

Harriet Tubman, Alias Moses: Joe's Journey

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By Carol Montgomery

Performance Time = about 9 1/2 minutes

Cast (8-12)

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Narrator 4

Joe

Old Ben*

William

Eliza

Peter

Friend*

Mr. Johnson

Harriet

*One person may play both roles. (Narrators may also double roles.)

** Suggestion: Have readers wear signs showing names of their characters.

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Harriet Tubman, Alias Moses: Joe's Journey

Adapted from Sarah Bradford's book:

Harriet Tubman, The Moses of Her People, published in 1869.

By Carol Montgomery

Narrator 1: Harriet Tubman, the simple woman who personally led three to four hundred slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad, told Sarah Bradford her life story.

Narrator 2: "Joe's Journey" is one story Harriet Tubman told Mrs. Bradford.

Narrator 1: On Harriet Tubman's seventh or eighth journey from Maryland to Canada a group of escaped slaves traveled with her.

Narrator 2: One incredible man was Joe.

Narrator 3: Joe had been hired out by his master to another plantation owner. Joe did an excellent job for six years—saving the plantation owner the trouble and expense of having an overseer in charge of his slaves.

Narrator 4: Joe became so valuable to the plantation owner that the owner determined to buy Joe at any cost. But, Joe's owner recognized Joe's worth and only relented to sell Joe for one thousand dollars down and another thousand dollars over time.

Narrator 1: In those days a thousand dollars was a LOT more money!

Narrator 2: The morning after the purchase the new master came riding down on a big horse with a piece of rawhide in his hand. He stopped in front of Joe's cabin...

Narrator 3: ... and required Joe to be whipped on his bare back—to teach Joe to obey. It didn't matter that Joe had been an excellent hired hand; now Joe was his property. This was the first lesson the owner gave his slaves.

Narrator 4: After Joe silently took his flogging, he pulled his shirt on over his bleeding back and said to himself.

Joe: This is the first (pause)...and the last.

Narrator 3: One night Joe took a boat, rowed down the river, and visited Old Ben, Harriet's father.

Joe: (determined) Next time Moses comes, let me know.

Old Ben: (nods) I surely will.

Narrator 4: Joe didn't have to wait long. Neither did the others who were waiting for Harriet Tubman to rescue them from slavery.

Narrator 2: Joe's brother William also disappeared from the plantation, along with Peter and Eliza. Other slaves were missing from other plantations.

William: Yes, sir! We hid in potato holes sometimes during the day. We didn't make a sound. We could hear them hunting us like we were animals! It was terrible. One time they passed just a few feet away from us!

Eliza: We were passed from friend to friend wearing different disguises. We never knew who could be a friend or who could be an enemy. But, Moses knew!

Peter: Sometimes we scattered and separated. Some traveled by boat, some by wagons, some by cars, and some by foot. Then we'd meet at the next station house.

Joe: I couldn't wait to get to Canada! I couldn't wait to get to freedom! Some of my favorite times were when we could talk, and laugh, and sing those hymns 'cause no one could hear us.

Narrator 1: Finally, they found themselves at the entrance of the long bridge which crosses the river at Wilmington, Delaware.

Friend: Psssst. Moses. I mean, Harriet. Don't cross the bridge; it's guarded by police. They've put up advertisements for Joe offering a BIG reward—two thousand dollars and all expenses paid for Joe's body in Easton Jail. And there are other rewards, plus the high price on your own head!

Harriet: (nods) I see. Lord, what do we do now?

Narrator 2: They separated the terrified group and hid them in houses of friends until other arrangements could be made.

William: Thank God for that businessman! He had two wagons filled with brick layers sent over the bridge for us. It looked just fine because they often crossed that bridge.

Eliza: Those brick layers went across that bridge singing and shouting on their way to get us. Then they waited until dark—just like they had been working all day. But, there was a secret when those two wagons of bricklayers crossed that bridge again.

Peter: All of us runaways were lying close in the bottom of those wagons. And the brick layers drove us across that bridge while they sang and shouted to one another again!

Joe: I was truly scared. But, we made it.

Narrator 1: They made it across that guarded bridge and they made it to New York to the anti-slavery office of Oliver Johnson.

Mr. Johnson: Well, Joe, I'm happy to see the man who is worth \$2000 to his master!

Joe: (dismayed) Oh, Master, how did you know me?

Mr. Johnson: Come see this ad. The description is so close no one could miss you!

Joe: (thoughtfully) And how far off is Canada?

Mr. Johnson: Here, look at this map. See the railroad tracks? It's more than three hundred miles to Niagara where you can cross the river and be free.

Joe: (heartbroken) Oh, no! How can we ever make it that far?

Harriet: (cheerfully) Come on, Joe! You can't give up now! The Lord has been with us in six troubles and he won't desert us in the seventh!

Narrator 3: But Joe was heartbroken.

Harriet: I remember from that time on, Joe was silent. He talked no more. He sang no more. He sat with this head on his hand and nobody could 'rouse him nor make him take any interest in anything.

Joe: (nods silently)

William: Praise God we passed along in safety in all of New York State!

Eliza: And, I'll never forget the look of that big suspension bridge over the river!

Peter: Neither will I. I knew when we made it half way across that bridge we'd be safe!

Joe: But, what if they had more policemen on that bridge? Or what if those hunters would stop us with the power of the law and drag us all back to slavery?

William: It was a good thing the other passengers on our train car were on our side. That way we could all sing; we were so excited.

Narrator 1: And they sang the following words.

William: (song-like; to the tune of “Oh! Susanna”’s first verse)
‘I’m on the way to Canada, that cold and dreary land.
The sad effects of slavery I can no longer stand.’

Peter: (song-like; to the tune of the end of the first verse “Oh! Susanna”)
‘I’ve served my Master all my days, without a dime reward.
And now I’m forced to run away to flee the lash abroad.’

William & Peter: (song-like; fits the chorus of “Oh! Susanna”)
‘Farewell, old Master; don’t think hard of me.

Eliza & Harriet: (song-like; fits the end of the chorus of “Oh Sussanna!”)
I’m traveling on to Canada where all the slaves are free.’

Eliza: (song-like; “Oh! Susanna”--first verse)
‘The hounds are baying on my track Old Master comes behind.
Resolved that he will bring me back before I cross the line.’

Harriet: (song-like; “Oh! Susanna”—end of first verse)
‘I’m now embarked for yonder shore where a man’s a man by law.
The iron hose will bear me o’er to shake the lion’s paw.’

Eliza & Harriet: (song-like; “Oh! Susanna”--chorus)
Oh, righteous Father, wilt thou not pity me?

William & Peter: (song-like; “Oh Sussanna!”—end of chorus)
And help me on to Canada, where all the slaves are free.

William: (song-like; “Oh! Susanna”--first verse)
Oh I heard Queen Victoria say, that if we would forsake,
Our native land of slavery and come across the lake

Peter: (song-like; “Oh! Susanna”—end of first verse)

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That she was standing on the shore with arms extended wide to give us all a peaceful home beyond the rolling tide.

William, Peter, & Eliza: : (song-like; "Oh! Susanna"--chorus)
Farewell, ole Master, don't think hard of me.

Harriet: I'm traveling on to Canada

William, Peter, Eliza, & Harriet: Where all the slaves are free.

Harriet: (excited) You hear the roar of that mighty waterfall in the distance? Sounds like the roar of a lion! Now, watch carefully out these windows and you'll see a beautiful sight!

Narrator 1: So they all crowded up to the windows.

Narrator 4: All except Joe.

Harriet: Joe, now aren't you even going to look? We're almost there! Look at the rise of the center of the bridge! That's the half-way point. Wait. (pause) Wait.

Narrator 2: As the bridge descended Harriet knew the line of danger was past. She leaped across to Joe's side of the car, nearly shook him out of his seat and shouted.

Harriet: (loudly) Joe! You've shook the lion's paw!

Joe: (shakes head in confusion)

Harriet: (louder) Joe, you're in Queen Victoria's dominion! You're a free man!

Narrator 3: Then Joe raised his head and his hands on high, his eyes streaming with tears. And according to Harriet Tubman he began to sing and shout the following song:

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Joe: Glory to God and Jesus, too, one more soul got safe.
Oh go and carry the news, one more soul got safe.

Harriet: Joe, come and look at the falls!

Joe: Glory to God and Jesus, too one more soul got safe!

Harriet: Joe! It's your last chance. Come and see the falls!

Joe: Glory to God and Jesus, too; one more soul got safe.

William: And guess who had the first feet to touch the free British soil of Canada after the conductor?

Eliza & Peter: Joe!

Harriet: The white ladies and gentlemen gathered around him 'til I couldn't see Joe for the crowd. I only heard his voice singing louder than ever.

Joe: Glory to God and Jesus, too!

Narrator 2: A sweet young lady took her fine handkerchief and handed it to Joe. Joe wiped the rivers of tears off his face.

Joe: Thank the Lord! There's only one more journey for me now and that's to heaven!

Narrators 1, 2, 3: The End

Narrator 4: Or (pause) the beginning of a new life.

Curriculum Links for “Harriet Tubman, Alias Moses: Joe’s Journey”

(Links active in 2010.)

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bradford/bradford.html>

Link to the original story of Harriet Tubman as told by Sarah Bradford, published in 1869. (Note: The story of Joe is told starting on page 27.)

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/tubman/>

Library of Congress list of online resources related to Harriet Tubman. Includes a black and white digital portrait of her that can be printed or downloaded. (Program cover?)

<http://myhero.com/go/hero.asp?hero=harriettubman>

Information and links on Harriet Tubman from The My Hero Project, celebrating “the best of humanity” and empowering young people to recognize their potential “to effect positive change in the world.”

<http://jfredmacdonald.com/rddf/railwaytofreedom.htm>

Script from Richard Durham’s Destination Freedom—scripts from Radio Black Legacy 1948-1950 “Railway to Freedom” originally broadcast July 4, 1948. This radio script includes songs and covers Harriet Tubman’s life. It’s very mature; appropriate for high school. (Note: Harriet was injured in her head and had periodic blackouts. This script creatively mentions her hearing voices—voices of slaves, voices of her people, and the voice of God. She says in the script, “I was Moses. I answered them.”) The script could be used to rewrite and adapt as a Readers Theater script in small groups. Give each group a part if you like the script.

http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1997/5/1997_5_105.shtml

American Heritage Magazine, Sept.1997, vol.48, issue 5 an article in the magazine’s Time Machine series highlights 1847 “One Hundred and Fifty Years Ago” with “Oh! Susanna”:

“...Despite its remoteness from authentic African-American music, Harriet Tubman adapted the song for passengers on her Underground Railroad (“Farewell, old master, don’t think hard of me / I’m on my way to Canada, where all the slaves are free”). The antislavery activist Sojourner Truth wrote her own version, which began, “I’m on my way to Canada, that cold but happy land / The dire effects of slavery I can no longer stand.”

<http://www.pdmusic.org/foster/scf48d.mid>

Stephen Foster’s song, “Oh! Susanna” was published in 1848 and became quite popular. Apparently, this is the tune that the slaves sang to the words about Canada. This site has info on Foster, plus an instrumental audio of the song.

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