

# Seeking a More Perfect Union

## *The Underground Railroad: Experiences of Freedom Seekers*

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### Watkins Museum of History Middle School (6-8) Lesson Plan

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#### Kansas History, Government and Social Studies Educational Standards

1. Choices have consequences
  - Human choices cause change dependent upon conditions which the decision maker may not be able to control or anticipate.
  - Every choice comes with a cost.
2. Individuals have rights and responsibilities
  - Rights tell the bearer what they are at liberty to do but are not a requirement to exercise them.
3. Societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups.
  - Beliefs are considered or accepted by individuals as true, and impact behaviors and reactions.
4. Societies experience continuity and change over time.
  - Change is generally continuous, not simply discrete events happening at their own pace, and are often determined by “turning or tipping” points.
5. Relationships among people, places, ideas, and environments are dynamic.
  - Dynamic relationships involve circumstances which often create shifts in priorities, leading to tension and adjustments toward progress.

# Overview

The classroom teacher should review the information in the Overview prior to students completing discussions and activities.



This plan is designed to support classroom instruction in history, government, and social studies. It can be completed in 1-3 hours depending upon how many pre and post activities you choose to include. The specific theme of this lesson is *The Underground Railroad: Experiences of freedom seekers*. Teachers should review the key vocabulary with the class prior to beginning the lesson. The Splash Activity is listed as one suggestion of how to do that. As students share their statements connecting the key vocabulary to the main topic, it may help to focus the conversation on the guiding questions:

What do you know about slavery?

When should individuals fight for the rights of others?

## Key vocabulary to front load for students:

**Plantation owners**  
**Underground Railroad**  
**Abolitionist**  
**Border ruffians**  
**Free people of color**  
**Freedom seekers**  
**Freestater**

## Word Splash Activity

Before beginning this unit review the key vocabulary by “Splashing” the words somewhere in the classroom. You can do this by:

- writing vocabulary words on a name tag and stick it to the students’ shirts
- displaying words on paper and hang them from the ceiling with paper clips
- using window markers to write the vocabulary words on the windows
- writing words at angles in different colored chalk on the front board.
- writing words on sticky notes and place randomly around the classroom.

Provide each student with a copy of the graphic organizer on slide 15. Have students write a predicted meaning of each word. Then have the group brainstorm and generate complete statements connecting the words or phrases to each other and to the main topic of *Seeking a More Perfect Union: The Underground Railroad: Experiences of freedom seekers*.

Once they have predicted and generated their statements, they should share them with the group arriving at a historical meaning for each word.

# Overview (continued)



Following the review of the key vocabulary review the foundation information with students. It may help to focus the conversation on the guiding questions:

Why didn't most white Southerners want slavery to be abolished?

Why did the people helping enslaved persons escape form a secret network?

Do you think the members of the Underground Railroad were justified in breaking laws to help escaping slaves?

Other than capture, what were some of the dangers enslaved people faced when fleeing to freedom?

## Foundation Information:

In the early years of the Kansas Territory many came through Kansas on their way to freedom. The informal network that aided these formerly enslaved people in their escape attempts was dubbed the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad. It was given that name because it consisted of networks of 'stations' kept by 'conductors' or 'station keepers' who provided food, shelter and wagon transportation from one station to another along the line of travel to freedom. Those who were members of the Underground Railroad put themselves and their families at great risk. It was a dangerous, undertaking. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made helping fugitive slaves a federal crime punishable by six months in prison and a \$1,000 fine. Five years later, the proslavery Kansas territorial government enacted legislation saying any person who spoke, wrote or printed materials for the purpose of assisting escaped slaves would be found guilty of a felony and sentenced to death.

When the Kansas-Nebraska Territories were opened for settlement, underground railroads had been in operation for decades and had helped tens of thousands of slaves escape to freedom. Whether highly organized or loosely planned, these men and women assisted slaves northward to escape slavery. When these territories opened, not only did they offer new opportunities for underground railroad operations, but they also created prospects for the expansion of slavery on the frontier.

Lawrence was founded in 1854 by the New England Emigrant Aid Company in an effort to keep the territory free from slavery. It is said that Lawrence is one of the few cities in the U.S. founded strictly for political reasons. Lawrence was an important stop on the Underground Railroad, the city played a central role in the state's anti-slavery struggle. It is estimated that as many as 900-1000 enslaved people were helped out of Kansas along underground railroad routes from 1856-1860.

# Seeking a More Perfect Union

## *The Underground Railroad: Experience of freedom seekers*

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### DISCUSSION

Share with the students:

The Grover Barn is an Underground Railroad historic site in Lawrence, Kansas. It was built in 1858 by abolitionists Joel and Emily Grover. The barn played a significant role in the Underground Railroad in pre-Civil War Kansas. Preserving the history of the barn is extremely important because it's a link from the present to the past. One tale of the Grover Barn involves famous abolitionist John Brown.

Have students watch a selection (2:40 - 9:40) from the video [Encounter on The Underground Railroad: John Brown](#) which uses the Grover Barn as its setting and provides historical background on how the Underground Railroad functioned in Kansas.

Following the video ask the students to respond to the Leading Questions below.

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### LEADING QUESTIONS

What role does the Grover Barn play in the history of the Underground Railroad?

Mr. Gill was approached by a man asking for help to escape to freedom. What was his compelling reason for trying to escape?

In addition to Mr. Daniels, who had asked for help, how many freedom seekers did John Brown and his men rescue on this particular trip?

Why do you think that the Grovers risked their own safety, even their lives, to help the freedom seekers?

### Student Support

Video Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSJljSbXp-s>



### BONUS ACTIVITY

1. If time allows, have the students watch the entire [Encounter on The Underground Railroad: John Brown](#) video (17:08).



# Seeking a More Perfect Union

## *The Underground Railroad: Experiences of freedom seekers*



### DISCUSSION

Lawrence, Kansas was one of the “entire towns that were founded purely for antislavery purposes”. Because of that, people like Richard Cordley, who was a minister, settled in Kansas to support the efforts to vote that Kansas be a free state. Cordley preached his first sermon in the Plymouth Congregational Church at Lawrence, Kansas, where he remained as pastor until 1875. At the time of Quantrill’s Raid of Lawrence in 1863, his house and all its contents were burned, and he was one of the persons marked for death, but he managed to elude Quantrill’s Raiders. Cordley wrote a book titled *Pioneer Days in Kansas*. In that book he tells the story of an enslaved person named Lizzie who fled Kansas on the Underground Railroad. Lizzie was hidden in Lawrence by Cordley’s family as well as a neighboring family named Monteith. Lizzie was described as *“a very likely young woman and has a great horror of being taken back to slavery. She was about twenty-two years old, slightly built, and graceful in form and motion. She was quite dark, but the form of her features indicated some white blood. She was very quiet and modest and never obtruded herself upon anyone. She had been thoroughly trained as a house servant, and we never have had more competent help than Lizzie proved to be.”*



### LEADING QUESTIONS

Why do you think that Richard Cordley chose to focus on Lizzie’s physical appearance and these personal characteristics (such as being quiet and modest) in his book?

Do you think it was hard for Lizzie to trust families like the Cordleys and the Monteiths after her experience of enslavement? Why or why not?



### HANDS ON ACTIVITY

1. Divide students into groups of 2 or 3. Project the image of the photo of Richard Cordley and his wife on slide 11. Ask the students to examine the photo and respond to the Leading Questions below.



### LEADING QUESTIONS

What observations do you have about the photo of Richard Cordley and his wife? Do they look the way you thought they might be based on the information shared in the previous discussion?

What observations can you make about the church in the photo?

You learned that Richard Cordley was “one of the persons marked for death” by Quantrill’s Raiders. Why was this?

# Seeking a More Perfect Union

*The Underground Railroad: Experiences of freedom seekers*



## DISCUSSION

In his book *Pioneer Days in Kansas – Chapter 7: Lizzie and the Underground Railway* you can find more details of how Richard Cordley, his wife, and his friends supported Lizzie’s flight to freedom. In the beginning of his story of Lizzie he says, “In my college days I had discussed the “Fugitive Slave Law”.... I had denounced it as the outrage of outrages, as a natural outgrowth of the “sum of all villainies.” I had burned with indignation when the law was passed in 1850. I had declared that if a poor wanderer ever came to my house, I should take him in and never ask whether he were a slave or not. It is easy to be brave a thousand miles away. But now I must face the question at short range. I had been quite familiar with the law and its penalties came to mind very vividly just then. “For harboring a slave, six months imprisonment and \$1,000 fine.” All this passed through my mind in rapid succession. It was the first time I had ever confronted the question except in theory. Theory and practice affect one very differently in a case like this”.



## LEADING QUESTIONS

Why does Richard Cordley say that the Fugitive Slave Law is the sum of all villainies?

What does Richard Cordley mean when he says that it is easy to be brave a thousand miles away?

What facts in the information above might have influenced Cordley to make that statement?

### Student Support

Chapter 7 excerpt from *Pioneer Days in Kansas – Lizzie’s Story*

[http://www.kancoll.org/books/cordley\\_pioneer/cordley.07.html](http://www.kancoll.org/books/cordley_pioneer/cordley.07.html)



## HANDS ON ACTIVITY

Students will continue working in their groups for this activity.

Provide each group with a printed copy of one of the excerpts from *Pioneer Days in Kansas – Lizzie’s Story*. As the groups read the excerpts ask each group to make a list of words or phrases that they did not understand. In addition, ask each group to choose a spokesperson who will share the group’s interpretation of their excerpt. Share those with the entire group and then use the Leading Questions below as conversation starters.



## LEADING QUESTIONS

In what order should the excerpts be arranged?

Why do you think that Cordley referred to Lizzie as “an inmate of our house”?

In one of the excerpts Lizzie says that she “would live anywhere or anyhow, and would work for anything, rather than go back to slavery” even though she never complained about being treated cruelly. Why do you think that she felt this way?



# Wrap Up Activity

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Share the conclusion of Lizzie's story with the students:

"We learned still later that Lizzie, after being cared for in Kansas for a few months, was taken to Canada, where she found friends and a comfortable home. Beyond this we never heard. The war soon after broke out and other stirring events occupied our attention. This was the first and only time I ever came in personal contact with the Underground Railroad. It is the only time I ever had any personal knowledge of its operations. I have sometimes wondered how it was I did not oftener know something of movements of this kind, but I presume those engaged in them never cared to have any more persons in the secret than was necessary. So far as I know very few Kansas people ever enticed slaves away or incited them to escape. But when one did escape and came to their door, there were not many who would refuse him a meal or a helping hand. A slave escaping across the line was sure to find friends and was sure not to be betrayed into the hands of his pursuers. It was said that the line of the Underground Railroad ran directly through Lawrence and Topeka, then on through Nebraska and Iowa. This roundabout way was the shortest cut to the north pole. Every slave for a hundred miles knew the way, knew the stations and knew their friends. I have been told by those who ought to know, that not less than one hundred thousand dollars' worth of slaves passed through Lawrence on their way to liberty during the territorial period. Most of this travel passed over the line so quietly that very few people knew anything about it."

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## Leading Questions

Were you surprised that helping Lizzie escape to freedom was Richard Cordley's only contact with the Underground Railroad? Why or why not?

What connections are there between the story of Grover's Barn and Lizzie's story?

# Follow Up Activity

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Discuss with the students that a musical and a primary source such as a letter, diary or book tell a story based on how the composer or writer understands a situation or event.

- Divide students into groups. Provide each group with a copy of chapter 7 from Richard Cordley's book, *Pioneer Days in Kansas* found at [http://www.kancoll.org/books/cordley\\_pioneer/cordley.07.html](http://www.kancoll.org/books/cordley_pioneer/cordley.07.html). Assign each group one sentence or paragraph to rewrite as if it were being written today. Have each group share their finished version with the class allowing time for questions and discussion after each group shares.

Providing Scaffolding:

- Students who are challenged by the writing can create these entries by drawing.
- Allow the student to share their ideas with a scribe who writes it down for them.

Providing Enrichment:

- Advanced students can replace writing what they learned with creating journal entries for a slave traveling the Underground Railroad.



# Teacher Tips

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- Note: The standards connected to this unit were taken directly from the Kansas State Department of Education Standards for History, Government and Social Studies. The standards listed are applicable guiding standards for this lesson plan.
- Vocabulary words listed in the lesson plan are appropriate for middle school students. If there are students who need scaffolding or enrichment words from the following list could be included at the teacher's discretion.
  - **Enslaved:** held in bondage; people seen not as people but as commodities to be bought, sold, and exploited.
  - **Bushwhackers:** people who came into Kansas Territory to raid antislavery settlements to discourage people from settling there
  - **Primary source:** something made or written by someone who was there at the time; an original record; examples are something made or written by someone who was there at the time; an original record; examples are letters, diaries, photographs, newspaper articles of the time, artifacts used at the event or time.
- Social, Emotional Learning (SEL) skill development can be addressed with the following:
  - Writing and drawing can provide a method of reflection and allow students to express feelings regarding their educational experiences. The format can vary depending on the students' needs and the instructor's goals.
  - Ask each student to write or draw how what they learned about the Underground Railroad made them feel.
  - Include SEL skills by asking students to include words or images that show how they felt about the characters in this painting.
    - Discuss whether learning about this topic might change their treatment of others.

Prior to showing the Grover Barn video be sure to preview it. This will allow you to select just certain sections to show students if you are on a limited time schedule or if there is any material that you find inappropriate for your students. In addition, it might be helpful to pause the videos periodically to do a check for understanding. This will ensure that the students understand the content and are making a connection between the video and the theme of Seeking a More Perfect Union - *The Underground Railroad: Experiences of freedom seekers*.

- When viewing a YouTube video be sure to look for the option to "Skip Ads" as it may appear at the beginning of or between segments of a presentation. It is also helpful to view the video in full screen mode.

# Seeking a More Perfect Union

*The Underground Railroad: The full experience of freedom seekers*

## **Key vocabulary to front load for students:**

**Plantation owners** – a person who owned an estate in the American South on which crops such as coffee, sugar and tobacco were generally cultivated by the exploitation of an enslaved person or indentured labor.

**Underground Railroad** – a network of routes, places and people that helped enslaved people in the American South escape to the North. The name was used metaphorically as it was not located underground nor was an actual railroad instead operating through “safe houses” and properties of anti-slavery sympathizers. Routes took freedom seekers in many directions and was often not a direct line to northern states. Between 1810 and 1850, it is estimated to have helped guide 100,000 enslaved persons to freedom.

**Abolitionist** – a person who sought to end the practice of slavery in the United States. A majority of early abolitionists were white, but some of the prominent leaders of the movement were escaped or freed black men and women.

**Border ruffians** – proslavery Missourians who crossed the border into Kansas to vote illegally, raid towns and intimidate anti-slavery settlers.

**Free people of color** – people of Black heritage who were born free or escaped the bonds of slavery before its practice was abolished in 1865.

**Freedom seekers** – an enslaved person who takes action to obtain freedom from slavery, either by attempting escape on their own or through the Underground Railroad.

**Freestater:** a settler who believed Kansas should not allow slavery



**Plymouth Congregational Church, Lawrence, Kansas**  
The photograph shows the Plymouth Congregational Church, Lawrence, Kansas, and Reverend and Mrs. Richard Cordley.

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[kansasmemory.org](http://kansasmemory.org),  
Kansas Historical Society



LEE KNIGHT,



Topeka, Kans

## Excerpts from *Pioneer Days in Kansas – Lizzie's Story*

DURING the summer of 1859 we were living in a stone house just south of the city limits of Lawrence, before we had a home of our own. As the town then was, we were fully half a mile from any other house. There was in my church a family named Monteith... Like most of the early settlers he came to make Kansas a free state, and he proposed to stay and see it done. We soon became fast friends and our families were quite intimate....One day Monteith came to my house and said he wanted to talk over a little matter with me. "There is at my house a runaway slave, who has been here several months. She is a very likely young woman and has a great horror of being taken back to slavery. At the same time we do not like to send her to Canada until arrangements can be made for her. She would be entirely alone. So we have been keeping her here in Lawrence. She has been at my house for several weeks, and it is thought wise to find another home for her. It is not best for her to be too long in one place. Would you take her into your house for a few weeks until other arrangements can be made?"...The next day, therefore, "Lizzie" became an inmate of our house.

## Excerpts from *Pioneer Days in Kansas – Lizzie's Story*

...She insisted on doing the larger portion of the housework, and said the work of our little family was like play to her. She was a good cook and often surprised us by some dainty dish of her own.... We did not wonder that her master set a high price on her, or that he was anxious to recover his "property." She did not complain of cruel treatment from her owners, but she had a great horror of going back. She would live anywhere or anyhow, and would work for anything, rather than go back to slavery. She fully understood the situation and the danger of being taken back if her whereabouts became known. She kept herself out of sight as much as possible, and never showed herself out-of-doors or in the front part when there was travel going by on the road.... In the autumn of the same year, 1859, the Monteiths moved into town, and it was thought best for Lizzie to return to them. We were reluctant to let her go, but we had no claim. Besides, she had been with us as long as it was wise for her to stay. We were in a lonely place, and it would not be difficult to kidnap her and take her off. By this time her being with us was very generally known. She went home with the Monteiths, therefore, and remained with them until a change was made necessary by "circumstances over which they had no control."... One very cold afternoon during this time, there came a sharp rap at the door. I opened it and two gentlemen stood there, wrapped in heavy fur overcoats. They were so bundled up that I did not recognize them.... When they had come in and thrown back their wraps a little, we saw that one was our old friend Monteith and the other was Lizzie.... Monteith then told us: "Lizzie's master has found out where she is. He is determined to take her back at any cost. He proposes to make a test case of it and show that a slave can be taken out of Lawrence, and returned to slavery. A large sum of money is offered for her recovery, and the United States marshal is here with his posse to take her at all hazards.



## Excerpts from *Pioneer Days in Kansas – Lizzie's Story*

They found where Lizzie was this morning and have been shadowing my house all day.... Lizzie could not get away without being seen. Their plan seems to be to watch the house all day and be sure she does not leave it, and then at night come and take her, and rush her away, before any alarm can be given. We determined to foil them. So Lizzie put on that overcoat of mine and drew the cap down over her head, and we walked out together as two gentlemen. We went to town, and then....came down here. When I go back they will think my companion stayed over in town. Now, we want Lizzie to stay here till night. About ten o'clock a team will come for her and take her into the country to a place of safety."

After answering a few questions, Monteith left us. We looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then came the thought, "What shall we do?" I had little hope that her new hiding-place would not be known. The United States marshal was a man of experience and of determined purpose.... It was not likely that they would be deceived by the ruse we were attempting to practice. As night came on we were confronted by the probability that Lizzie's pursuers would come before her rescuers arrived. If they did, then what should we do? What could we do? To give her up to them was not to be thought of, but how to prevent their taking her was a serious question. It would be folly to resist by force. There were no arms in the house, and if there had been we should not have used them. These were officers of the law and resistance would be madness. Could we in any way save Lizzie from them if they should come? Of course, they would search the house.... Mrs. Cordley, hit upon a plan to which we all assented. ....Mrs. Ward was....an invalid (visiting in the Cordley home).... Her room was the front chamber. The bed consisted of a mattress with a light feather bed spread over it. Mrs. Ward was to play the sick lady. She was so pale and slight that this was not a difficult part for her. Mrs. Cordley was to play the part of nurse, and was to be sitting by the bed. A stand at the bedside with bottles and spoons and glasses completed the picture of the sick-room. In case of alarm Lizzie was to crawl in between the mattress and the feather bed and remain quiet there till the danger was passed. Lizzie assented to the plan with great readiness. "I will make myself just as small as ever I can, and I will lie as still as still can be."... If the officers came they were to be told to look for themselves. The house would be thrown open to them. The illusion of the sick-room was so complete and natural that we felt a perfect assurance that they would not disturb a lady as sick as Mrs. Ward would be by that time.

# Key Vocabulary Graphic Organizer

Fill out what you think each of the words or phrases means under the Predicted Meaning column. As the class discusses their Predicted Meanings the group will determine the historically accurate meaning of the given word as it relates to the topic *Seeking a More Perfect Union: The Underground Railroad: Experiences of freedom seekers*.

Predicted Meaning	Coded Word	Historical Meaning
	Plantation owners	
	Underground Railroad	
	Abolitionist	
	Border ruffians	
	Free people of color	
	Freedom seekers	
	Freestater	