

# Underground Railroad Codes

By Carol Montgomery

Performance Time = about 3 minutes

Readability = Grade 6.3 (multi-syllabic words)

## Cast (8+):

(Note: Names may be assigned to speakers.):

Leader	Speaker 3
Overseer	Speaker 4
Speaker 1	Speaker 5
Speaker 2	Speaker 6

Chorus (May include all speakers except the Leader.)

(Optional: The students could add more narrations on other code words such as “heaven” or “Promised Land” meaning Canada or freedom.)

(NOTE: At our website, this is one of several free Readers Theater scripts useful for any study on the Underground Railroad or to help celebrate Black History Month.)



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**Leader:** The Underground Railroad.

**Chorus:** The Underground Railroad.

**Leader:** Saved many slaves.

**Chorus:** Saved many slaves.

**Leader:** The Underground Railroad.

**Chorus:** The Underground Railroad.

**Leader:** Used secret codes.

**Chorus:** Used secret codes.

**Speaker 1:** No real train tracks existed for the Underground Railroad. It meant a secret way slaves used to escape to freedom.

**Speaker 2:** Many people did not believe in slavery. Some of them sheltered runaway slaves in their safe house illegally—even in secret hiding spots.

**Speaker 1:** These safe houses, used for a stop of a few hours to several days, were called **stations**. The person who ran the safe house was the **stationmaster**.

**Speaker 2:** A stationmaster often fed the runaway slaves. A good stationmaster with a safe house station could help hundreds of runaways.

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**Speaker 3:** The fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad had many code names. To keep runaways safe they could be called **travelers, passengers, baggage, or cargo.**

**Speaker 4:** A runaway could arrive at a safe house station almost any way. Sometimes even a group or family of runaways showed up.

**Speaker 3:** These **passengers** could arrive under a wagon delivery of straw, bricks, or vegetables. Or, they could sneak to the safe house station under the cover of darkness. Sometimes the stationmaster knew when to expect runaways because he was told about the **shipment** coming.

**Speaker 4:** Many times a guide helped people travel on the Underground Railroad. The guide's code name was often **Conductor.**

**Speaker 5:** One of the most famous conductors on the Underground Railroad was Harriet Tubman. Harriet had been a slave herself and knew the horrors of slavery.

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**Speaker 6:** Once when Harriet was thirteen she ran after a slave boss--an overseer--chasing a runaway slave. The runaway tried to hide in a small country store, but the overseer followed him.

**Speaker 5:** When Harriet appeared in the doorway the angry overseer yelled to her,

**Overseer:** (loud and angry) You girl! Help me tie this man up!

**Speaker 5:** But, Harriet didn't budge and the slave ran past her.

**Speaker 6:** The overseer tried to stop the runaway by throwing a two pound weight. The weight hit Harriet in the head leaving a permanent injury and sudden strange blackouts the rest of her life.

**Overseer:** Harriet Tubman eventually escaped slavery and helped conduct over three hundred other runaway slaves to freedom. Her code name was **Moses**.

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**Leader:** The Underground Railroad.

**Chorus:** The Underground Railroad.

**Leader:** Was Freedom's Trail

**Chorus:** Was Freedom's Trail

## Curriculum Links: (Valid April, 2017)

<http://www.42explore2.com/undergrd.htm>

More links and ideas on this one site than you have time to explore)

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_lesson/lesson101.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson101.shtml)

(activity ideas and links)

<http://www.freedomcenter.org>

(website for Ohio's National Underground Railroad Freedom Center; has information on slavery today—human trafficking)

## You Tube: (Valid April, 2017)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PohCmDe7kIY>

Wonderful, four-minute slide show on Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad done by students reading their script.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePJajGdbEug&feature=related>

“A Woman Called Moses” is a well-done, one-minute slide show by a student reading her script.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZStWWVqkh0>

A fully dramatized one-minute film clip entitled “A Part of Our Heritage—Underground Railroad.” Let this clip load all the way before you play it. The drama could make some cry, but there is no violence. You really must see this and see if it's appropriate for your students. There is nothing like experiencing history with your own emotions.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlwDAwKNfTU>

Well-done 6 1/2 min slide show by another student entitled, “Digital Story: Secrets and Codes of the Underground Railroad.” The author even dips slightly into the secret codes on some quilts hung out to air.

