

Beyond the Page: Freedom River

Subject: Language Arts, Social Studies

Running time: 18 minutes

Objectives

The student will:

- gain a better understanding of the book *Freedom River*, written by Doreen Rappaport and illustrated by Bryan Collier;
- be motivated to read more books and find out more about the author, illustrator, and subject matter; and
- learn about the Underground Railroad.

Synopsis of the Book

This book is based on a true story about John Parker, an ex-slave who bought his own freedom. Parker owned an iron foundry in Ohio, a free state, before the Civil War. Crossing the Ohio River into Kentucky, a slave state, this selfless man “conducted” many escaped slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad. His dangerous journeys demanded courage, self-sacrifice, and careful planning. *Freedom River* tells how John Parker risked his life to rescue a couple and their baby.

Synopsis of the Video

At the Beyond the Page Café, Today's Special is *Freedom River*, written by Doreen Rappaport and illustrated by Bryan Collier. Shelley, the Café's star storyteller, reads the story aloud to the young patrons as we view an animation of Collier's illustrations. The illustrator combined paper collage and watercolor painting to create scenes for this compelling true story. After the reading, the kids watch a video about the Underground Railroad. They learn that it was not a railroad at all, but a network of dedicated people who guided enslaved people to freedom. Next the children have an online chat with Bryan Collier, the illustrator, who shows them how he made the collages for *Freedom River*, and with author, Doreen Rappaport, who reveals where she got the idea for the book.

Preview Questions

1. Have you ever heard of the Underground Railroad? What was it, and how did it help enslaved African Americans? Can you think of any people who helped on the Underground Railroad?
2. What is a collage and how is it made?

Post-Viewing Questions

1. Why did John Parker risk his life to help Isaac, Sarah, and their baby?
 2. What did you learn about the Underground Railroad?
 3. At the Beyond the Page Café, kids get information from books, videos and the Internet. If you wanted to learn more about the Underground Railroad, what media would you choose? Explain your choices.
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Related Activities

1. Ask students to imagine that they are Sarah or Isaac. Have them write the journal entries of their journey to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Be sure they include the dangers they face, the route they follow, the people who help them, and information about their final destination and new home.
2. In the online chat, Bryan Collier demonstrates how he makes collages with magazines and watercolors. Have students use watercolors and photos from magazines to create their own collages. Point out to students the magazine photos of wood, clouds, and foliage in *Freedom River* that give the illustrations detail, realism, and texture. Help them look for photos with interesting patterns.
3. Have students recall the online chat with Bryan Collier, the illustrator, and Doreen Rappaport, the author of *Freedom River*. Help students formulate their own questions for the author and illustrator. Encourage them to send their questions and comments to Collier and Rappaport at the following address:

Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier
c/o Hyperion Books for Children
114 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011-5690

Resources

Disney Educational Productions

www.Edustation.Disney.com

Additional information, including books, videos, and Web links.

National Education Technology Standards Project

www/cnets.iste.org/index2.html

(Scroll to Search Lessons. Pull down Awesome Authors.)

The Underground Railroad

www.nationalgeographic.com/features/99/railroad/

This Website features a simulated journey on the Underground Railroad. The site also provides a timeline, a map showing Underground Railroad routes, resources, and links.

Edwards, Pamela Duncan, *Barefoot: Escape on the Underground Railroad*; illustrated by Henry Cole (HarperCollins Children's Books, 1998).

Shroeder, Alan, *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman*; illustrated by Jerry Pinkney (Penguin Putnam, 1996).