

COVER PAGE

Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad
by Ann Petry

Introduction

Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad is the exhilarating true story of Harriet Tubman's daring escape from slavery, and the heroic efforts as a conductor on the Underground Railroad that delivered three hundred African Americans to freedom.

Born a slave on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Harriet courageously takes action when she can no longer bear the injustices all around her. She is still a child.

A diminutive, illiterate woman prone to narcoleptic sleeping spells, Harriet uses her extraordinary physical strength, guiding visions, knowledge of the natural world, trust in God, and dedication to nonviolent rebellion to save her people from grave social injustices. Risking her life, livelihood, and personal freedom, Harriet Tubman worked tirelessly to end slavery in the United States.

With her 1946 novel *The Street*, author Ann Petry became the first African American female writer to sell over one million copies. First published in 1955, *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* was met with wide acclaim. "It is my belief," said Petry, "that the majority of textbooks used in high schools do not give an adequate or accurate picture of the history of slavery in the United States." *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* paints a riveting portrait of one of our greatest heroes, and adds an important layer to America's historical picture. A biographical novel, *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* celebrates the courage, compassion, self-sacrifice, and irrepressible determination that made Tubman the "Moses of her people."

Over the course of the unit, ask students to think about the concepts of selflessness and personal sacrifice. What did Harriet give up in order to be free? What did she relinquish so that others might enjoy those same freedoms?

Using this Reading Guide

This reading guide presents lessons to support the teaching of the novel *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*. Organized by sections of grouped chapters, the lessons preview key vocabulary words and include close reading questions tied to the Common Core State Standards. The lessons identify a key passage in each section that will help you guide students through an exploration of the essential ideas, events, and character development in *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*. This passage will also serve as the jumping off point from which students will engage in their own SyncTV-style group discussion.

Each section of the reading guide also includes a list of comparative texts provided in *The Giver Literature Unit* on StudySync that go along with that section. For each comparative text, the

reading guide includes important contextual notes and ideas for relating the text to Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad.

Text Sections

Chapters 1-3: The First Years

Harriet is born and raised on the Brodas plantation in Chesapeake Bay, Maryland. Talk of freedom increases with Harriet's age. By age six, Harriet knows she is a slave and has fallen in love with the wonders of nature.

Chapters 4-5: Testing Her Wings

Harriet, age 6, is hired out for the first time. Abused and neglected, Harriet falls ill and is sent home. Her next mistress is equally awful, and, in response, Harriet runs away.

Chapters 6-8: Harriet Tubman is Born

Due to her antics, Harriet is sent back to the Brodas Plantation, where she is made a field slave. Harriet hears rumor of an underground railroad, prays for her master to die (he does), and risks her own safety to protect a runaway slave.

Chapters 9-10: Freedom Calling

Harriet falls in love with a free man and makes a beautiful quilt in place of a proper trousseau. Harriet shares her dream of freedom, and her new husband promises to betray her, should she run. Devastated but undeterred, Harriet flees for the third time.

Chapters 11-13: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Harriet is now technically free but still feels trapped. Inspired by the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, she begins her career as a conductor on the Underground Railroad and quickly becomes a legend to slaves on the Eastern Shore.

Chapters 14-17: Go On or Die

Even the masters now hear tales of "Moses," though they never see a trace of him. Harriet rescues 11 slaves, her largest group yet. When a slave threatens to turn back, Harriet is forced to turn her rifle on him, lest he expose the whole lot.

Chapters 18-19: Moses' Visions

Between 1851 and 1856, Harriet makes 11 trips on the Underground Railroad. She embarks on a quest to save her parents, and, during two of her sleeping seizures, has two important visions.

Chapters 20-21: A New Pattern of Life

Harriet is now much admired in the North and becomes a popular antislavery lecturer. John Brown asks for her help in securing freedom on a large scale by violent means, and although

Harriet promises to help him, she does not follow through. Harriet becomes a scout, spy, and a nurse for the Union Army.

Chapter 22: The Last Years

Harriet returns to Auburn to take care of her parents. After freedom is secured for all slaves in the U.S., she finds herself at a loss. In order to help the self-sacrificing and consequently destitute “Moses of her people,” a friend publishes two Harriet Tubman biographies to wide acclaim. When she passes, the city of Auburn holds a day of observance and erects a fitting memorial for “General Tubman.”

Chapters 1-3: The First Years

Key Passage

Chapter 3, Paragraph 32-33

This period of carefree idleness was due to end soon. The fierce old woman who looked after the children kept telling Minta that things would change.

Whenever she saw the little girl stop to look at the trees, the sky, she repeated the same harsh-voiced warning: “Overseer’ll be settin’ you a task any day now. Then you won’t be standin’ around with your mouth hangin’ open, lookin’ at nothin’ all day long.”

Why It’s Key

Individual: Like most childhoods, Harriet’s sets the stage for the sort of person she will become. Her careful attention to the glories of nature will serve her well when she is a conductor on the Underground Railroad, for knowing the ins and outs of the woods will be the number one reason she is such a successful savior.

Tone: The old woman is a frightening creature according to Minta and the other children. Here, her tone is especially menacing, almost like she is putting a hex on Harriet. She will not be the last to attempt to squash Harriet’s indomitable spirit.

Foreshadowing: This moment signals the end of Harriet’s terribly short childhood. She is hired out at age 6, less than a year after the old woman’s mean-spirited warning.

Irony: Though the old woman criticizes her for what she sees as lollygagging about, Harriet is in fact honing the skills that will one day make her the greatest conductor on the Underground Railroad in American history.

Your SyncTV

CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3, 7.5; SL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3, 7.5; SL.7.1

Discussion prompt: Author Ann Petry ends each chapter with a summary of the national historical events that occurred in tandem with each period of Harriet's life. What is the purpose of these summations? Explain.

Vocabulary

roughhewn

rough•hewn adjective

wood or stone that has been cut roughly; lacking a finished surface

The table was cut in a roughhewn manner, its edges splintering like an inexpertly felled tree.

haphazardly

hap•haz•ard•ly adverb

in a careless manner; at random

Jacob distributed the candy haphazardly, his friends grumbling or grinning in response to their allotment.

prophecy

pro•phe•cy verb

to declare or foretell by or as if by divine inspiration

Did the old witch ever prophecy anything but disaster? With all her talk of erupting volcanoes and blood-thirsty sea creatures, it didn't seem like it.

revolt

re•volt noun

a rebellion or uprising against authority

I led the revolt against the substitute teacher after she refused to let students use the restroom during a test.

patroller

pat•roll•er noun

someone on surveillance duty; an individual or a member of a group that guards an area

The patroller drove his golf cart on the greens all night, hoping to catch rascal kids stealing golf balls and setting off sprinklers.

Close Reading

Question #: 1

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: According to Harriet's mother, what is the worst job for a slave?

Sample Answer: Big Rit, a house slave, worries Harriet will be made a field slave, which she regards as both a miserable fate and the least respectable assignment.

Question #: 2

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: What are the Big House and the Quarter?

Sample Answer: The “Big House” is what slaves call their master’s house, while they live in the “Quarter,” a village of tiny, one-room, windowless identical log cabins.

Question #: 3

CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.2

CA CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.2

Question: Compare and contrast Harriet’s mother and father. What makes them “good” slaves?

Sample Answer: Both Big Rit and Ben are popular with Master Brodas, are treated comparatively well, and receive occasional preferential treatment. They are exceptional slaves from their Master’s perspective – smart, well behaved, with a sense of loyalty to and belief in the honesty and goodness of their master. Both seem content with their lot, though Big Rit holds tightly to Brodas’ promise that he will free the family after his death.

Question #: 4

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: What does it mean for a slave to be “hired out”?

Sample Answer: Many farmers do not have the means to own slaves, so they “rent” slaves from more well-to-do plantation owners.

Comparative Texts

Text: John Brown’s speech on the abolition of slavery

Compare to: Chapter 9 of The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

Connection: John Brown made a speech before the court that was to hang him for attempting a violent rebellion in the name of ending slavery. In his address, he cites a sense of religious duty “that all things whatsoever I would that men should do to me, I should do even so to them,” therefore inspiring him to interfere with the institution of slavery. John Brown’s appeal to his audience’s understanding of Christianity and the Bible can be contrasted with the cowskin whip-wielding Thomas Auld, who “found religious sanction for his cruelty.”

Chapters 4-5: Testing Her Wings

Key Passage

Chapter 5, Paragraph 40

*The next minute she had the rawhide down. I give one jump out of the door and I saw that **they** came after me, but I just flew and **they** didn't catch me. I ran and I ran and I passed many a house, but I didn't dare stop for they all knew my mistress and they would send me back.*

Why It's Key

Individual: Earlier in this chapter, Big Rit delivers a lengthy monologue on the “good old days,” the years of her young life when the plantation was wealthy and “everybody had plenty to eat and we all felt safe.” Ben agrees with her, as he too longs for the days of slavery gone by. These sentiments are in stark contrast with their daughter’s feelings about the matter. Harriet is just six years old, but already she is determined to free herself from the shackles of slavery, to runaway and live in a pigpen if that is what is required.

Foreshadowing: The use of the verb “flew” here is significant, for it foreshadows the dreams Harriet will have of flying away, of the lore other slaves will establish in which Harriet has the wings of a bird, soaring over everything to freedom. That she “passed many a house” but did not stop, knowing these were hostile sites, is in stark contrast to the string of welcoming homes that will greet her on the Underground Railroad.

Your SyncTV

CCSS: RL.7.1, RL.7.4; SL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1, RL.7.4; SL.7.1

Discussion prompt: In Chapter 5, on the way to yet another family to whom she’s been “hired out,” Harriet wonders, “Why do I have to go anywhere? Suppose she didn’t like the people. What could she do about it?”

Why is this inner monologue significant? Are these questions surprising, in that they are the inquiries of a slave? What do they reveal about Harriet’s unique nature? Do they reveal anything about the woman Harriet will grow to become?

Vocabulary

quality

qua•li•ty adjective

of or occupying high social status (obsolete usage)

Though James can be a bit rowdy, he comes from a quality family.

timbre

tim•bre noun

in a careless manner; at random

Jacob distributed the candy haphazardly, his friends grumbling or grinning in response to their allotment.

huskiness

husk•i•ness adjective

having a semi-whispered vocal tone; somewhat hoarse, as when speaking with a cold or from grief

She was just a tiny little thing, but her singing voice possessed the huskiness of an adult professional singer.

coffle

coff•le noun

a line of animals, prisoners, or slaves chained and driven along together

Though the children were tied together with pretty little ribbons, from looks on their faces you would have thought they were locked in a coffle.

wharves

wharves noun

platforms built parallel to the waterfront at a harbor or river for the docking, loading, and unloading of ships

We stood along the wharves and watched for incoming lobster boats.

Close Reading

Question #: 1

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: What is the “Rolling Road”?

Sample Answer: Harriet travels down the Rolling Road toward her new home at the Cooks. The road takes its name from the days when tobacco, the chief crop on the Eastern Shore, was rolled down to the wharves along this route.

Question #: 2

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: What are the Big House and the Quarter?

Sample Answer: The “Big House” is what slaves call their master’s house, while they live in the “Quarter,” in a village of tiny, one-room, windowless identical log cabins.

Question #: 3

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: What does “sold south” mean, and why do slaves consider it to be the worst fate of all?

Sample Answer: A slave who had been “sold south” had been sold to a large plantation in the Deep South. Due to the excruciating travel conditions (slaves are transported via chain gang) as well as the awful fate that awaited them down south, many sold unfortunates run away rather than suffer a living death.

Question #:4

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: How does Mrs. Cook respond to Harriet’s illness?

Sample Answer: She says that Harriet is faking, and that all slaves seem born knowing how to do this.

Comparative Texts

Text: Old Plantation Days by N. B. De Saussure (Nancy Bostick)

Compare to: Chapter 5 of Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Connection: Many Southerners found themselves in reduced circumstances after the Civil War, adjusting to a “New South” very different from the antebellum South they so fondly remembered. Old Plantation Days is a typical memoir that lovingly recalls life on the plantation, a daydream of a privileged existence supported by the labor of grateful, adoring, happy slaves. Students will contrast this comforting vision with the experience of young Harriet Tubman, whipped and starving in a pigpen.

Chapters 6-8: Harriet Tubman is Born

Key Passage

Chapter 6, Paragraph 4

In a way, Harriet had won a victory – though Rit did not think so. Harriet worked in the fields from then on. Brodas hired her out to a man who kept her out of doors. She loaded wood on wagons, split rails, and knew more about mules and hoes and plows than she did about the interior of a house. Despite her strong sturdy body, she was still a child. Yet she was often ordered to perform jobs that would have taxed the strength of a full-grown, able-bodied man.

Why It’s Key

Individual: Again, Petry marks and explicates Minty’s gradual transformation into Harriet. Harriet’s complex character is also revealed in this passage - she is both a child and as strong as a grown man, under her mother’s thumb and staunchly her own person, a slave and, out in

nature, free as a bird. These contradictions of personhood, as well as several more yet to be developed, will one day make her Harriet Tubman, hero and savior of her people.

Central Idea: Author Ann Petry emphasizes Harriet’s disregard for traditional gender roles. Harriet is a woman who hates doing housework but loves making a beautiful quilt, will fall in love, get her heart broken, and long for a romantic partner her whole life long – but she is also a leader, a hero, strong and brave and independent – all traditionally masculine traits. The biography shatters archaic notions of women’s lack of ability.

Central Idea: Petry also explores the meaning of freedom. What does it mean to be truly free? Is it possible to be both free and enslaved, bound and flying? At what price does freedom come? What are the factors that make up true and total freedom? Here, Harriet is still a slave but she is free from housework, which she finds suffocating.

Informational Text Structure: Petry organizes Harriet Tubman’s life in several ways: by historical passages at the end of each chapter, with a succession of names, by seasons and trips on the Underground Railroad. Here, she marks Harriet’s first victory, one of many to come.

Your SyncTV

CCSS: RL.7.1; SL.7.1, 7.3

CA CCSS: RL.7.1; SL.7.1, 7.3

Discussion prompt: In your opinion, why does Harriet throw herself between her master and the fleeing slave? If you were in her position, would you do the same? What does Harriet gain from this encounter? What does she lose? Explain.

Vocabulary

intractable

in•tract•a•ble adjective

not easily controlled or directed

I kept the dog on a tight leash but it did no good – I found the hound dog intractable.

desultory

de•sol•tor•y adjective

marked by a lack of definite plan, regularity, or purpose

My mother, looking for nothing in particular, dragged me from store to store on a desultory mall trip.

conjure

con•jure verb

to call or bring into existence as if by magic

With little food in the house, my grandfather still managed to conjure up a delicious meal.

emancipation

e•man•ci•pa•tion noun

the fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions; liberation

My mother loves to talk about the emancipation of feminist ideas in the 1960s.

Close Reading

Question #: 1

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: Now that Harriet is a field negro, how does she begin to change?

Sample Answer: Along with increased happiness and strength (she loves the outdoors), Harriet's appearance changes – always a shy, solemn-eyed child, she now looks sullen, with calloused, hard working hands. She holds herself straight-backed and proud, and has developed a husky, memorable voice. She no longer wears the tow-linen shirt of children, but a young lady's one-piece dress.

Question #: 2

CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.2

CA CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.2

Question: Who is "The Prophet"?

Sample Answer: Nat Turner of Virginia believed himself to be a holy prophet who would lead his people out of slavery. In 1831, he and six other men gathered an army of 70, who then killed 60 white men, women and children. The story ends with Turner's execution, followed by much stricter slave laws. Harriet thinks Nat's God loves vengeance, while her God is loving and compassionate.

Question #: 3

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: In the Quarter, what clothing item signifies a child's transformation into a young woman?

Sample Answer: Young women wear brilliantly colored bandanas as a sign of maturity. For Harriet, this adornment is quickly followed by the creation of a colorful quilt in preparation for her marriage.

Question #: 4

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: Why is Harriet confused when she hears about the Underground Railroad?

Sample Answer: Harriet wonders if there truly is a train that goes underground, and with good reason. Travelers on the Underground Railroad were called parcels, passengers, or boxes, and those who led the escapes were called conductors, stationmasters, or brakemen. Adding to the confusion, there was much talk at that time of steam trains.

Question #: 5

CCSS: RL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1

Question: Who was Tice Davids?

Sample Answer: Tice Davids was a slave who ran away from a Kentucky plantation. His master hot on his heels, he nonetheless disappeared into thin air (or deep water?), having crossed the Ohio River. His master, baffled, surmised that he must have “gone on the underground railroad.” The biography suggests that Davids’ master originated the term.

Chapters 9-10: Freedom Calling

Key Passage

Chapter 9, Paragraph 31-35

But if a man really loved a woman, wouldn't he be willing to take risks to help her to safety? She shook her head. He must have been joking, or speaking through a sudden uncontrollable anger.

“You don't mean that,” she said slowly. But he did mean it. She could tell by the way he looked at her.

For the tall young man with the gay laugh, and the merry whistle, had been replaced by a hostile stranger, who glared at her as he said, “You just start and see.”

She knew that no matter what words she might hear during the rest of her life, she would never again hear something that hurt her like this. It was as though he had deliberately tried to kill all the love and the deep devotion she had for him.

Why It's Key

Turning Point: This moment marks the division between the unformed Harriet, who quite possibly could have lived a normal, reasonably happy life with her husband, and the Harriet who emerges after her heart is broken, rising from the ashes like an untouchable phoenix. Losing the love of her life prepares Harriet for a life of self-sacrifice. Her personal life is in shambles, so she has far less to lose in risking her freedom, not to mention bodily harm, to save others. Perhaps, Petry seems to argue, there would be no Harriet Tubman, greatest Conductor on the Underground Railroad, had not John Tubman betrayed her so.

Individual: Petry takes great care to paint Harriet as both one of our greatest American heroes, a legend of almost supernatural proportions, and as a real, normal woman, with hopes, dreams, triumphs and heartbreaks. In this scene, the reader, accustomed to admiring Harriet the hero, cannot help but empathize with Harriet the woman, vulnerable and simply human.

Tone: John's incredibly cruel tone here is at first difficult to understand. Didn't he just marry this girl? Doesn't he appreciate her total devotion? John is free, so why wouldn't he want his wife to be free as well? One must surmise that this is an issue of power – as both the man and the free person in this relationship, he has complete power. Harriet's desire to be free seems to strike him as a threat to his manhood, even a bid for that power.

Foreshadowing: That Harriet at such a young age has already heard the most hurtful words she will hear in her life is in a way quite freeing. She can now step boldly into the future, into her perilous destiny. What more could hurt her now?

Your SyncTV

CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3; SL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3; SL.7.1

Discussion prompt: In the past, the sound of horses' hooves terrified Harriet, but now, on this third attempt to escape, hidden beneath the blanket on this farmer's wagon, Harriet is "surprised by her lack of fear." Why is this? What has changed in her circumstances, in her heart and in her soul? Who is the new Harriet?

Vocabulary

defiant

de•fi•ant adjective

boldly resistant or challenging.

Brett's defiant attitude often gets him into trouble – he's a principal's office regular.

hoard

hoard verb

to gather or accumulate, often in excess

If you need an umbrella, just ask. My mother hoards them.

concealment

con•ceal•ment noun

the action of hiding something or preventing it from being known

The worst thing about my brother's room is that it's impossible to find the root of the constant foul smell – Max is just so adept at concealment.

handbill

hand•bill noun

flier, handout or poster

It was impossible to avoid the handbills promoting chess club - someone had taped them to everyone's locker.

haycock

hay•cock noun

a haystack

Ruth stood on the haycock and gestured for the audience - made up of roosters, pigs, and cows - to sit down. The play was about to begin!

Close Reading

Question #1:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: According to Big Rit, men and women have different attitudes towards change. What are they?

Sample Answer: Big Rit tells Harriet that men hate change, while women thrive on it. This strangely contradicts Rit's own personality, as she continually longs for the old days. It does, however, describe Harriet and her husband John perfectly.

Question #2:

CCSS.RI. 7.1, 7.2

CA CCSS.RI. 7.1, 7.2

Question: What are the two reoccurring dreams Harriet discusses with her husband?

Sample Answer: In the first dream, Harriet dreams that men on horseback (the sound of horse hooves has always terrified her) ransack the Quarter and put everyone in the chain gang. In the second, Harriet is flying over everything, until she comes to a barrier she cannot cross. Sometimes it's a fence, sometimes a river. A group of ladies (angels?), all dressed in white, stretch out their arms and pull her over. John hates the dreams, which makes sense as he also resents Harriet's longing to be free.

Question #3:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

Question: Who is Thomas Garrett?

Sample Answer: Thomas Garrett was a white Quaker living in Delaware who was tried and convicted of harboring runaway slaves. He was fined every penny he had, and his personal effects were seized. When the judge said that surely now Garrett would never make this mistake again, Garrett told him that if he knew any fugitives who needed a good breakfast, send them his way. During the operation of the Underground Railroad, 2,500 slaves passed through Garrett's

“station.” Garrett’s self-sacrificing goodwill mirrors Harriet’s own, for she too dies nearly penniless, having given her worldly goods to the needy.

Question #4:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: What does the white lady in the faded sunbonnet tell Harriet when she passes her in the fields?

Sample Answer: One day in 1849, this lady stops her carriage to ask Harriet how she came to have the scar on her head. When Harriet tells her that her master did it, the woman responds: “If you ever need help, Harriet, you let me know.” Perhaps there would be no “Harriet Tubman, Conductor” if not for this bonneted woman.

Question #5:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: To her great disappointment, Harriet’s second escape is thwarted when her brothers force her to turn back. She is determined to make a second attempt, but is afraid to go alone. Why?

Sample Answer: Ever since Harriet received her head wound, she has been plagued by sudden fits of sleeping – what we now call narcolepsy. She fears that if she suddenly falls asleep during her escape she will be swiftly found.

Question #6:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: Why doesn’t Harriet follow the North Star (which her father tells her to use as a guide) when she flees for the third time?

Sample Answer: Harriet knows she can’t escape on her own, so she heads to Bucktown to ask the white woman with the faded bonnet for help. Whether she will be turned in or given aid, Harriet cannot know, only that she must risk it.

Chapters 11-13: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Key Passage

Chapter 12, Paragraph 15

If only she had been wearing fine clothes, silk or satin instead of the torn shabby suit. Not silk or velvet, just a simple calico dress, a dress that would have immediately revealed that she was a woman. Then she shook her head. How could she sleep on the ground in a dress, climb in

and out of a potato hole in long skirts? Besides, clothes did not change a person, did not really matter. Love and devotion should not depend on the kind of clothes one wore. A man's suit or a woman's dress would not have made one whit of difference. Neither the one nor the other could alter or change the kind of person that she was. Her mind, her soul, would always wear freedom's clothes. John's never would.

Why It's Key

Central Idea: Equality for all. Harriet Tubman did not just believe in freedom for slaves, but for equal rights in all arenas for all people. Appearances – whether skin color or dress – should not make “one whit of difference.” Fittingly, then, after freedom was secured, Harriet lent her name and considerable talents to the women's rights movement. This paragraph illustrates the war that has raged within Harriet, the battle between her love for John (which would require her to take on a traditionally female persona, complete with cumbersome dresses and endless housework) and her yearning for freedom, to be valued for her soul, not her prettiness. For Harriet, clothes should be functional (at one point she requests shorter skirts to accommodate movement), not ornamental. Hiding in the woods, Harriet felt “perfectly safe, confident” in her man's suit. It is only the male gaze that reduces her to insecurity.

Central Idea: For Harriet, the line between freedom and slavery is not fixed. As a young person she felt free working in the fields and woods though she remained a slave; free in Philadelphia, although she is technically a free person, she feels trapped by established gender division, and the housework she is forced to take on in order to make money for her missions. Though Ben and his wife live on slaveholder's ground, they “seemed to belong to the cabin” cozy and warm, while she feels like “an outsider, stranger,” pushed out into the cold and dark.

Turning Point: This second betrayal by the same man acts as a major catalyst in Harriet's life, propelling her towards a greater purpose. This is the end of Harriet-who-dreams-of-love-and-family, and the start of Harriet Tubman, the “Moses of her people.” She will never walk “side by side” with anyone again, for she is meant to lead. Up until the moment she learns of John's infidelity, the impetus for Harriet's missions has always been to rescue members of her family. Now, for the first time, Harriet leads a group entirely made up of non-relatives. Her objective has greatly expanded - she sees the stark contrast between her life as a free woman, and all the privileges she enjoys and the cruel terrible labors of slaves, and she wants to free as many people as she possibly can.

Central Idea: The Individual and Society. Heartbreak has opened Harriet's eyes to her power and purpose as an individual. Although she knows she cannot end slavery single-handedly, she believes she can make slavery unprofitable in the area she knows best, the Eastern Shore of Maryland. She decides to leave maps for braver slaves to find, believing that the more timid men and women will follow a leader they know and trust. In this way, like a flower spreading its seeds, many more people will reach freedom than a single person could hope to lead alone.

Your SyncTV

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.6; SL.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.6; SL.7.1

Discussion prompt: In *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*, author Ann Petry employs a technique called omniscient narration, which allows the reader access to the thoughts of every person in the story. This biography opens with the group perspective of the slaves on Brodas plantation, then we see the world through Harriet's eyes, and after that her master's. In Chapters 11-13, we start out with Harriet, then jump to her brother-in-law John Bowley, and finish with the collective point of view of the Northeastern African American population. Why do you think Petry made this choice? Does it work? What would we lose if the story were told from Harriet's point of view alone?

Vocabulary

abolitionist

ab•o•li•tion•ist noun

a person who advocated for or supported the ending of slavery in the U.S. prior to the Civil War
Though they did not harbor fugitives nor offer food to runaways they encountered, their votes and comments at town hall meetings proved they were abolitionists.

intuition

in•tu•i•tion noun

knowledge or belief obtained neither by reason nor by perception;
instinctive knowledge or belief

My intuition kept me home that day; I had a feeling something bad would happen if I left the house. The car accident on my block proved me right.

ingenuity

in•ge•nu•i•ty noun

the quality of being clever, original, and inventive, often in the process of applying ideas to solve problems or meet challenges

She showed admirable ingenuity in fashioning a sling from old slacks and strips of cardboard.

jouncy

joun•cy adjective

moving in an up-and-down manner

The horse ride was a bit too jouncy for my taste.

talisman

tal•is•man noun

an object thought to have magical or protective powers

Jonathan clutched the bouquet of daisies close to his chest like a talisman, hoping it would protect him from his mother's unbridled wrath.

Close Reading

Question #1:

CCSS.RI.7.1,

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: Why does Harriet's excitement about having finally secured her freedom pass so quickly?

Sample Answer: There is no one to welcome her into Pennsylvania – she is utterly alone. Harriet misses her family, and decides to go back to Maryland to rescue them.

Question #2:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: What is the Underground Railroad?

Sample Answer: The Underground Railroad, a network of stations and friends offering encouragement, food, lodging, and other assistance to slaves seeking refuge in the northern United States or Canada. Harriet's knowledge of the Maryland woods, her fearless nature, and her guiding visions will make her an excellent "conductor."

Question #3:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: Why does Harriet decide to be a conductor on the Underground Railroad?

Sample Answer: Harriet now visits the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee every night, to learn about goings on at home as well as national and local affairs concerning slavery and freedom. The Committee is unusual because the secretary, William Still, is African American, while the president, J. Miller McKim, is a white Quaker. One night, William Still asks Harriet if she knows a man and a woman from Maryland who are in need of help. Harriet realizes that Still is talking about her sister and brother-in-law, and promptly volunteers to lead them to safety.

Question #4:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: What is the Fugitive Slave Law?

Sample Answer: The Fugitive Slave Law was one of the concessions made to the south in the Compromise of 1850. It required that all escaped slaves were, upon capture, to be returned to their masters and that officials and citizens of free states had to cooperate in this law. Northerners resented being forced to act as slave catchers, and were skeptical of slavery

apologists who argued that their slaves were quite happy as they were. If slaves are so content, Northerners asked, why are they running away?

Question #3:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: What is John Bowley's and his Quaker friend's "bold and desperate plan" to save his wife and children from auction?

Sample Answer: John bravely enters the courthouse and hands the guard an envelope holding a forged letter claiming that his master, the auctioneer, wants the family brought to the inn to be sold. They calmly walk down the street until they reach the Quaker's house, where they hide for a time in the attic.

Comparative Texts

Text: Twelve years a Slave directed by Steve McQueen

Compare to: Chapters 11 and 13 of Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Connection: Once the Fugitive Slave Law was enacted in 1850, the number of bounty hunters multiplied, responding to notices of runaway slaves like this one. The danger loomed for all African Americans, not just fugitive slaves. As depicted in the Oscar-winning film, [Twelve Years a Slave](#), free African Americans in northern cities faced the real risk of being kidnapped and shipped south for sale. The peril was just as great, if not greater, for anyone who aided in their escape, including Harriet Tubman. Students will write an opinion essay about the dangers faced by Harriet Tubman and those she guided in the 1850s.

Chapters 14-17: Go On or Die

Key Passage

Chapter 17, Paragraph 41-44

She knew they were weighing this new freedom in the balance. Was it better to be warm and be a slave? Or was it better to be cold and to be free? Then they said, No, in unison. Even Catherine, the delicately pretty girl who had been a house servant, said, No, she did not want to go back though she was shivering from the cold.

Harriet poked the fire. "It would have surprised me if you'd said, Yes. I've seen hundreds and hundreds of slaves who finally got to the North and freedom. But I never yet saw one who was willing to go back South and be a slave."

She thought, Freedom's a hard-bought thing, not bought with dust, but bought with all of oneself—the bones, the spirit, the flesh—and once obtained it had to be cherished, no matter what the cost.

She would help these six people get adjusted to life in St. Catharines, and then in a few more months she would go back to Maryland to help another group of slaves escape. Nothing would ever stop her from helping them, not masters or slave catchers, or overseers or fugitive slave laws.

Why It's Key

Central Idea: In this scene, Harriet muses that freedom isn't bought with dust but with "all of oneself." Freedom comes with sacrifice and loss. Harriet has given up her family, romantic love, money, safety, and a sense of home, not only for her own freedom but for the freedom of everyone she has led out of slaveholder's land. Eventually she will become even more of ascetic, donating her personal effects for the greater good.

Individual: Imbued with supernatural power and determination, Harriet knows that nothing and no one can stop her from fulfilling her destiny. She is confident in her identity as the Moses of her people, ordained by God to serve and lead.

Story Structure: As a child, Harriet went back to her cruel mistress' home after spending a week in a pig pen. Cold and lack of food sent her packing, but now that she is an adult it's clear that no price is too high to pay for the freedom ticket. Of course, there are African American people who are content to live in slaveholder territory – her husband, for instance. Here, Harriet poking at the fire reminds the reader of John and his new pretty young wife in their warm cabin on the Brodas plantation, oppressed and sickeningly content.

Your SyncTV

CCSS: RI.7.1, 7.3, 7.4; SL.7.1

CA CCSS: RI.7.1, 7.3,7.4; SL.7.1

Discussion prompt: The fugitive Catherine Henry shivers when she dons a boy's suit for a disguise and throws her old clothes into the river. Why is this significant? Reread page 1. Having read this much of the biography, why do you think Petry chose to open the story with an outline of the creeks, rivers, coves and streams of Tidewater Maryland, along with the fish and game birds that dwell there? Take some time to locate other places in the text where author Ann Petry mentions water. What purpose do these frequent descriptions serve? Use examples from the text in your answer.

Vocabulary

goodly

good•ly adjective

excellent quality or fine appearance

Janet rode a goodly horse in the show, winning first place.

mutinous

mu•ti•nous adjective

involving revolt against control; rebellious

I tried to calm them down with a movie but after the gross pizza fiasco the children were mutinous.

sullen

sull•en adjective

showing irritation or ill humor by a gloomy silence or reserve

My daughter is going through a really trying phase – she hides in her room all day and sits at the dinner table with a sullen face and slumped shoulders, not touching a thing.

brooding

broo•ding verb

preoccupied with depressing or morbid thoughts

My brother is a depressed romantic, always brooding over his failures with the popular girls.

devoid

de•void adjective

entirely lacking or free from

Julia is technically an expert pianist, but her playing is devoid of emotion.

Close Reading

Question #1:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: How much are the 11 slaves Harriet rescues from the Bordas plantation “worth”?

Sample Answer: All told, this group is valued at 11,000 dollars. If captured, Harriet would surely be hanged.

Question #2:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: Where does the Quaker Thomas Garrett hide runaway slaves?

Sample Answer: Garrett is a cobbler. When fugitives arrive he gives each of them a new pair of shoes and opens the secret door in his shop - a whole wall on hinges - to a hidden room.

Question #3:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: In Chapter 15, why does Harriet point her gun at the fugitive who wants to turn back?

Sample Answer: Harriet is forced to threaten the runaway with the gun and the words, “go on with us or die” because of the problems his desertion would cause not only for the other members of the group but for everyone involved in the Underground Railroad. Should he return to the plantation, his master would force him to divulge all of the information he has on Railroad operations, putting those who offer shelter and support for runaways in grave danger.

Question #4:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: What does William Still write in his record book is the reason for Harriet’s unprecedented success as a conductor?

Sample Answer: Stills attributes Harriet’s many triumphs to her “adventurous spirit and utter disregard for consequences.” He describes her as one-of-a-kind.

Question #5:

CCSS.RI.7.1

CA CCSS.RI.7.1

Question: What does Ben say when the Master questions him as to whether or not he has seen his two missing sons, bound for the Chain Gang?

Sample Answer: Honest and true Ben tells him that he hasn’t seen one of them this Christmas” which is quite right – he slipped food under the door to the fodder house for them, and walked them to the road, but he did this without looking inside the cabin, and he wore a blindfold when he escorted them out of the plantation.

Comparative Texts

Text: “Go Down, Moses” as recorded by Paul Roberson

Compare to: Chapter 14-15 of Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Connection: American slavery reminds us all of the terrible costs of inequality. To exploit a growing need for slaves to work New World plantations, African tribesmen sold their captive enemies to American and European traders. As many as 15 million Africans were transported in the Middle Passage, the ocean voyage between Africa and America; some two million died. Once on American soil, slaves endured brutal treatment. Many slaves found hope in the Old Testament story of the Jews’ escape from slavery in Egypt. [Paul Robeson’s version](#) of the spiritual, “Go Down, Moses,” captures both the hopeful and hopeless vision of release. Harriet Tubman realized that hope for many, earning the name “Moses” for leading slaves to freedom.

Text: The Underground Railroad by William Still

Compare to: Chapters 14-15 of Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground

Connection: William Still helped thousands of slaves to freedom as the Philadelphia station master on the Underground Railroad. Based on his detailed notes taken during his years of

service, Still later wrote a book about the Railroad and how it worked. The book also confirmed everything that Harriet said she had done to free slaves. Still's account of her actions, spelled out in "Moses' Arrives with Six Passengers," affirmed Harriet's role as a modern-day Moses, and later, as advocate for freemen and women after the Civil War.

Chapters 18-19: Moses' Visions

Key Passage

Chapter 18, Paragraph 15-21

Harriet said she had a dream while she was sleeping. And in the dream she had seen this river.

Eliza said it was too deep to wade, they'd all drown.

Harriet said she was certain there was one place so shallow that they could wade it.

They stopped following her. All of them stopped. Bill asked her if she'd crossed this river before. She said no, but she'd seen it in her dream, that the Lord told her what to do, and running water leaves no trail. They would be safe on the other side.

Peter Pennington said, "I'll wade no freezin' water for no crazy woman," and started back toward the woods.

She raised the gun, pointed it, scowling. "Stand still," she ordered. "You try and go back, try to run back to the woods, and you'll never run any more. You go on with me or you die."

They went on. She didn't like it, the threat of violence always disturbed her. And she had never felt so unsure of herself, so desperate, so afraid. But her visions had never failed her.

Why It's Key

Motif: Water, like the flight of the fugitive, is both perilous and cleansing, capable of robbing the living of their last breath and breathing new life into their bodies through baptism. The river almost kills Harriet as a child, but it saves the slave Tice Davis when he "disappeared before his master's very eyes."

When Harriet dreams of flying to the women in white, the river far below her reflects her free image, like "the gleam of a mirror" (her husband hates the dream, as he does not want her to run free).

In the story, water is often the key to freedom. On Harriet's own journey to freedom she is told to "follow the river," and in 1849 a Mr. Mason of Virginia complains he'd sooner catch a fish with his bare hands than a runaway slave. Here, the river comes to the rescue once more, serving as an invisibility cloak, just as it had for Davis.

Individual: The Harriet of this biography is both deeply human and larger-than-life, of mythical proportions and merely man. Here, it's hard to miss the biblical allusion - Harriet isn't walking on water, nor does she part it, but along the path she chooses the water does magically become

shallow enough to walk comfortably. Harriet sees herself as a vessel for God. Her fears (which do reveal a vulnerable humanity) quickly subside because she knows her God will protect her until “he no longer wanted her.”

Interestingly, after declaring that the Lord was leading her, Harriet adds the Native American maxim, “running water leaves no trail.” Perhaps this is a subtle nod to Harriet’s other true love and guide, the natural world.

Central Idea: This is one of few places Harriet’s gender is a bone of contention. This man reduces her to a stereotype, and she responds in a traditionally masculine way – with a gun to his face. Later, however, Harriet will condemn John Brown’s violent tactics. Whether this signifies a development in her belief system or just that she never really intended to shoot anyone, the text does not make clear.

Your SyncTV

CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3; SL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3; SL.7.1

Discussion prompt: In Chapter 19, John Brown’s plan to lead slaves to Canada reminds Harriet of another leader, the felled Nat Turner. Why is Harriet repelled by Turner and Brown’s methodology? What is the difference between Harriet’s and these men’s understanding of God? Is Harriet’s brand of freedom crusade a precursor to a more recent civil rights movement? Explain.

Vocabulary

inauspicious

in•au•spi•cious adjective

ill-omened; unfavorable

It was an inauspicious day for a wedding, gloomy and threatening to rain.

imbued

im•bued verb

to inspire or impregnate, as with opinions, feelings, etc.

The Lamaze teacher was imbued with the teachings of the yoga sutras, so she was big on the importance of breathing.

wrath

wrath noun

extreme anger; vengeance or punishment as the result of anger

The king threw the olive branch into the volcano, inviting the wrath of the gods.

nostalgia

no•stal•gia noun

a wistful desire to return in thought or in fact to a former time in one's life
Looking through her old photo albums filled her with an almost unbearable nostalgia.

Close Reading

Question #1:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

Question: In Chapter 18, what does Harriet do when she sees the handbill calling for her capture?

Sample Answer: *She laughs, telling the fugitives that nobody will ever catch her. After all, she just had a vision that saved them all – God will protect her until he has no use for her anymore.*

Question #2:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2, 7.4

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2, 7.4

Question: Why does Eliza Nokey cry out in terror when she and Harriet are stowed in the bricklayer's wagon?

Sample Answer: *Eliza whispers that being buried underneath wood planks and bricks is like “being in a coffin.” Harriet agrees. To reassure (or threaten) her, Harriet whispers, “Go on or die.”*

Question #3:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.3

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.3

Question: What is Old John Brown renamed after he, his sons, son-in-law and two other men murder five pro-slavery settlers in Kansas?

Sample Answer: *Bloody Brown or Pottawatomie Brown, as the massacre took place in Pottawatomie, Kansas. Harriet has great admiration for John Brown, but condemns his violent ways. Though she at first promises to help him, she eventually retracts her offer, quite possibly because in her eyes the end did not justify the means.*

Question #4:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

Question: How does Harriet disguise herself when she arrives in her hometown on her quest to save her parents?

Sample Answer: *She bends over, affecting the hunched look of an old woman, and buys a pair of chickens from a free Negro family. Walking through town, she looks like an old woman going home from market. Her other favorite disguise is a man's suit. Perhaps the use of these two costumes, one of each gender, has some significance – Harriet refuses to be pigeonholed in any way, certainly not by her gender.*

Question #5:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.3

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.3

Question: In 1857, Harriet is troubled by “a dream that had no meaning.” What was it?

Sample Answer: Night after night, Harriet dreams of being visited in the wilderness by a snake whose head turns into a man with dazzling eyes and a long white beard. He seems to want to say something to Harriet but is unable. Like so many of Harriet’s dreams, this is a vision and far from meaningless, for one day, sitting in the woods, the man from the dream approaches her. It is Old John Brown, having traveled a long way to meet her. Though she admires Old John throughout her life, the snake is usually a bad omen – perhaps a warning that Harriet should divorce herself from Brown’s intended massacre.

Comparative Texts

Text: John Brown’s Body by Stephen Vincent Benét

Compare to: Chapters 19-20 of Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad

Connection: As the country moved toward civil war in the late 1850s, abolitionists disagreed on how to end slavery. Some, like John Brown, believed that only violence could end the even greater violence of slavery. Others felt that violence would solve nothing. After his failed attempt to break into the federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia and seize weapons for a slave revolution, John Brown was tried and hanged. But in death, he remained a powerful symbol of going to extremes for a cause. In the epic poem John Brown’s Body, Stephen Vincent Benét analyzes the complex motivations behind Brown’s desire to end slavery. Students will compare the John Brown of “John Brown’s Prayer” with Harriet Tubman, whose help Brown actively sought before the failed raid.

Chapter 22: The Last Years

Key Passage

Chapter 22, paragraph 36

In many ways she represented the end of an era, the most dramatic, and most tragic, era in American history. Despite her work as a nurse, a scout, and a spy in the Civil War, she will be remembered longest as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, the railroad to freedom – a short, indomitable woman, sustained by faith in a living God, inspired by the belief that freedom was a right all men should enjoy, leading bands of trembling fugitives out of Tidewater Maryland.

Why It’s Key

Purpose: It is now commonly understood that the lives of women and people of color (and especially women of color) are largely ignored in traditional textbooks. Petry's aim is undoubtedly to illuminate this locus of oppression, and share Harriet Tubman's inspiring story with young people, but also to subtly ridicule America's treatment of her both then and now. Though in many ways Harriet enjoyed the privileges of a man (many, hearing of "Moses" strength and leadership, thought Harriet was a man) and was recognized for her hand in ending slavery as a conductor on the Railroad, her work as a scout and nurse for the Union Army fell to the wayside. Though time and again she asked for remuneration, she was never paid. Ironically, the remuneration she did receive was for her second husband's service. Today, Petry argues, Harriet Tubman's multidimensionality remains under-appreciated.

Authorial Presence: Petry switches points-of-view throughout the biography, but mostly refrains from commentary. This is her moment to weigh in. Author Ann Petry writes that Tubman "represented the end of an era," pointing out the somewhat problematic truth that Harriet Tubman is in this country more of a symbol than a real person who lived and breathed. With this biography, Petry takes it upon herself to flesh out Harriet Tubman, human being.

Your SyncTV

CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3; SL.7.1

CA CCSS: RL.7.1, 7.3; SL.7.1

Discussion prompt: From her birth until her death in 1913, Harriet Tubman was named and renamed, marking different periods of her life. What was the purpose of these names? Who named her and why? How did her self-perception as well as the outside world's understanding of who Harriet was shift with each renaming?

Vocabulary

indomitable

in•dom•i•table adjective

impossible to subdue or defeat

Despite her grave injury, the gymnast showed indomitable spirit.

agitation

ag•i•ta•tion

a state of anxiety or nervous excitement

My mother pattered around the kitchen, wringing her hands in agitation.

haversack

hav•er•sack noun

a small pack with a single strap

Perfect for the man or woman on the go, this haversack features a thermos holder and insulated lining.

remuneration

re•mun•er•ation noun

reward; pay

money paid for work or service

I cleaned the house as best I could and received my remuneration.

Close Reading

Question #1:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.6

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.6

Question: From which original text does Ann Petry claim biographers glean nearly all Harriet Tubman direct quotes?

Sample Answer: In order to raise funds for the nearly destitute Tubman, her friend Sarah Bradford wrote *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, which was published in 1869. As Harriet had a near photographic memory, the interviews Bradford collected here are regarded as factual treasure troves.

Question #2:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.4

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.4

Question: What does John Brown call Harriet?

Sample Answer: When John Brown introduces Harriet to Wendell Phillips, he says: “I bring you one of the bravest people on the continent – the General Tubman, as we call her.” Many powerful men see and treat Harriet as they would a man (i.e. as an equal). Harriet-the-legend’s name is Moses, which, like “General” is hyper-masculine.

Question #3:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2

Question: To whom does Harriet turn over her home and land, and for what purpose?

Sample Answer: Harriet transfers stewardship of her house and 25 acres to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Auburn. Though she continued to live there until her death, the home was intended to serve the poor, the sick, and the homeless.

Question#4:

CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2, 7.3

CA CCSS.RI.7.1, 7.2, 7.3

Question: Petry writes that Harriet has which “rarest of human virtues”?

Sample Answer: Compassion. Unlike the Zion Church, who begins to charge people for the use of Tubman’s home and land, Harriet feels that above all else entrance to her estate should be without fare. The point is to help the downtrodden, not to fleece them.

Conclusion

Comparative Text

Text: Sundown Towns by James Loewen

Connection: James Loewen’s detailed history of America’s “Sundown Towns” tells the story of communities where African Americans have been excluded as residents, and were officially unwelcome after dark. The exclusionary rules have been in place in some towns since Harriet Tubman’s day. Even after federal laws made it illegal, many towns found other ways to keep their populations “whites-only.” Students will write about the bitter irony of former slaves and slave descendants denied freedom of movement by communities that won’t let them in.