

Famous African Americans Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad



Harriet Tubman lived during a time when it was illegal to help slaves escape to freedom, but she helped slaves escape anyway. Because of her efforts, she came to be known as “Moses,” referring to an important figure in the Bible. The Moses of the Bible led the Jews, his own ethnic group, out of slavery in Egypt. Similarly, Tubman led African Americans out of slavery in the American South. She became the most well-known leader of the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a system of secret **routes**¹ that helped slaves escape to free states.

Harriet Tubman was born a slave. She escaped slavery and made a promise to help others do the same. She made a total of 19 rescue trips back down south. She never lost one of the 300 slaves she saved. She was **skillful**² and brave. She even led her parents to freedom in 1857.

Harriet Tubman continued to help other African-American people. She was a nurse and a spy during the Civil War. In her later years, Tubman **established**³ a house for elderly African Americans who needed help. She was a beacon for the African-American community and the United States.

¹ **route:** path; road; way to get somewhere

² **skillful:** good at what she did

³ **establish:** to bring into existence

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. How was Harriet Tubman most like Moses?

- A They are both important figures in the Bible.
- B They both saved people from slavery.
- C They are both famous Americans.
- D They both lived in Egypt.

2. What does the author describe in the passage?

- A slavery in the United States
- B how Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery
- C how Moses led the Jews out of Egypt
- D the life and works of Harriet Tubman

3. Harriet Tubman helped African Americans in more ways than just her role in the Underground Railroad. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A She never lost one of the 300 slaves she led to freedom.
- B She made a total of 19 rescue trips to the South.
- C She established a house to help elderly African Americans.
- D She became the most famous leader of the Underground Railroad.

4. Why is Tubman most likely described as brave?

- A She promised to help free slaves.
- B She made 19 rescue trips back down south.
- C She established a house for elderly African Americans who needed help.
- D She is compared to Moses, an important figure in the Bible.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A how Tubman helped slaves and other African Americans
- B why the Underground Railroad was never discovered by police
- C how Tubman trained to be a nurse in the Civil War
- D similarities and differences between Tubman and Moses from the Bible

6. Read the sentences: “The Moses of the Bible led the Jews, his own ethnic group, out of slavery in Egypt. **Similarly**, Tubman led African Americans out of slavery in the American South.”

As used in this sentence, what does the word “**similarly**” mean?

- A mysteriously
- B very differently
- C legally
- D in about the same way

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Harriet Tubman wanted to continue helping African Americans, _____ she established a house for elderly African Americans who needed help.

- A because
- B so
- C earlier
- D instead

8. What was the Underground Railroad?

9. Based on the passage, why did Harriet Tubman most likely want to help other slaves escape?

10. One of the definitions of the word “beacon” is someone or something that guides or gives hope to others. The text states that Harriet Tubman was a “beacon” for the African-American community and the United States. Use information from the text to support this statement.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 660

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8. What was the Underground Railroad?

Suggested answer: The Underground Railroad was a system of secret routes that led blacks from slave-holding states to free states.

9. Based on the passage, why did Harriet Tubman most likely want to help other slaves escape?

Suggested answer: Harriet Tubman most likely wanted to help other slaves escape because she had been a slave herself and was able to escape, and wanted to give freedom to those still in slavery.

10. One of the definitions of the word “beacon” is someone or something that guides or gives hope to others. The text states that Harriet Tubman was a “beacon” for the African-American community and the United States. Use information from the text to support this statement.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary and should be supported by the text. Students should indicate that Harriet Tubman was a “beacon” because she guided slaves to their freedom. Thus, she not only helped them escape but she also became a source of hope for those who looked towards her as their guide to freedom. Furthermore, she continued to help the country as a nurse and spy during the Civil War and established a nursing home for elderly African Americans. This work shows that Harriet Tubman was a figure embodying hope for those in a time of need.