

EULENSPIEGEL PUPPETS
FREEDOM STAR



MUSIC BY RON HILLIS

Study Guide

FREEDOM STAR: Gertie's Journey on the Underground Railroad

tells a dramatic and moving story, based on regional history, of a young slave girl who escapes from a farm in Missouri and journeys through Iowa on her way to freedom. Written by the Eulenspiegel puppeteers in consultation with historian Floyd Pearce and nationally known author Mary Swander, the show includes live music with topical songs written and played by Ron Hillis, one of Iowa's foremost composer/guitarists.

The production features several large tabletop puppets, along with rod puppets, shadow puppets, and hand-dyed scenery. This beautiful and exciting play uses well researched regional history references, including information about John Brown during the years he spent in Iowa and traveled back and forth to Kansas.

Before The Show:

Shortly after the Revolutionary War, the United States became divided between the free states of the North and the slave states of the south, with many bitter feelings between pro-slavery and anti-slavery citizens. From 1786 to 1865 (the start of the Civil War), thousands of Americans in the North and South devoted their lives to abolish (remove) slavery from their country. Many of these "abolitionists" helped slaves escape to freedom, and many of the anti-slavery agents started using railroad words to describe their work. The Underground Railroad had one destination - freedom.

1. What is the Underground Railroad? (*The Underground Railroad is not really a train, but a chain of houses owned by people who were against slavery. The people provided shelter and safety to runaway slaves as they went northward to freedom in Canada. The houses were the "stations".*)

2. Who were the "conductors"? (*The citizens who guided the escaped slaves to freedom were called "conductors". The people who owned the safe houses were called the "stationmasters". The escaped slaves were called "passengers".*)

3. What difficulties and dangers did Gertie and other runaway slaves encounter on their journey north? (*Lack of food & sleep, dogs, sickness, bounty hunters (people who hunted slaves for the reward money), drowning in the Mississippi or Missouri Rivers, and getting lost. Can you think of other dangers?*)

4. After 1850, why didn't runaway slaves stay in Iowa and settle down? *(The Fugitive Slave Bill of 1850 gave slave owners the right to organize a posse at any place in the United States to aid in the recapture of runaway slaves. The local police and courts were required to help return runaway slaves. Abolitionists who were caught could be arrested, fined as much as \$5000 (a lot of money in those days!), and make restitution to the slave owners. In Canada, slaves were given basic freedoms, plus the right to marry, to vote and to own land.)*
5. Who was John Brown? *(John Brown was a famous abolitionist, who tried to free a large group of slaves in Virginia, by raiding a government arsenal, and seizing guns and ammunition. Federal troops squashed the movement and captured John Brown. He was hung for his crimes in December of 1859. To slave owners, John Brown's movement was the "madness of abolitionism". Before 1859, John Brown spent much time in Iowa to organize a militia to free the slaves, and to lead anti-slavery settlers to Kansas to make it a "Free State". He organized his militia in Springdale, Iowa, starting in 1858. He was hoping to get the slaves to rebel against their owners in Kansas and throughout the South. He was called "God's Angry Man". Many abolitionists and anti-slavery leaders journeyed through Iowa on their way to Kansas. John Brown lives on in the song, "John Brown's Body.")*
6. Why did abolitionists travel across Iowa to Kansas? *(In 1854, Congress decided that Kansas, when it became a state, could vote whether to come in as a free state or a slave state. Abolitionists from New England took the train to its last station, Iowa City, and traveled on foot or horseback across Iowa to Kansas, hoping to settle Kansas with people opposed to slavery.)*
7. Why were "slave songs" important? *(Slave songs, such as "Steal Away", "Follow the Drinking Gourd", "Run, Mary, Run" and "Follow Me" could carry messages to slaves planning to escape. "Follow the Drinking Gourd" would remind slaves to follow the North Star to freedom. Harriet Tubman, former slave and the most famous "conductor", would come to a plantation and sing "Let My People Go" as a signal. Can you name other slave songs and spirituals?)*
8. What other signs might slaves watch for? *(houses located in a certain place; a light in a window; a quilt hanging in a certain place; a "log cabin" quilt with a black center signified a safe house).*

After The Show:

1. What does "freedom" mean to Gertie? And, what does "freedom" mean to you?

2. Who are Quakers?
3. What different kinds of puppets and masks were used? How many Gertie puppets were used? Owls? Bounty hunters?
4. What original song did you like best? What kind of instrument was the musician playing?
5. Why was Iowa important in the Underground Railroad?
6. Why was it important to follow the North Star?
7. What means of transportation were used by Gertie on her journey?
8. What kind of boat did Gertie travel on?
9. Why was Gertie afraid of the bounty hunter?
10. Why was Gertie so proud of her “freedom shoes”?

Suggested Reading List

Nonfiction book list

HARRIET TUBMAN, BLACK LIBERATOR by Matthew G. Grant. An easy reader biography of the most famous conductor on the Underground Railroad.

GO FREE OR DIE: A STORY ABOUT HARRIET TUBMAN by Jeri Ferris. Illus. by Karen Ritz. Grades 2 - 4.

WALKING THE ROAD TO FREEDOM: A STORY ABOUT SOJOURNER TRUTH by Jeri Ferris. Illus. by Peter Hanson. A biography of a slave woman, freed with the help of Quakers, and her struggle to reunite her family. Grades 2-4.

THE STORY OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD by R. Conrad Stein. Grades 2-4.

GET ON BOARD: THE STORY OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD by Jim Haskins. Grades 3-5.

BOUND FOR THE NORTH STAR: TRUE STORIES OF FUGITIVE SLAVES by Dennis B. Fradin. Grades 4-7.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD by Raymond Bial. Ages 8-12.

STITCHING STARS: THE STORY QUILTS OF HARRIET POWERS by Mary E. Lyons. Ages 9-12. Story of a former slave and her quilts.

IF YOU TRAVELED ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD by Ellen Levine. Illus. by Larry Johnson. Ages 9-12.

Books For Younger Readers and Listeners

AUNT HARRIET'S UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN THE SKY by Faith Ringgold.

BAREFOOT: ESCAPE ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD by Pamela Duncan Edwards. Illus. by Henry Cole.

FOLLOW THE DRINKING GOURD by Jeanette Winter.

THE SECRET TO FREEDOM by Marcia K. Vaughan. Illus. by Larry Johnson. Ages 4-8.

SWEET CLARA AND THE FREEDOM QUILT by Deborah Hopkinson. Illus. by James Ransome. Ages 4-8.

UNDER THE QUILT OF NIGHT by Deborah Hopkinson. Illus. by James E. Ransome. Ages 4-8.

Fiction For Older Readers

The Riverboat Adventures series by Lois Walfrid Johnson

NIGHTJOHN by Gary Paulson. A story about a slave who teaches other slaves how to read and write at night, and his adventures and fears.

UNCLE TOM'S CABIN by Harriet Beecher Stowe.