

Midnight Train: Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad

BY: Mary J. Kelly



An Educator's Guide

Welcome to the show!

Mary portrays Harriet Tubman during her years as a slave, her journey to freedom and her endeavors to help others flee northward. Harriet's story is one of triumph and survival under the harshest conditions one can imagine. Mary brings Harriet's story to life with her uniquely expressive vocalizations and visually exciting physical movements creating a cavalcade of characters that reflect historical and contemporary attitudes.

This program is presented as part of the Artists-in-the-Schools Program, which is funded and jointly sponsored by the Hillsborough County Public Schools and the Arts Council of Hillsborough County

About the Program

Midnight Train: Harriet Tubman Conductor on the Underground Railroad was written by Mary J. Kelly. Harriet Tubman is well known for her 19 trips down South along the secret route known as the Underground Railroad to save over 300 other Africans from the brutality of slavery. The struggle for the Africans from slavery to freedom was long and costly in terms of human suffering. Still today, this struggle stirs up harsh memories of racial injustice. Mary states, "I felt called to put my energy into writing a script to inspire audiences to learn about and rethink the issue of slavery. Mary's portrayal of Harriet incorporates a storytelling style utilizing characterizations, song, movement and audience participation that create a realistic view of being enslaved. Furthermore, social injustice still exists--worldwide, in fact--but we now call it human trafficking "different name, same abominable activity."

Theater Etiquette:

Note: Please share this information with your students

Ask the students what they think the proper behavior/etiquette is during a live performance.

Show respect for the performers by:

- Refraining from talking with other students
- Sit and try not to move around during a performance
- Listen and pay attention to the performance
- Be courteous and show respect to other audience members

The listener's role during storytelling is to engage his or her imagination within the world that the storyteller is creating. Because storytelling often does not involve visual elements which extend beyond what the teller can do with her own body, the listener must use his imagination to "actively create... the reality... of the story in his or her mind" The listener draws upon his own perceptions, past experiences and understandings to create the story, making the listener a "co-creator" of the story as experienced.

YOU CAN:

- Laugh, answers questions and react to the performance.
- Show your support and appreciation *after* the performance is finished with applauding when the performance ends.
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Vocabulary:

- Audience: A group of people assembled to see a performance
- Performer: A person who portrays a character on stage
- Etiquette: A appropriate behavior in a social setting

Standards for Theater Etiquette

TH.4.S.1.1	Exhibit proper audience etiquette, give constructive criticism, and defend personal responses.
TH.5.S.1.1	Describe the difference in responsibilities between being an audience member at live or recorded performances
TH.68.S.1.1	Describe the responsibilities of audience members, to the actors and each other, at live and recorded performances and demonstrate appropriate behavior.

Preparation for the Program

Lesson Lead-in or Hook: Inform the students that before they see the performance "Midnight Train" they will discuss the historical time of slavery in America.

Steps to Deliver Lesson:

- **The teacher will:** Read or make handouts of the compiled information about Harriet Tubman.
- **Pre-Performance Discussion:** Ask the students to think about what they know about the living conditions and culture of slaves in America. Ask them some of the following questions and have them write three to five things that they know on file cards.
 1. What do you know about slavery?
 2. Where did you learn about slavery?
 3. Do you think that it's OK to own another human being?
 4. What does freedom mean to you?

Guided Practice: individual reflection and group discussion

"One of the best sources for information about a culture or living conditions of a group of people is stories about and by people within that group. The best of all is when those stories are told in their own words."

Information about Harriet's life

About 1822, in Dorchester County Maryland, on the plantation of Edward Brodas a baby girl was born. Her parents were Harriet Greene and Benjamin Ross, they were slaves. They named their daughter Araminta and nicknamed her Minta. Because her parents were held in bondage/slaves/owned by their Master she was considered owned by Mr. Brodas. He didn't allow his slaves to have African names so Minta would later be called Harriet after her mother. Harriet had ten brothers and sisters two of which were sold before she was born.

Mr. Brodas or Master as the slaves called him lived in "*The Big House*" a fine brick mansion with fine furniture. His slaves lived in one-room log cabins. These cabins didn't have windows and usually had dirt floors. There wasn't much if any furniture. In the winter time they kept warm by sleeping on piles of blankets and huddling near the fireplace.

A slave's life was hard and often they were treated cruelly. They were not free to do anything but what the master demand. They worked in the fields, stables, cookhouses and in "The Big House" from sun up until sundown and without pay. The girl slaves started working from the age of five. They would help in the nursery watching the children who were too young to work. The boys were sent out in the fields at the age of six to help pick crops. Slaves were not allowed to learn to read or write.

When Harriet was only seven she was **hired out**. "*Hired out*," means that the master sent her to work for someone else. Harriet was hired out three times. The work she did was hard work sometimes taking care of a baby, chopping wood, loading wagons, plowing fields and trapping animals. She was often treated cruelly and received many whippings which scarred her back.

The slaves often sang while they worked in the fields. These songs are called *spirituals*. These songs usually related to the teachings in the Bible. Sometimes they were message songs to tell of passage on the *Underground Railroad*. Harriet's favorite song was Steal Away. Another song she liked to sing was a spiritual about the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt thousands of years before.

Harriet and the other slaves hated the life they were forced to live. They often thought of freedom and knew that if they could get to the North, they could be free. They heard stories about slaves who escaped north to freedom. These runaways seemed to disappear from sight as if they had gone on an underground road. It was said that there were many friendly people --black and white--who helped them on their journey north. Soon everyone began talking about an **Underground Railroad**. This was a network of people who secretly led slaves to freedom. The roads and country side were patrolled by white men looking for runaways. If caught, the slaves were brought back in chains and punished severely. Some were branded with an "R," or had the front part of their foot cut off and sometimes they were killed as example to the other slaves.

Harriet and her father, Ben, liked to lie in the grass late at night and look at the stars. "You see those four stars that look like a cup and the three stars that look like a handle, that be the Big Dipper and it always point to the North Star, the brightest star in the sky. If you keep that star in front of you it will take you up North to freedom," he told her. Ben taught her many things like, which plants in the woods were good to eat and which ones could be used for medicine. She learned about the animals he knew and how to walk through the woods without making a sound. Harriet often dreamed of her freedom but she wasn't quite sure how she was going to get it.

When she was a teenager she was hit in the head by an iron weight. The overseer had thrown it at a slave who was trying to run away. He missed and the weight hit Harriet in the head. She laid in the bed unconscious for months. Her mother thought she was going to die. When she awoke she had a large dent in her forehead and suffered from horrible headaches. Sometimes she would fall asleep unexpectedly and would not awaken

for hours. It was during this time that she said she knew that she would be free or die trying. Harriet worked hard out in the fields and grew strong.

Harriet fell in love with a free black man named John Tubman. They were married and lived in a small cabin by themselves but, she was still owned by her master. Harriet never stopped dreaming about being free. She often talked to John about escaping; he only laughed at her and said he was happy there. She knew he wouldn't help or go with her. Harriet learned that she and her brothers were to be sold to a Georgia trader. She gathered up some food and tied it in some cloth. Then she crept through the woods to a nearby house. And this began Harriet's journey on the Underground Railroad. For weeks she slept by day and traveled by night hiding in haystacks, barns, and attics. Many families helped her on her journey white Quakers, blacks and German farmers all risking their own safety to give Harriet food and shelter.

Each night she looked to the North Star for direction after traveling nearly ninety miles, she finally crossed the Pennsylvania state line to freedom. "I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person now I was free," she said. "There was such a glory over everything, the sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in heaven. Only thing was, no one was there to greet me! Everybody I knew was back in the quarters. And that's when I made up my mind that I was going to help them be free too!" Harriet found herself a job to earn money, she learned all about the network of the Underground Railroad. And when she had saved enough she made her first trip of 19 back into the South to lead other slaves out of bondage. She worked closely with the Underground Railroad. They traveled by night and slept during the day. She often dressed like a man to disguise herself and move more easily through the woods. When Harriet arrived at a plantation, she crept quietly to the slaves' doors and softly sang "Go Down Moses" and the slaves knew that she was there to help them escape. She became a legend in the slave quarters and they started calling her "Moses" because, like the Moses of long ago, she led her people out of slavery.

She risked her life many times but her courage never wavered. She said, "I just hold steady onto the Lord, He will take care of me." Because of the *Fugitive Slave Law*, which required the people of the North to return runaways to the South, Harriet, started taking the runaways clear to Canada. Tubman maintained strict discipline during the perilous journeys to the North. If a runaway lagged behind or lost faith and wished to turn back, she forced him on at gun point. Before the Civil War she freed her parents and most of her brothers and sisters as well as over 300 hundred other slaves. During the Civil War Tubman served the Union Army working as a nurse and cook for white soldiers. She acted as both a scout and a spy, often bravely leading Union raiding parties into Confederate territory. She had settled in Auburn, NY, in 1857. After the Civil War she fed, sheltered, and nursed any blacks who came to her home for aid. Harriet Tubman died in Auburn on March 10, 1913, and was buried with military honors.

Spirituals

<p>Sometimes I feel like a motherless child Sometimes I feel like a motherless child Sometimes I feel like a motherless child A long ways from home A long ways from home True believer, a long ways from home A long ways from home A long ways from home</p>	<p>Go down, Moses, Way down in Egypt land Tell ol'pharaoh, Let my people go. When Israel was in Egypt Land Let my people go Oppressed so hard they could not stand Let my people go, Go down, Moses, Way down in Egypt land Tell ol'pharaoh, Let my people go.</p>
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Pre- Show Standards that connect to the performance

Language Arts

LAFS.4.RL.1.2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text
LAFS.5.RL.1.2	Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.
LAFS.6.RL.2.6	Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.
LAFS.7.RL.2.5	Analyze how a drama or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.
LAFS.8.RL.1.3	Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

Theatre

TH.4.H.3.2	Compare a historical play with actual historical events.
TH.5.H.1.2	Participate in a performance to explore and celebrate a variety of human experiences.
TH.68.S.1.4	Discuss the ways in which theatre experiences involve empathy and aesthetic distance.

Social Studies

SS.5.A.4.6	Describe the introduction, impact, and role of slavery in the colonies
SS.8.A.5.2	Analyze the role of slavery in the development of sectional conflict.



Post-show Activities

- Go to the <http://freedomcenter.org/> Learn three facts you might include on a poster about the importance of the Underground Railroad in the struggle for freedom.
- Have the students use what they know or have learned about Harriet Tubman to write an interview question or letter to her. Have them write questions and honest answers. This will reveal what they have learned about her. For example: How do you think Harriet felt about leaving home to take care of Ms. Susan's baby? Who were the people that helped the slaves on the Underground Railroad escape?
- Write a letter to Harriet describing how you felt learning about and/or hearing her story.
- **Guided Practice:** individual reflection and group discussion

Evaluation/Assessment

- Teacher observation/reflection
- How did the lesson go?
- How did the students react to the discussions and performance?
- Did the students achieve the benchmarks?

Post-Show Standards that connect to the performance

Language Arts

LAFS.4.W.1.1	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information
LAFS.5.W.1.1	Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
LAFS.6.W.1.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
LAFS.7.W.1.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
LAFS.8.W.1.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Theatre

TH.5.H.1.2	Participate in a performance to explore and celebrate a variety of human experiences.
TH.5.H.3.3	Demonstrate how the use of movement and sound enhance the telling of a story.
TH.68.H.1.2	Analyze the impact of one's emotional and social experiences when responding to, or participating in, a play

Vocabulary and Key Concepts

1. **Freedom:** The condition of being free of restraints. Liberty of the person from slavery, detention, or oppression
2. **Empathy:** Understanding of another's feelings, the ability to identify with and understand somebody else's feelings or difficulties
3. **Slavery:** The state of one bound in servitude as the property of a slaveholder or household; the state or condition of being held in involuntary servitude as the property of somebody else
4. **Harriet Tubman:** was famous as an African-American abolitionist and Union spy during the U.S. Civil War and the role she played in rescuing slaves via the 'Underground Railroad' and women's suffrage.
5. **Kidnapping:** the unlawful act of capturing and carrying away a person against their will and holding them in false imprisonment - snatch.
6. **Negro Spiritual:** Songs that helped the Africans endure the life of a slave, but were an expression of their joys, sorrows, hopes, and dreams.
7. **Quaker:** A religious group started as the "Society of Friends." They helped the Africans on the Underground Railroad to freedom.

8. **Underground Railroad:** A secret cooperative network that aided fugitive slaves in reaching sanctuary in the Free states or in Canada in the years before the abolition of slavery in the United States.
9. **Aesthetic Distance:** implies awareness of difference in life and art. “the factor which allows us to enter into and imaginative world—even though we are aware that it is separate from everyday reality...”
10. **Storytelling:** is the conveying of events in words, and images, often by improvisation or embellishment. Stories or narratives have been shared in every culture as a **means** of entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and instilling moral values.

Enrichment/Extensions to Lesson:

Websites:

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/memories/index_flash.html

<http://www.biography.com/people/harriet-tubman-9511430?page=2>

<http://www.history.com/topics/harriet-tubman>

<http://www.math.buffalo.edu/~sww/Ohistory/hwny-tubman.html>

Resources

1. Anne Benjamin and Ellen Beier: Young Harriet Tubman: Freedom Fighter, A Troll First-Start Biographies
2. Dorothy Sterling: Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman, Scholastic, Inc.
3. David A. Adler, Samuel Byrd: A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman, (Picture Book Biography)
4. Stephen Feinstein: Read About Harriet Tubman (I Like Biographies!)
5. Kathleen Kudlinski & Robert Brown: Harriet Tubman (Childhood of Famous Americans)
6. Dave Jackson, Neta Jackson: Harriet Tubman: Listen for the Whippoorwill, (Trailblazer Books #10)

Something about Mary J. Kelly, MFA

Mary J. Kelly is a celebrated performance artist: actress, storyteller, and published playwright. She has been performing for over 30 years in schools, colleges, businesses and organizations.

Mary's education and experience includes a Master of Fine Arts from Arizona State University-Tempe in theatre/performance/production. Her BFA is in theatre education/child drama. She has written and performed in a number of theatrical presentation and storytelling programs. Mary currently resides in Sarasota, Fl. She is a Teaching Artist on EdExploreSRQ, a Roster Artist on the Florida State Touring Roster, and an Arts Integration Specialist consultant for other state organization.