



Harriet Jacobs Field Trip Pre, Post, and On-Site Activities

Pre-Field Trip Activities

1. Students should complete the attached lesson plan on the Life of Harriet Jacobs, supplemented with reading from *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.
2. Students should read **Escape to Freedom** provided in this unit which gives a brief biography of Harriet Jacobs and tells the story of her escape from slavery.
3. Teachers may use the Lesson Plan: **The Life and Times of Harriet Jacobs** (attached) as a pre-visit activity or a stand-alone classroom lesson. Classes preparing for a field trip to the site should familiarize

Post-Field Trip Activities

1. Have students write an essay on the part of the Harriet Jacobs' story that was most compelling for them. Have students share their stories with the class.
2. Have students take the Post-Visit Quiz (attached) to assess their comprehension of the information shared at the site.
3. The teacher may choose a supplemental lesson plan of their own to summarize the field trip.

On-Site Field Trip Activities

The Harriet Jacobs field trip is designed and suggested for students 8th grade and above, though accommodations can be made for younger groups. The walking tour lasts approximately 1.5 hours and is a combination of sitting, walking, and standing. Tour begins from the Visitor's Center at 108 N. Broad Street and progresses throughout 5 different stops in downtown Edenton that are mentioned in the Harriet Jacobs narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Caution should be taken during traffic intersections and sidewalk walking.

An open-hearth cooking demonstration activity is available as a compliment to this tour. Students will be able to see what cooking over a hearth is like while learning more about Molly Horniblow's reputation as a successful tea and cracker bakery owner.

Supplemental Lesson Plan: The Life and Times of Harriet Jacobs

Harriet Jacobs, born enslaved in Edenton, North Carolina, escaped to the North at the age of 29, gaining her full and legal freedom ten years later. While living the life of a fugitive slave or freedom-seeker, Jacobs became an anti-slavery activist and an abolitionist author. By the time of the Civil War, as a free African American woman, Jacobs served as a relief worker dedicated to assisting the newly freed people of her southern homeland. This lesson will examine the remarkable life of Harriet Jacobs' through her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Competency Goals

This lesson and corresponding field trip can be used in partial fulfillment of the following:

NCSCOS Grade 8: SS 4.04; 3.04, RL.8.3; 5.6; 9-10.2

Objectives

After classroom discussion, historical background reading and examining the selections written by Harriet Jacobs, students should be able to:

- summarize the life experiences of Harriet Jacobs.
- analyze the impact of Jacobs' writing.
- list some of the hardships faced by enslaved people, freedom-seekers, and freedmen in the antebellum and post-war periods.
- understand and describe the Maritime Underground Railroad.

Teacher Planning

Provide the following materials either through web access to the Educational Unit or through handouts downloaded via the web site.

Escape to Freedom: The Life of Harriet Jacobs

Access to Internet

Glossary of terms found in the primary source

Time Requirement

The reading of Jacob's book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* may take several days. Teachers can adapt this lesson to fit the time limits of their class.

Bell Ringer Activity

Before the lesson begins, have students write their definition of slavery. Have them include a sentence or two on what they think are the most difficult circumstance an enslaved person would face.

Teacher Input

A. Teachers should preview *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* prior to making assignments to students. Teachers will need to explain to the students that some of the subject matter and language used in slave narratives might be difficult or disturbing.

B. Students will need access to websites listed in the lesson.

Classroom Activities: Guided Practice

1. Have students read the brief biography of Harriet Jacobs, **Escape to Freedom: The Life of Harriet Jacobs** (attached).

2. Divide the class into groups and assign each group a selected chapter from ***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*** to read. The text is available online at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>.
 - a. Have each group summarize its selection for the class.

3. Project the image of the front page of ***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*** for the class to see or provide as a handout. Discuss this image and have students answer the following questions.
 - a. Why do you think Harriet Jacobs did not name herself as the author? In the preface by the author, Jacobs signs the name Linda Brent. Why did she not use her real name and why did she change all the names of the individuals in the narrative?
 - b. Why did she state “Written by Herself”? Why is this important?
 - c. For what audience was this book written?
 - d. What does it mean for a book to be “Published for the Author”?

4. After Harriet ran away from Dr. Norcom’s plantation, Norcom advertised a reward for her return. Project, or make available as a handout, the runaway ad that Dr. Norcom placed in the *American Beacon* newspaper of Norfolk, Virginia in June, 1835 regarding Jacobs (attached). Have the students answer the following questions either in classroom discussion or individually on paper:
 - a. How does Norcom describe Harriet?
 - b. What skills does he say that she has?
 - c. What does he say is her reason for running away?
 - d. Where does he think she may be?
 - e. How much reward is he offering for her capture and return?
 - f. What does the amount say about the value he placed on her?

5. Have students read the information on the Maritime Underground Railroad found at The Historical Marker Database <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=34770> Project, or have as a handout, the “Caution!!” broadside provided in this lesson (attached). Have students answer the following questions either in classroom discussion or individually on paper:
 - a. This poster or broadside was created in response to what law?
 - b. Who created this poster?
 - c. Who had been deputized to help the slave catchers? Why had the decision been made to do this?

- d. What attitude is demonstrated by this poster?
- e. What is the main difficulty in using this poster and others like it as a means of communicating to enslaved people who sought freedom?

Classroom Activities: Independent Practice

1. Have students read the slave narrative of William Henry Singleton of Craven County, North Carolina as homework. Text found at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/singleton/singleton.html#sing7>
2. Have students write an essay comparing and contrasting the experiences of Harriet Jacobs and William Henry Singleton.

Closure

Have students look back at their initial definition of slavery and the most difficult circumstance they felt an enslaved person would face. Ask them to discuss how their concept of slavery has changed after reading the slave narratives.

Assessment

Have students write an essay about the portion of the Harriet Jacobs story that was most compelling for them. Have students share their stories with the class.

For Further Study

Selected websites that may be useful:

<http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/digs/www97255> Online version of *Incidents*

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/bio.html> Brief biography of Harriet Jacobs

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/support4.html> 1864 letter from Harriet and Louisa Jacobs

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/support11.html> Request from son of owner for help in getting a job with the Freedmen's Bureau

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html> PBS Underground Railroad

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/texts.html> North American Slave Narratives – Documenting the American South

Escape to Freedom: The Life of Harriet Jacobs

The life story of Harriet Ann Jacobs (pictured), born an enslaved girl in Edenton, North Carolina in 1813, gives insight into the horrors faced by the enslaved, their desire for freedom, and their struggle to achieve freedom. Harriet shared her story with the world through her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published anonymously in 1861, at the outbreak of the Civil War. Her story of resistance and escape, after hiding for nearly seven years in an attic, added to the growing body of anti-slavery, abolitionist literature.



Harriet began life unaware of her enslaved status. She stated in the opening line of her narrative, "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away."¹ She lived with her mother, Delilah, a slave of Margaret Horniblow, until she was six-years-old. When her mother died, she fell under Horniblow's direct charge, learning to sew as well as read and write. It wasn't until the death of her mistress in 1825 that she experienced the harsher realities of slavery. Margaret Horniblow willed twelve-year-old Jacobs to her three-year-old niece, Mary Matilda Norcom. Because her new owner was only a child, Jacobs had to answer directly to Mary Matilda's father, Dr. James Norcom. It was under his authority that Harriet first experienced the sexual harassment that was common for many female slaves.



Jacobs resisted Norcom (pictured on left), and in an effort to discourage his advances, she began a relationship with a white neighbor and lawyer by the name of Samuel Tredwell Sawyer. This relationship resulted in two children named Joseph and Louisa Matilda. Dr. Norcom continued to harass Harriet and in 1835 threatened that if she did not give in to his demands, he would send her from his town house and force her to work as a field hand at one of his plantations. Harriet steadfastly held her ground and Norcom followed through with his threat. Upon learning that Norcom also planned to send her children

to the plantation, to be "broke in"² as she later wrote in her book, Jacobs decided to run away. Her hope was that Norcom would no longer feel the need to use the children as pawns to get Jacobs to comply with his demands once she was gone. If she was successful, she believed he would sell the children. Jacobs went into hiding and, shortly thereafter, through a slave broker, Sawyer purchased their two children along with Harriet's brother John. Sawyer allowed the children to continue to live with Jacobs' grandmother, Molly Horniblow, a free black woman who earned her living as a baker. Samuel Tredwell Sawyer (pictured on right) did not, however, legally emancipate the children.³



Harriet hid in the homes of friends initially and eventually came to hide in an attic crawl space over the storeroom off the porch of her grandmother's house on West King Street in Edenton. For nearly seven years, Jacobs stayed in the cramped space measuring nine feet long by seven feet wide and only three feet high at its highest point. Norcom looked for Jacobs without success. He advertised for her return and traveled north in search of her. Little did he know, however, that she was often directly above him when he came to Molly Horniblow's house, hoping to catch Jacobs there. Harriet remained hidden, only venturing out of her self-induced prison for brief spells at night to straighten her back and exercise her limbs. To fool Norcom, Jacobs wrote letters which indicated she was in the North. She then had the letters smuggled north and mailed back to Edenton. If Norcom intercepted the letters and read them, he would continue to think she had left Edenton. Many years later, Jacobs recalled her time hiding in the attic in this excerpt from a letter to her friend Ednah Dow Cheney:

I am sitting under the old roof twelve feet from the spot where I suffered all the crushing weight of slavery. Thank God, the bitter cup is drained of its last dreg. There is no more need of hiding places to conceal slave Mothers. Yet it was little to purchase the blessings of freedom. I could have worn this poor life out there to save my Children from the misery and degradation of Slavery.⁴

In 1842, Jacobs escaped Edenton on a boat leaving out of Edenton harbor, arriving first in Philadelphia and later making her way by rail to New York. Many freedom-seekers made similar journeys escaping through southern ports and traveling coastal waterways because maritime jobs were frequently held by black men. Such routes ultimately became known as the Maritime Underground Railroad, leading to free states such as Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts and beyond. However, simply getting to the North did not mean that runaways could truly live free, especially when Congress strengthened the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. To truly attain freedom, a freedom-seeker would have to either travel all the way to Canada or find a way to purchase themselves or be purchased by people who intended to aid them in their cause.

In New York, Jacobs found work as a nursemaid to the Willis family, prominent abolitionists, who sheltered her from runaway slave catchers. Now under constant threat of capture, Jacobs began to develop into an abolitionist and activist in her own right. Norcom died in 1850 but the threat to Jacobs did not disappear. For two more years, she evaded capture by fleeing to Massachusetts when word arrived that she was in danger. Eventually, Mr. Willis purchased Jacobs from Norcom's daughter and granted her freedom in 1852.

Jacobs moved to Rochester, N.Y. and began to work with her brother, John S. Jacobs, an abolitionist lecturer at the Anti-Slavery Office and Reading Room. Here, she met and befriended Amy Post and other anti-slavery feminists. Encouraged by Post to write her story, Harriet Jacobs began to develop the manuscript for *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in 1853. Although completed in 1858, it was not published until 1861. Jacobs did not identify herself as the author, nor did she use any real names in the narrative. The preface, written by Lydia Maria

Child, a well-known feminist abolitionist and author, lent credence to the narrative. The book was not merely the story of one enslaved woman but also an appeal for the abolition of slavery:

*In view of these things, why are ye silent, ye free men and women of the north? Why do your tongues falter in maintenance of the right? Would that I had more ability! But my heart is so full, and my pen is so weak! There are noble men and women who plead for us, striving to help those who cannot help themselves. God bless them!*⁵

Jacobs spent the Civil War years speaking against slavery and volunteering among the U.S. Colored Troops and contrabands in refugee camps in Washington, D.C. and Alexandria, Va. There, she offered the following words at a flag presentation for soldiers:

*Soldiers, what we have got, came through the strength and valor of your right arms. Three years ago this flag had no significance for you, we could not cherish it as our emblem of freedom. You then had no part in the bloody struggle for your country, your patriotism was spurned; but to-day you are in arms for the freedom of your race and the defense of your country—to-day this flag is significant to you. Soldiers you have made it the symbol of freedom for the slave, unfurl it, stand by it and fight for it, until the breeze upon which it floats shall be so pure, that a slave cannot breathe its air.*⁶

She and her daughter Louisa also established a school for freedmen in Alexandria. In describing it, she stated in a letter dated April 13, 1863:

*I must say one word about our schools. We have 125 scholars; we have no paid teachers as yet, the children have been taught by convalescent soldiers, who kindly volunteer their services until called to join their regiment.*⁷

Throughout the Reconstruction era, they continued relief work. Harriet even visited Edenton in 1867 to assist the freedmen in that area.

Jacobs died in Washington, D.C. in 1897. Her words offer a view that expands past her own lifetime. In a letter regarding a fair to raise funds for "disabled colored soldiers," Jacobs predicted:

*I see the dawning of a better future for us. Since the Presidential election, I feel that this Republic will live, and in her new life learn justice and a broader humanity to the race she has hitherto despised—a race which, by its present bearing, is awakening respect from its stoutest opponents.*⁸

NOTES:

1. Jacobs, Harriet, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 5.
2. Jacobs, Harriet, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 94.
3. Jacobs, Harriet, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), xvii.
4. Harriet Jacobs to Rev. J. Sella Martin. 13 April 1863. *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Vol. 2: 715.
5. Jacobs, Harriet, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 30.
6. Harriet Jacobs to Rev. J. Sella Martin. 13 April 1863. *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Vol. 2: 578.
7. Harriet Jacobs to Rev. J. Sella Martin. 13 April 1863. *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Vol. 2: 478.
8. Harriet Jacobs to Rev. J. Sella Martin. 13 April 1863. *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Vol. 2: 610.

\$100 REWARD

WILL be given for the apprehension and delivery of my Servant Girl **HARRIET**. She is a light mulatto, 21 years of age, about 5 feet 4 inches high, of a thick and corpulent habit, having on her head a thick covering of black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address. Being a good seamstress, she has been accustomed to dress well, has a variety of very fine clothes, made in the prevailing fashion, and will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery. As this girl absconded from the plantation of my son without any known cause or provocation, it is probable she designs to transport herself to the North.

The above reward, with all reasonable charges, will be given for apprehending her, or securing her in any prison or jail within the U. States.

All persons are hereby forewarned against harboring or entertaining her, or being in any way instrumental in her escape, under the most rigorous penalties of the law.

JAMES NORCOM.

Edenton, N. O. June 30

STANW

CAUTION!!

COLORED PEOPLE

OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,

You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and advised, to avoid conversing with the

Watchmen and Police Officers of Boston,

For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR & ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as

KIDNAPPERS

AND

Slave Catchers,

And they have already been actually employed in KIDNAPPING, CATCHING, AND KEEPING SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY, and the *Welfare of the Fugitives* among you, *Shun* them in every possible manner, as so many *HOUNDS* on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.

Keep a Sharp Look Out for
KIDNAPPERS, and have
TOP EYE open.

APRIL 24, 1851.

Glossary of Terms

broke in – subdued completely; crushed the spirit, resistance or strength of an animal or a person; trained to be obedient; tamed.

convalescent – a state of recovering health and strength gradually after injury or sickness.

contrabands – enslaved people who escaped to or were brought to Union lines during the war. Contrabands were later called freedmen.

crawl space – a shallow unfinished space beneath the first floor or under the roof of a building; literally, a space only large enough to crawl through.

credence – mental acceptance as true or real; credibility.

degradation – a decline to a low, demoralized, or impoverished state.

emancipate – to free from restraint, control, or the power of another; to free from bondage; manumission.

Fugitive Slave Law (1850) – part of the Compromise of 1850, which required authorities in free states to return runaway slaves to their masters.

sexual harassment – uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature, especially by a person in authority toward a subordinate.

Post-Visit Quiz

The Life and Times of Harriet Jacobs

1. Why did Harriet not use her real name or that of others in her narrative?
2. What does it mean for a book to be “Published for the Author”?
3. How does Dr. Norcom describe Harriet?
4. What does he say is her reason for running away, and where did he think she was hiding or living?
5. How much reward was offered for her capture and return?
6. Who created the reward advertisement? What attitude is demonstrated by the advertisement?
7. What was the Maritime Underground Railroad? How did Harriet use this as a means of escape?
8. Where did Harriet hide from Dr. Norcom while in Edenton? Describe her living conditions while hiding in her pursuit of freedom.
9. Who was Molly Horniblow? Why was she important to Harriet?
10. After escaping to the North, what kind of life did Harriet lead?
11. How did Harriet officially acquire freedom?
12. What was an abolitionist?
13. What was a freedom-seeker?