

Welcome to the Teachers' Instructions area for this student activity. Here you'll find directions and suggestions for using this activity along with the materials you need to evaluate your students' work.

**Title:** Freedom's Song

**Audience:** Middle

**Duration:** 45 Minutes

**Subject Area(s):**

Language Arts - Reading

**Grade Level(s):** 6,7,8

### **Teacher Directions:**

In this activity, students will use the Secrets: Signs & Symbols interactive to uncover the mystery of coded songs and hidden messages that helped slaves escape to freedom. Students will collect information about how slaves used songs to communicate important information about the Underground Railroad. They will write a song that contains information that could have been valuable to fugitives in their escape to freedom.

Note to teacher: Due to the depth and richness of the Pathways to Freedom: Maryland and the Underground Railroad interactive, this activity may take more than one class period to complete.

This activity can be completed using a variety of technology configurations. If a computer lab is available, students can access the activity, worksheets and Web pages through Thinkport.

Another option would be to display the activity and Web page on a classroom computer with a projection device. In this case, students will need a copy of each work sheet.

### Focus for Media Interaction

The focus for viewing the Secrets: Signs & Symbols interactive is for students to collect information about the hidden codes in songs that allowed slaves to communicate information about the Underground Railroad.

### Viewing Activity

Tell students to open the Secrets: Signs & Symbols interactive on the Pathways to Freedom: Maryland and the Underground Website. This interactive may be found at <http://pathways.thinkport.org/secrets/>. Explain to students that they will be using this Web page to collect information on how songs were used to assist slaves in their escape to freedom. Call students' attention to the buttons at the top of the interactive. Tell students that they will be using the information from the "Music" section of the interactive to identify words and phrases of songs that had different meanings for the Underground Railroad. Ask students to open up the

Secret Songs worksheet (or pass out copies of the worksheet to the students) and use the worksheet to collect the Underground Railroad code words.

### Postviewing Activity

After students have completed the worksheet, decode the song "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" as a class. Remind students that songs and stories were used by slaves to pass on important information about the Underground Railroad. Ask students to refer to the song on their worksheet and predict what the intended meaning might have been to the slaves. Some suggested meanings are included below in the parenthesis beside the song lyrics.

*Swing low, sweet chariot,* (Swing low - going South) (sweet chariot- Underground Railroad)  
*Coming for to carry me home,* (Taking me to freedom in the North)  
*Swing low, sweet chariot,*  
*Coming for to carry me home.*

*I looked over Jordan and what did I see* (Jordan could be a river in the area)  
*Coming for to carry me home,*  
*A band of angels coming after me,* (The angels could be the conductors)  
*Coming for to carry me home.*

*If you get there before I do,* (The North)  
*Coming for to carry me home,*  
*Tell all my friends that I'm coming, too,* (Let them know they are headed to freedom)  
*Coming for to carry me home.*

After decoding "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," explain to students that they are going to write a song that contains information that could have been valuable to slaves in their escape to the North.

Review these song-writing techniques with your students. If you want you may use the song "Wade in the Water" from the interactive to illustrate the points listed below.

- a.) Most songs contain two or three verses and a chorus that repeats.
- b.) Not all songs rhyme. If your song rhymes, use a consistent rhyming pattern.
- c.) Your song should have the same number of lines in each verse.
- d.) The verse contains the main story line of your song. Verses are generally four to eight lines in length.
- e.) The chorus contains the meaning of the song, and generally contains the title in the first or last line.
- f.) The last verse should close the song and bring it together in a meaningful conclusion.
- g.) Keep audience and purpose in mind as you are writing your song. In this case the audience is the slave community and the purpose is to provide directions to help them escape to freedom.

Tell students that they may use the Songs of Freedom Organizer to help them write their song. The organizer is based on four verses. If students want to write a three-verse song they should combine step six and seven of the organizer.

#### Extension Activity

Work with the school music teacher, or a student or parent who writes music, to set the song lyrics to music.

Write a song using double meanings that could be used to direct someone from your school to a well-known location in your community. Trade songs with a partner and have them decode the song to figure out the selected location.

#### **Student Directions:**

Slaves who wanted to escape to freedom in the North often relied songs to guide them to the "promised land." Find out how slaves decoded these songs to escape from slavery.

#### **The Students will:**

be able to explain how songs and stories were used by slaves to communicate

**Directions:** As you explore the Secrets: Signs and Symbols interactive, you will discover how song lyrics helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. You will be responsible for gathering information on how songs were used to assist slaves in their escape to freedom. Open the interactive and click on the "Music" button that is located at the top of the screen. Collect information from this section of the interactive to answer the questions in the Secret Songs worksheet. After you have completed the worksheet, you will write a song that contains

information that could be used by slaves in their escape on the Underground Railroad. A Songs of Freedom Organizer is provided to help you write your song. Use the Songs of Freedom rubric to check your work. If you need help with the writing of your song, you may use the Song-Writing Tips handout.

### **Secrets: Signs & Symbols**

The Secrets: Signs & Symbols interactive provides you with an opportunity to decode the hidden meanings in slave songs. As you investigate this site, you will discover how these songs helped lead slaves to freedom.

<http://pathways.thinkport.org/secrets/>

How did hidden meanings in songs lead slaves to freedom?

Secret Songs Worksheet ([View](#))

Secret Songs Worksheet Teacher Key ([View](#))

Songs of Freedom Organizer ([View](#))

Songs of Freedom Rubric ([View](#))

## **Voluntary State Curriculum**

### **3.0 Comprehension of Literary Text: Students will read, comprehend, interpret, analyze, and evaluate literary texts.**

#### Grade 6

6. Determine important ideas and messages in literary texts

a. Analyze main ideas and universal themes

Assessment Limits:

- In the text or a portion of the text
- Literal versus interpretive meanings of a text or a portion of text

#### Grade 7 and 8

6. Analyze important ideas and messages in literary texts

a. Analyze main ideas and universal themes

Assessment Limits:

- Literal versus interpretive meanings of a text or a portion of text

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Activity Signature

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