Underground To Canada

By

Barbara Smucker

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org

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Suggestions and Expectations

This 72 page curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one or two chapters of ***Underground to Canada*** and is comprised of four activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature*, *Grade 5*, makes reference to

a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
c) compare and contrast two characters;
d) determine how characters … respond to challenges;
e) drawing inferences from the text;
f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include **loyalty**, **courage**, **perseverance** when facing difficult circumstances, **slavery** in the United States, Abolitionists and the Underground Railway, life in North America during the 1850s.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *foreshadowing*.
7. Identify *personification*.
8. Use of singular / plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *simile*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *sequence chart* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify the climax of the novel.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a friendly letter
4. Complete an Observation Sheet
5. Conduct an interview
6. Write about personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. The 5 W's Chart

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Design an Activity Card

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Synopsis

Ripped from her mother's arms by a ruthless slave trader, all Julilly has left is the dream of freedom. Every day that she spends huddled and starving in the trader's cart travelling south, or working on the brutal new plantation, she thinks about the land where it is possible to be free, a land she and her friend Liza may reach some day. So when workers from the underground railway offer to help the two girls escape, they are ready. But the road is long and hard, and the slave catchers and their dogs will soon be after them . . .

Author Biography

Barbara Smucker

Barbara Claassen Smucker was born 1 September 1915 in Newton, Kansas. She married Donovan Smucker, college professor and minister, on 21 January 1939. They had two sons, Timothy and Thomas, and a daughter Rebecca. Barbara died in 2003.

Barbara earned a BS (1936) in journalism from Kansas State University at Manhattan. She taught high school English in Harper, Kansas (1937-8), then returned to her home town to work as a reporter for the Evening Kansas Republican (1939-1941).

After she and her family moved to Chicago, Barbara wrote her first book of historical fiction for children: **Henry's Red Sea**, the first of twelve books for children.

Smucker's books have been published in 16 countries and translated into French, German, Japanese, Swedish, Spanish, Dutch, and Danish. Her books have received numerous awards.

Underground to Canada was recognized by the Children's Book Center as one of the 50 best books of all time in Canada.

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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

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Name: _____

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Chapter 1

Before you read the chapter:

The protagonist in most novels features the main character or "good guy". The protagonist of ***Underground to Canada*** is a twelve-year-old slave girl, Julilly. In what ways do you think Julilly's life might have been especially difficult?

Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

plantation	fretful	hewn	tote	overseer
fertile	rumor	whimper	oppress	melody

1. We all heard the _____ about Rachel's house burning down.
2. The support timbers in the farmhouse had been _____ from solid oak.
3. I couldn't remember the lyrics, but I will never forget the song's _____.
4. Julilly's family had lived on the Hensen's _____ for many years.
5. My grandfather was delighted to discover that the soil was very _____.
6. Rueben Freemont was the _____ of more than fifty slaves.
7. Little April was forced to _____ the bucket all the way to the top of the hill.
8. Not getting the sleep she was used to made the baby very _____.
9. A quiet _____ was the only sign that the old collie dog was in distress.
10. When the owner of the plantation left Silas in charge, he began to _____ the slaves so badly that two of them ran away.

Questions

1. The first paragraph of Chapter One is certainly an attention-grabber, isn't it? What was there about this paragraph that really caught <u>your</u> attention?

2. Describe the **setting** of the story for Chapter One.

coarse tow shirt – a tow shirt is defined as a coarse linen shirt

3. Describe how Julilly got her name.

4. What argument did Mammy Sally make to Mr. Hensen as to why Julilly should not have to work in the fields yet?

5. How did Mr. Hensen treat the slaves? Give one fact from this chapter to prove your answer.

6. Old John, the coachman, brought bad news about the Hensen's situation to the slaves after driving Missy Hensen to town. What two pieces of bad news did he tell the others?

7. How were the Hensens going to solve their problems?

8. As Chapter One ends Julilly and the others are in dread about what the future had in store for them. What in particular made them so afraid?

9. ***Foreshadowing*** is a literary device defined *as a hint or clue provided by the writer to tip the reader as to what is to come later in the story*. How might the conclusion of Chapter One be considered an example of this? What do you think is going to happen in Chapter Two?

Good to Know – The Number of Slaves Who Escaped

It is estimated that more than 100,000 slaves escaped from the slave states to the north – both to Canada and the northern states.

Language Activities

A. A **simile** is a comparison using the words "like" or "as". An example from Chapter 1 is, *They (whisperings) crept from ear to ear as soundless as the flickering of fireflies.*

What two things are being compared in this example?

Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your imagination:

a) the sound of a cricket

b) a crack of thunder

B. Many words can be used as a **noun** or a **verb** depending on the sentence. Use your imagination and write sentences to illustrate how these words can be used as both a noun and a verb.

FIRE

Noun	
Verb	

FALL

Noun	
Verb	

C. Who is going to help the poor old action word?

An **adverb** is a part of speech which usually modifies (or helps) a verb. Often an adverb will end in the letters **ly** (i.e. ***slowly***). The novel features a good many creative adverbs.

a) She spoke softly, rocking slowly back and forth . . .

- In this sentence what word does **Softly** modify? _____

b) She pushed Julilly gently away and, lifting her voice, spoke crossly.

- In this sentence what verb does **gently** modify? _____

c) Julilly watched carefully as the old man pushed the wheelbarrow into the barn then closed the door.

- In this sentence the adverb _____ modifies the verb _____.

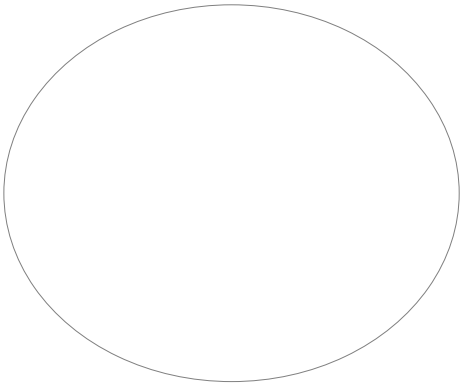
D. A **quintet** is a five-line verse that tells a story. The quintet has a syllable pattern and can bring an exciting scene to life. (It doesn't have to rhyme.)

Line 1 – tells **when**. 3 syllables Line 2 – tells **where**, 5 syllables Line 3 – tells **what**, 7 syllables Line 4 – describes **activity**, 9 syllables Line 5 – contains a **thought**, 3 syllables.	Now create a quintet poem using ideas from recent events in ***Underground to Canada.***

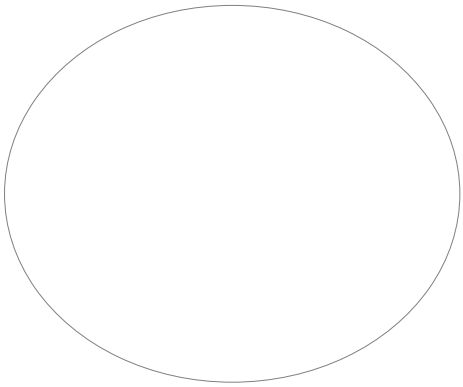
TITLE: _____

E. 5 Ws and an H.

Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



WHO?



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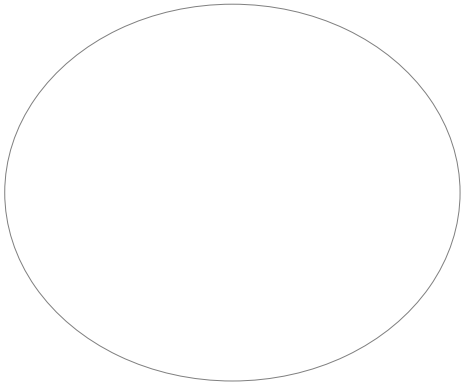

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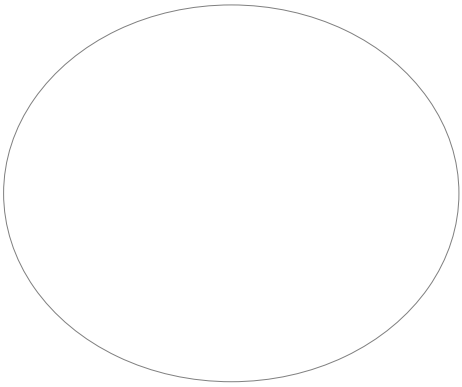
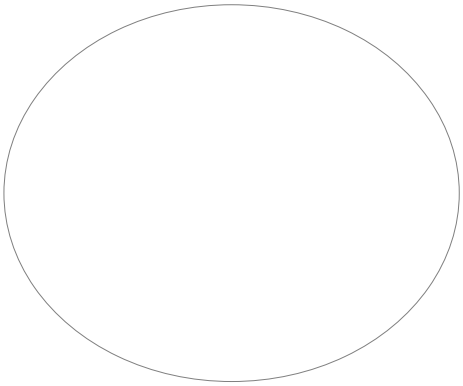
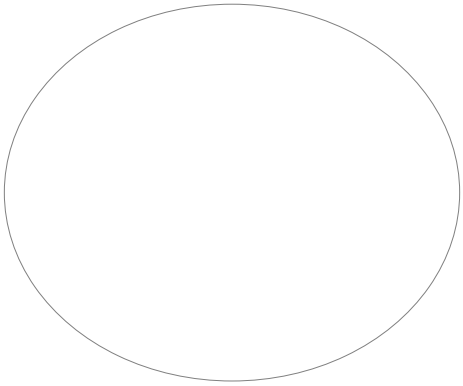


WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activity

Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.

Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first chapter of our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6