

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Educator's Primer on the Historical Period

MISSION 2: "Flight to Freedom"

Before you begin playing MISSION US: "Flight to Freedom," here are five important pieces of information to consider. This information may or may not help you as Lucy makes her way through life on a plantation in the 1840s.

1. From the 1820s, when slavery ended in the northern states, until the Civil War broke out in 1861, the United States was divided into "free states" and "slave states." Free states and territories were in the North, and slavery was not permitted there. Slave states and territories were in the South, and slavery was permitted there. If a slave escaped to a free state, he or she was still legally a slave, and could be returned to his or her master in the South. Slaves who ran away, also called "fugitives" or "Freedom seekers," tried to find protection among free blacks and abolitionists in the North, or went to Canada, where slavery was prohibited.
 2. Slaves who lived in "border states" (slave states next to free states) such as Kentucky had a better chance of escaping than slaves who lived further South. As a result, slave owners in border states were especially watchful about preventing or capturing runaways. They sent out nightly patrols, imposed curfews, hired slave catchers with dogs, posted runaway advertisements and rewards, and arrested any suspicious slaves.
 3. The "Deep South" refers to the area of the United States surrounding the Mississippi River Delta, where cotton was the major crop. Because the harsh working and living conditions on cotton plantations were well-known, masters in border states threatened to sell "troublesome" slaves, or slaves who ran away, "down river" or "down South." Even slaves who worked hard and "obeyed" their masters were sometimes sold South, since that was where the demand for slave labor was highest.
 4. Slavery was a system based on cruelty and violence. Slaves found ways to resist their masters by working slowly, breaking tools, "stealing" food or clothes, or lying to their masters. All these forms of resistance carried the risk of punishment, which often included whippings. Slaves who tried to run away or were openly rebellious risked severe whippings, branding, imprisonment, or were forced to wear iron collars around their neck, hands, or feet. Slaves that burned property, stole, or committed murder or other serious crimes were killed.
 5. Even though masters treated slaves as property, slaves themselves found ways to build families and communities that helped them survive their enslavement. Slaves got married, raised children, and relied on networks of relatives and friends. Many slaves practiced Christianity, and found strength through faith, spiritual expression, and belief in a better life after death.
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