

# DISCOVER CURRICULUM:

LEVI AND CATHARINE COFFIN  
AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD







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## INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS

The Levi and Catharine Coffin State Historic Site is one of 11 sites administered by the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. Located in Fountain City (formerly known as Newport until 1878), the site contains an interpretive center containing an orientation theater, exhibition space and library. The 1839 home where Levi and Catharine Coffin lived is one of the best documented and important Underground Railroad sites in the country. The Coffins lived at the home until moving to Cincinnati in 1847. The work they did in assisting more than 1,000 freedom-seekers still impacts generations today. Touring the Coffin house, as well as the interpretive center, allows visitors a chance to understand the conscious decisions made by the Coffins and their willingness to risk their livelihood so that others may be free. Visitors can also see how the work of the Coffins impacted the surrounding community and the nation.

The following curriculum is designed to complement a visit to the Levi and Catharine Coffin State Historic site and our virtual programs. However, participation is not required to benefit from the attached..

### Indiana Academic Standards

The following Indiana Academic Standards are met with this curriculum:

K.1.2, 1.1.1, 1.1.3, 1.2.1, 2.1.1, 2.1.3, 2.2.4, 2.2.5, 2.2.7, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.6, 3.2.2, 3.2.5, 3.2.6, 4.1.4, 4.1.6, 4.1.7, 4.1.16, 4.2.7, 5.2.10, 6.1.17, 6.1.22, 6.1.24, 6.2.6, 6.2.8, 8.1.11, 8.1.22, 8.1.23, 8.1.24, 8.1.30, 8.2.6, 8.2.7

# WHAT WAS THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD?

## (GRADES 3 - 8)

If you ask someone who may not be familiar with the history of the Underground Railroad, that person may imagine they will learn about an urban subway like what is seen in large cities like New York. It is important to understand that the Underground Railroad was not a thing, but a system of people, working together to aid freedom-seekers, or runaway slaves, heading north toward freedom. The Underground Railroad was loosely organized, meaning no maps or written instructions were used. Instead, freedom-seekers who trusted the system came to find that it worked through word-of-mouth and local connections. For example, Levi Coffin in Wayne County, Indiana, often received freedom-seekers brought to his home by William Beard, a Quaker who lived in Union County. Beard did not know where Coffin took freedom-seekers next, and so on. Secrecy was key and the sharing of one's connections or contacts could be disastrous.

But why go to such lengths to aid so many strangers? As early as 1793, the United States Congress made it a crime for enslaved Africans to escape in a law known as the Fugitive Slave Act. They also made it illegal for anyone in the United States and its territories to aid in those escapes. As a result, a person could face heavy fines, and in some cases, jail time. This threat was enough to keep most Americans from providing aid. But there were enough who, especially from the early 1800s through the Civil War, provided shelter, transportation and other resources for freedom-seekers. Levi Coffin and his wife Catharine are one such example.

Though the video mentions a potential number of freedom-seekers aided by the Underground Railroad, this is something that historians try not to estimate. Without enough primary and secondary resources, there was never a true accounting of how many were aided successfully to freedom. Plus, there were many more freedom-seekers who accomplished escapes without the aid of the Underground Railroad. But we do have a few hints through stories and records that have been found or published. Levi Coffin estimates in his autobiography that he aided around 100 freedom-seekers in the 20 years he called Indiana home. He goes on to estimate another 1,000 while living in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Students will hear or read many terms that are used when learning about the Underground Railroad. Use the accompanying vocabulary sheet to aid students when referencing and understanding what they will learn about the Underground Railroad. The Levi and Catharine Coffin State Historic Site is part of the National Parks' Network to Freedom. As an affiliate site, we do use certain terms that are different from what students may hear or see in any books or videos they may encounter that speak of the Underground Railroad. This curriculum guide will include terms used by Network to Freedom sites.

# UNDERGROUND RAILROAD VOCABULARY

## (GRADES 3 - 8)

As you learn about the Underground Railroad, you will hear various terms and names. This list provides an explanation of each.

**Abolitionist:** An individual who wished to see the practice of slavery abolished in the United States. An abolitionist is not always seen the same as an anti-slavery activist (see below). For example, an abolitionist may believe that ending slavery is important, but may not believe that emancipated Blacks are equal to whites.

**Anti-Slavery:** An anti-slavery activist is an individual that opposes slavery for moral or political reasons and may aid freedom-seekers.

**Catharine Coffin:** Instrumental in managing the day-to-day needs of freedom-seekers who spent time in the Coffin homes in Newport, Indiana (now Fountain City) and Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Conductor:** The term generally used to describe a person who aids freedom-seekers on the Underground Railroad.

**Enslaved:** *make (someone) a slave; cause (someone) to lose their freedom or choice of action.* Slavery was not a choice. And in the case of slavery as it existed in the United States, racist beliefs that perpetuated the idea that Africans were inferior to Europeans drove many to believe slavery was justified.

**Enslaver:** This term refers to those who chose to hold humans in bondage for the purpose of exploiting humans for labor purposes. It is important to remember that slavery existed at one time both in the north and the south. This term helps to encompass the fact that slavery was not just a “southern institution.”

**Free Black:** A term used to describe those who were never enslaved yet were not seen as United States citizens until the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868.

**Freedom Seekers:** Historically, enslaved Africans who chose to escape were called either runaway slaves or fugitive slaves. Using the term freedom-seeker today sets a standard of remembering that though held in bondage, the spirit of those who were enslaved was free.

**Fugitive Slave/Runaway Slave:** These are the historical terms often used to describe someone who is the property of another and has chosen to flee. These are still predominately used in textbooks and history books. However, the terms “runaway” and “fugitive” help to paint a different picture of individuals who chose to fight for the human right of freedom.

When an enslaved African chose to flee, that choice was one of breaking the law. As a result, many period newspapers, slave ads and writings often refer to freedom-seekers as “fugitives.” The law broken was known as the Fugitive Slave Acts, first passed in 1793, which criminalized the act of fleeing bondage. Using this term created the impression that the law was on the side of the slaveholders and the slave was a guilty individual which deserved capture and punishment. The term “runaway” often reflects the actions of unhappy, young individuals.

**Grand Central Station:** The name given to the home of Levi and Catharine Coffin in Newport (now Fountain City), Indiana. The home received freedom-seekers who escaped by crossing the Ohio River in cities such as Cincinnati, Ohio and Jeffersonville and Madison, Indiana. Altogether, approximately 1,000 freedom-seekers found shelter under its roof.

**Levi Coffin:** A Quaker from North Carolina who aided in Underground Railroad activities in Newport, Indiana, from 1826 to 1847 along with his wife, Catharine. After moving to Cincinnati in 1847, Levi and Catharine aided another possible 1,000 individuals. It is during his years in Cincinnati that he gained the nickname of the “President of the Underground Railroad.”

**Slave:** *a person who is the legal property of another and is forced to obey them.* This is one of many definitions for the term “slave.” It is still acceptable to use when describing Africans forced into bondage and forced to implement labor for fear of mistreatment, separation from family or death.

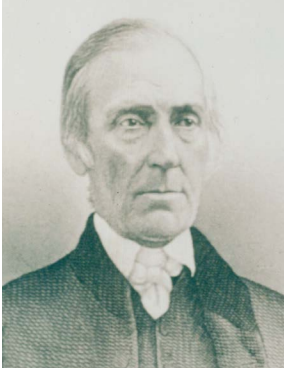
**Slaveholder:** Though this term holds as much weight as “enslaver,” this also has often become synonymous with “Southerner.” Though anti-slavery voices in the South were in the minority, there were individuals in states where slavery was legal to practice who chose not to participate, and for a few, actively fought its use in the South.

**Station:** A location, such as a safehouse, church or business, where freedom-seekers found shelter, food, and other resources on their journey of the Underground Railroad.

**Underground Railroad:** A loose system of homes and other buildings connected by individuals willing to aid freedom-seekers in their journey north, and sometimes south, to freedom. The Underground Railroad develops as a way for Americans to resist laws that required the capture and return of escaped enslaved Africans.

## WHO WERE LEVI AND CATHARINE COFFIN?

### (GRADES 3 - 8)



Levi Coffin was born in Guilford County, North Carolina, in 1798 and was the only son of a Quaker farmer. Being the only son, Levi did not have much in the way of a formal education as he was needed at home to help with daily chores. But when he could attend school Levi was a

model student and always looked for books to read. He valued education so much that his first career was as a teacher. Raised to believe that slavery was a sin, Levi often witnessed how enslaved Africans were mistreated and, at times, how enslaved families were separated. As he grew into a teenager Levi became involved in what may have been some of the first Underground Railroad activity in North Carolina. It is this knowledge Levi took with him when he later moved to Indiana.



Catharine White Coffin was also born in Guilford County, North Carolina, in 1803. Like Levi, she was raised in the home of a Quaker family. Quakers normally married other Quakers, and with the Coffin and White families living in the same community, Levi and Catharine “had been

acquainted since childhood.”<sup>1</sup> Levi and Catharine married in October of 1824 on Levi’s birthday. Levi identified Catharine’s distaste for slavery, mentioning that “[h]er heart has ever been quick to respond to the cry of distress, and she has been an able and efficient helper to me in all my efforts on behalf of the fugitive slaves, and a cheerful sharer in

all the toils, privations and dangers which we have, in consequences, been called upon to endure.”<sup>2</sup>

It was in 1826 when Levi and Catharine, along with their one-year-old son Jesse, made a journey by wagon from central North Carolina to Wayne County, Indiana to start a new life. They settled in Newport (now Fountain City) where Levi’s parents had settled several years before. Levi and Catharine also knew many of those who also settled in the area, as many also came from Guilford County, North Carolina. Levi immediately opened and mercantile store and began a new life in Indiana.

Much of what we know of Levi and Catharine’s work in supporting the Underground Railroad comes from Levi Coffin’s autobiography, a book he wrote in 1876 called *Reminiscences*. This book is important in understanding not just how the Coffins helped but also understanding what escaping enslavement was like for freedom-seekers. Levi had hoped that by moving from North Carolina, a state where slavery was legal, and coming to Indiana, a state where slavey was illegal, he could live a life where he never had to witness slavery again. But he found that Indiana was still impacted by slavery, especially since some freedom-seekers chose to escape to the Hoosier state. Both he and Catharine felt it was their duty to aid freedom-seekers even if that meant defying the laws of the day.

**“Seldom a week passed without our receiving passengers by this mysterious road”**

This quote very much sums up the dedicated work Levi and Catharine Coffin were involved starting in 1826. When Levi speaks of the Underground Railroad work that he and his wife managed it is apparent that the Coffins were willing to go as far as

<sup>1</sup> Levi Coffin’s autobiography *Reminiscences*, 1876 | <sup>2</sup> *Reminiscences*





*This summer kitchen in the basement of the home may have been created to better aid freedom seekers and keep slave catchers from knowing how many where in the house.*

needed to help freedom-seekers. Levi speaks that it was not unusual for he and Catharine to be aiding 10 or more freedom-seekers at one time. In one story that Levi gives, he describes Catharine answering a knock at the door in the pre-dawn hours to find a group of 17 looking for shelter, aided by a fellow Quaker. In a short period, Catharine will make sure they are fed and rested until Levi can determine where the journey to freedom should go next.

In just over 20 years, Levi estimated that they assisted around 100 freedom-seekers per year, potentially impacting the lives of up to 2,000 individuals. Not all were adults, as some were also children. Levi recounts Catharine hiding two young girls between the mattresses of a bed in the house a day after they narrowly escaped capture. In another story, he tells how a group of 14, which included children, were hidden inside a garret attic space in the home:

**“[Jim] got safely to the first station of the Underground Railroad, with his party, numbering fourteen, and hurried on with them...until they reached our house. They were hotly pursued and had several narrow escapes...They remained at our house [for] several days to rest...exhausted with night travel, and suffering from exposure, and while they were concealed in our garret, their pursuers passed through the town.”**

At times freedom-seekers had to be hidden if bounty hunters came through town looking for

runaway slaves. Levi believed that any freedom-seeker he and his wife aided were never captured.

The risks for both the Coffins and the freedom-seekers were great. According to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, if Levi and Catharine were caught aiding freedom-seekers, they faced a heavy fine, or payment for committing a crime. Many could not afford to pay fines in the early 1800s. Freedom-seekers faced the biggest risk, as their recapture mean't being returned from where they escaped. It was not unusual for freedom-seekers to be punished for their escape, inhumane treatment that both Levi and Catharine would do anything to help freedom-seekers avoid.

The 1839 home that was built for the Coffins and their family is today a state historic site. In the late 1960s, the home was restored thanks to the hard work of the volunteers of the Levi Coffin House Association. Today, visitors can tour the Coffin home and hear many of the stories Levi left in his book. But one interesting theory that is explored is the question, “Did Levi build the house because of the Underground Railroad?” This is a tough question to answer as Levi never speaks to why the house is built the way it is. But anyone who visits the house gets to see spaces that are uncommon for the period.

Basements are typically not common in early 19th-century homes in Indiana. They are expensive

to build and take a lot of work and effort to create. Yet, Levi felt that he needed one. This space also appears to have been used as a kitchen. It was probably called the “summer kitchen” by the Coffins if anyone asked. Summer kitchens were spaces where meals were cooked during the hot summer months. Typically, Indiana homes had outdoor summer kitchens, but the Coffins seemed to have chosen to put one in their basement, which is the coolest space in the house.

Another odd detail in the basement is the inclusion of an indoor well. This is even stranger than the summer kitchen being in the basement! Wells are normally always found outdoors. Where Levi chose to build his home happens to be in a part of the town where underground springs are near the surface. This means, if you want clear fresh spring water to drink, you didn’t have to dig very far to find it! And having it in their home meant they could have a root cellar that was naturally kept cool by the spring water. Another great feature is that you didn’t have to fight the ice in the winter to get fresh water.

These two spaces lead some historians to believe he built the house with the basement kitchen and indoor well because of the work he and Catharine were doing to aid freedom-seekers. Many freedom-seekers came under the cover of darkness and the Coffins did not always know when or how many may arrive. By having these spaces below

the house, Catharine could cook and draw as much water as needed without having to be seen as much, especially by bounty hunters.

The Coffins lived in this home until April 1847 when they decided to move to Cincinnati, Ohio. The Coffins didn’t think they would be gone long and continued to own the house, hoping to move back one day. But that never came to be. But this is another intriguing detail of why the Coffins owned the home until after the Civil War ended. Was it still being used for the Underground Railroad? Did they find someone to live there they could trust to keep the station running? The answer hasn’t been found. Regardless, the Coffins continued to aid freedom-seekers in Cincinnati until the Thirteenth Amendment passed and ended slavery for good in the United States.

*This dining and kitchen space in the back of the Coffin home is most likely where freedom seekers entered the home upon arrival.*



# PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESOURCES

## (GRADES 3 - 5)

**GOAL:** Students will learn the difference between a primary and secondary resource. They will then examine and example of each type of resources that connects Levi and Catharine Coffin to Underground Railroad work.

### MATERIALS:

- Worksheet “Primary and Secondary Resources”
- Pencil
- Copies of excerpt from Levi Coffin’s *Reminiscences* and letter written by Charles Osborne
- Printed Primary and Secondary Resource Example Cards

### ACTIVITY:

- Make sure each student has access to a copy of the excerpt from Levi Coffin’s *Reminiscences*, the letter by Charles Osborne, and the worksheet titled “Primary and Secondary Resources.”
- Have students break down into smaller groups.
- To begin, explain to students the differences between primary and secondary sources and why they are important when studying history. Use the front page of the “Primary and Secondary Resources” worksheet to review with students:
  - Primary Resource: a record that was create by a person who was a first-hand witness to an event.
  - Secondary Resource: documents, texts, images, or objects connected to an event created by someone who used primary resources for information.
- To better understand primary and secondary resources, pass out one Primary and Secondary Resource Example Cards to each group. Have a student from each group read the card out loud and have the class discuss if it is a primary or secondary resource.
- Explain to students that primary and secondary resources are important when studying history, especially the Underground Railroad. Since the end of the Civil War, thousands of stories about the Underground Railroad have been discovered, but how can historians determine what is truth and what a person may just be making up?
  - It is important to note too that sometimes a primary resource may not be found, but there could be several secondary sources giving evidence regarding certain events. But primary resources are very valuable because it is a source created by someone who witnessed a historic event.
- Now that students have learned about primary and secondary resources, explain that they are now going to review two sources using the “Primary and Secondary Resources” worksheet. They are to use the two documents you passed out at the beginning of the class.



## WANT TO EXPLORE FURTHER?

There are many ways to explore other primary and secondary sources related to the Underground Railroad.

### Primary Resources:

*Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written By Himself*, Google Books:

[https://books.google.com/books?id=WnCOHo\\_Hop8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=narrative+of+the+life+of+henry+box+brown,+written+by+himself&hl=en&sa=X&ved=OahUKEwiLI6ej7PSAhWp64MKHWorACMQ6AEIjAB#v=onepage&q=narrative%20of%20the%20life%20of%20henry%20box%20brown%2C%20written%20by%20himself&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=WnCOHo_Hop8C&printsec=frontcover&dq=narrative+of+the+life+of+henry+box+brown,+written+by+himself&hl=en&sa=X&ved=OahUKEwiLI6ej7PSAhWp64MKHWorACMQ6AEIjAB#v=onepage&q=narrative%20of%20the%20life%20of%20henry%20box%20brown%2C%20written%20by%20himself&f=false)

*William and Charity Still*, Temple University:

<http://stillfamily.library.temple.edu/stillfamily/exhibits/show/william-still>

*Historical Images of Slaves*, National Humanities Center:

<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text1/photosenslaved.pdf>

*A Woman's Life-Work: Labors and Experience of Laura S. Haviland*, Google Books

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/A\\_Woman\\_s\\_Life\\_work/LV7hAAAAMAAJ?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_Woman_s_Life_work/LV7hAAAAMAAJ?hl=en)

*Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, Reputed President of the Underground Railroad*, Google Books: [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reminiscences\\_of\\_Levi\\_Coffin\\_the\\_Reputed/KXUFAAAAQAAJ?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reminiscences_of_Levi_Coffin_the_Reputed/KXUFAAAAQAAJ?hl=en)

*Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, Google Books:

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/The\\_Narrative\\_of\\_the\\_Life\\_of\\_Frederick\\_D/RFVoAwAAQBAJ?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Narrative_of_the_Life_of_Frederick_D/RFVoAwAAQBAJ?hl=en)

*Life of Josiah Henson*, Google Books:

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/Life\\_of\\_Josiah\\_Henson/ZboU\\_-aT7LYC?hl=en](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Life_of_Josiah_Henson/ZboU_-aT7LYC?hl=en)

*Narrative of William J. Anderson*, University of North Carolina:

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/andersonw/andersonw.html>

### Secondary Resources:

*Wilbur Siebert Collection*, Ohio History Collection: <http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/siebert>

*Network to Freedom*, National Parks Services: <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1205/index.htm>

*Lincoln Mullen, Historian: The Spread of U.S. Slavery, 1790 – 1860 (Interactive)*:

<https://lincolnmullen.com/projects/slavery/>

*Indiana and the Fugitive Slave Laws*, Indiana Historical Bureau: <http://www.in.gov/history/3117.htm>

## PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES EXAMPLE CARDS

Cut out each card to pass out to students when doing review of primary and secondary sources.

My sister and I found wedding photo in an old trunk stored in the attic of our house. When we asked our dad about it, he said it was a picture of his great-grandparents when they got married in 1920.

Today we used our textbook to read about the history of the Underground Railroad.

I am writing an essay about Harriet Tubman for my history class. I used biographies and encyclopedias as the sources for my assignments.

Today, my class heard recordings made in the 1930s of people speaking of their memories from when they used to be enslaved.

I watched a documentary about Frederick Douglass. The filmmakers included interviews with descendants of Douglass who shared their thoughts on his accomplishments.

My dad showed me a letter written in 1863 by an ancestor who fought in the Civil War

## LETTER BY CHARLES OSBORN TO WILBUR SIEBERT, FEBRUARY 11, 1896

Economy, Ind, 2-11-1896

W H Siebert

Dear Sir,

I have delayed writing you hoping to hear from David Macy of Farmland, Ind, who once lived in Rogersville, Henry Co, and whose father Jonathan Macy was probably at the head of all fugitive slave operations in that place. But he does not answer me. Perhaps you may be in correspondence with him. Levi Coffin and his helpers usually sent fugitives to the Cabin Creek settlement, about 20 miles from Fountain City, to John H. Bond's, a mile or two Southwest of Farmland, Randolph Co. Ind. Zimir and Amos Bond, Solomon Wright and others stood by him. From there they were mostly sent to Youngs Prairie, 5 or 6 miles east of Cassapolis, IN Cass Co., Michigan, in the care of Stephen Bogue and others. I know of no stations between these places nor of the route beyond. James E. Banine of Vandalia, Michigan, if still living, could give further information. The probable reason for these situations was that they were settlements of Friends or Quakers of which Coffin was a member. In the enclosed letter from Bond he says they sometimes sent slaves north to Camden in Jay Co. to Benjamin Ninde's but does not know where they went from there. Should you wish to know any thing further about this perhaps Benjamin's son Lyndley M. Ninde of Fort Wayne, Ind., could and would be glad to give you information. A large number, and perhaps a majority, of those escaping to Canada did not go over any regular route but were passed from one place to another where the fugitives were known to have friends, being governed by circumstances; tarrying and working when not pursued still movers and visitors went in their direction, or if pursued, taken to an out of the way settlement in the unexpected direction etc. I think the places mentioned in Henry Co. are of this class as I know many of the persons aiding fugitives in Wayne and Randolph Counties were not connected with any certain line. We have an extensive history of Randolph Co. (I am a resident of Randolph) which gives many of the early reminiscences, the early antislavery and underground RR coming in for a full share as the author was an abolitionist, Prof. Ebenezer Tucker, a graduate of Oberlin College, and for years teacher in the Union Literary Institute in the eastern part of Randolph Co., a manual labor school for colored people. This school was in a colored settlement on both sides of the state line. Fugitives often stopped in the settlement at the Institute and attended school awhile. He says there were 10 there at one time....

But I have written more perhaps than you have time and patience to read. Hope you will find enough information to pay you for your stamp. Respectfully your friend.

Charles W Osborn



# ANALYZING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

## CHARLES OSBORNE LETTER

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Analyze the letter by Charles Osborne, a resident of Wayne County, who claimed to have knowledge of the Underground Railroad. Answer the questions below to determine what you can of the document.

Who wrote this document?

When was the document written?

Where was Charles Osborne when he wrote the document?

Who is the letter addressed to?

Is this a secondary or primary resource? How can you tell?

Are there any words on the document you do not know? Write them down here, and on the back of the worksheet, write the definitions.

There are many locations mentioned in this letter. Write five locations below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

What is the main idea of the letter?

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List two quotes that support the main idea.

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Why do you think this letter was written?

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This letter was written many years after the Underground Railroad had ended. Why is the information still important today?

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## EXCERPT FROM LEVI COFFIN'S

### *REMINISCENCES, THE REPUTED PRESIDENTS OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD (1876)*

The Underground Railroad business increased as time advanced, and it was attended with heavy expenses, which I could not have borne had not my affairs been prosperous. I found it necessary to keep a team and a wagon always at command, to convey the fugitive slaves on their journey. Sometimes, when we had large companies, one or two other teams of wagons were required. These journeys had to be made at night through deep mud and bad roads, and along by-ways that were seldom traveled. Every precaution to evade pursuit had to be used, as the hunters were often on the track, and sometimes ahead of the slaves. We had different routes for sending the fugitives to depots, ten, fifteen, or twenty miles distant, and when we heard of slave-hunters having passed on one road, we forwarded our passengers by another.

In some instances where we learned that the pursuers were ahead of them, we sent a messenger and had the fugitives brought back to my house to remain in concealment until the bloodhounds in human shape had lost the trail and given up the pursuit.

I soon became extensively known to the friends of the slaves, at different points on the Ohio River, where fugitives generally crossed, and to those northward of us on the various routes leading to Canada. Depots were established on the different lines of the Underground Railroad, south and north of Newport, and a perfect understanding was maintained between those who kept them. Three principal lines from the South converged at my house; one from Cincinnati, one from Madison, and one from Jeffersonville, Indiana. The roads were always in running order, the connections were good, and conductors active and zealous, and there was no lack of passengers. Seldom a week passed without our receiving a passenger by this mysterious road. We found it always necessary to be prepared to receive such company and properly care for them. We knew not what night or what hour of the night we would be roused from our slumber by a gentle rap at the door. That was the signal announcing the arrival of a train of the Underground Railroad...I would invite them in, in a low tone, to come in, and they would follow me into the darkened house without a word, for we knew not who might be watching and listening. When they were all safe inside and the door fastened, I would cover the windows, strike a light and build a good fire. By this time my wife would be up and preparing victuals for them, and in a short time the cold and hungry fugitives would be made comfortable. I would accompany the conductor of the train to the stable, and care for the horses...The fugitives would rest on pallets before the fire and rest for the night.



# ANALYZING PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

## EXCERPT FROM LEVI COFFIN'S REMINISCENCES

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Analyze the excerpt from Levi Coffin's autobiography *Reminiscences*. Answer the questions below to determine what you can of the document.

Who wrote this document?

When was the document written?

Is this a secondary or primary resource? How can you tell?

Are there any words on the document you do not know? Write them down here, and on the back of the worksheet, write the definitions.

There are several locations mentioned in this letter. Write down the locations mentioned by Levi Coffin.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

What is the main idea of the excerpt?

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List two quotes that support the main idea.

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Why do you think Levi Coffin wrote an autobiography?

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These stories happened many years after events happened. Why is the information still important?

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# NATURE AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

## (GRADES 3 - 8)

**GOAL:** Students will explore how freedom seekers interacted with nature during their escapes from slavery.

### MATERIALS:

- Computer
- Headphones
- “Journey to Freedom” Worksheet
- Pencil

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

In the last several years, much research has gone into understanding the conditions that freedom seekers encountered when escaping enslavement. Many relied on their knowledge of local environments to survive what could be a perilous journey. Once coming into land that was unfamiliar freedom seekers could be at a disadvantage. The Underground Railroad was instrumental in aiding freedom seekers through areas they had never set foot in before.

Levi and Catharine Coffin provided some insight into what freedom seekers encountered when escaping slavery. Levi mentioned that some arrived without being properly clothed or the use of shoes. Many chose to escape in winter for many reasons: less work, often rivers and other waterways froze offering easier escape, some tried to avoid the slave sales and auctions common to that period of year. Some arrived ill or with frozen feet. Catharine and Levi allowed freedom seekers to stay in their home as long as needed if there were no threats of slave catchers.

There are sources available to help students understand the perspective of freedom seekers and the risks taken when escaping. One such story is that of Harriet Tubman. Like many enslaved Africans, Harriet learned from her natural surroundings, as much of her work as a slave revolved in working in wetlands and timber fields. Working in nature allowed her to understand the flora and fauna of the region she called home. Any traditions and skills passed on to her by her family and acquaintances may have also assisted in how she proceeded to lead herself and others towards freedom.

Harriet Tubman grew up interacting with the natural environment around her in Dorchester County, Maryland along the state’s eastern shore. Located along the Chesapeake Bay the county developed early as a haven for farmers and fishermen. Though the county does have forest, much of the land is marshy lowlands. One the areas main rivers, the Blackwater, was a waterway Harriet was familiar with. The area is populated by many small mammals and amphibians. One of the earliest job’s Harriet had as an enslaved girl was checking muskrat traps in the west marshes. Fishing had always been a major trade in the county, and Harriet also would have been familiar with, and perhaps her diet included, local fish and shellfish such as crab.

Harriet’s father is believed to be a great influence on Harriet as she grew into a woman. Ben Ross was born enslaved in Maryland, but eventually was manumitted (given his freedom by his enslaver) and received a



small parcel of land to live on and work. As a free man, he worked along the shores as a hired fisherman as well as in the timber trade. As a teenager, Tubman worked alongside her father in these trades, giving Harriet both knowledge of life outside her own place of enslavement but also more of the natural environment.

According to Angela Crenshaw, a ranger with the National Park Service, it was this time with her father where Harriet gained much knowledge that would prove to aid in her future Underground Railroad endeavors. This included learning to read terrain, being comfortable in the dark woods, and understanding the sounds nature provided and navigation. Harriet was known for using owl calls in communicating with those she aided after her own escape, most likely that of the Barred Owl. Knowledge in navigation often meant relying on key stars and constellations, such as the North Star and the Big Dipper, both utilized by Tubman.

Adkins Arboretum in Ridgely, Maryland has created an interactive tour for visitors that allows them to explore the thoughts, feelings and experiences enslaved Africans had trying to escape slavery in Maryland's Eastern Shore. Though students in Indiana cannot travel to Maryland, the audio recordings will aid students in understanding the choices and knowledge enslaved Africans had in order to escape.

#### ACTIVITY:

Using the link below, have students listen on their own to the audio recordings from the Adkins Arboretum website. Students should answer questions connected to the attached worksheet which concentrates on the obstacles and opportunities freedom seekers experienced when escaping.

[https://www.adkinsarboretum.org/programs\\_events/a-journey-begins-underground-railroad.html](https://www.adkinsarboretum.org/programs_events/a-journey-begins-underground-railroad.html)

The website also includes short audio descriptions of certain freedom seekers and their experiences with nature during their escape, including Harriet Tubman. Students can explore these on their own.

## A JOURNEY BEGINS: NATURE'S ROLE IN THE FLIGHT TO FREEDOM

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Using the link below, listen to the audio recordings provided through the website for the Adkins Arboretum in Ridgely, Maryland. Each recording gives insight into the experience freedom seekers, like Harriet Tubman, had escaping from the Eastern Shore region of Maryland. Answer the questions below.

[https://www.adkinsarboretum.org/programs\\_events/a-journey-begins-underground-railroad.html](https://www.adkinsarboretum.org/programs_events/a-journey-begins-underground-railroad.html)

Why were sweet gum pods an obstacle for freedom seekers?

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Why would crossing a bridge be a dangerous decision for a freedom seeker?

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What does it mean to forage for food?

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What would be one reason a freedom seeker would not want to cook over an open fire?

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Why did some freedom seekers wait until the winter season to escape?

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How can using waterway (creeks, rivers, lakes) be both helpful and dangerous for freedom seekers during an escape?

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How many miles could a person walk in one day?

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What was the importance of the tulip poplar tree for freedoms seekers?

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How was moss used by freedom seekers?

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Listen to one of the audio files about one of the freedom seekers highlighted.

Whose story did you listen to?

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Name one thing in the story that surprised you.

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# INDIANA LAW AND SLAVERY

## (GRADES 5 - 8)

**GOAL:** Despite Indiana being declared a free state in 1816, slavery still impacted state and its citizens. Indiana also passed particular laws that created barriers for free blacks living in the state before the Civil War. This activity will introduce students to a few of those laws by discussing their intent.

### MATERIALS:

- Pre-printed cards each listing an Indiana law

### ACTIVITY:

*Their shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted: Provided, always, That any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original states, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid."*

- Article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance (1787)

*That when a person held in labor in any of the United States, or the Territories on the Northwest or South of the river Ohio...shall escape into any other part of the said States or Territory, the person to whom such labor or service may be due...is hereby empowered to seize or arrest such fugitive from labor...and upon proof...before any Judge...it shall be the duty of the Judge...[to remove] the said fugitive from labor to the State or Territory from which he or she had fled.*

- Fugitive Slave Law of 1793

*That all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent, and unalienable rights; among which are the enjoying and defending life and liberty, and acquiring, possessing, and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.*

- Article 1, Section 1 1816 Indiana Constitution

*Every black or mulatto person who shall come into the state after the first day of July next, and shall not produce such certificate and give such bond as is required by the first section of this act shall be deemed a pauper..."*

- Section 2 of legislation enacted by the Indiana General Assembly, 1831

*No negro or mulatto shall come into, or settle in the State, after the adoption of this Constitution.*

- Article 8 of 1851 Indiana Constitution

Have each group spend 10 minutes discussion what they read. Then, have each group read what their paper says out loud and share with the whole class their thoughts on what they think the language means.

If there is any confusion about the 1831 provision, note that this is a law that requires any free black or mulatto to pay a bond, which was totaled at \$500 and they must prove that they are free (which is why a certificate is referenced). Many could not afford such a hefty tax (which today is close to \$15,000). However, by not paying this bond, they are at risk of being considered poor, and forced into six months of labor.

After each group has had a turn, ask these questions:

- What jumps out to you the most after hearing each of these?
- What impressions do you have about how Indiana's views on blacks living in the state may have changed?
- Were any statements made today that surprise you, and why?
- Who do you feel is the target of these statements?
- Are there any modern laws that these can be compared to?

Note to students that though Indiana started with laws focused on keeping the practice of slavery out of the state that did not mean the state was welcoming to free blacks. Though we voted against slavery within the state, there were still enslaved Africans in the state, and the laws were not enforced. Slavery was only finally eradicated in Indiana due to cases going to the state's Supreme Court. Because much of Indiana was settled by Upland Southerners, migrants from states such as the Carolinas, Kentucky and Tennessee, many supported a state's choice to choose to be free or slave.

As the number of free blacks and those of mixed race (mulatto was the term used in the early 19th Century), white Hoosiers began to feel threatened. Free blacks only wished to have the same opportunities as their white counterparts coming to Indiana: land ownership, jobs and stability. By the 1830s, that was threatened when some in the state felt those opportunities were being stolen by their black neighbors. By 1831, laws were passed to discourage more migration of free blacks into the state. By imposing the bond of \$500 and requiring free papers, Indiana was burdening free blacks and mulattos who chose to live here, burdens that often they could fight. When Indiana decided to rewrite the state's constitution, lawmakers included provisions to limit any further migration of free blacks coming into the state by banning it. And, it was now required that any free black or person of mixed race to register with the local county government. If registration was not obtained a free black could be misidentified as a runaway slave, arrested and sent south.