

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:** Signs to Freedom

**Audience:** Middle

**Duration:** 45 Minutes

**Subject Area(s):**

Language Arts

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

### **Teacher Directions:**

In this activity, students will use the Secrets: Signs & Symbols interactive to interpret the coded messages that helped slaves escape to freedom. Students will collect information about how slaves used railroad terminology, quilts, and songs to communicate important information about how and when to escape. They will write a summary that explains how the slaves used the double meanings of words to communicate information about the Underground Railroad. <?xml:namespace prefix = o ns = "urn:schemas-microsoft-com:office:office" />

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 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 secrets, signs and symbols 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 "Following the Drinking Gourd," "The Language of Quilts," and "Language of the Railroad" sections of the interactive. Ask students to open up the Secrets: Signs & Symbols worksheet (or pass out copies of the worksheet to the students). Tell them to click on the three headings mentioned above to find the answers to the worksheet.

#### Postviewing Activity

Review the fact that using railroad terminology allowed people to talk about the details of the Underground Railroad in a way that would not get them into trouble if they were overheard. Review the vocabulary from the interactive.

Drinking gourd - The group of stars that looked like a drinking gourd, whose two stars on the cup's edge point to the North Star.

Abolitionist - A person who worked to end slavery

Conductors - People who helped the slaves escape

Stations - Safe places where escaping slaves could hide

Station Masters - Person in charge of the safe places

Passengers (sometimes referred to as baggage)- People who were traveling on the Underground Railroad

After reviewing the vocabulary, ask each student to imagine that he or she is a slave or a conductor living in Maryland during the days of the Underground Railroad. Ask students to write a dialog between two people, incorporating the double meanings of the everyday words that were used to relay valuable information about the Underground Railroad. Tell students to include all of the vocabulary words in the dialog.

Extension Activity

Create a vocabulary quilt that highlights the vocabulary words and how they were instrumental to the Underground Railroad. Students may create squares on The Language of Quilts section of the site, and combine these with squares that contain the vocabulary words and the definitions.

### **Student Directions:**

Slaves who wanted to escape North to freedom used a system of secrets, signs and symbols to communicate. Find out how slaves decoded these signs and symbols to escape from slavery.

### **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

- 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

#### Grade 8

- 6. Analyze and interpret 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

### **1.0 General Reading Processes**

Topic

D. Vocabulary

Indicator

- 1. Develop and apply vocabulary through exposure to a variety of texts

Objectives

- a. Acquire new vocabulary through listening to, independently reading, and discussing a variety of literary and informational texts
- b. Discuss words and word meanings daily as they are encountered in text, instruction, and conversation

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

be able to define the following key terms: drinking gourd, abolitionist, conductors, stations, passengers

**Directions:** As you explore the Secrets: Signs and Symbols interactive, you will discover how song lyrics, words with double meanings and even quilts helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. You will be responsible for gathering information on how secrets, signs

and symbols were used to assist slaves in their escape to freedom. Open the site and click on the "Following the Drinking Gourd," "The Language of Quilts," and the "Language of the Railroad" buttons that are located across the top of the screen. Collect information from these three sections of the interactive to answer the questions in the Secrets: Signs & Symbols worksheet.

**The Secrets: Signs & Symbols** The Secrets: Signs & Symbols interactive provides you with an opportunity to decode the hidden meanings in slave songs, and to unravel the double meanings of seemingly innocent railroad terms. As you investigate this site, you will discover how these songs and terms helped lead slaves to freedom.

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

How did words like drinking gourd, conductor and passengers help lead slaves to freedom?

Secrets: Signs & Symbols Worksheet [\(View\)](#)

Secrets: Signs & Symbols Worksheet Teacher Key [\(View\)](#)

**Directions:** After you have completed the worksheet, you will write a dialog in which two people are planning an escape on the Underground Railroad. The dialog should incorporate the double meaning words that were used to help slaves escape on the Underground Railroad and make sure to include all of the vocabulary words from the Secrets: Signs and Symbols organizer.

Words of the Underground Railroad Worksheet [\(View\)](#)

**Directions:** Use the Words of the Underground Railroad Rubric to check your work.

Words of the Underground Railroad Rubric [\(View\)](#)

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Activity Signature

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