







“Follow the Drinking Gourd” Tells an Important American Story

Overview:

Students will listen to and analyze the song “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” This U.S. folk song, published in 1928, tells the story of the slaves walking north to freedom over the “Underground Railroad” prior to and during the Civil War. Legend has it that they looked up at the Little Dipper/Little Bear (Ursa Minor), constellation in the sky to guide them on their way north because its two brightest stars can be used as pointers to the North Star, Polaris, which is a useful navigation tool in the Northern Hemisphere.

Objectives:

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

-  **Identify** the approximate paths the slaves took north.
-  **Explain** how the Little Dipper’s handle, otherwise known as the Little Bear’s (Ursa Minor) Tail, was what served as a navigational pointer to the North Star when walking northward.
-  **Explain** that the star at the end of the Little Dipper’s handle points to the North Star, which is always visible when it is dark in the Northern Hemisphere.
-  **Hypothesize** what some of the symbols (e.g., drinking gourd, first quail, peg foot) in this song stand for.

Preparation:

-  Write the vocabulary words on the board.

Materials:


- γ Visual Aid: “Ursa Minor/ The Little Dipper”
- γ Visual Aid: “Maps of the Underground Railroad”
- γ YouTube video of the song “Follow the Drinking Gourd”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msqLxEyDHLg>
- γ Attached photos of (or bring in the real thing):
 - a gourd and one that has been carved into a scooper or drinking gourd
 - dandelion greens
 - purslane
- γ Handout: “Follow the Drinking Gourd”

On the board:

- γ Vocabulary words
- γ “Follow the Drinking Gourd” Lyrics


Suggested Snack:

- γ A fresh salad of native plants from the garden

 You or the students will harvest some foraged native plants to make a salad from the garden using items such as: dandelion greens, purslane (which is full of beneficial omega 3 fatty acids and adds a “peppery” flavor), sorrel, and/or red clover. Add an olive oil/vinegar dressing to finish the salad. These are the kinds of greens the former slaves might have eaten on their trip north.

Vocabulary:

 folk song


 quail


 abolitionists


 gourd


 drinking gourd

 peg foot

 clandestine

 fugitive slaves

 light pollution

 forage

Learning Activities:

1. Classroom Activity (45 min.)

A. Introduce this lesson by telling students that they are going to be listening to a folk song that tells a story of the fugitive slaves who walked to the northern states where slavery did not exist prior to and during the Civil War.

- Explain that where we all live in the Northern Hemisphere we can see the Little Dipper and the North Star at night year round (provided there is little light pollution).

- Play the song (see the YouTube link under the Materials section above) several times (it is short). (The Weavers, an American folk music quartet, has one of the most lyrical versions of this song.) Project the lyrics which are on the Handout onto the board.

B. Review the Handout with students. Ask students to discuss the questions from the Handout with a peer or small group to brainstorm, then allow individual writing time. Allow students to share their work at the end of their writing.

2. Snack: Serve a salad of fresh greens foraged from the garden. (5 min.)

3. Have students answer the Reflection Questions in their garden journals. (5 min.)

Student Reflection Questions:

1. Imagine that you are a slave walking north on the Underground Railroad without your family. What are you thinking, experiencing, and feeling?

2. What states might you be walking through, and which state would you decide to stay in because it did not have slavery at that time?

Assessment Questions:

1. Why do you think this song uses the symbol of the drinking gourd?
 - A. The fugitive slaves were thirsty.
 - B. The North Star could be found by using the two brightest stars in the handle of the Little Dipper (which looked like a gourd). These served as navigational pointers to the North Star.
 - C. The slaves used gourds to drink water out of while they worked in the fields picking cotton and/or tobacco.
 - D. **Both B and C.**

2. What time of each day do the fugitive slaves start out on their walk?
 - A. End of the day
 - B. **Early in the morning**
 - C. Middle of the day

Standards:

Common Core State Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

Next Generation Science Standards

- ESS1.A: The Universe and Its Stars

Patterns of the apparent motion of the sun, the moon, and stars in the sky can be observed, described, predicted, and explained with models (MS-ESS1-1).



Follow the Drinking Gourd

Name: _____

Teacher: _____

Date: _____

Read the following lyrics to this folk song and then answer the questions on the back of this handout.

When the sun comes back
And the First quail calls
Follow the drinking gourd,
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom
If you follow the drinking gourd.

The riverbank makes a very good road.
The dead trees will show you the way.
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on,
Follow the drinking gourd.

The river ends between two hills
Follow the drinking gourd.
There's another river on the other side
Follow the drinking gourd.

When the great big river meets the little river
Follow the drinking gourd
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom
If you follow the drinking gourd.

1. What people are following the drinking gourd?

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2. Why do you think the song uses the drinking gourd symbol?

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3. What river are they walking by?

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4. What is this trail called and why?

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5. What time of year is the drinking gourd seen in the Northern Hemisphere?
Why is it best seen then?

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.....



25 Seeds



**Gourd
Dipper
Non-GMO, Heirloom**

Smooth tan surface. 12" L neck is slender, usually curved and longer than the 5" diameter bowl. Great for making arts and crafts. Long handles are just right for making water or feed dippers. Very easy to grow in the summer heat. Harvest in about 80 days.



Seeds to Plate

Follow the Drinking Gourd

Photo: Purslane



Seeds to Plate

Follow the Drinking Gourd

Photos: Dandelion and Greens



Seeds to Plate

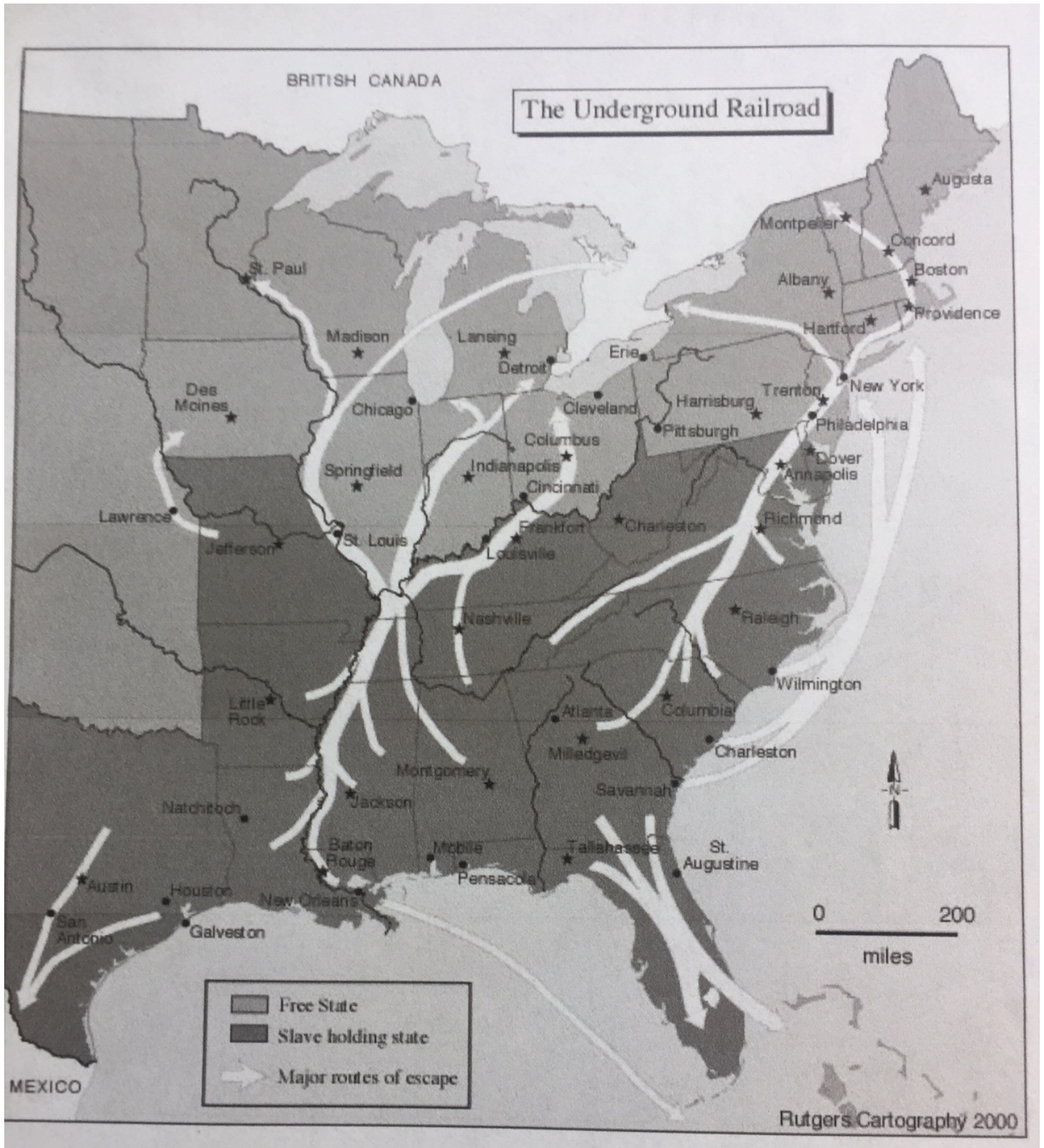
Follow the Drinking Gourd

Photos: Dandelion and Greens





Map of the Underground Railroad





Map of the Underground Railroad



From: <http://www.thomaslegion.net/theundergroundrailroadhistory.html>



Ursa Minor/The Little Dipper

