



KALEIDOSCOPE

GALLAGHER BLUEDORN • University of Northern Iowa

Teacher Guide for *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad*

Unit Focus Questions:

- Why do stories matter?
- How do stories change the world?
- How might stories keep us alive?

Materials: Students should have a notebook or blank paper and writing utensils for each video lesson.

DAY 1 **Pre-Performance** **Video Length: 15 minutes**

Episode Focus Questions:

How do we tell stories? What unique tools do theatre artists use to tell compelling stories?

Overview:

Stories must be important if we find so many different ways to tell them! During this video lesson, students will consider all the ways that we tell stories - then consider the unique tools that theatre artists use. By looking for evidence in a production photo, students will identify how body language, lighting, costumes, and set design all contribute to storytelling.

Students will:

- Brainstorm a list to answer the question: *How many ways are there to tell someone's story?*
- Write observations of a production photo to describe the setting, mood and character's emotions.
- Select three words from their photo observations to create a one-sentence story that describes what they think might be happening in the scene. Students are encouraged to speak their sentence aloud and use facial expression to enhance the mood and meaning of their one-sentence story.

Extension Ideas:

- Students may perform or record their one-sentence stories and share with the class.
- Work in small groups to combine the one-sentence stories into a paragraph describing the scene.



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DAY 2

Pre-Performance

Video Length: 15 minutes

Episode Focus Questions:

How do symbols help us tell stories? What does Harriet Tubman symbolize?

Overview:

Stories were a matter of life and death for Harriet Tubman. This video lesson examines important events in her life and the symbols that were critical to the success of the Underground Railroad. Students will consider how Harriet Tubman became a symbol herself and what she represents.

Students will:

- Examine a production photo and create symbolic meaning for objects in the set design (fence, stars, American flag.)
- Write three lines that Harriet might speak or think while trying to decide whether to escape or not. The first line is about what the **fence** might symbolize to Harriet, the second line is about what the **stars** mean to her, and the final line is about what the **flag** represents.
- Complete the sentence: “Harriet Tubman is a symbol of _____.” Consider, if this were the last line of the play, how would you direct the actress playing Harriet Tubman to stand, focus her eyes, speak, pose? Would she be alone or with others?

Extension Ideas:

- Compare the words that students chose to complete the sentence: “Harriet Tubman is a symbol of _____.” How many ideas were generated as a class?
- Students may draw a picture to show their idea of how they’d stage their imagined final line of the play (“Harriet Tubman is a symbol of _____.”) Or take the pose themselves and snap a photo. Or work in pairs with one director and one actor.
- Create a montage performance in which all students add their ideas together into one collective performance.
- Discuss: Where do you see or hear symbols in today’s world? What importance do symbols have in our own lives?
- Discuss: Harriet Tubman used songs to convey secret messages in the Underground Railroad. Do you think songs are still used to communicate messages to select groups?

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DAY 3 Performance Video Length: 45 minutes

This performance video can also be broken down into two smaller sections.

Additional resources from Virginia Repertory Theatre:

Q&A with the actors – 13 minutes

Kid Friendly Yoga – 17 minutes

Tongue Twisters – 4 minutes

DAY 4 Post - Performance Video Length: 15 minutes

Episode Focus Questions:

How do theatre artists tell stories that capture our attention? Where do you see the fight against ignorance today?

Overview:

Students will create a reflection map that shows their personal journey in watching *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad* and identify specific choices that the theatre artists made in order to capture their attention. They will then apply the tools they observed in the performance to create their own mini-play that addresses a current-day “fight against ignorance.”

Students will:

- Create a Reflection Map that shows their personal journey through the performance of *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad*. The map will identify 1.) a memorable moment and the choices the theatre artists made in that moment, 2.) something you learned, 3.) the main message and a moment in the show where that message was expressed, 4.) emotions you experienced personally, and 5.) questions that remain.
- Write a list of issues that people are fighting for now. Where do we see the fight against ignorance today?
- Write a mini-play in 60 words or less that addresses a current issue you care about.
 1. **Choose a Character:** Select a person connected to that issue to be the main character in your play. This might be an activist, a scientist, a journalist, a witness - or a family member or neighbor. You are also welcome to create a fictional character.
 2. **Write the Message (60 words or less):** Decide what the message is that this person would like people to take away. These will be the character’s lines. As the playwright you get to write no more than 60 words for your character to speak, sing, rap, or recite in order to get this message across – so choose the most powerful words you can!
 3. **Stage Directions:** Describe how your character should enter the stage, stand, move or gesture. Playwrights add stage directions in (*parentheses*) to tell the actor what to do.

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Describe the Setting: Describe how you'd like the stage to look. Where does your story take place? Would you like a realistic set, or something simple that just suggests the setting? What kind of lighting would set the mood? Again, borrow from the Harriet Tubman play. What choices were most effective for you – and how could you use those ideas here?

Extension Ideas:

- Take time to interview people and research the issues that students have selected.
- Invite students to produce their mini-plays as live performances, videos, music videos, Tik Tok, etc. How could they share their stories with broader audiences in order to make a real-world impact?
- Identify “Stories That Change the World.” Discuss which literature, news, personal stories, etc. the students feel have changed the world or saved lives.

Resources:

Teaching Tolerance: <https://www.tolerance.org/>

So many amazing classroom resources - lessons, images, texts!! Includes social justice standards.

Slavery Images: <http://slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/page/welcome>

A wealth of free images about the history of slavery.

Social History for Every Classroom: <https://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/852>

This page includes an mp3 of Paul Robeson singing “Go Down Moses.”

Library of Congress: <https://guides.loc.gov/chronicling-america-harriet-tubman>

Original newspaper articles about Harriet Tubman’s life.

Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/search/?q=Harriet%20Tubman>

This site has a wide variety of resources, including artwork, lesson plans, documentaries and legislation related to Harriet Tubman.

Biography.com: <https://www.biography.com/activist/harriet-tubman>

Facts about Harriet Tubman’s life and influence that continue up to the modern day.

Underground Railroad: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/underground-railroad>

Facts about the Underground Railroad and the people who ran it.

Iowa and the Underground Railroad: <http://www.iowapbs.org/iowapathways/mypath/iowa-and-underground-railroad>

Includes videos and a host of resources about Civil Rights in Iowa.

Virginia Repertory Theatre’s Study Guide: https://va-rep.org/tour/guides/VirginiaRep_Harriet_Tubman_guide_2020.pdf

Study Guide for the production including facts, vocabulary, discussion questions and theatre terms.

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