

## **White Allies: John Hossack and The Hossack Family**

- Grade Level: 6-12
- Estimated Time: 1-2 class periods
- Topic: Underground Railroad
- Subtopic: White Allies

This lesson addresses the following disciplinary concepts and topics from the [Illinois Learning Standards for English and Language Arts](#) and [Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science](#):

- English/Language Arts
  - Reading Informational Text
  - Vocabulary Interpretation and Use
  - Written Expression
- Social Science
  - Inquiry Skills
    - Recognize Perspectives and Articulate Identities
    - Evaluating Sources and Planning Inquiries
  - Disciplinary Concepts
    - Civics
      - Participation and Deliberation: Applying Civic Virtues and Democratic Principles
    - Geography
      - Human-Environment Interaction: Place, Regions, and Culture
    - History
      - Change, Continuity, and Context
      - Perspectives
      - Historical Sources and Evidence
      - Causation and Argumentation

### Essential Questions

- What is an ally?
- How did white allies like John Hossack & The Hossack Family support the Underground Railroad and Freedom Seekers?
- How can we compare allies of the past with those in the present?

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## Objectives

- Identify essential vocabulary such as ally, abolitionist, slavery, enslaved, Underground Railroad, and more.
- Examine stories associated with John Hossack and The Hossack Family's involvement in the Underground Railroad in Illinois.
- Examine and analyze primary and secondary sources related to the Hossack Family and the Underground Railroad in Illinois.
- Compare allyship of the past with the present.

## Introduction

- Display the following prompt on the board as students walk in and/or read it at the beginning of the class period.
  - *In your own words, define "ally" or "allies."*
  - *Describe a personal experience involving either you acting as an ally or someone acting as an ally for you.*
- Allow students 5-10 minutes to respond to the prompt.
- After students have responded, ask a few students to share their experiences with the class.
  - *Have students help define the term using their own words and experiences.*
  - *Ally – someone who helps someone else through assistance, guidance, or other general support.*
- Once a few students have shared their experiences, transition into the next portion of the lesson and say that today's lesson will allow students the opportunity to learn about allies present during the Underground Railroad era in Illinois history. In particular, there are many examples of white allies helping others during the era of slavery and abolition in America. For this lesson, the focus will be on John Hossack and The Hossack Family
- Review Essential Questions and Objectives together as a class.

## Source Examination and Analysis

- One Illinois example includes John Hossack and the Hossack family.
- Show the image of the Hossack family for students to view (attached). Note that John Hossack and his wife, Martha, are seated with the rest of the family gathered around them.
- Taken from the exhibit, read the following brief story of the Hossack family to the class and emphasize the family affair of assisting freedom seekers:
  - *John and Martha Hossack came to Illinois in 1838 to manage construction along the I&M Canal. They became strong supporters of the abolitionist movement, and their farm in Cook County provided safety for Freedom Seekers. In 1851, they moved to Ottawa, Illinois. They continued to shelter and move Freedom Seekers, often from their home. Their sons also helped, driving Freedom Seekers to stations in Harding or Newark at night. In 1859, John and two others were arrested for breaking the Fugitive Slave Law. They had helped an enslaved man escape from a courtroom. The jury found John guilty, but the judge gave him a light sentence: \$100 and 10 days in jail.*

*Journey to Freedom Illinois' Underground Railroad*

[www.IllinoisUGRR.org](http://www.IllinoisUGRR.org) [www.lookingforlincoln.org](http://www.lookingforlincoln.org)

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- (Source Examination and Analysis Continued)
- Show <https://youtu.be/IUeEal7M154?si=FEpmQO2Tko5fvxXQ> of John Hossack to provide further visual representation of Hossack.
- Let students know they will learn more about John Hossack’s trial by participating in a podcast listening activity.
- Distribute and review the instructions on the **Podcast Activity - The Trial of John Hossack: Slavery on Trial in the Free State of Illinois**
  - [Play the podcast](#) for students and allow students to complete the worksheet.
    - If possible, enable captions and display them for students to see.
  - Once students have finished listening to the podcast, allow them 5-10 minutes to provide answers to the Summary Discussion Questions.
  - Go over the worksheet together.

Conclusion

- As a summary discussion, review the final two discussion questions with students:
  - *Knowing the risks involved, why do you think John Hossack and others got involved in helping freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad?*
  - *Comparing the past to the present, what is one example of allyship in current American society? Describe a situation where an individual or group is actively working to help another person or group.*

Extensions Beyond the Lesson

- Have students explore Underground Railroad maps to identify routes that may run through or near their communities. Using local museums, libraries, and archives in the area, students can research their local Underground Railroad history and present their findings.
- Explore resources available through the [National Park Service’s Network to Freedom](#), including the [Interactive Map](#) showing sites and stories that are part of the network. Identify Illinois towns where the Underground Railroad passed through and pathways through other states.
- Learn about another story of a white ally on the Underground Railroad in Illinois. Listen to the [Looking for Lincoln podcast](#) about Dr. Richard Eells and his efforts to aid freedom seekers in Illinois.
- Check out the traveling exhibit, *Journey to Freedom: Illinois’ Underground Railroad*, in a community near you! Visit the [www.IllinoisUGRR.org](http://www.IllinoisUGRR.org) for more information.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Podcast Activity - The Trial of John Hossack: Slavery on Trial in the Free State of Illinois**

*The podcast you are about to hear is a dramatized account of John Hossack, who stood trial in 1860 for violating the Fugitive Slave Act. Hossack was accused of helping an enslaved person gain his freedom in Ottawa, Illinois.*

*The narrative is based on court documents using the actual words spoken during the trial. The narrator, Robert Hitt, is a fictional observer who helps bring the real-life historic characters to life.*

*Listen to the podcast "[The Trial of John Hossack: Slavery on Trial in the Free State of Illinois](#)." Use the podcast to answer these questions.*

1. A primary subject in the trial, what was the name of the Black gentleman who fled from enslavement to Illinois?
2. Why was the trial moved from Jonesboro to Ottawa?
3. Where was the man claiming to own the enslaved individual from?
4. What did the judge in the case rule and say should happen to the enslaved person?
5. How was the once enslaved man able to escape from authorities? Who helped him? Where did authorities last see him before escaping?
6. Describe one of the eyewitness accounts who saw the escape.
7. Describe one of the mentioned opinions from someone who disagreed with Hossack helping with the escape.

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8. Was John Hossack found guilty or not guilty of violating the Fugitive Slave Act?
9. John Hossack claimed he was not in the wrong. What did he believe was wrong?
  
10. When paraded through Jonesboro and Ottawa, describe the difference in public response between town residents, the enslaved individual, and the supposed owner.
  
11. How was John Hossack's Ottawa home used during the era of the Underground Railroad in Illinois?

Summary Discussion Questions

12. Knowing the risks involved, why do you think John Hossack and others got involved in helping freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. Comparing the past to the present, what is one example of allyship in current American society? Describe a situation where an individual or group is actively working to help another person or group.

## **Podcast Activity - The Trial of John Hossack: Slavery on Trial in the Free State of Illinois - ANSWERS**

*The podcast you are about to hear is a dramatized account of John Hossack, who stood trial in 1860 for violating the Fugitive Slave Act. Hossack was accused of helping an enslaved person gain his freedom in Ottawa, Illinois.*

*The narrative is based on court documents using the actual words spoken during the trial. The narrator, Robert Hitt, is a fictional observer who helps bring the real-life historic characters to life.*

*Listen to the podcast "[The Trial of John Hossack: Slavery on Trial in the Free State of Illinois](#)." Use the podcast to answer these questions.*

1. A primary subject in the trial, what was the name of the Black gentleman who fled from enslavement to Illinois? Jim Gray
2. Why was the trial moved from Jonesboro to Ottawa? Thanks to the help of Jonesboro resident Jim Roots, the case was moved. Jonesboro, in the southern part of the state, was generally less sympathetic to anti-slavery and abolitionist ideas. Ottawa, in the northern part of the state, had a much greater anti-slavery and abolitionist attitude among its residents, ultimately setting the stage for the trial.
3. Where was the man claiming to own the enslaved individual from? Missouri
4. What did the judge rule and say should happen to the enslaved person? Due to the Fugitive Slave Law, Mr. Gray should be returned to Mr. Phillips in Missouri.
5. How was the once enslaved man able to escape from authorities? Who helped him? Where did authorities last see him before escaping? Anti-slavery abolitionists in the packed courtroom helped break Mr. Gray free right in the middle of court proceedings. Mr. Gray also dove into a waiting getaway carriage and sped off.
6. Describe one of the eyewitness accounts who saw the escape. Several. Marshal, Innkeeper, and more.
7. Describe one of the mentioned opinions from someone who disagreed with Hossack helping with the escape. Claimed it was similar to larceny, a violation of the Constitution, etc.
8. Was John Hossack found guilty or not guilty of violating the Fugitive Slave Act? Guilty
9. John Hossack claimed he was not in the wrong. What did he believe was wrong? The law, the Fugitive Slave Act, and the overarching ability for one person to enslave another.

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10. When paraded through Jonesboro and Ottawa, describe the difference in public response between town residents, the enslaved individual, and the supposed owner. Jonesboro – crowds laughed and jeered at Mr. Gray, the enslaved person. Ottawa – crowds booed and jeered Mr. Phillips, the supposed owner.
11. How was John Hossack's Ottawa home used during the era of the Underground Railroad in Illinois? Served as a depot helping more than a dozen freedom seekers.

Summary Discussion Questions

12. Knowing the risks involved, why do you think John Hossack and others got involved in helping freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad?

Students may note that following morals and values may have superseded following the law in this story. They saw that their actions were right despite the risks of breaking the law to aid freedom seekers.

13. Comparing the past to the present, what is one example of allyship in current American society? Describe a situation where an individual or group is actively working to help another person or group.

Students may note many examples, including current movements to battle inequalities marginalized groups face in the United States.



**Image of The Hossack Family**



Credit: Jay W. Preston, "John Hossack, Abolitionist," 2000-2010.  
<http://www.johnhossack.com/hossack.htm>