

Underground Railroad Unessay Project

- Grade Level: 6-12
- Estimated Time: 1-2 weeks
- Topic: Underground Railroad
- Subtopic: Underground Railroad Overview
- **Important Notes:**
 - Students will need access to technology to complete project research. This could take place in class if technology is available or assigned as homework.
 - This project was adapted from the following source:
 - Bryan A. Banks, "The Unessay: A Creative and Audience-Focused Assignment, *Perspectives on History*, September 20, 2023.
<https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/the-unessay-a-creative-and-audience-focused-assignment-september-2023/>

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
 - Conventions and Knowledge of Language
- Social Science
 - Inquiry Skills
 - Recognize Perspectives and Articulate Identities
 - Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries
 - Evaluating Sources and Planning Inquiries
 - Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action
 - Disciplinary Concepts
 - Civics
 - Participation and Deliberation: Applying Civic Virtues and Democratic Principles
 - History
 - Change, Continuity, and Context
 - Perspectives
 - Historical Sources and Evidence
 - Causation and Argumentation

Essential Questions

- What was the Underground Railroad?
- What are some significant pieces of the Underground Railroad story in Illinois?
- How can we commemorate the Underground Railroad in Illinois?

Lesson #6 – Underground Railroad in Illinois Unessay Project

Objectives

- Identify significant pieces of the Underground Railroad story in Illinois.
- Examine primary and secondary sources relating to the Underground Railroad in Illinois.
- Evaluate the legacy of the Underground Railroad in Illinois.
- Commemorate the history of the Underground Railroad in Illinois creatively and respectfully.

Introduction

- Display the following prompt as students walk in and/or read it at the beginning of the class period.
 - *Think of the Underground Railroad. What is one fact you know about the Underground Railroad?*
 - *When thinking about the Underground Railroad, what would you like to learn more about? Why do you want to learn more about this particular topic?*
- Allow students 5-10 minutes to respond to the prompt.
- After students have responded, ask a few students to share their responses with the class.
- Once a few students have shared their responses, transition into the next portion of the lesson and let students know that today, students will have the opportunity to take on the role of historian and begin an in-depth research project about the Underground Railroad in Illinois 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.

Underground Railroad in Illinois Unessay Project Introduction

- Distribute and review the project overview and rubric.
- Students may choose to work independently or as a small group.
- Allow students adequate time to research their projects 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 the Underground Railroad in Illinois** with students to aid them in beginning their research.
- Provide guidance during research, especially when identifying trustworthy primary and secondary resources.
- If time allows, you may have students present their projects to the class either as part of the assignment or for extra credit.

Helpful Resources – Researching the Underground Railroad in Illinois

- [Looking for Lincoln](#)
 - Many resources and pieces of information that work tell the quality stories of Abraham Lincoln's life and times, including many stories associated with the Underground Railroad in Illinois.
- [National Park Service's Network to Freedom](#)
 - Includes the [Interactive Map](#) showing sites and stories.
- [The Historical Marker Database](#)
 - Try searching for historical markers related to the Underground Railroad in Illinois. There may be some near your community.
- [Clio](#)
 - Nearly 40,000 entries documenting historical and cultural points of interest across the country, including sites in Illinois.
- [The Underground Railroad in Illinois](#), a book by Glennette Tilley Turner
- [Enslavement and the Underground Railroad in Missouri and Illinois](#), a book by Julie Nicolai
- [Onward to Chicago: Freedom Seekers and the Underground Railroad in Northeastern Illinois](#), a book by Larry A. McClellan
- Search for notable freedom seekers, white allies, black leaders, and Underground Railroad communities near you. These stories may help narrow down a topic of focus for your project.

Underground Railroad in Illinois Unessay Project

You have been given the opportunity to work as a historian to complete in-depth research on a topic related to the Underground Railroad in Illinois. Often, historians are asked to describe their research for public audiences outside of typical written fashion. This can occur through documentaries, podcasts, historical fiction, graphic novels, comics, magazines, museum exhibits, and much more. During this project, you will work to complete research to make a creative "unessay" project that you are proud of. An unessay project asks students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding through any medium available, aside from a written essay. By the time this project is complete, you should be an expert on your chosen topic!

Project Requirements

- Your topic must be related to the Underground Railroad in Illinois. You may focus on a notable individual from the Underground Railroad era, a community where the Underground Railroad passed through, a historical event, an influential idea, or anything else, as long as it relates to the Underground Railroad in Illinois.
- You must demonstrate a high level of knowledge and understanding through any medium other than a written essay. Your project can take the form of a museum exhibit, podcast, comic, poster, slideshow, video, work of art, etc.
- You must show the utmost respect and care for this project and how you portray your chosen topic. Put the same level of appreciation into the project as if you were researching your family member, home, or personal life experience.

First Assigned Piece of the Project:

Conduct basic research to identify a topic that you are curious about.

Then, in a paragraph, write your project proposal addressing the following questions:

- *What is going to be your project's focus? What will be your research question(s)? Use this question to guide your research and ultimately work to answer it. Here are a few examples*
 - *Who was Susan Richardson and how did she help other freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad?*
 - *How was the city of Galesburg involved in the Underground Railroad?*
 - *Why were the Illinois Black Codes developed? Why were they repealed?*
- *How do you plan to present the project? Why did you choose this topic/presentation method?*
 - *We plan to produce a podcast on the life and work of William Donnegan.*
 - *We plan to produce a documentary about significant Underground Railroad-related history in Galesburg, Illinois.*
 - *I plan to curate a digital exhibit on the Illinois Black Codes and what led to their repeal.*

Unessay Project Rubric

Name: _____

Research Question: _____

Project Medium: _____

Category	5	4	3	2	0-1
Content (x2)	The project demonstrates a superb level of knowledge on the chosen topic.	The project demonstrates an above-average level of knowledge on the topic.	The project demonstrates an average level of knowledge and understanding on the topic.	The project demonstrates a low level of knowledge and understanding on the chosen topic.	The project demonstrates little or no knowledge and understanding on the chosen topic.
Historical Analysis of Research Question	The project shows an in-depth analysis of the chosen topic. A high amount of critical thought is evident.	The project shows adequate thought and analysis of the chosen topic.	The project is missing key points, but still shows some in-depth analysis and thought.	The project shows little in-depth thought about the chosen topic. Little effort is evident.	Very little evidence of critical analysis is shown.
Creativity	The project shows excellent creativity and/or unique thinking when presenting the chosen topic.	The project shows good creativity and/or unique thinking when presenting the chosen topic.	The project shows some creativity, and/or unique thinking when presenting the chosen topic.	The project shows little creativity, and/or unique thinking when presenting the chosen topic.	The project shows no creativity, and/or unique thinking when presenting the chosen topic.
Use of Sources	The project provides citations that informed or inspired the work. An excellent mixture of primary and secondary sources is cited.	The project provides citations that informed or inspired the work. A good mixture of primary and secondary sources is cited.	The project provides some citations that informed or inspired the work. Sources are cited but include some that may not be reliable or trustworthy.	The project provides a few citations. Unreliable or faulty sources are cited.	No citations are provided and/or most or all sources are unreliable.

Comments:

Grade: _____