

Underground Railroad in Rhode Island

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About These Materials:

The Rhode Island Historical Society developed the lessons in this unit thanks to funding from the National Park Service’s National Underground Network to Freedom program. The grant was administered by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). More information about this little-known topic of the Underground Railroad in Rhode Island can be found on our free online source for Rhode Island History, [EnCompass](#). Some of the lessons below are paired with the essays in that module.

The lessons are not designed to be used in lecture-style teaching or as independent homework assignments. The lessons use collections of primary and secondary sources with guiding questions and graphic organizers to help students analyze the sources and gather their thoughts to be used as points of class discussion, either in groups or as a whole class. Some of the questions ask students to formulate and back-up their own thinking. As such, there may not be right or wrong answers, and students should be encouraged to listen to and consider the perspectives of their peers.

This material is based upon work assisted by a grant from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), funded by the Department of the Interior, National Park Service. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of ASALH or the Department of the Interior

Learning Objectives:

Students will learn to read and analyze primary source documents

Students will have a better understanding of what the lives of enslaved people were like before the Civil War

Students will have a better understanding of the risks freedom seekers had to consider before deciding to escape enslavement

Students will have a better understanding of the thoughts, risks, and actions of Rhode Island anti-slavery activists and abolitionists before the Civil War

Educational Standards:

RI K-12 GSEs for Civics and Government

GSEs for Grades 9-12

C&G 1: People create and change structures of power, authority, and governance in order to accomplish common goals.

C&G 1–2: Students demonstrate an understanding of sources of authority and use of power, and how they are/can be changed, by...

- a. identifying how actions of a government affect relationships involving the individual, society and the government (e.g., Homeland Security)

C&G 2: The *Constitution* of the United States establishes a government of limited powers that are shared among different levels and branches.

C&G 2–2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the democratic values and principles underlying the U.S. government by...

- c. identifying and giving examples of the discrepancies between democratic ideals and the realities of American social and political life

C&G 3: In a democratic society all people have certain rights and responsibilities.

C&G 3–2: Students demonstrate an understanding of how individuals and groups exercise (or are denied) their rights and responsibilities by...

- d. identifying and explaining ways individuals and groups have exercised their rights in order to transform society

C&G 4: People engage in political processes in a variety of ways.

C&G 4–1: Students demonstrate an understanding of political systems and political processes by...

- e. analyzing multiple perspectives on an historical or current controversial issue

C&G 4–3: Students participate in a civil society by...

- b. identifying and describing the role that various institutions play in meeting the needs of the community

C&G 5: As members of an interconnected world community, the choices we make impact others locally, nationally, and globally.

C&G 5-2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the benefits and challenges of an interconnected world by...

- b. analyzing and evaluating a contemporary or historical issue (e.g., free trade versus fair trade, access to medical care and terrorism)

RI K-12 GSEs for Historical Perspectives/RI History

GSEs for Grades 9-12

HP 1: History is an account of human activities that is interpretive in nature.

HP 1 –1: Students *act as historians*, using a variety of tools (e.g., artifacts and primary and secondary sources) by...

- a. formulating historical questions, obtaining, analyzing, evaluating historical primary and secondary print and non-print sources
- b. explaining how historical facts and historical interpretations may be different, but are related

HP 1–2: Students interpret history as a series of connected events with multiple cause-effect relationships, by...

a. explaining cause and effect relationships in order to sequence and summarize events, make connections between a series of events, or compare/contrast events

HP 2: History is a chronicle of human activities, diverse people, and the societies they form.

HP 2– 1: Students connect the past with the present by...

- a. explaining origins of major historical events
- b. identifying and linking key ideas and concepts and their enduring implications
- c. analyzing and evaluating how national and world events have impacted Rhode Island and how Rhode Island has impacted national and world events

HP 2– 2: Students chronicle events and conditions by...

- a. creating narratives based on a particular historical point of view
- b. synthesizing information from multiple sources to formulate a historical interpretation

HP 3: The study of history helps us understand the present and shape the future.

HP 3– 1: Students demonstrate an understanding of how the past frames the present by...

- a. gathering evidence of circumstances and factors contributing to contemporary problems
- b. formulating a position or course of action on a current issue from a choice of carefully evaluated options, taking into account the historical underpinnings

HP 3 – 2: Students make personal connections in an historical context (e.g., source-to-source, source-to-self, source-to-world) by...

- a. articulating an understanding of the meaning, implications, and impact of historical events on their lives today
- b. analyzing how an historical development has contributed to current social, economic, or political patterns

HP 5: Human societies and cultures develop and change in response to human needs and wants.

HP 5– 2: Students demonstrate an understanding that culture has affected how people in a society behave in relation to groups and their environment by...

- a. analyzing how membership in particular cultural groups has affected civic engagement on the local, regional, and national level, citing evidence.

HP 5– 3: Various perspectives have led individuals and/or groups to interpret events or phenomena differently and with historical consequences by...

- a. utilizing sources to identify different historical narratives and perspectives about the same events.

RI K-12 GSEs for Geography

GSEs for Grades 9-12

G 2: Places and Regions: Physical and human characteristics (e.g., culture, experiences, etc.) influence places and regions.

G 2–2: Students distinguish between regions and places by...

- a. analyzing and explaining how concepts of site and situation can explain the uniqueness of places.

G 3: Human Systems: (Movement) Human systems and human movement affect and are affected by distribution of populations and resources, relationships (cooperation and conflict), and culture.

G 3–3 Students determine how geography influences human settlement, cooperation or conflict by...

- a. analyzing these relationships in a given historical or current example.

RI Economics Grade Span Expectations

E 3: Individuals, institutions and governments have roles in economic systems.

E 3– 1 Students demonstrate an understanding of the interdependence created by economic decisions by...

- a. identifying and evaluating the benefits and costs of alternative public policies and assess who enjoys the benefits and bears the costs.

E 3– 2 Students demonstrate an understanding of the role of government in a global economy by...

a. evaluating how policy makers encourage or discourage economic activity.

Additionally, these lessons meet the ELA Common Core anchor standards of reading and writing--especially the literacy in history/social studies strand--as well as the anchor standard of speaking & listening.

Definitions:

Anti-Slavery Activist- a person against the institution of slavery who takes civic action

Emancipation- the process of being set free from restrictions; liberation

Freedom Seeker - freedom seekers are enslaved individuals who liberated themselves from enslavement. You may see the term "fugitive," "escapee," or "runaway" used in older documents or texts. Recent scholarship acknowledges that "freedom seekers" or "self-emancipated" are preferred terms to use since the other terms places the individual in a lawbreaking context, or one deserving of capture and punishment. See <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/undergroundrailroad/language-of-slavery.htm> for more information

Injustice- a lack of fairness

Prosecution- conducting legal proceedings against someone in a criminal charge

Self-emancipation – a formerly enslaved person who escapes enslavement to become free

Stereotype – a widely-held or common belief or generalization about a person or group of people that is usually untrue and can be derogatory

Underground Railroad – an informal secret network of places where freedom seekers were able to hide as they moved northward to freedom

Lesson 1: Analyzing Anti-Slavery Imagery

Historical documents can give us a window into how people at the time viewed a historical event or issue. In this lesson, we will use the primary source pictured below, *Truth Shall Make You Free*. This source was printed in 1840 as the frontispiece to a book published by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket. It may seem obvious to think that white people opposed to slavery during this time must have thought Black enslaved Americans were equals to them and believed in the “equality of races.” However, that was not always the case. Though anti-slavery activists believed the institution of slavery to be wrong, they were still influenced by common stereotypes of the time. A close examination of the following image can reveal such stereotypes.

Break the image up into three sections to take a close look and concentrate on each section. This has been done for you in the following pages. Your teacher can either have you examine each section together with your class, or they may split the class into groups and assign one section for each group to analyze and then share with the class. We suggest doing this either in groups or with a class rather than individually as a student may notice something that another missed. Use the graphic organizers with each section and then use the guiding questions at the end to facilitate your class discussion.

Document 1: We “pledge to sacrifice our lives and our all”: Rhode Islanders’ Involvement in the Underground Railroad

For context about the Underground Railroad in Rhode Island, read the essay [We “pledge to sacrifice our lives and our all”: Rhode Islanders’ Involvement in the Underground Railroad at this link.](#)

Document 2: Truth Shall Make You Free



Frontispiece to a book published by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket, 1840. Rhode Island Historical Society Collections RhiX17437



Section A

Document Analysis: Section A

Take a few minutes to look closely at Section A of the document. Then, fill out the chart below and answer the questions.

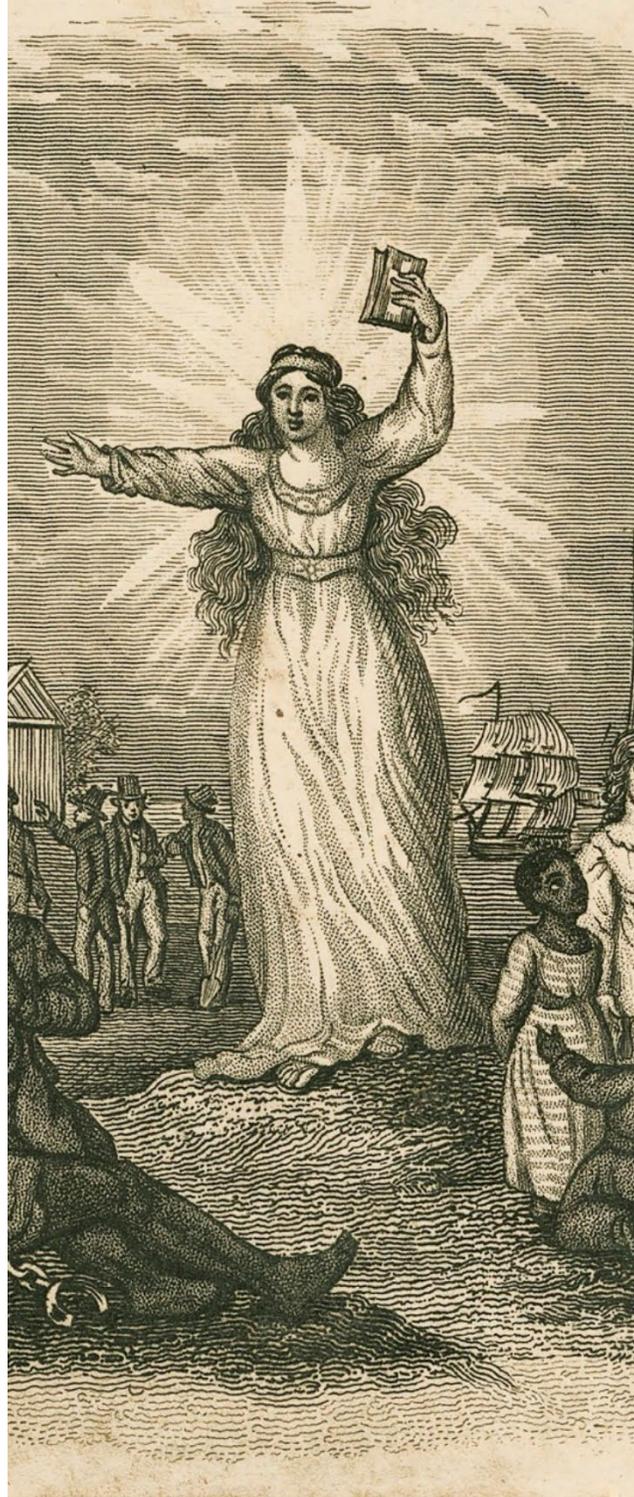
Describe the people, objects, and activities you see in your section. Be sure to look in the background, too.

People	
Objects	
Activities	

What symbols do you see in this section?

Is there anything else you'd like to describe about this section?

SHALL MAKE YOU



Section B

Document Analysis: Section B

Take a few minutes to look closely at Section B of the document. Then, fill out the chart below and answer the questions.

Describe the people, objects, and activities you see in your section. Be sure to look in the background, too.

People	
Objects	
Activities	

What symbols do you see in this section?

Is there anything else you'd like to describe about this section?



Section C

Document Analysis: Section C

Take a few minutes to look closely at Section C of the document. Then, fill out the chart below and answer the questions.

Describe the people, objects, and activities you see in your section. Be sure to look in the background, too.

People	
Objects	
Activities	

What symbols do you see in this section?

Is there anything else you'd like to describe about this section?

Document Analysis: Putting it all together

Now, look at the full document again and think of all the pieces as a whole as you answer the following questions.

1. What important facts can you learn from this document?
2. What inferences can you make about this document?
3. What is the date of the image? What is the historical context for this document / when was it produced and what was happening in the United States at the time this was created?
4. How are the different people being portrayed?
5. Who published the book this image is from? Who is the intended audience of this piece?

Lesson 2: Self-Emancipation

There were many forms of resistance enslaved Africans took to combat the institution of slavery that was forced upon them. Resistance for those enslaved included but were not limited to the slowing down of work, feigning sickness, and breaking tools. Others still chose to run away freeing themselves from slavery; this action is what we refer to as self-emancipation.

In the early 19th-century, many enslaved Africans wrote accounts of their lives in bondage and their path to emancipation. Abolitionists used these, what they called "slave narratives", today referred to as "freedom" or "liberation narratives", as a tool to push for the abolition of slavery in the United States. Those abolitionists participated by getting these works published, writing for the emancipated Africans, or acting as editors.

In 1837, James Curry was a self-emancipated man after he fled captivity in North Carolina. Traveling north to find refuge from those who would force him to go back into slavery, he makes his way to Massachusetts before continuing his journey to Canada. In Massachusetts he met Elizabeth Buffum Chace whom he told his life story of being held in captivity. Chace takes his story and turns it into a liberation narrative.

Document 1: The Narrative of James Curry

Before analyzing the documents below, read the essay [The Narrative of James Curry at this link.](#)

Document 2: Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave

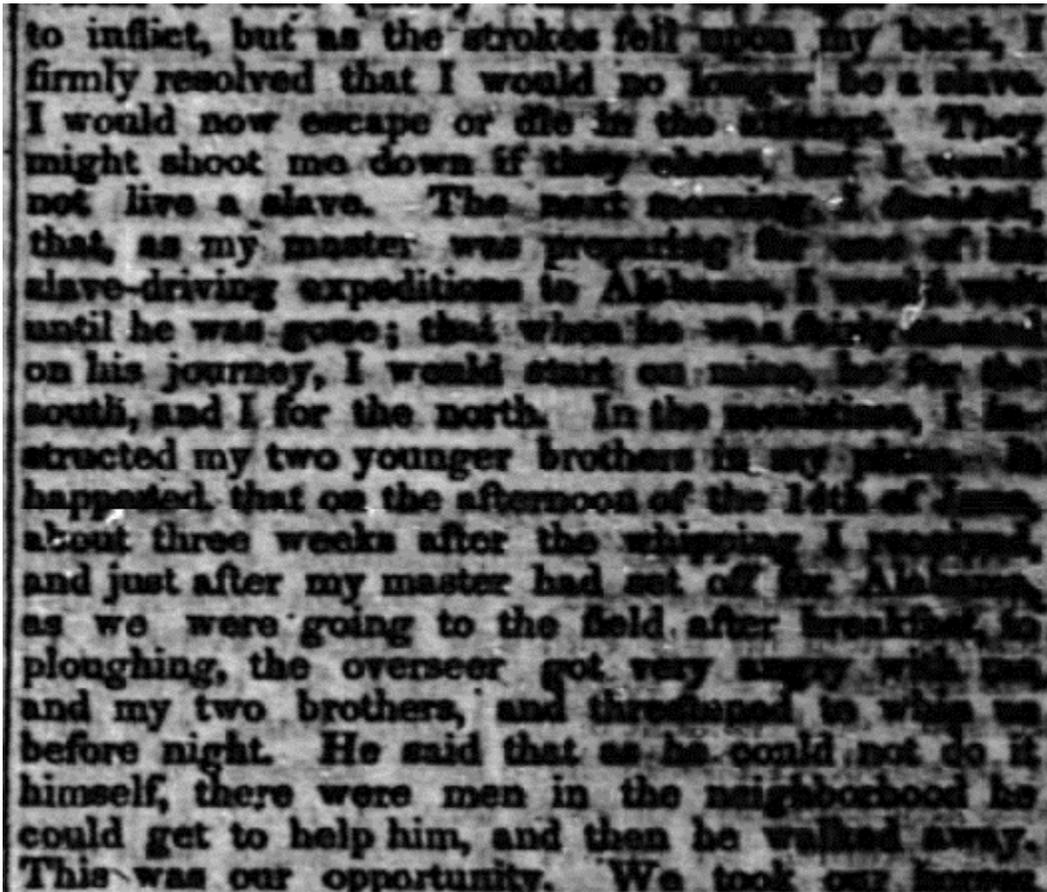


Masthead for The Liberator in which the *Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave* was published

The following excerpt is from the *Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave*. The original narrative was completed in 1838 by Elizabeth Buffum Chace a year after her meeting with James Curry. It is likely that Chace had taken the words and stories Curry provided as he detailed his story and composed it into a first-person perspective. The narrative was not published until January 1840, taking up most the front page of an antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*. By this time James Curry had already made his way to Canada to live as a free man.

The excerpt below details Curry's experience beginning his journey of self-emancipation.

Excerpt 1: Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave



to inflict, but as the strokes fell upon my back, I firmly resolved that I would no longer be a slave. I would now escape or die in the attempt. They might shoot me down if they chose, but I would not live a slave. The next morning, I decided, that, as my master was preparing for one of his slave-driving expeditions to Alabama, I would wait until he was gone; that when he was fairly started on his journey, I would start on mine, he for the south, and I for the north. In the meantime, I instructed my two younger brothers in my plans. It happened that on the afternoon of the 14th of June, about three weeks after the whipping I received, and just after my master had set off for Alabama, as we were going to the field after breakfast, to ploughing, the overseer got very angry with me and my two brothers, and threatened to whip us before night. He said that as he could not do it himself, there were men in the neighborhood he could get to help him, and then he walked away. This was our opportunity. We took our horses

A clipping from The Liberator showing part of "Excerpt 1." Due to the quality of the print, the full excerpt has been transcribed for you below

I firmly resolved that I would no longer be a slave. I would now escape or die in the attempt. They might shoot me down if they chose, but I would not live a slave. The next morning, I decided, that, as my master was preparing for one of his slave-driving expeditions to Alabama, I would wait until he was gone; that when he was fairly started on his journey, I would start on mine, he for the south, and I for the north. In the meantime, I instructed my two younger brothers in my plans. It happened that on the afternoon of the 14th of June, about three weeks after the whipping I

received, and just after my master had set off for Alabama, as we were going to the field after breakfast, to ploughing, the overseer got very angry with me and my two brothers, and threatened to whip us before night. He said that as he could not do it himself, there were men in the neighborhood he could get to help him, and then he walked away. This was our opportunity. We took our horses round to the road fence and hitched them, and ran for my wife's house. There I changed my clothes, and took my leave of her, with the hope of being soon able to send for her from a land of freedom, and left her in a state of distress which I cannot describe. We started without money and without clothes, except what we wore, (not daring to carry a bundle,) but with our hearts full of hope. We travelled by night, and slept in the woods during the day. After travelling two or three nights, we got alarmed and turned out of the road, and before we turned into it again, it had separated, and we took the wrong road. It was cloudy for two or three days, and after travelling three nights, we found ourselves just where we were three days before, and almost home again. We were sadly disappointed, but not discouraged; and so, turning our faces again northward, we went on. I should have said before, that I knew the way to Petersburg, Va. having been several times sent there by my master with a team. Near Petersburg, we passed a neat farm-house, with every thing around it in perfect order, which had once been shown to me by a slave, as I was driving my master's team to

the city. 'That,' said he, 'belongs to a Friend; they never hold slaves.' Now I was strongly tempted to stop there, and ask instruction in my northward course, as I knew the way no farther; but I dared not. So, not knowing the north star, we took the two lower stars of the great bear for our guide, and putting our trust in God, we passed Petersburg. We suffered much from hunger. There was no fruit and no grain to be found at that season, and we sometimes went two days, and sometimes three, without tasting food, as we did not dare to ask, except when we found a slave's, or free colored person's house remote from any other, and then we were never refused, if they had food to give.

Document Analysis: Excerpt 1

As you read the above excerpt, there may be words you are unfamiliar with or that are misspelled/alternately spelled. Use the organizer below to write words you don't know and give their definition.

Unknown Word	Definition or Meaning
Ploughing/Plowing	loosening or turning the soil before sowing seed or planting

Questions

1. How did James Curry escape Slavery?
2. Who did Curry take with him during his escape?
3. Curry continued north even after getting lost and ending up so close to home again, do you think other people would have headed back home? Why or why not?

4. Even though Curry remembered that the people who lived at the farmhouse did not enslave others he was afraid to stop there and ask for help, why?

5. What risks were Curry and his brothers taking by self-emancipating?

Excerpt 2: Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave

I soon entered a colored person's house on the side of the canal, where they gave me breakfast and treated me very kindly. I travelled on through Williamsport and Hagerstown, in Maryland, and, on the 19th day of July, about two hours before day. I crossed the line into Pennsylvania, with a heart full of gratitude to God, believing that I was indeed a free man, and that now, under the protection of law, there was 'none who could molest me or make me afraid.' In the course of the morning, I was spoken to by a man, sitting at the window of a house in Chambersburg, who asked me if I wanted a job of work. I replied that I did, and he took me into his garden, and set me to work. When the job there was done, he told me I might clean his carriage. At dinner, I ate in the kitchen with a colored woman. She inquired where I came from, I told her the name of the town in Pennsylvania. Said she, 'I didn't know but you came from Virginia, or Maryland, and sometimes, some of our colored friends come from there hither, and think they are free, but the people about here are very ugly, and they take them and carry them back; and if you haven't sufficient free papers, I would advise you not to stay here to-night.' This was enough for me. I had discovered that the man was very curious about me, and seemed disposed to keep me at work upon little jobs until night. I went out, and jumped over the garden wall, and was soon on the turnpike road. I was very fearful, and came on tremblingly; but near Philadelphia, I

fell in with members of the Society of Friends, whom I never feared to trust, who 'took in the stranger,' and I worked for them until Christmas.

After finding, to my great disappointment, that I was now a free man, and that I could not send for my wife from here, I determined to go to Canada. But the situation of that country at that time was such, that my friends thought it not best for me to go immediately, and advised me to come into the State of Massachusetts, as the safest place for me until the difficulties in Canada were passed away. I was taken by kind friends to New York, from whence the Abolitionists sent me to Massachusetts, and here I have found a resting place, and have met with friends who have freely administered to my necessities, and whose kindness to the poor fugitive I shall ever remember with emotions of heartfelt gratitude. And here I have fulfilled the promise made in slavery to my Maker, that I would acknowledge him before men, when I came into a land of freedom. And although I have suffered much, very much in my escape, and have not here found that perfect freedom which I anticipated, yet I have never for one moment regretted that I thus sought my liberty.

In a few days I start for Canada, fully believing that he who has thus far protected me, will guide me safely, where, under the free government of Queen Victoria, I may feel myself a man. I trust in God.

Document-Analysis: Excerpt 2

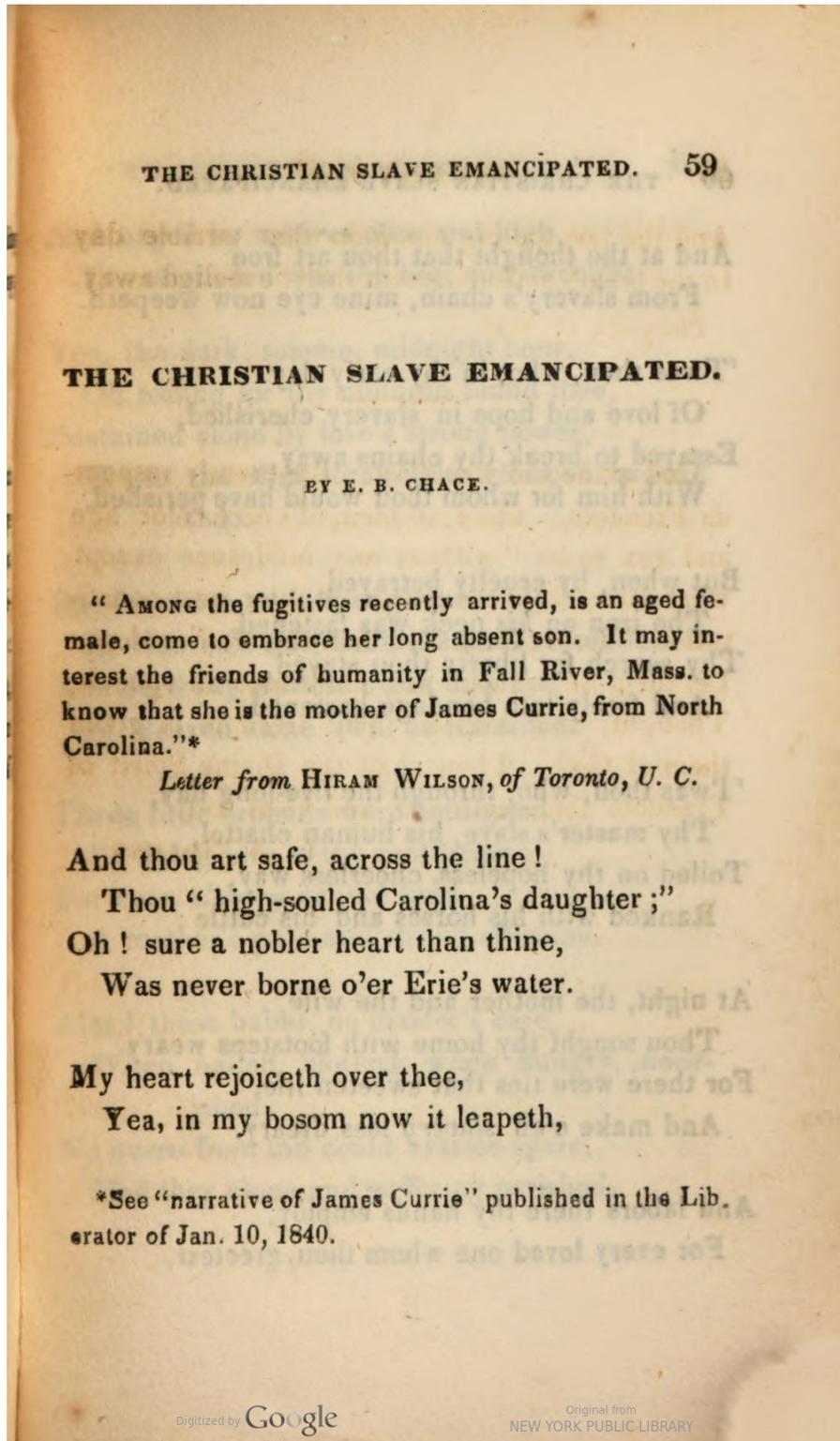
Use the organizer below to write words you don't know and give their definition.

Unknown Word	Definition or Meaning

Questions:

1. In both excerpts, Curry mentions people giving him shelter and food during his travels, who were these people? Why did they help him?
2. Curry and his brothers got separated after escaping slavery, do you think families were always reunited after finding freedom?
3. After Curry got to the North he considered himself a free man but found he could not send for his wife. why do you think he decided to continue his journey to Canada despite this?

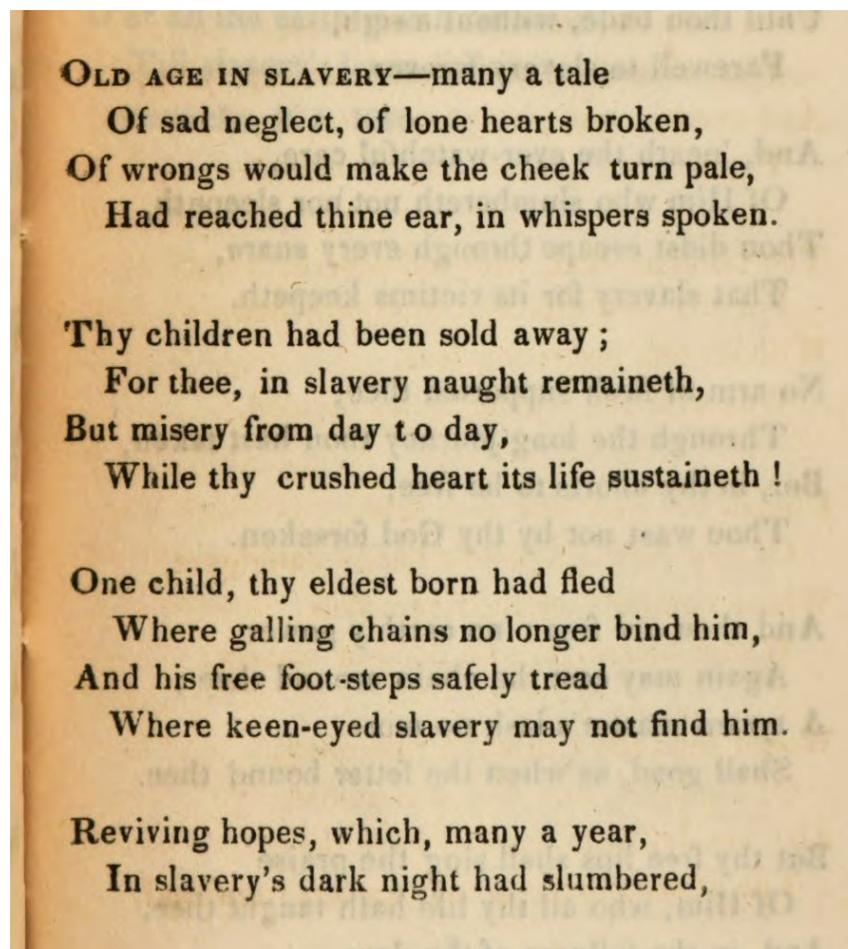
Document 3: *The Christian Slave Emancipated*



Lead page for *The Christian Slave Emancipated* within a publication by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket. 1840. New York Public Library Collections. Digitized by Google.

After the publishing of the *Narrative of James Curry, A Fugitive Slave*, reports reached Elizabeth Buffum Chace stating that James Curry's mother, Lucy, had reunited with her son in Canada. In response to this news, Chace wrote a poetic tribute to Lucy called [*The Christian Slave Emancipated*](#), which was published later the same year in a book of essays published by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket, the same book that contained the cover image from Lesson 1. The following is an excerpt from that poem.

Excerpt: *The Christian Slave Emancipated*



Excerpt from *The Christian Slave Emancipated* (page 63) within a publication by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket. 1840. New York Public Library Collections. Digitized by Google.

64 THE CHRISTIAN SLAVE EMANCIPATED.

Now whispered *freedom* in thine ear,
And her pure, peaceful blessings numbered.

One struggle—and thy purpose high,
Was fixed—and then it faltered never,
Until thou bade, without a sigh,
Farewell to slavery forever.

And, 'neath the ever-watchful care,
Of Him who slumbereth not nor sleepeth,
Thou didst escape through every snare,
That slavery for its victims keepeth.

No arm of flesh supported thee,
Through the long journey thou hast taken,
But, in thy efforts to be free,
Thou wast not by thy God forsaken.

And thou *art* free : no earthly power
Again may cast the chain around thee ;
A tyrant master's lash no more
Shall goad, as when the fetter bound thee.

But thy free lips shall sing the praise
Of Him, who all thy life hath taught thee,
And, in the fullness of thy days,

From slavery's blighted land hath brought
thee.

Thanks be to HIM! his holy word
In tones of thunder hath been spoken;
O'er all the earth it *will* be heard,
Till slavery's latest link is broken.

Pawtucket, R. I., 1840

Excerpt from *The Christian Slave Emancipated* (page 65) within a publication by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket. 1840. New York Public Library Collections. Digitized by Google.

Document-Analysis: Document 3

1. Who do you think was the audience Chace was trying to reach in this poem?
2. How do you think she wanted the audience to feel about slavery?
3. Chace refers to the "long journey", what paths might the self-emancipated have taken?
4. In what ways is Chace incorporating her religious beliefs in this poem? How is she using religion to justify the anti-slavery movement? Why might that be important to the audience she is writing to?

Lesson 3: Enslavement and Family

Families of enslaved people were often separated. Enslavers might sell members of a family to different places, and ties could be forever lost. In this lesson, we will examine three documents highlighting the stresses and strains enslavement and seeking freedom could put on families.

Document 1: Children and Teenagers in the Underground Railroad

Read about [Children and Teenagers in the Underground Railroad](#) at this link.

Document 2:

ARRIVAL FROM MARYLAND, 1859.

ANN MARIA JACKSON AND HER SEVEN CHILDREN—MARY ANN, WILLIAM HENRY, FRANCES SABRINA, WILHELMINA, JOHN EDWIN, EBENEZER THOMAS, AND WILLIAM ALBERT.



The coming of the above named was duly announced by Thomas Garrett :

WILMINGTON, 11th mo., 21st, 1858.

DEAR FRIENDS—McKIM AND STILL:—I write to inform you that on the 16th of this month, we passed on four able bodied men to Pennsylvania, and they were followed last night by a woman and her six children, from three or four years of age, up to sixteen years ; I believe the whole belonged to the same estate, and they were to have been sold at public sale, I was informed yesterday, but preferred seeking their own master ; we had some trouble in getting those last safe along, as they could not travel far on foot, and could not

* 11,097 (1872)

N. Y. PUBLIC LIBRARY
PICTURE COLLECTION

Slavery- U.S.

[Arrival from Maryland](#), 1859; Ann Maria Jackson and her seven children. New York Public Library Digital Collections.

Document Analysis

Anna Maria Jackson and her seven children escaped from enslavement. As you can imagine, it cannot be easy to leave unnoticed and hide throughout the travel to the North as a single woman with seven children. Answer the questions below to help you think about the difficult decisions and risks she faced in seeking freedom.

1. Why risks can you infer would be involved for a person who is deciding whether or not to escape enslavement?
2. What factors would Anna Maria Jackson have to consider before making the decision to leave?
3. All freedom seekers had risks to consider when deciding whether to flee, but what risks might a family have to consider that an individual may not? What about a family with young children? How old were Anna Maria Jackson's children?
4. What factor led Anna Maria Jackson to take the risk and seek freedom with all seven of her children? What was to happen to her children if they stayed?

5. Why might someone in a similar situation as Anna Maria Jackson decide not to attempt to flee?

Document 3: The Narrative of James Curry

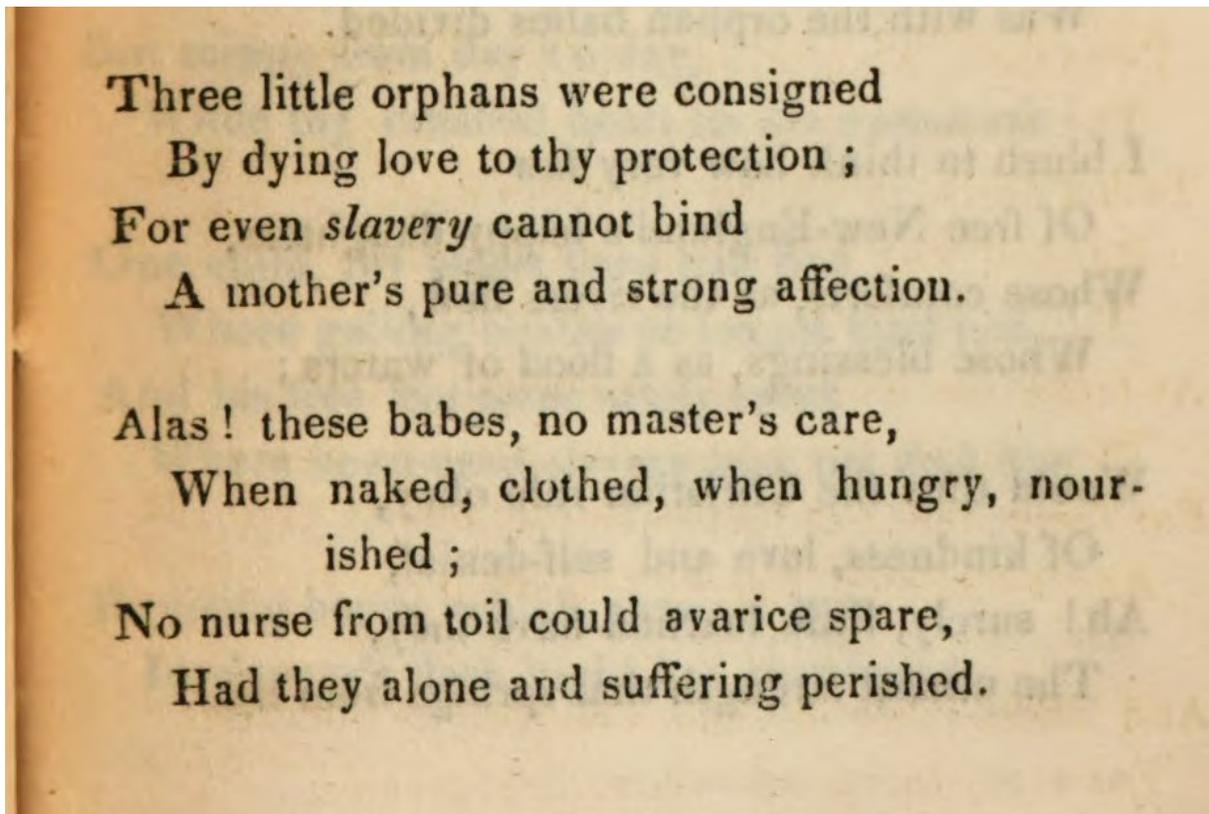
If you have not done so for Lesson 2, [read the essay about James Curry at this link](#) to learn about the familial connections mentioned in this essay.

Use the table below to outline Curry's family and what the essay says happened to them.

Familial connection to Curry	What happened to them?

Document 4: Excerpt from *The Christian Slave Emancipated*

Inspired by the stories James Curry told to Elizabeth Buffum Chace, Chace wrote a poem about Curry's separation from his mother and subsequent reunion. A mother herself, Chace was touched by what she learned. She wrote a poem titled [The Christian Slave Emancipated](#) that was published in a book by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket. You may have analyzed other excerpts from this poem in Lesson 2.



Excerpt from *The Christian Slave Emancipated* (page 61) within a publication by the Juvenile Emancipation Society of Pawtucket. 1840. New York Public Library Collections. Digitized by Google.

Document Analysis: Document 4

1. Who were the “three little orphans” in the poem? Why are they being referred to as orphans here?
2. Though Curry and his brothers were adults when they escaped enslavement, why do you think Chace chose to refer to them as “orphans” and “babes” in the poem?
3. What does Chace mean by the last stanza in the excerpt starting with “Alas!” and ending with “perished”?
4. Though she is literally referring to Curry, his brothers, and his mother, who do you think Chace is figuratively referring to when she writes about “orphans” and “babes”? In other words, what is she trying to convey about the institution of slavery and what it does to families?
5. Who is Chace's audience? Who is she trying to appeal to and what is she trying to get them to understand and believe? What stance does she want them to take on the institution of slavery?

Lesson 4: Taking Civic Action Today .

Documents 1 and 2: Rhode Islanders' Involvement in the Underground Railroad and Children and Teenagers in the Underground Railroad

If you did not do so for the previous lessons, read the essay about how [children and teens participated in the Underground Railroad](#), both as freedom seekers and in aiding those seeking freedom.

Read the essay about how [Rhode Islanders participated in the Underground Railroad](#) despite the Congressional Fugitive Slave Act.

1. What actions did young people take to aid freedom seekers?
2. What were the legal ways Rhode Island citizens protested the Fugitive Slave Act?
3. What were the illegal ways Rhode Island citizens protested the Fugitive Slave Act?
4. What risks did Rhode Island Citizens who continued to participate in the Underground Railroad face? Why would they choose to continue to participate despite the risks?

Document 2: Fugitive Slave Act

Read the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, [transcribed here by the American Battlefield Trust](#)

Outline below what the Fugitive Slave Act implemented into federal law

Document 3: Petition for the Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act

To the Honorable General Assembly of the State of Rhode-
Island.

We, the colored citizens of ~~Rhode Island~~ *Newport* in said State, respectfully ask your honorable body to PROTEST, in the name of the State, against the law passed at the late session of Congress, in relation to the surrender of *Fugitive Slaves*, and to instruct the Senators, and request the Representatives in Congress from this State, to make every effort, for its *immediate repeal*. And we further ask your honorable body, to devise and establish such further safeguards of our *rights and liberties*, as may be required in consequence of the passage of said law.

Rev Standley Canterbury *Eliza Canterbury*
Henry Johnson *Mary Jane Smith*
Perry Rodely
William Canterbury *Charles Banister*
Perry Barnes
Richard Whit
Edward Buchanan
Robert Wilson
Isaac Rice Jr
Esther Brundley
Rego Chalinder
Hannah Chalinder
Albert Stephens
Henry Williams
Wesley Essex
Thomas Church
George Stephens
Agriamir Bengtson
Samuel Green
Richard Hull
Hannah McGreen
Moses C. Barboote
Ellen Perry
James Giles

Petition for the Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law from the "colored citizens" of Newport. Rhode Island State Archives collections.

Document Analysis: Documents 2 and 3

1. What did the Fugitive Slave Act mean for those living in the northern “free” states who assisted freedom seekers?
2. What did the Fugitive Slave Act mean for those seeking freedom?
3. Document 3, the petition, is an example of one of many such petitions signed by citizens throughout the state of Rhode Island. Who were the citizens who signed this particular petition? i.e. were they Black or white? Where were they from? What are some of the names?
4. What were the petitioners trying to get the General Assembly of Rhode Island to do?

Document 4: Meeting of Colored Citizens

ON MONDAY EVENING.

Meeting of Colored Citizens.

At a public mass meeting of the colored citizens of Providence, R. I., held in Hoppin's Hall, on Monday evening, Sept. 23d, relative to the fugitive slave bill, the following resolutions were presented and adopted :

Whereas, we, the colored inhabitants of this country, have been shamefully oppressed by this nation's despotic legislation from its formation, causeless—therefore

Resolved, That we, the citizens of Providence, R. I., in view of the fugitive slave bill, do, from this time henceforth, pledge to sacrifice our lives and our all upon the altar of protection to our wives, our children, and our fellow sufferers in common with us.

Whereas our fathers bore their breast firmly to the howling storm of British artillery, and struggled with the peril of the Revolution manfully and patriotically for all the true glory of which this country should ever boast—

Resolved, That we have an undoubted and inherent right to unrestrained liberty, and the pursuit of happiness anywhere on this vast domain, the foundations of which were laid through the blood and energies of our fathers, who, according to Gen. Washington's own words, fought with unflinching bravery in the darkest hour of '76, for an asylum truly democratic in its whole character.

Resolved, That we believe that the moral and executive character of Rhode Island is too democratic to practice or submit to an enactment so inhuman and disgraceful.

Resolved, That we look to the great moral arm of Rhode Island as a refuge from the storm which now threatens our social habitations, with lamentations beyond endurance.

Resolved, That we consider the action of Congress, in the passage of the fugitive slave bill, unworthy of the age, and an abiding disgrace upon that body.

Resolved, That the act is unconstitutional, from the fact of its destroying the rights guaranteed to each State by the Constitution, namely—securing to each and every person within their limits life and property.

Resolved, That we, upon mature consideration, believe it to be our duty to God, ourselves, our children, and three millions of our brethren that are in bonds, at any hour of day or night, that a slaveholder, or his agent, shall come within the limits of the State of Rhode Island for the purpose of retaking runaway slaves, that we will use every means that nature or art may place into our hands to deprive him of his object.

Resolved, That we who have escaped from chains, fetters, and the slave driver's lash, are determined never to go back again, but have adopted the inestimable motto—Liberty or Death.

Resolved, That these resolutions be referred to a committee of three for publication, and with instructions to transmit copies of them to the Governor and the members of Congress from this State.

E. SCOTT,
SHERMAN MARRS, } Committee of
JOHN BANKS, } publication.

Document Analysis: Document 4

1. What did the “Colored Citizens of Providence” gather to meet about?
2. What were some of the resolutions they put forth in this notice?
3. What was the purpose of posting this notice in the newspaper when a larger group sent a petition to the General Assembly?

Your Turn: Putting it all together

Think of an issue or concern that you have in your world today. This can be at the school level, in your community, state, or country. Take some time to research your issue to better formulate your opinion. Then, use the prompts below to formulate your argument and proposed solutions on a separate sheet of paper or document.

1. Write a paragraph that summarized your issue.
2. In the second paragraph, write about your viewpoint of the issue and viewpoints that do not correspond to your own.
3. In the third paragraph, write about how you would start to find resolution. What actions could you take as a young person, like the young people involved in the Underground Railroad, to work towards doing what you think is right without harming others.
4. Next, design a petition written to the main authority who could help you solve your issue whether it be your school committee, or a town, state, or federal government entity.
5. Write a paragraph about how you would gain signatures for your petition. Who would you reach out to? How would you work to convince others to sign and stand up with you towards your cause?
6. What is the outcome you would like to see? How would you determine if your action is successful?

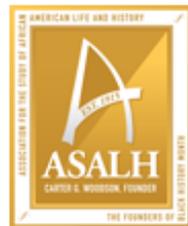
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AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE *and HIS*



2021



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