

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD by Maurine F. Dahlberg



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Themes/issues addressed in this book

Slavery; nineteenth-century America; friendship and loneliness; gold-prospecting

Book Summary

In 1859, Gilly's father goes in search of gold and doesn't come back. Eleven-year-old Gilly is sent to her uncle and aunt's farm in Virginia, but cannot reconcile their use of slaves with her father's teaching that slavery is wrong. Rumours abound about an Underground Railroad and the mysterious Spirit who helps slave to escape, but only when Rissy, a black slave girl, is sold to her uncle's cruel neighbour, does Gilly start to understand what is really going on. A sassy, opinionated and irrepressible heroine, Gilly's confidence may prove to be her greatest liability.

BEFORE READING

Individual Work

- Have you ever had to go and stay with people who weren't your parents? How did you feel? Write at least three paragraphs describing your first day there. What was the hardest thing?

Group Activities

- Group work: get a map of the USA. Find out where the following places are: the Rocky Mountains; Missouri, Virginia, Kansas. Work out the distances between the different places.
- Discussion: what does it mean to 'prospect for gold'? How do you 'pan for gold'? What was the Gold Rush?
- Discussion: talk about slavery. What was it? Where did slaves come from and how? When did it end, and how? Why did some people think it was bad? What happened if slaves ran away from their master?

AFTER READING

Individual Work

- Pick three of the following objects from the book. Find out some more about them in the library or on the Internet and then write a paragraph describing them in detail:
a trundle-bed (p. 9) a pitcher (p. 7, 11) a smokehouse (p. 9)
a calaboose (p. 21) corn bread (p. 33, 163) a buggy (p. 44)
a hickory switch (p. 61) a primer (p. 73)
- What is the Underground Railroad? How did it work? Write at least four paragraphs on how slaves might move from place to place, and who might help them.

Group Activities

- Discussion: what is Aunt Laura's attitude to 'frontier folk'? Why does she feel like that? What was the 'frontier'?
- Group work: How are Uncle Henry and David's opinions of slavery different? In groups, divide a piece of paper down the middle. On one side, write down Uncle Henry's arguments for slavery. On the other side, write down David's arguments against slavery. Compare your results with other groups. Whose arguments are the most convincing, and why?

Vocabulary

- Check you know what the following words mean:
heirloom humiliation pondered bribed
subdued bedraggled sedately humble
superstitious determination complicated
fragrance remedies ruminating

FLYWAYS

Series Summary

Flyways was conceived in response to the general decline in children's literacy levels. The series provides high quality, imaginative and thought-provoking fiction to children who are currently unchallenged by the majority of available reading material. The Flyways series includes a high percentage of prize-winning international literature, as well as books by new and established authors.

CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS COVERED

5-14 Curriculum (Scotland)

Years: P6-P7, S1-S3

Reading:

Reading for Information

Reading to Reflect

Awareness of Genre

Talking:

Talking in groups

Talking about texts

Talking about experiences, feeling and opinions

Writing:

Functional

Imaginative

National Curriculum (England, Wales, Northern Ireland)

Key Stages 2 and 3

English: Reading

Reading Strategies

Response to Texts, inc analysing and evaluating

Reading for Information

National Literacy Strategy:

Text-Level Reading

Text-Level Writing

Vocabulary