

Education and Programming Resources: Glossary

From The Programming Guide for *Through Darkness to Light: Photographs Along the Underground Railroad*
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Abolitionist—A person who advocated to get rid of slavery in the United States.

Big Dipper—The constellation Ursa Major in the night sky that was an important navigation tool for the Underground Railroad. Enslaved individuals who wanted to escape slavery were told to follow the “drinking gourd” north. The bottom two stars of the bowl of the dipper point to the North Star.

Bloodhounds—A breed of dog that is good at hunting and following scent. Bloodhounds were used to help find runaway slaves.

Bounty hunters—A person who is hired to track down and capture (or kill) other people for a reward. Bounty hunters were often used to help locate runaway slaves.

Civil War—This conflict was fought from 1861 to 1865 between the Union (northern) and Confederate (Southern) states as a war of independence—the South desired to be its own nation and secede from the United States. The issue of slavery divided political parties. The Republican platform for President had run on an anti-slavery platform. When President Lincoln was elected, southern states seceded, fearing he would end slavery. President Lincoln however wasn’t against the institution of slavery however until 1863—then the Civil War became a fight to end slavery.

Conductor—These were people who were part of the Underground Railroad that guided people on journeys.

Enslaved—Individuals who worked for or were used for work but were not paid and who could not leave.

Emancipation—The freeing of someone from slavery. President Lincoln gave this executive order January 1, 1863 that freed all enslaved persons from the institution of slavery, more than three million people.

Flogging—Enslaved individuals were often beaten or flogged.

Free black—A free black was an African American individual prior to 1865 who was not enslaved.

Frederick Douglass—He was an escaped slave from Maryland who later became a prominent leader of the abolitionist movement, strong public speaker, and a published author.

Fugitive—A person who has fled or escaped from a place. Escaped slaves were fugitives.

Fugitive Slave Act of 1850—There were two federal laws that allowed for capture and return of runaway slaves in the United States (even in free states). The first was enacted in 1793 and the second in 1850. These laws sparked the establishment and growth of the Underground Railroad. Both Fugitive Slave Acts were repealed by Congress in 1864.

Harriet Beecher Stowe—She was the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, an anti-slavery novel. Born in Connecticut, Stowe was from a family that expected their children to make a difference. She became a published author (published two books in 1833 and 1835) before she married and had children.

Harriet Tubman—Born into slavery in Maryland, Tubman was a runaway slave at the age of twenty-nine. She became an abolitionist and Civil Rights advocate and helped many escape slavery as part of the Underground Railroad.

Henry Box Brown—He was an enslaved man in Virginia who escaped to freedom in 1849 by mailing himself in a wooden crate to abolitionists in Philadelphia.

Levi Coffin—He was a white man born in North Carolina who believed that slavery was wrong. As an adult, he lived in Indiana and became an abolitionist. His home was known as the "Grand Central Station" of the Underground Railroad.

Mason-Dixon line—This was the boundary line between Pennsylvania and Maryland that was laid out by two English surveyors, Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon in the 1760s. Before and during the Civil War, the line was symbolic between slave holding and free states.

Signals—The Underground Railroad was a secret network of people and places that helped runaway slaves to freedom. To keep information hidden, people used special signals/codes through language and song to communicate messages to others. Safe places where people could hide were called stations, station masters were the individuals in charge of the station. Travelers were passengers. Spirituals and songs were also communication tools that contained hidden information. People sang about going home or being bound for the land of Caanan, they were really talking about fleeing north and heading to Canada toward freedom.

Spirituals—These are religious songs associated with African American Christians that are thought to derive from a combination of European hymns and traditional African music.

Sojourner Truth—Born into slavery 1797, she walked to freedom in 1826 and lived in New York City until she decided to become an itinerant preacher speaking for abolition of slavery, women's rights and suffrage and more. She eventually settled in Battle Creek, Michigan and continued to lecture until her death.

Station masters/station agents—These were people who took escaped slaves into their homes or stations to hide them.

Underground railroad—A network of people (black and white) that helped escaped slaves who were seeking freedom.

William Still—He was a free black living in Philadelphia who kept records of people who escaped through the Underground Railroad. He wrote down their stories and later published them.