



Learning with Lincoln Institute

Sponsored by Teaching with Primary Sources at
Eastern Illinois University and
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
Endorsed by the
Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission



Freedom Stairway

by Bobbie Ireland

Students will look at a photograph of an old, tattered stairway that led to a station on the Underground Railroad. They will put themselves in the picture by using their senses. The classroom will contain sensory elements that will aid in answering literal questions. They will try to put themselves in another place and time.



Overview

Objectives:

After completing the activity, students will be able to:

- Analyze a primary source
- Empathize what it may have been like for runaway slaves
- Understand the risks of the Underground Railroad
- Recreate the “freedom stairway”
- Apply writing skills in the content area

Understanding Goal:

Students will gain more insight into the feelings of the runaway slaves by using their 5 senses

Investigative Question:

What were the slaves feeling and experiencing as they made their way to a safe station on the Underground Railroad?

Time Required:

One or two 30 minute class periods

Grade Level:

3 - 5

Topic:

African American History

Era:

National Expansion and Reform, 1815-1860

Illinois Learning Standards:

Fine Arts: 25, 25A
Language Arts: 3, 3A, 3B, 3C

For information on specific Illinois Learning Standards go to www.isbe.state.il.us/ils/



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Preparation

Background for Lesson:

Students will already be familiar with slavery and the Underground Railroad from previous lessons and assignments. This activity can be implemented in the middle or close to the end of the unit. These links on the Library of Congress website can be used earlier or as a review in the unit.

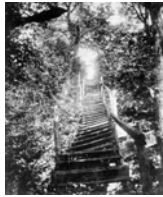
<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/timeline/expref/slavery/slavery.html>

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/voices/>

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/collections/slavery/>

Library of Congress Items:

Title: "Freedom Stairway" Photograph of the "freedom stairway", the steps leading from the Ohio River to the John Rankin House in Ripley, Ohio.



Collection or Exhibit

African American Experience.

Media Type:

Photo

URL:

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/aaeo:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(o4630\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/aaeo:@field(DOCID+@lit(o4630)))

Additional Materials:



Various items to recreate/set the tone of the photograph in the classroom.



Pine scented air freshener



Streamers or tissue paper to hang from the ceiling to resemble leaves and branches



Brown paper bags or paper to crumple on the floor



Desks in a row to resemble the stairway handrail



A spray bottle of water to mist to resemble rain or splashing from the Ohio River



A CD of night nature sounds



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Procedure

Description of Teacher Actions:

1. Working with the entire class, pass out a copy of the Primary Source, Freedom Stairway, to each student. Discuss students' understanding of the photograph. Use the "Put Yourself in the Picture" reflection form to ask questions." The students will get their own copy of the form later. Ask the following questions:
 - What do you see?
People? Words? Buildings? Animals? Interesting items? Do these things give you clues about this time and place?
 - What do you hear?
People? Animals? Nature? Sounds from inside or outside of buildings?
 - What do you taste?
Are things edible or is there something in the air?
 - What smells are around you?
City or rural scents? People? Animal? Businesses? Do they make you think of something good or bad?
 - How and what do you feel?
What is the environment like? Hot? Cold? Wet? Are there "things" that you can touch? What do they feel like?
2. Explain that for this activity, students will take a closer look at the photograph. There were many questions that the students couldn't answer regarding this photograph by using sight alone. Explain to the students that they will be putting themselves into the picture in order to answer more questions.
3. Have all the students stand up and move their desks into a line beside the crumpled up paper on the floor.
 - a. Have the students make a line behind the crumpled paper.
 - b. Start the nature sounds cd.
 - c. Turn off the lights, spray the room freshener, and let them make their way up the freedom stairway.
 - d. As they walk on the simulated stairway, mist them with the spray bottle and spray the air freshener as needed.
4. As the students walk on the simulated stairway refer back to your "Put Yourself in the Picture" reflection form and ask some of the questions.
5. When finished, move desks back into original positions.



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6. Hand out the “Put Yourself in the Picture” reflection forms to every student.
Make sure everyone still has their picture of the Freedom Stairway.
Now, revisit the questions from the form.
This time, the students will use their own observation and recall of the information to answer the questions on the form.
7. Have the students predict what they think would be at the top of the stairway.
They may choose to draw, write, or verbally state their prediction.
8. After students complete the form, ask them to share responses with the class. Share with the class the specifics of the picture.
Ask students “What if” questions to get their personal feelings of the situation.
Explain the time period in which it was created, and the purpose of the source.
9. Ask students to use their completed “Put Yourself in the Picture” reflection form to write a reflective essay about the Underground Railroad and the feelings and emotions that the runaway slaves could have felt.
Students may handwrite or use a word processing program to complete the assignments. The teacher can adjust the required length of the essay to fit the writing skills of each student.
The students can also choose to write a poem, instead of the essay.
The poem will be written from the perspective of a runaway slave that is experiencing the Underground Railroad first hand.

Extension Ideas:

A diorama can be made of the Freedom Stairway.
Research, for Primary Sources, can be done on the John Rankin House in Ripley, Ohio and the role it played in the Underground Railroad.

Evaluation

Evaluation

Teacher observation of students’ recreation of the photograph.
Evaluation of the completed reflection form “Put Yourself in the Picture”.
Evaluation of the “What if” question.
Evaluation of the completed writing assignment (reflective essay or poem).



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Attachments

Put Yourself in the Picture

PUT YOURSELF IN THE PICTURE	Imagine yourself in the image provided and list three to five phrases describing what you see, hear, taste, touch and smell.
	Sight What do you see? People? Words? Buildings? Animals? Interesting Items? Do these things give you clues about this time and place?
	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
	Sound What do you hear? People? Animals? Nature? Sounds from inside or outside of buildings? Sounds can indicate something good, bad or sad.
	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
	Taste What do you taste? Are things edible or is there "something in the air"?
	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
	Smell What smells are around you? City or rural scents? People? Animals? Businesses? Do they make you think of something good or bad?
1. 2. 3. 4. 5..	
Touch How and what do you feel? What is the environment like? Hot? Cold? Wet? Are there "things" that you can touch? What do they feel like?	
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	