

# SLAVERY IN NEW JERSEY



## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What was the Underground Railroad and how did it help enslaved people gain their right of freedom? What role did the people of New Jersey play in the Underground Railroad and the struggle against slavery?



## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Describe the Underground Railroad and its significance in the abolition of chattel slavery.
- Investigate Harriet Tubman’s role as a leader in the Underground Railroad.
- Explore New Jersey’s role in the Underground Railroad and map key stops along the route.



## LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



## TIME NEEDED

45 minutes



## MATERIALS

- AV equipment to show a video
- *On Track or Off the Rails?* handout (one per student or one copy to read aloud)
- *On Track or Off the Rails Cards* handout (copied and cut apart so each student gets one of each card)
- *Underground Railroad Routes in New Jersey* handout (one per student or pair)
- *New Jersey Stops on the Underground Railroad* handout (one per student)



## VOCABULARY

abolitionist

enslaver

Quaker

enslaved

plantation

Underground Railroad

# Procedures

## NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE

When discussing slavery with students, it is suggested the term “enslaved person” be used instead of “slave” to emphasize their humanity; that “enslaver” be used instead of “master” or “owner” to show that slavery was forced upon human beings; and that “freedom seeker” be used instead of “runaway” or “fugitive” to emphasize justice and avoid the connotation of lawbreaking.

- 1 Write “Underground Railroad” on the board. Ask students if they have ever heard this term and what they know about it. Allow students to share their prior knowledge in pairs or as a class, but don’t confirm or negate their ideas at this point.
- 2 Tell students they will watch a video to learn more about the Underground Railroad and an important figure in history named Harriet Tubman. Inform students that, after the video, they will play a game called “On Track or Off the Rails,” to test what they have learned. Depending on the level of challenge you wish to provide, either distribute and preview the statements on the handout *On Track or Off the Rails?*, or reserve them until after the video. Show students *Harriet Tubman—A Kid Explains History, Episode 13* (4:20): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YAPVs233Hc>.
- 3 Provide each student with one “On Track” and one “Off the Rails” card (see the handout, *On Track or Off the Rails Cards*). Explain that you will read a series of statements and they should decide—based on the video—if each statement is true (“On Track”) or false (“Off the Rails”). One at a time, read aloud each statement from the *On Track or Off the Rails?* handout. Have students respond by standing and raising the appropriate card above their heads or by moving with their card to a designated side of the room. Reveal the correct answer and provide any necessary clarification for each statement before moving onto the next one.

## NOTE

The correct answers are as follows: 1-F, 2-T, 3-T, 4-F, 5-F, 6-T, 7-F, 8-T, 9-T, 10-F, 11-T.

## NOTE

In 1804, the New Jersey Legislature passed the Act for the Gradual Emancipation of Slavery. It provided that children born to enslaved women after July 4, 1804, would be free. However, girls were obligated to serve their mother's enslaver until age 21, and boys until 25. All people born before July 4, 1804, were enslaved for life unless freed by their enslavers. Slavery persisted in New Jersey until the end of the Civil War, in 1865. In 1866, New Jersey became the last Northern state to ratify the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abolishing slavery.

- 4 For an extra challenge, have students, in pairs or small groups, come up with one or more additional true or false statements about the Underground Railroad they think can “derail” their classmates. Allow groups to join together and attempt to stump one another with their statements.
- 5 Tell students you have one more “On Track or Off the Rails” statement for them. Read aloud or post the following: “New Jersey was a major route along the Underground Railroad.” Have students confer and hold up the card that matches their response. Confirm it is indeed true that New Jersey had many secret safe houses and active abolitionists working to help enslaved people find freedom. Note it is also true that New Jersey was the last Northern state to abolish slavery. Allow students to react to this contradiction.
- 6 Distribute the following handouts and review the instructions on the first one with students: *Underground Railroad Routes in New Jersey* and *New Jersey Stops on the Underground Railroad*. Independently or in pairs, direct students to read about at least three stops on the Underground Railroad in New Jersey and represent them on the map using drawings, symbols, captions and other ways of conveying key information. When they are done, allow students to share their maps in small groups and discuss why they selected their locations and which facts most surprised them.
- 7 Gather the class and discuss any questions students may have as a result of their Underground Railroad research. In addition, use some of the discussion questions below to deepen students’ understanding of chattel slavery in New Jersey.

# Discussion Questions

- 1 Why is it important to learn about the Underground Railroad?
- 2 What were some ways that people moved along the Underground Railroad?
- 3 What are examples of “stations” on the Underground Railroad?
- 4 What were the risks to “station masters” and “conductors,” like Harriet Tubman, when helping people escape? Why do you think both free and enslaved people took these risks?
- 5 What stops on the Underground Railroad in New Jersey did you find most inspiring?
- 6 Were you surprised to learn that New Jersey was the last Northern state to end chattel slavery? Why?
- 7 In the United States, why do we study slavery and how people tried to escape it?

# Lesson Extensions

- Conduct a read-aloud of *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad* by Ellen Levine. This book tells the true story of Henry "Box" Brown, who escaped slavery in Virginia by having himself shipped in a crate to Philadelphia. Then have students construct their own "freedom boxes" (using discarded milk cartons, cereal boxes, etc.) and fill it with written and/or visual reflections about challenges to freedom and justice in today's world that they would like to "ship away."
- Assign students to select one historical figure from the list below and create a video or other multimedia presentation about the person's contributions to ending slavery.

Abigail Goodwin (1793–1897)

Reverend Thomas C. Oliver (1818–1900)

Charles Fern Hopkins (1842–1934)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + Fiaschetti, Patricia Weigold. "Freedom's Path: The Underground Railroad in NJ." 23 January 2015. <https://njmonthly.com/articles/historic-jersey/freedoms-path-underground-railroad-nj>.
- + *Harriet*. Directed by Kasi Lemmons. Focus Features, 2019.
- + New Jersey Underground Railroad Heritage. "Steal Away, Steal Away..." <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10929/24563/h6732002.pdf?sequence=1>.
- + NJTV News. "NJ Stops Along the Underground Railroad." February 16, 2015. YouTube video, 3:14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9e4nWro68>.
- + NJTV News. "Stops on the Underground Railroad in New Jersey." February 16, 2012. YouTube video, 3:06. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGAgpJUIWJE>.
- + PBS. "Henry 'Box' Brown." <http://underground-railroad.lunchbox.pbs.org/black-culture/shows/list/underground-railroad/stories-freedom/henry-box-brown/>.
- + Safian, Gail R. "Slavery in New Jersey: A Troubled History." Durand-Hedden House & Garden Association Inc. in consultation with South Orange-Maplewood Community Coalition on Race. <https://villagegreennj.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/juneteenth-exhibit.pdf>.
- + Scholastic.com. "The Underground Railroad Teaching Guide." <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/teacher-activity-guide-underground-railroad>.
- + Whitehead, Coleson. *Underground Railroad*. New York: Double Day, 2016.



# On Track or Off the Rails?

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Based on the video *Harriet Tubman—A Kid Explains History*, do you think the following statements are *on track* (true) or *off the rails* (false)? Can you come up with one or more additional statements that will *derail* your classmates? Write them at the bottom.

## OT or OtR?

- 1 The Underground Railroad was a network of secret, underground tunnels.

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- 2 The Underground Railroad was a network of people who provided secret routes and safe houses to help free enslaved people.

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- 3 “Stations” on the Underground Railroad included barns, churches and even caves.

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- 4 Abolitionists were Black people who wanted to end slavery.

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- 5 Harriet Tubman was freed by her enslavers, which is why she was able to become a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad.

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- 6 The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was a law saying that enslaved people who escaped had to be returned to their enslavers, even if they were in a free state.

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- 7 The best night to begin trips on the Underground Railroad was Friday because the plantation owners enjoyed long dinners with their families at the end of the week.

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- 8 Harriet Tubman sometimes threatened “passengers” with a gun if they were afraid to continue the journey north.

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- 9 Many enslaved people headed to Canada because slavery there was abolished in 1833 (32 years before the U.S.).

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- 10 During the Combahee River Raid of 1863, plantation owners killed over 700 enslaved people.

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- 11 Harriet Tubman worked as a nurse, a spy and a guide for troops during the Civil War.

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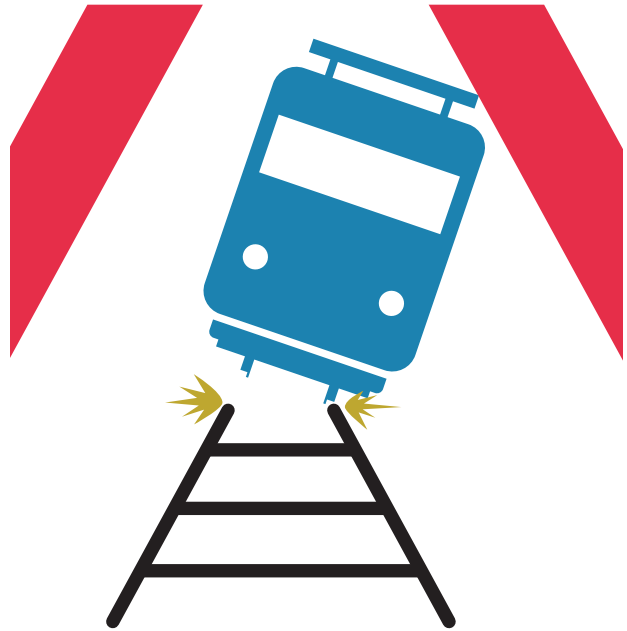


# On Track or Off the Rails Cards

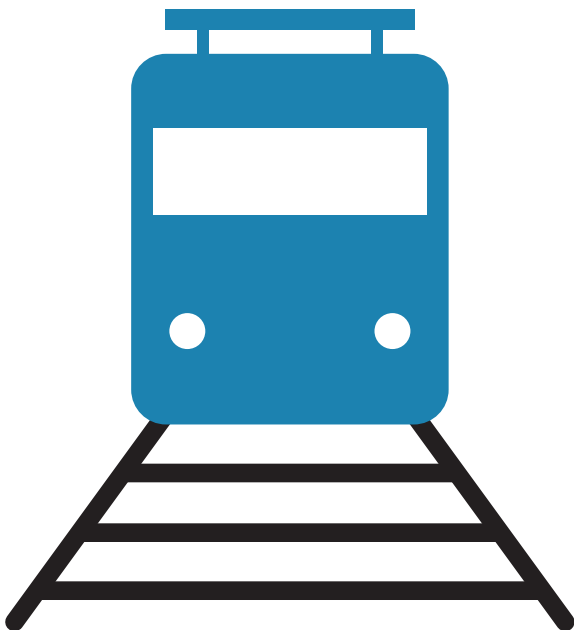
**ON TRACK**



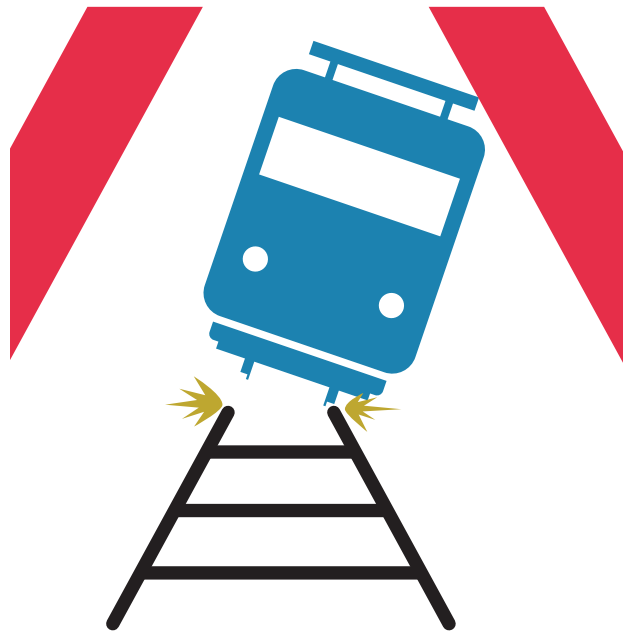
**OFF THE RAILS**



**ON TRACK**



**OFF THE RAILS**

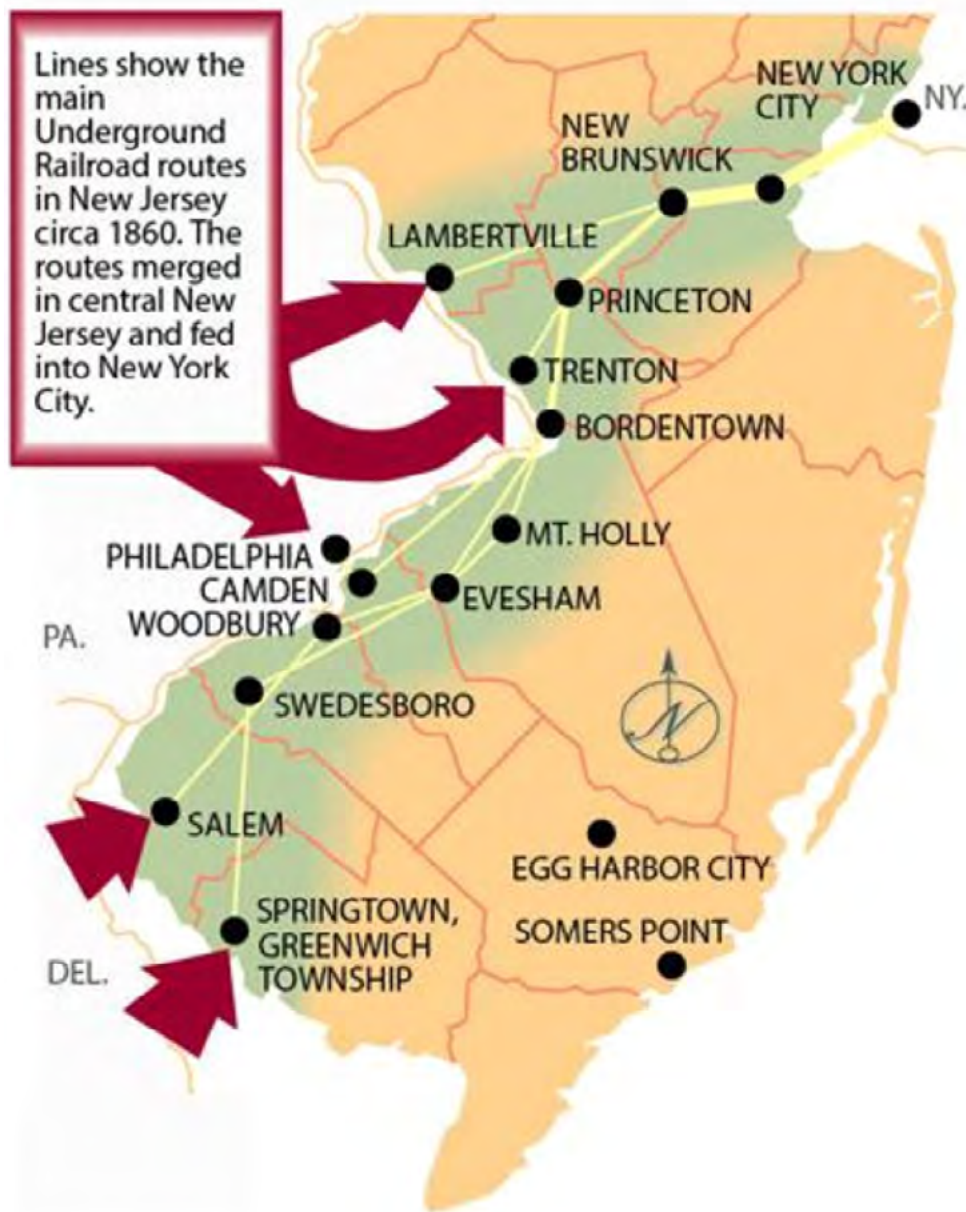




# Underground Railroad Routes in New Jersey

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Read the handout *New Jersey Stops on the Underground Railroad*. Choose three that you find interesting and add more information about them on the map. For each, include a short summary and a drawing that shows the importance of the site. Add additional illustrations to your map that represent the Underground Railroad.



MAP SOURCE: The Press of Atlantic City. Used with permission by Krishna Mathias.





# New Jersey Stops on the Underground Railroad

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Communities such as Somers Point and Egg Harbor City** offered freedom seekers a direct path to Pennsylvania, where slavery had been abolished. Michelle Craig McDonald, a professor of history at Stockton University, says: "The goal of slaves on the Underground Railroad was to make it to Pennsylvania...Think about New Jersey as the gateway or the last stop in a journey. When you got to Egg Harbor City you knew freedom was days away."
- 2 The Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church** in Swedesboro was built in 1834. The church doors were always left unlocked so freedom seekers passing through on the Underground Railroad could let themselves in for a rest. If slave catchers showed up in the area, runaways would be hidden in a secret room beneath a hallway in the church.
- 3 The Edgewater House** was built in 1741 in Cherry Hill, Camden County. It was owned by Thomas Evans and later by his son, Josiah Bispham Evans. They were both members of the Quaker religion and believed that slavery was wrong. By 1840, Edgewater was a safe house on the Underground Railroad. The Evans family passed down stories about the Underground Railroad to their family members. They said freedom seekers coming from Woodbury were hidden in the "haymow" (attic) and then "hurried off in a covered wagon to Mount Holly."
- 4 The Bordentown Friends Meetinghouse**, built in the 1740s, served as a shelter for freedom seekers during the time of slavery. Bordentown was known as "Station B" on the Underground Railroad, and three routes passed through the town. One went from Philadelphia north to Princeton. Another line ran east through Station B. There was also a southern route. Bordentown was a busy intersection on the road to freedom.
- 5 Members of the Buckingham and Lambertville** communities were outraged when Benjamin "Big Ben" Jones was captured by four slave catchers in a bloody struggle in 1844. Benjamin, who stood 6 feet 10 inches tall, had escaped from Maryland and settled in the area in 1833. The towns of Buckingham and Lambertville had ended slavery in 1776. Now they held anti-slavery talks and events at the Buckingham Friends Meeting House and other locations. They also raised \$700 (almost \$20,000 in today's money) to buy Benjamin out of slavery. He returned to the area, where he lived to the age of 75.



# New Jersey Stops on the Underground Railroad

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

- 6 Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church** in Springtown, Greenwich Township, is one of the oldest Black churches in New Jersey. It dates back to the early 1800s, when Springtown was a swamp area. We know about at least five members of the church who were secret Underground Railroad members. They probably hid runaways from Delaware and Maryland at the church and on their own properties.
- 7 Fort Stockton** in Woodbury was an important station for Civil War soldiers fighting against slavery. A marker on the site tells us it was the “training ground for the men of the 12th New Jersey Volunteer Infantry...considered one of the ‘fightingest’ regiments of the Union Army.” Of the 992 soldiers from Fort Stockton who fought in the war, only 278 returned.
- 8 John Coleman** was a Black pioneer and an Underground Railroad operator near Evesham and Mount Laurel. He worked tirelessly to provide hiding places for freedom seekers and to build the network of people and places on the Underground Railroad. He was so respected by his community that they named the area Colemantown.
- 9 Sampson Peters House and Cooper Shop** is an important site in Trenton's history. Sampson Peters was born into slavery in East Windsor in 1771. He was set free in 1802 and moved to Trenton, where he opened a cooper (barrel-making) shop. The shop was a meeting place for a group he helped form, called the Religious Society of Free Africans. Sampson was an abolitionist. He also spoke out against the movement to return free Black people to Africa. Sampson lived to the age of 74.
- 10 Crossing the Raritan River** near New Brunswick was dangerous. Slave catchers often patrolled the area. Conductors on the Underground Railroad worked with a spy named Cornelius Cornell, who lived near New Brunswick. He would signal when it was safe to cross the river. Freedom seekers could then head to Jersey City along the Hudson River, and ferry to New York City. There, they hoped to catch a train north to freedom.



# New Jersey Stops on the Underground Railroad

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

- 11 The Goodwin Sisters House** was an Underground Railroad station in Salem by 1838. It was operated by Abigail Goodwin and her sister, Elizabeth. They were Quakers, a religious group that promotes peace and fought against slavery in the 1800s. We know about the Goodwin sisters through a diary kept by their nephew and letters written between the sisters and a Philadelphia station master named William Still.
- 12 The Peter Mott House** is a special place because it is one of the only Underground Railroad stations owned and operated by African Americans. The house, built around 1844, is in Lawnside in Camden County. Peter Mott was a free Black farmer who may have escaped from enslavement in Maryland. He was also the pastor of a church in Lawnside. The community of Lawnside was officially recognized as a town in 1926, and was the only all-Black community in New Jersey.
- 13 The Thomas Budd House**, built around 1744, is the oldest structure in Mount Holly that's still on its original site. Thomas Budd was a plantation owner, but later his house was used to hide enslaved people on the Underground Railroad. The house's basement has a tunnel in the corner, which was used to secretly transport people. Today the building is a bookstore.
- 14 Paul Robeson**, born in Princeton in 1898, was one of the most important Black leaders of the past century. He was a singer, actor, athlete, author and civil rights activist. He was also the son of a man who was born into slavery. William Drew Robeson was born in 1844 and enslaved on a plantation in North Carolina. At age 15, William escaped slavery with his brother, Ezekiel, on the Underground Railroad. After serving in the Union Army during the Civil War and attending college, William settled in Princeton and became the minister of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church from 1880 until 1901.

#### SOURCES:

Historic Sites of Trenton. "Sampson Peters House and Cooper Shop." <http://www.mappler.net/site5/african-american-historic-sites/historic-buildings-clubs-and-meeting-houses/sampson-peters-house-and-cooper-shop>.

Jacob's Chapel A.M.E. Church. "Church History." <https://www.jacobschapelame.org/our-past>.

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NJ.gov. "New Jersey History Kids: A Description of the Underground Railroad Routes Through New Jersey." [https://www.state.nj.us/state/historykids/pdfs/underground\\_railroad/description\\_of%20\\_routes.pdf](https://www.state.nj.us/state/historykids/pdfs/underground_railroad/description_of%20_routes.pdf).

Visit Bucks County. "Tour the Underground Railroad in Bucks County." <https://www.visitbuckscounty.com/things-to-do/planning-ideas/underground-railroad>.

Women History Blog. "Underground Railroad in New Jersey." <https://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2015/10/underground-railroad-in-new-jersey.html>.