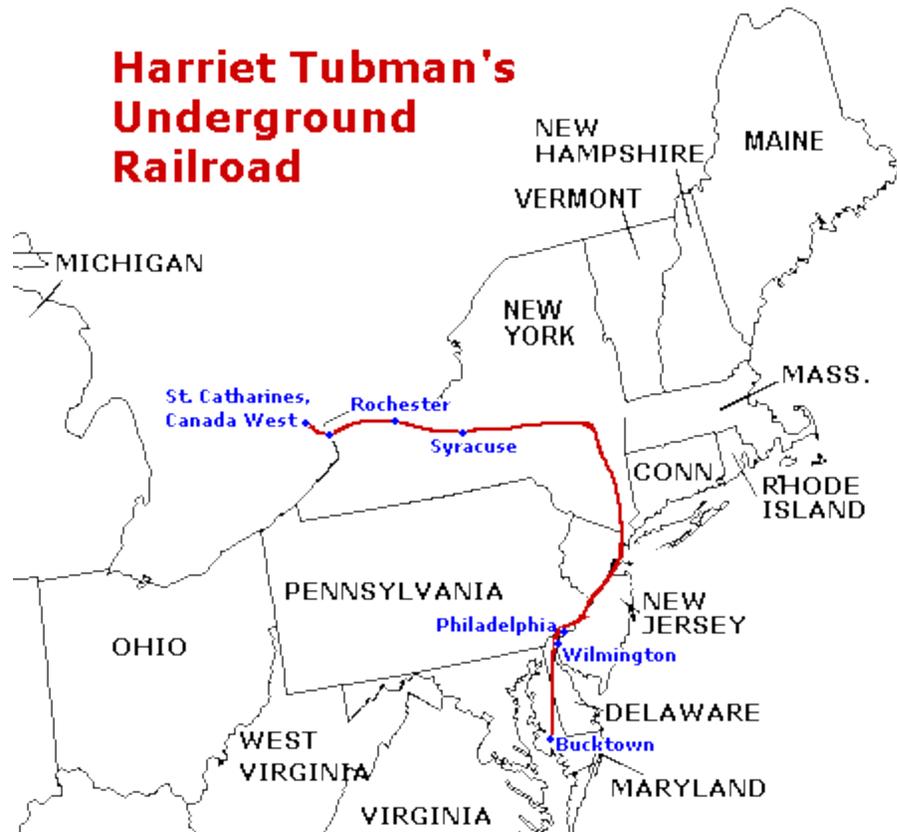
- What is an example of Harriet's **character** that you learned from 'Letters to Harriet Tubman'?
- What is an example of Harriet Tubman's **courage**?
- What was the most surprising thing you learned about Harriet Tubman's life and work? Why?

A Map of the Underground Railroad



- A map of all the routes of the Underground Railroad, Circa 1850.

Harriet Tubman's Underground Railroad



- Harriet Tubman's route. She would travel the path on foot with as many as 70 slaves at a time. The road is approximately 500 miles long.

For Students:

- What were or could have been some of the risks in navigating the Underground Railroad?
- In 'Letters to Harriet Tubman', what is an example of a difficulty Harriet Tubman had to face in traveling the Underground Railroad with runaways?
- Why is being free so important?
- How would you feel if you were not free?

Harriet's Songs

1. **The Battle Hymn of the Republic:** Written by abolitionist, Julia Ward Howe in 1861. The song links the judgment of the wicked at the end of the age ([Old Testament, Isaiah 63](#); [New Testament, Rev. 19](#)) with the [American Civil War](#).
2. **Go Down Moses:** an American [Negro spiritual](#). It describes events in the [Old Testament](#) of the [Bible](#), specifically [Exodus 8:1](#):
3. **Follow the Drinking Gourd:** American [folk song](#) first published in 1928. [Peg Leg Joe](#), an operative of the [Underground Railroad](#), had passed as a laborer and spread the song to different plantations, giving directions for [slaves](#) to escape. The song was published by the [Texas Folklore Society](#) in 1928. (The cover spells the title "Foller de Drinkin' Gou'd.")^[1]
4. **Oh Freedom:** "Oh, Freedom" is a post-Civil War [African-American freedom song](#). It is often associated with the American Civil Rights Movement. The song was first recorded in 1931 by the E. R. Nance Family with Clarence Dooley as "Sweet Freedom".

5. **Steal Away:** an [American Negro spiritual](#). The song is well known by variations of the chorus: "Steal Away" was composed by [Wallace Willis](#), [Choctaw freedman](#) in the old [Indian Territory](#), sometime before 1862.^[4]

For Students:

- Which song was your favorite and why?
- Why do you think these songs are important to the history of the Underground Railroad?

More on Harriet Tubman in American History

Harriet Tubman is known for being a conductor on the **Underground Railroad**, a network of secret routes and safe houses during the early-mid 19th century, used by African-American Slaves to escape into northern states and Canada. Prior to this, she fled slavery in 1849. Later in her life, she collaborated with abolitionist **John Brown in planning his raid on Harper's Ferry**, an attempt to initiate an armed slave revolt ultimately defeated by the US Marines. . She also served as a scout, spy and nurse during the **American Civil War (1861-1865)** under command of Colonel James Montgomery. In 1863, Tubman led the way on **Montgomery's expedition up the Combahee River**. This was a Union raid into the interior of South Carolina, which freed over 750 slaves. Later in 1896, in Washington, D.C., she attended the organizing meeting of the **National Association of Colored Women**.

Supplemental Assignment:

Have students write their own letters to Harriet Tubman. They can tell her what their favorite part of her story was, Things they learned that they had never considered before, why they think she is important to black history, etc.