

# *The Greatest Lakes*

## **Freedom Trails North:**

### *the Underground Railroad in the Great Lakes Country*

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

The Great Lakes Region has been important to the transportation of people and goods probably since the end of the Ice Age. It was the route many immigrants took to their new homes in the Midwest and beyond. It is still the easiest and cheapest way to transport raw materials (like grain and iron ore) to the East Coast.

In the days before the Civil War, there was an *illegal* form of transport, helping runaway slaves to find a free life in Canada. This was known as the **Underground Railroad**.

#### **1. What do you know about the Underground Railroad?**

Hopefully, you have discussed this important chapter in American History in your social studies class. But, just for review, try to answer these questions:

(1) Was the Underground Railroad *really* a railroad? \_\_\_\_\_

(2) Did it *really* go underground? \_\_\_\_\_

(3) People involved in the UGRR were given code names like *stationmaster, conductor, stock holder*. Who were these people? \_\_\_\_\_

(4) Who were the *Freedom Seekers*? \_\_\_\_\_

(5) Those people who owned slaves, living in the South, were not happy about their “property” escaping to Canada. How did they fight back? \_\_\_\_\_

(6) What was the **Fugitive Slave Act of 1850**? Why did it anger so many American-Americans and those opposed to slavery (*abolitionists*)? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **2. The Geography of the Underground Railroad:**

Helping runaways escape to Canada was illegal, so it was very secretive. We don't know for sure how most Freedom Seekers made their way north. We don't know all the places they hid, and the names of those people who hid them. However, the testimony of some Freedom Seekers and their friends has helped historians put together a *map* of the Underground Railroad. Your teacher will now show you one.

After studying and discussing the map, answer these questions:

(1) Where do all routes eventually end? Why there? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

(2) The routes in northern states are very detailed, but they are very general in the South. Why is that so? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

(3) The majority of routes go through Great Lakes states - Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan. Why was this the “route of choice” by many Freedom Seekers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

(4) How about the **Great Lakes** themselves? Do you think they helped the runaways on the journey to freedom, or were they obstacles to overcome? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. Two Abolitionist Towns - *Oberlin and Ripley, Ohio*

Almost all towns, large and small, in the Great Lakes states had people involved in the Underground Railroad. Most of them kept it quiet. But there were two towns in Ohio that were not the least bit shy about their roles in helping runaways to freedom: **Oberlin** and **Ripley**.

Your teacher will direct you to two websites about these small but important villages in Ohio:

<http://www.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/BlackHistoryMonth/blackhist.html> and

<http://www.ripleyohio.net/underground.htm>

Browse these websites and use the information there to fill in this comparison chart:

	OBERLIN	RIPLEY
<b>Location:</b> Where in Ohio are these villages found?		
Who were some important UGRR people in these towns?		
What significant events occurred here before the Civil War?		

#### 4. The Freedom Trails North Game!

A computerized simulation has been prepared to help you learn more about the roles people played in the Underground Railroad during the 1850s. The goal of this game is to get the Freedom Seeker to safety in Canada. Of course, there are people to help - stationmasters, conductors, boat captains, and even people on the streets. And there were those trying to send the runaways back to slavery - slave catchers and law enforcement officers. Each member of the class will be given a role in the simulation.

What is *your* role? \_\_\_\_\_

If you were living in Ohio in 1852, how would you feel about slavery? \_\_\_\_\_

*After completing the simulation, answer the following questions:*

(1) Did the Freedom Seeker make it safely to Canada? \_\_\_\_\_ How many tries did it take? \_\_\_\_\_

(2) What decisions did you have to make during the **Freedom Trails North** Game? List them:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(3) Who were the winners and losers in this simulation? Fill in this chart to summarize the results of **Freedom Trails North**:

CHARACTER	DECISIONS MADE	REWARDS AND CONSEQUENCES
The Freedom Seeker		
Slave Catcher		
Conductors		
Stationmasters		
Marshalls		
Boat Captains		
By-standers		

## 5. Conclusions:

On the board or overhead projector, the class will make a “Pros” and “Cons” list about the risks of the Underground Railroad. After some class discussion, answer these three questions below:

(1) What kinds of rewards did the people working on the Underground Railroad get? What happened when they got caught? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(2) If you lived in Ohio or Indiana or any other “free state” in 1852, what would you do if a Freedom Seeker asked for your help? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(3) The Underground Railroad was illegal according to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and other laws, too. Do you think that you can justify disobeying laws that are wrong, or should we obey the laws even when we disagree? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

