

## WHAT IS AN ABOLITIONIST?

An abolitionist was someone who was against slavery. They worked to make slavery illegal (against the law).

## WHAT WAS THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD?

The Underground Railroad was a secret system that helped people escape from slavery. It was not really a railroad or underground! That was just a name that helped people talk about it without giving away its secrets. People traveled to safe houses (called 'stations') and the folks who guided them were called 'conductors'. Harriet Tubman was the most famous 'conductor'. We call people escaping from slavery *freedom seekers*.

## WHAT WAS SLAVERY IN AMERICA?

From 1619 onwards, about 350,000 people were forced from their homes in Africa and taken to America to work as enslaved labor. Their children also became enslaved as the law said that a mother's children would be 'owned' by the same person. This meant that they would be 'owned' for the rest of their lives and never have basic freedom. Millions more were taken to South and Central America, as well as the Caribbean Islands.

Slavery ended in the USA when the American Civil War was won by the North.

## WHAT IS EMANCIPATION?

Emancipation means the freeing of someone from slavery.

Abolitionists fought for the emancipation of all enslaved people.

Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that all enslaved people would be emancipated in 1863.

## CHANGING WORDS

We try to use different words to describe slavery now than we might have done when your teachers or parents were growing up. This is an attempt to give people the **dignity** that they deserve.

**Enslaved people rather than 'slaves'**. What's the difference? It helps us remember that these were people with hopes, dreams and families just like us. They were not just 'property' belonging to someone.

Harriet Tubman was enslaved on a farm in Maryland.

Abolitionists wanted to help enslaved people.

**Slaveholders rather than slave owners or masters**. What's the difference? Slave owner puts too much emphasis on 'property'. If you 'hold' something, it does not necessarily mean that it is yours. Master, also suggests that the slaveholder was 'better' than the enslaved person.

'I was the conductor of the  
Underground Railroad for eight  
years, and I can say what most  
conductors can't say—I never  
ran my train off the tracks and  
I never lost a passenger'

HARRIET TUBMAN

"Truth is powerful and it prevails."

SOJOURNER TRUTH



# Sojourner Truth



## **SOJOURNER TRUTH**

**Sojourner Truth was born in the late 1700's. When she was born her name was Isabella. Isabella was born in Ulster County, New York. Sojourner changed her name to Sojourner Truth. She didn't speak English that well because she was from a Dutch farm, but she learned to speak English just by listening to other people. She was born enslaved. The law said if your mom was enslaved, you were too! She was sold to another farm. When she was 16, she was 6 feet tall and could do the work of any man.**

**She had to have a man named Thomas to be her husband. She didn't have a choice. She and Thomas had four daughters and one son. One day, she discovered that her 5-year-old son was gone. What she'd long feared had happened. Her son had been sold away from her!**

**In 1825, the slave holder said that she was such a good worker, he told her she would be free in a year. When he changed his mind and told her that she had to work for another year, she got mad and decided to escape.**

**But before she escaped, she didn't leave any work undone. She didn't sleep until every last bit of wool was spun, then she escaped with her baby daughter. She ran away to neighbors named Isaac and Maria Van Wagener, who she thought might help her.**

**She talked about how it was to be enslaved. When she was done, the neighbors decided to help her be free. She heard that they believed**

that it was immoral to own enslaved people. She asked if she could board with them and work for wages wherever she could. They said yes. Her dream of freedom day had come!

She explained how badly people were treated in slavery. She wrote a book about her life. She persuaded people by telling her story through speeches in front of big crowds.

Sojourner Truth's name really suits her. Sojourner means someone who goes places!

By Charlotte and Hannah

Sojourner Truth was a great speaker. She persuaded many people that slavery was wrong.





## Henry 'Box' Brown



## **Henry 'Box' Brown**

Henry Brown was born in 1815 or 1816 in Virginia. He was enslaved. He worked in a tobacco factory in Richmond, Virginia. He soon decided to escape by sending himself north in a packing box.. He wanted to be shipped to safety so he put himself in a 3 feet by 2 ½ feet box.

The box was thrown about and treated roughly and placed upside down for a long time on the trip. It was sent by train and ship. The ride was 26 hours. He arrived in Philadelphia which was a free state where slavery was illegal. When he got out of the box, he earned his nickname Henry "Box" Brown.

In Philadelphia, Henry told his story about his escape to teach people about slavery and how bad it was. He became a performer and magician, using escape tricks in his act.

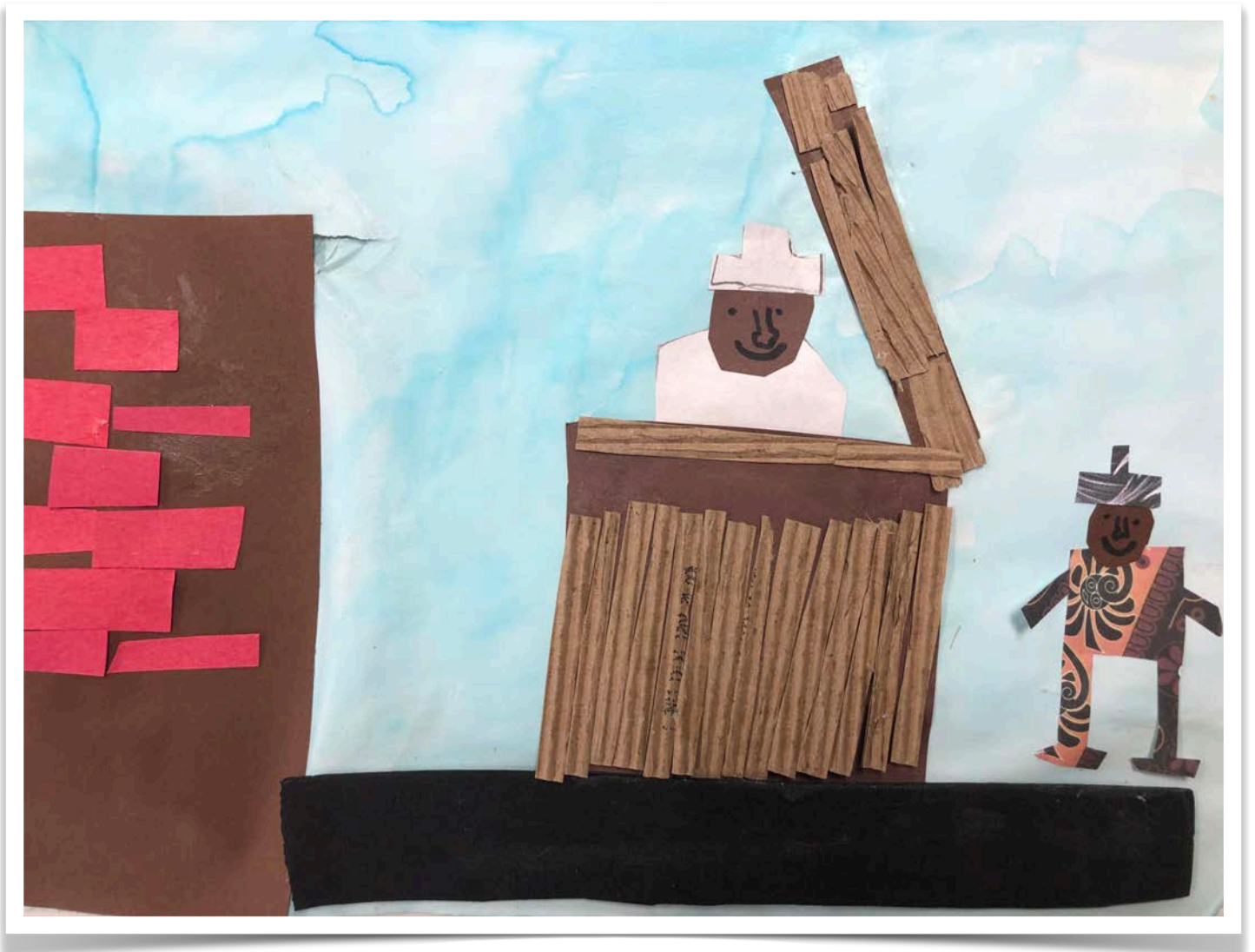
He married and they had three children and his wife Nancy Henry then worked to teach people in the north about the horrors of slavery.

He died June 15, 1897 in Ontario, Canada.

He inspires us because he was very brave and tough.

BY CARTER D AND JUSTIN

**Henry Brown was finally free!**



## Harriet Beecher Stowe



## **Harriet Beecher Stowe**

Harriet Beecher Stowe was a white woman born in Connecticut in June 1811. She was never enslaved because she was white but still believed that slavery was wrong.

Harriet wrote a book called Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1852 that was a best seller in the 1850s. It was a fictional story that was against slavery and convinced millions of people that slavery was wrong.

The book sold so well that when Abraham Lincoln met her he said "So you are the little lady who started this big war." Harriet's book was originally published one chapter at a time in newspapers. The book became a play and the play became very popular.

Uncle Tom's Cabin is a 751 page novel about enslaved African Americans. The book follows the life's of African Americans and a cruel slave holder. She learned about slavery from stories told by enslaved people who crossed the Ohio River to freedom. The novel sold so well it was translated into thirty languages!

By Julia and Abbey



**Harriet wrote a famous book called 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'.**



## William and Ellen Craft



## **William and Ellen Craft**

William and Ellen Craft were enslaved African Americans who were born in Georgia. They worked for the Collins family.

They wanted to escape. The most horrible thing about it was that kids could be sold across the country away from their parents and the same thing could happen to a husband and wife like Ellen and Willam. They were married but they could still be separated.

They made a promise that they would never have kids while they were slaves because their kids could get separated from them.

They had an idea to go ahead and escape. Men back then usually had beards and Ellen pretended to be a man, and pretended that Willam was enslaved to her.

Ellen used a sling on her arm because she could not write and then she got somebody to write for her. Ellen pretended her husband was an enslaved person and she was the slave holder.

She had lighter skin so they wrapped bandages around her face so she looked like she was hurt. As long as she didn't talk she would look like a male slaveholder. She now was going to go by the name Mr. Johnson. Then they got tickets for a train to Pennsylvania to be free. On the train somebody started talking to Ellen but she didn't answer and pretended to be deaf.

In the year 1848 they traveled by steamboat, along the coast of South Carolina and North Carolina and Virginia and Maryland They went to Philadelphia on Christmas day without being found! They got to Pennsylvania! They were finally free! They were inspiring because they used their wisdom to do tricks on different people to get to freedom. They inspired other people to do the same.

By Cameron and Ella



**Ellen used a clever disguise to achieve their freedom.**





John Rankin



## John Rankin

John Rankin grew up in Tennessee and Kentucky where slavery was legal. He was born in 1793 and died in 1886. He was a minister and tried to persuade the slave holders to free the enslaved people but they always said no. The enslaved people did all of the work on the farms. Although, he did successfully persuade his brother to free the enslaved people on his farm.

He got a lot of criticism in Kentucky and he was scared that his family wasn't safe there. He and his family moved to Ohio in 1822 where slavery was illegal. They lived in a house on a high hill looking down at the Ohio River. Because Ohio was a free state but it was next to a state where slavery was legal (Kentucky), enslaved people tried to cross the Ohio River to freedom. They had to row or even swim across the Ohio River to get to their freedom. In the winter if it was cold enough they sometimes tried to walk across the frozen river. They would risk crossing the frozen river.

John Rankin realized his house was in the perfect position for the enslaved people to hide and have shelter after they crossed the Ohio River.

Even though in Ohio slavery was illegal, it was still against the law everywhere in the USA to help an enslaved person escape. Anyone who did could go to jail and have their property taken away.

In 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law allowed slave holders to go anywhere in the USA and bring back any enslaved people who had escaped.

Slave holders from the South would send 'slave catchers' to bring back any enslaved people. A lot of times the 'slave catchers' would capture African Americans who were free and not enslaved people and pretend they were escaped enslaved people so they could sell them in the South where slavery was legal.

John Rankin and his family were part of the Underground Railroad. This was not a railroad that was underground, but it was a secret network of abolitionists and safe houses that could help freedom seekers.

John Rankin inspires me because he is brave and courageous!

-Maren

John Rankin inspires me because he is very courageous and compassionate and he gave escaped enslaved people shelter and food.

-Morgan

By Morgan and Maren

**The stairs in front of John Rankin's house were known as 'the freedom steps'.**



**John Brown**





## **John Brown**

John Brown was a white abolitionist. This means that he wanted to get rid of slavery. John tried to help African American people by trying to get rid of slavery in the south.

John Brown was born in Connecticut in 1800. His father Owen was very strict. He worked hard in a tannery with John and his other sons making leather. Owen Brown believed every word in the Bible and he taught this to his sons. He punished his children harshly for breaking rules. But he also taught his sons that slavery was very wrong. Many people in the U.S. owned slaves at that time.

When John grew up he left home and he got married and raised a family. He was as strict as Owen Brown. John taught them to live by the Bible and to hate slavery. John spoke out often against slavery. He spoke loudly in churches and at meetings. Many people listened to his strong words. He felt that slavery was a horrible crime and that he should use any means, including violence, to stop it.

John believed that talking was not enough. He came up with a secret plan. He would send guns, swords and other weapons to the enslaved people. John hoped the enslaved people would attack the slaveholders and escape.

On October 16 1859, John gathered a small force of people together in West Virginia. There were a total of 21 men that took part in the raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. An arsenal is a place where weapons are stored.

They were unsuccessful and after a short amount of fighting Brown and his men surrendered to the local townspeople and soldiers. Some of Brown's men were killed in the fight. Sadly, John Brown himself was captured and executed.

He was executed a half year before the start of the Civil War. His story became famous throughout the U.S. Some of the north did not agree with his violent actions but they did agree with the fact that slavery should be abolished. His efforts may have helped start the war that ended slavery.

BY BRENNAN AND NICO

**This is the building in Harpers Ferry where John Brown and his men made their last stand.**



## Harriet Tubman



## **Harriet Tubman**

Harriet Tubman was born in March of 1821. She was enslaved on a plantation in Maryland. Her birth name was Araminta Ross. Harriet Tubman's nickname was Minty.

She had to work in her slaveholder's house from sunrise to sunset. Everyday she had a job to do in the big house. She was moved from plantation to plantation. She had this one slaveholder called Mrs. Cook who abused her when she didn't do something right. She had to take care of Mrs. Cook's baby but Harriet fell asleep and the baby cried. She got hit by Mrs. Cook with a whip at the back of her neck which almost killed her. She once stole a sugar cube and she got caught. She got whipped for that too.

Harriet got a very bad forehead injury at the age of 13. She got the injury because a slaveholder wanted to hurt one of his enslaved men, so he threw a metal weight at him. Instead it hit Harriet. This caused blackouts even when she was leading her people to freedom.

Harriet used the "Underground Railroad" to escape north and she followed the North Star. Even when she reached the north she wasn't happy enough with her own freedom, so she went



back to the south and guided over 300 enslaved people to the north. She went back to get members of her own family first. Harriet became famous as an Underground Railroad conductor.

Harriet Tubman would only use the Underground Railroad when it was nighttime.

Amazingly, Harriet Tubman led over 300 enslaved people to freedom.

**When she was young, Harriet had to look after the slaveholder's children.**



## William Still



## **William Still**

William Still was born in New Jersey. His birth date is 1821. He was one of 18 children! His father was a free man because he had bought his own freedom. His mother had run away from slavery. Therefore William Still was a free man. This means he was not enslaved.

He moved to Philadelphia and worked there to help escaped enslaved people find work and places to live. He recorded the details of every freedom seeker who came to Philadelphia.

He helped freedom seekers find homes and lost relatives. One day he was writing down someone's information and a couple minutes later he figured out it was actually his brother whom he had never seen before!

He was very skillful at interviewing escaped enslaved people and recording their stories. He was also a great researcher! He would then use these details to help them find their relatives.

William Still Inspired us because he was never enslaved but he still fought against slavery. He really helped lots of enslaved people that had escaped. He is also very important because he wrote down a lot of what we know about the Underground Railroad.

By Kieran and Ben



**William Still was amazed one day to find that he was interviewing his own brother!**





## Frederick Douglass



## **Frederick Douglass**

**Frederick Douglass was born enslaved in Maryland in February 1818. His mother was sent away from him to a different farm when he was young. He secretly taught himself to read and write. Slaveholders did not want to have enslaved people educated. In 1825 Douglass was given to a new slaveholder because his old slaveholder died. After 20 years of being enslaved, Douglass decided to escape. He started to make a plan with other enslaved people. He escaped by dressing up as a sailor and he sailed up the Chesapeake Bay.**

**When he was free he began to use his powerful voice to speak against slavery. He told a lot of people in the north about how bad slavery was. He even went to England to give speeches. Throughout his life, Douglass fought against slavery. He wanted to help the African Americans become free.**

**Douglass never stopped speaking out to help others, even after slavery had ended.**

**On February 20, 1895, he gave a speech to a women's group. He fought for women's rights after the end of slavery. He died at home later that day. He was 77 years old.**

**Frederick Douglass inspires us to never stop speaking out to others about what is right.**

**By Carter R and Nico**

**Frederick escaped on a sailing ship in the Chesapeake Bay!**



"I could, as a free man, look across the bay  
toward the Eastern Shore where I was  
born a slave."

FREDERICK DOUGLASS