

Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

- Grade Level: 6-12
- Estimated Time: 1-3 class periods or an extended research project
- Topic: Underground Railroad
- Subtopic: Underground Railroad Communities
- Important Note: Students will need access to technology to research communities. This could take place in class if technology is available or assigned as homework.

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
 - Written Expression
- Social Science
 - Inquiry Skills
 - Evaluating Sources and Planning Inquiries
 - Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action
 - Disciplinary Concepts
 - Civics
 - Participation and Deliberation: Applying Civic Virtues and Democratic Principles
 - Geography
 - Human-Environment Interaction: Place, Regions, and Culture
 - Spatial Views of the World
 - Human Population: Spatial Patterns and Movements
 - History
 - Change, Continuity, and Context
 - Perspectives
 - Historical Sources and Evidence

Essential Questions

- What Illinois communities did the Underground Railroad pass through?
- How did Illinois communities aid freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad?
- How are these communities and historic sites commemorated today?

Lesson #5 – Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

Objectives

- Identify and locate Illinois communities with significant Underground Railroad activity.
- Examine primary and secondary sources relating to Illinois communities along the Underground Railroad.
- Evaluate the legacy and commemoration of Underground Railroad sites in Illinois communities.

Introduction

- Display the following prompt as students walk in and/or read it at the beginning of the class period.
 - *Think about your community and hometown.*
 - *What makes it unique? What sets it apart from other communities?*
 - *What is your community proud of? How can you tell what your community is proud of?*
- 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.
 - *Students may highlight community history or unique attractions in the area. Students may describe points of pride being commemorated through annual events, historical markers, museums, historic sites, etc.*
- Once a few students have shared their responses, transition into the next portion of the lesson and let students know that today's lesson will be about unique communities in Illinois. The lesson will examine several communities in Illinois where the Underground Railroad passed through and how each community commemorates this history.
- Review Essential Questions and Objectives together as a class.

Locating Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois Activity

- Distribute and review the instructions on the worksheet **Locating Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois**.
- Split students up and assign each student two of the listed communities to research.
- Allow students adequate time to research their assigned communities and complete their work. Emphasize the necessity for students only to use trustworthy resources in their research.
 - You may choose to share the **Helpful Resources – Researching Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois** with students to aid them in their research.
- Group students together with other students who studied the same communities.
- Allow groups five minutes to discuss their communities and research findings.
- While other students listen and take notes, have each group take turns locating and presenting their communities to the class using their written responses.
 - You may choose to display the attached map of Illinois. Students can use the map to locate their assigned communities.

Lesson #5 – Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

Conclusion

- As a summary discussion, review the final question together and ask for student responses:
 - *In recent years, more and more communities associated with the Underground Railroad have received commemorations, and their histories are being more widely shared. What lesser-told stories in history do you think deserve additional commemoration? Might there be local history in your community that deserves more recognition and commemoration? Explain your choice and why you feel additional commemoration is necessary.*

Extensions Beyond the Lesson

- Have students explore additional 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.
- Encourage students to continue to 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.
- Subscribe to [Looking for Lincoln podcasts](#) to learn more about Black leaders along the Underground Railroad in Illinois.
- Check out the traveling exhibit, *Journey to Freedom Illinois' Underground Railroad*, in a community near you! Visit the www.IllinoisUGRR.org for more information.

Helpful Resources – Researching Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

General Information

- [National Park Service's Network to Freedom](#), including the [Interactive Map](#) showing sites and stories that may be associated with their assigned communities.
- [The Historical Marker Database](#)
- [Clio](#)

Chicagoland

- [Bronzeville Historical Society](#)
- [Historical documents offer glimpses of the Underground Railroad in Chicago - WBEZ Chicago](#)
- [Underground Railroad Memorial - Visit Oak Park](#)

Miller Grove

- [Underground Railroad: People of Miller Grove](#)
- [Miller Grove – The History of Southern Illinois](#)
- [Educating with Evidence – UGRR in Southern Illinois](#)

Galesburg

- [Underground Railroad Freedom Station - Knox College](#)
- [Exploring the role Galesburg played in the abolitionist movement and Underground Railroad - WQAD](#)
- [The Oneida Institute and The Galesburg Underground Railroad - Before Knox](#)

Brooklyn/Freedom Village

- [Brooklyn was an Underground Railroad community – The Alton Telegraph](#)
- [We Call It Freedom Village: Brooklyn, Illinois's Radical Tactics of Black Place-Making - Medium](#)
- [Uncovering the Underground Railroad's Hidden Past In The Metro East - STLPR](#)

Rocky Fork

- [Rocky Fork Underground Railroad Community \(1816 - \) - BLACKPAST](#)
- [Rocky Fork – Mythic Mississippi Project – University of Illinois](#)
- [A Return to Rocky Fork: Early People – Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau](#)

Lesson #5 – Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

New Philadelphia

- [On the Route to Freedom: The Underground Railroad and New Philadelphia - NPS](#)
- [New Philadelphia UGRR – Mythic Mississippi Project – University of Illinois](#)
- [New Philadelphia is Illinois' newest national park - IPM News](#)

Mount Hope

- [Underground Railroad – McLean County Museum of History](#)
- [Underground Railroad myths obscure history of movement – The Pantagraph](#)

Jacksonville

- [Underground Railroad - City of Jacksonville](#)
- [Woodlawn Farm](#)
- [Jacksonville African American History Museum](#)

Springfield

- [Springfield connections to the underground railroad – Illinois Times](#)
- [Lincoln's Springfield: The Underground Railroad – Richard Hart](#)
- [Old State Capitol in Springfield listed to National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network of Freedom](#)

Cairo

- [The Underground Railroad in Southern Illinois – The History of Southern Illinois](#)
- [The Cairo Historical Preservation Project](#)

Quincy

- [Quincy Underground Railroad Museum – Dr. Richard Eells House](#)
- [Eells House connects town with Underground Railroad – Historical Society of Quincy & Adams County](#)
- [Free Persons of Color and the Underground Railroad - Historical Society of Quincy & Adams County](#)

Name: _____

Locating Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

Illinois was a significant location during the Underground Railroad era of US history. Several communities were stops along the Underground Railroad or aided freedom seekers in other ways. To further explore these notable sites, let's research Illinois Underground Railroad communities together and also learn how these communities are continuing to keep this history alive today.

You will be assigned to research some Illinois Underground Railroad communities. In your research, you must locate each community in Illinois (using the attached map). You will also need to complete the following two tasks for your communities:

- *How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.*
- *How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?*

Then, each group will use their written responses to take turns introducing their assigned communities to the class. While this occurs, you are expected to take notes on the other communities presented to the class to not only locate the communities, but also learn about these stories together.

Lesson #5 – Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

Map of Several Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois



Match the communities listed with their locations on the map.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Chicagoland</i> | <i>Quincy</i> |
| <i>Miller Grove</i> | <i>Cairo</i> |
| <i>Galesburg</i> | <i>Springfield</i> |
| <i>Freedom Village/Brooklyn</i> | |
| <i>Rocky Fork</i> | <i>Jacksonville</i> |
| <i>New Philadelphia</i> | <i>Mount Hope</i> |

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____

Community #1: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #2: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #3: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #4: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #5: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #6: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Lesson #5 – Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois

Community #7: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #8: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #9: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #10: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Community #11: _____

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Summary Discussion Question

In recent years, more and more communities associated with the Underground Railroad have received commemorations, and their histories are being more widely shared. What lesser-told stories in history do you think deserve additional commemoration? Might there be local history in your community that deserves more recognition and commemoration? Explain your choice and why you feel additional commemoration is necessary.

Map of Several Underground Railroad Communities in Illinois-ANSWERS



Match the communities listed with their locations on the map.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Chicagoland</i> | <i>Quincy</i> |
| <i>Miller Grove</i> | <i>Cairo</i> |
| <i>Galesburg</i> | <i>Springfield</i> |
| <i>Freedom Village/Brooklyn</i> | |
| <i>Rocky Fork</i> | <i>Jacksonville</i> |
| <i>New Philadelphia</i> | <i>Mount Hope</i> |

1. Freedom Village/Brooklyn
2. Miller Grove
3. Rocky Fork
4. Galesburg
5. Chicagoland
6. Mount Hope
7. Jacksonville
8. Quincy
9. Springfield
10. Cairo
11. New Philadelphia

Community #1: Freedom Village/Brooklyn

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

1829 Priscilla Baltimore led eleven Black families across the Mississippi River into Illinois. They stopped in dense woods and called their settlement "Freedom Village." This was a place for both free and enslaved African Americans who fought against slavery. In 1837, a group of white farmers filled out the paperwork to create the town of Brooklyn, which included Freedom Village. Brooklyn grew as a community of both African Americans and European Americans. The 1880 census listed 371 African Americans and 203 European Americans.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #2: Miller Grove

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

In 1844, a few free African Americans from Tennessee founded Miller Grove. Over time, the population grew to include other families from Tennessee and some of their former enslavers. The settlement is now mostly gone. However, archaeology, oral history, and documents reveal its abolitionist activity and ties to the Underground Railroad. Crow Knob might have been a lookout point. Sand Cave is said to have been a hiding place for those seeking freedom.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #3: Rocky Fork

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

Long before statehood, the area of Rocky Fork—now within Godfrey—was already a passageway for Freedom Seekers. Abolitionists Don Alonzo Spaulding and Andrew T. Hawley bought this wild, dense land. They offered safety and work to Freedom Seekers and helped them become landowners. As more people arrived, they built a community. By 1839 they organized an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) group while they continued to support the Underground Railroad.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #4: Galesburg

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

Anti-slavery advocates came from upstate New York specifically to establish a town, found Knox College, and engage in the fight against slavery. From the beginning, the community became one of the leading Underground Railroad locations in what was then the West. Beecher Chapel hid Freedom Seekers in its cupola, and several Conductors lived in and around the community.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #7: Jacksonville

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

In the mid-1800s, people in Jacksonville sheltered dozens who freed themselves from the horrors of slavery. Among Illinois' most prominent abolitionists were Jonathan Turner and Edward Beecher, both of whom attended Illinois College. Several local historic homes offered safety on this journey to freedom. One of nine documented Underground Railroad sites in town, the Asa Talcott House is now home to the Jacksonville African American Museum.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #8: Quincy

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

A major port on the Mississippi River, across from the slave state of Missouri, Quincy was one of the most significant starting points on Illinois' Underground Railroad. While its population had notable abolitionists and Stationkeepers—including Dr. David Nelson, Dr. Richard Eells, John Van Doorn, Berryman and Esther Barnett, Charles Sidener, and brothers Simeon and Monroe Clark—it also included many pro-slavery advocates, making it a tense and dangerous place for everyone involved. The 1835 house of Dr. Richard Eells sheltered Freedom Seekers on the Underground Railroad. Today, it keeps the memory of these events as the Quincy Underground Railroad Museum.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #9: Springfield

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

As the center of State Government, Springfield generated restrictive Black Laws and supreme court decisions that benefited pro-slavery advocates. These judges, legislators, and their supporters circulated around Springfield and influenced the city's life. On the other hand, Springfield was an important center for the Underground Railroad. Local Conductors included William Butler, Luther Ransom, Jameson Jenkins, and William Donnegan.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #10: Cairo

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

At Illinois' southern tip, Cairo was a tense contradiction. Many of its residents supported slavery, like those in nearby states. At the same time, it was a major entry point for Freedom Seekers escaping southern states, including Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. Cairo's importance swelled when the Illinois Central Railroad arrived in 1856, bringing relatively fast travel to Chicago.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Community #11: New Philadelphia

How was this community involved in the Underground Railroad? Cite specific examples from your research.

New Philadelphia was the first town platted and legally registered by an African American before the American Civil War. A formerly enslaved man called "Free Frank" McWorter founded New Philadelphia in 1836. He sold land to buy his family out of slavery. He eventually paid for 15 relatives' freedom. The town grew as a bi-racial community and waystation on the Underground Railroad. Residents of New Philadelphia aided Freedom Seekers. The McWorter sons sometimes accompanied them all the way to Canada.

How does the community remember or commemorate this significant history today? Are there any historical markers in the community? Are there any museums or historic sites dedicated to preserving these stories? Are there any specialized groups or organizations working to keep history alive?

Answers may vary.

Summary Discussion Question

In recent years, more and more communities associated with the Underground Railroad have received commemorations, and their histories are being more widely shared. What lesser-told stories in history do you think deserve additional commemoration? Might there be local history in your community that deserves more recognition and commemoration? Explain your choice and why you feel additional commemoration is necessary.

Answers may vary.