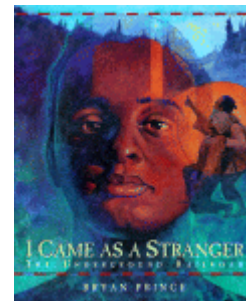

TEACHER GUIDE
Tundra Books
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I Came As a Stranger
The Underground Railroad
Written by Bryan Prince



Category: Juvenile Nonfiction - History; Juvenile Nonfiction - Biography & Autobiography - Historical; Juvenile Nonfiction - History - Canada

Imprint: Tundra Books

Format: Trade Paperback

Pub Date: February 2004

Age: 10 UP

Trim Size: 6 x 9

of Pages: 168 pages

ISBN: 978-0-88776-667-1 (0-88776-667-6)

CDN Price: \$22.99 / **US Price:** \$15.95

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Some crossed the international border hidden in ships. Others slipped across in disguise or in the dead of night. Behind them were hard journeys fraught with peril and dread. These fugitives were escaped slaves who had fled bondage in the American South. They had followed the North Star with one goal in mind: freedom in Canada!

Some of the freedom-seekers traveled alone and unaided. Men and women of a secret organization called the Underground Railroad assisted many more. These courageous people, both black and white, some of whom were escaped slaves themselves, risked their freedom and their very lives to help some 40,000 men, women, and children reach safety. In defiance of laws that forbade aiding and abetting runaways, they provided food, clothing, shelter, and money, and served as guides.

Today Canadians take pride in the role Canada played in offering sanctuary to people fleeing slavery. But Canada's record is not untarnished. Slavery existed in Canada's early colonial period. Even after the institution was abolished in British North America, deeply rooted prejudices remained. The former slaves encountered major social obstacles in addition to the hardships of making a living in a frontier community. Until slavery was abolished in the United States, they lived with the fear that vengeful masters or professional slave catchers would snatch them from their new homes.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Bryan Prince has had a lifelong interest in the story of the Underground Railroad, especially the Canadian involvement, and for good reason. He is a direct descendant of

escaped slaves who traveled the secret route to freedom in Canada. Over a period of 25 years he has spent thousands of hours researching, writing, and lecturing on the subject. He was awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for his contributions to black history. Mr. Prince lives with his wife and four children in North Buxton, Ontario, a former settlement for fugitive slaves. In addition to being a historian and writer, he is a full-time farmer.

TEACHING IDEAS

Curriculum Connections

LANGUAGE ARTS

Modern literary critics consider Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to be flawed as a work of art. Why then, is the book regarded as one of the most important works of fiction in American history?

GEOGRAPHY

On a map of the United States, locate the Slave States: Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Missouri, Tennessee, and Kentucky. From which of these states would a fugitive slave have a better chance of reaching Canada?

HISTORY

Sophia Pooley was a slave in the household of the famous Mohawk Chief Joseph Brant. She stated, "I used to talk Indian better than I could English. I have forgotten some of it — there are none to talk it with now." In what way does this suggest that both Blacks and Natives were victims of white oppression?

On a map you can see that Southern Ontario is a peninsula with few crossing places from the United States. Why was this an advantage for the slave catchers?

CIVICS

Americans who assisted fugitive slaves violated the law. Do citizens have a moral right to disobey an unjust law? How can they have that law changed?

SOCIOLOGY

Black leaders in Canada were divided on the subject of integration. Some believed that the former slaves should live in their own separate communities. Others felt that the people should be integrated into white society. What might be some advantages and disadvantages of each option? Consider both short-term and long-term possibilities.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

1. The most common image that we have of the Underground Railroad is that of sympathetic white people assisting fugitive slaves. However, Bryan Prince reveals that more often it was a case of black people helping each other. Why would the author consider this an important point?
2. Slavery in Canada was abolished step-by-step. Slavery in the United States was abolished only after a long and bloody war. What effects might these different circumstances have had on racial attitudes in the two countries?
3. Thomas Johnson thought that Queen Victoria was black. Robert Nelson did not trust white abolitionists. Why did these men think the way they did?
4. Bryan Prince states that even some abolitionists did not believe in equality of the races. How did the experiences of some black people in Canada reflect this?
5. After the Civil War, with slavery abolished in the United States, many of the black people who had fled to Canada returned home. Would you have stayed in Canada or returned to the South. What would have been the advantages and disadvantages for each?
6. At the end of the book, Bryan Prince lists several historic sites in Ontario that have connections with the Underground Railroad. Why is it important that these sites are maintained and that people visit them?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students if they were to make the journey from a slave state to Canada, would they try to do it alone, or would they join a group escorted by a “conductor” like Harriet Tubman. Have them give reasons for their choices.
2. Sometimes it is difficult to be non-objective when discussing people of another time and place. Ask students what their attitudes toward slavery might be if they had been born and raised on a southern plantation (a) as a white child, (b) as a black child. Ask them to explain their answers, keeping in mind what they would learn from the people around them.
3. Most of the former slaves quoted in Bryan Prince’s book spoke of masters who treated them with great cruelty, but a few said they’d had masters who were kind to them. The Irish writer Oscar Wilde once commented that in his opinion, “kind” slave owners were the worst of the lot. Ask students what they think Wilde meant by that. (Wilde quite likely believed that the “kindness” of some slave owners masked the true brutality of slavery.)
4. Escaping slavery was no game, but the fugitives and their Underground Railroad conductors had to be very clever to avoid capture. Alfred Jones used a forged pass to get past patrols. We know that Harriet Tubman usually picked up her “passengers” on a Saturday night because Sunday was the slaves’ only day off. That meant the absence of a runaway might not be noticed until Monday. Ask students what they would do to prepare for a flight to Canada. What would they need to know before leaving? What would they take with them?
5. When fugitive slaves reached Canada, they found themselves in a world that was very different from the one they had left. Ask students how runaways would have had to adjust to climate, law, and social attitudes.

6. John Brown believed that slavery could be abolished through armed insurrection. Throughout history there were others who led slave revolts. Have students research and write a brief report on one of the following: Spartacus (ancient Rome), Toussant L'Ouverture (Haiti), Nat Turner (United States).

BEYOND THE BOOK

Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman became known as “Moses,” like the biblical hero who led the Jews out of slavery and into the Promised Land. Try to imagine this prim-looking woman shepherding her charges through the dark, hiding them in chimneys and haystacks, driving them forward at gunpoint if need be. “I think slavery is the next thing to hell,” she declared.

North Star to Freedom

Many fugitives had no map or compass to guide them. They traveled mostly at night, under cover of darkness. On clear nights they relied on the stars to lead them to Canada; the constellations of the Big Dipper and Little Dipper are easy to spot, and point to the beacon of the North Star. On cloudy nights it was all too easy to get turned around and to travel the wrong way.

OTHER TITLES OF INTEREST

Suggested Reading

Black Fugitive Slaves in Early Canada
by Linda Bramble
ISBN 0920277160

The Blacks in Canada: A History
by Robin W. Winks
ISBN 077351631X

Bound For the North Star
by Dennis Brindell Fradin
ISBN 0395370172

North Star to Freedom
by Gena K. Gorrell
ISBN 1550050680

The Underground Railroad
by Shaaron Cosner
ASIN 053112505X

The Underground Railroad: First Person
Narratives of Escapes to Freedom in the North
by Charles L. Blockson
ISBN 0425115887

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/features/99/>

<http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/ath/library/webquests/underground/>