The Underground Railroad
from the Esri GeoInquiries™ collection for U.S. History

Activity

Explore the network of places and routes that made up the Underground Railroad.

Social Studies Standards

C3: D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
C3: D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will identify locations that were enslaved and free in the United States in 1850.
- Students will explain the role of distance, location, and networks with the Underground Railroad.

Map URL: http://esriurl.com/historygeoinquiry5

Ask

Where was slavery practiced in the United States in 1850?

- Click the link above to launch the map.
- With the Details button underlined, click the button Show Legend.
- Which states allowed slavery? Which did not? [Southern states allowed slavery; Northern states did not.]
- Which areas were the most enslaved? [The Mississippi River counties and coastal South Carolina were the most enslaved.]
- What factors influenced these areas being mostly enslaved? [Distance to free states, the Mississippi River, climate, plantations, and coastal lowlands]

Acquire

Where did the big river meet the little river?

- Click the button, Show Contents of Map.
- Click the button, Bookmarks. Select Underground Railroad.
- Turn on the layer, Map Notes. Open and read the Map Note located in Northern Michigan.
- Why did rivers make good escape routes? [Easy to follow north, provided hiding areas, and covered scents.]
- Which rivers do you think are the big river and little river? [Answers will vary.]
- Filter the US Rivers layer so that FOLLOW is set to YES (see ToolTip on page 2).
- Why was this intersection a key destination? [It bordered slave and free states and had long, wide rivers.]
- Remove the filter.

Explore

Where were the Underground Railroad stations located?

- Turn on the Notable Underground Railroad Stations layer.
- What patterns do you notice about the station locations? [They are located in northern cities, along the Ohio River, the Great Lakes, and Canada.]
- Which stations were located farthest north? [Towns in Canada were farthest north.]
- Click the two purple stations.
- What types of stations were these, and what does this reveal about the Underground Railroad? [Both were slave jails, illustrating the risk of being captured and returned to slavery.]

more
The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made it a crime in the United States to assist runaway slaves.

How did the Underground Railroad contribute to Southern lawmakers calling for a stricter fugitive slave law?

• Slave owners who were losing "property" wanted a law to deter people from helping fugitive slaves.

What impact did the stricter Fugitive Slave Act have on the Underground Railroad?

• It became more risky to help runaway slaves; the only safe destination was Canada; it rallied abolitionists.

Ohio River was a popular starting point; routes were more numerous in Ohio and become dispersed farther west.

Most runaway slaves came from border states. Why? [They came because of distance.]

How far is the Ohio River from Windsor? [It is 220-420 miles.]

How far is the Ohio River from the mouth of the Mississippi River? [It is 580-620 miles.]

How far is Windsor from the mouth of the Mississippi River? [It is 1,100+ miles.]

Besides distance, what other factors made escaping the Deep South difficult? [From your previous studies you may have noted that the area was mostly enslaved, there was a lack of cities, and there were difficult climate conditions.]

Choose the Line or Area Measure tool.
Set the distance units.
Click and drag your pointer to calculate the distance of a line.

Filter only available for certain map layers.
With the Details button underlined, hover over a layer name.
Click Filter button.
Set Filter parameters.

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made it a crime in the United States to assist runaway slaves.

ACT

Why was the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 passed?

• The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made it a crime in the United States to assist runaway slaves.
• How did the Underground Railroad contribute to Southern lawmakers calling for a stricter fugitive slave law? [Slave owners who were losing "property" wanted a law to deter people from helping fugitive slaves.]
• What impact did the stricter Fugitive Slave Act have on the Underground Railroad? [It became more risky to help runaway slaves; the only safe destination was Canada; it rallied abolitionists.]

MEASURE

FILTER

Next Steps

DID YOU KNOW?
ArcGIS Online is a mapping platform freely available to public, private, and home schools. A school subscription provides additional security, privacy, and content features. Learn more about ArcGIS Online and how to get a school subscription at http://www.esri.com/schools.

THEN TRY THIS...
• Create a hot spot map to show where the highest concentration of Underground Railroad stations and routes was located.
• Use the ArcGIS Story Map Journal template to research and present an Underground Railroad story about a town, a network, or a person.

This GIS map has been cross-referenced to material in sections of chapters from these texts.

• The Americans by McDougal Littell — Chapter 10
• History Alive! The United States by TCI — Chapter 19

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