

HARRIET TUBMAN Reading Comprehension

Harriet Tubman was one of the most famous American women in history. She was born on March 10, 1821, in Dorchester County, Maryland, the daughter of slaves on a Maryland plantation. Her original name was Araminta Ross, and she was nicknamed "Minty." From an early age, she worked as a servant at the plantation house. As a teenager, she suffered a vicious head wound as she tried to protect a fellow slave from a beating. According to legend, the woman who was beating the other slave hurled a two-pound weight, hitting Harriet in the head. Her injury would haunt her for the remainder of her life, resulting in periodic fainting spells.

Tubman spent her early life as a slave. In 1844, she married a free black man named John Tubman, who would prove disloyal. Life as a slave was extremely difficult. They were forced to work in the merciless heat without rest. They were often beaten and forced to live in poor conditions. In the early and mid 1800s, slaves were often sold to Southern plantations where they would never have contact with their families again. Harriet was a particularly strong and powerful woman who could be sold for a hefty sum. Fearing that she was about to be sold, Harriet resolved to run away. Despite the brutal punishment that would be inflicted upon her if she was caught, Harriet took off in the middle of the night sometime in 1849 and headed north to freedom. She gained assistance along the way by abolitionist Quaker families who hung specially designed carpets or lights on the outside of their houses as a sign that runaway slaves were welcome and would receive help. She traveled by night through the dense woodlands of Maryland, guided north by the North Star and the moss that grew on the north side of the trees. She eventually made it to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a free city where she landed a job and saved money. After living in Philadelphia for two years, Harriet decided to return to Maryland, in the hopes of freeing her family members. She succeeded in guiding her sister and mother to freedom along the same path that she had taken. This path became known as the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a network of woodland paths scattered throughout parts of the South that led to freedom in the North. Harriet returned again and guided her father and brother to freedom.

Soon, Harriet became known as the "conductor" on the Underground Railroad and made more daring trips to the South to guide more slaves to their freedom. Harriet devised strategies to trick various parties that tried to capture her. If she was traveling with a baby, she would use herbal drugs to ensure it didn't cry. She made sure that she traveled on Saturdays as "runaway notices" in Southern newspapers could not be printed until Monday. Harriet's daring "forays" continued to elude slave hunters who were offered huge bounties for returning slaves to their owners. By 1856, a \$40,000 bounty was placed on her capture—dead or alive. She became a serious threat to Southern plantation owners who made large investments in their slaves. In one famous story, Harriet was close to being captured at a bus station. To avoid capture, she pulled out a book and pretended to read. Since nearly all slaves were illiterate, the hunters simply ignored her and continued their search.

By 1860, Tubman was said to have completed 19 successful journeys on the Underground Railroad, freeing as many as 300 slaves. She was never captured, nor were any of her "passengers." During the Civil War, she served as a cook, nurse, and spy for the Union Army. After the war, she settled in Troy, New York, where she would die in 1913.

1.) Which of the following was an EFFECT of Harriet's head injury?

- a.) She suffered from fainting spells.
- b.) She became a conductor on the Underground Railroad.
- c.) She married a free black man.
- d.) She was sold to another family.

2.) Which of the following best describes the Underground Railroad?

- a.) A network of trains and railroad tracks that led slaves to freedom in the North
- b.) A network of paths and forest trails that led slaves to freedom in the West
- c.) A network of paths and forest trails that led slaves to freedom in the South
- d.) A network of paths and forest trails that led slaves to freedom in the North.

3.) Which of the following did Harriet NOT take into consideration in her quest for freedom?

- a.) The position of the North Star
- b.) The disappointment of her owners when they learned she had runaway
- c.) Specially designed carpets on the outsides of houses friendly to runaway slaves
- d.) The tendency of moss to grow on the north side of trees

4.) Which of the following questions is answered in the last paragraph?

- a.) Was Harriet Tubman able to read or write?
- b.) How did Harriet Tubman contribute to the Union Army in the Civil War?
- c.) How did Harriet Tubman avoid capture on the Underground Railroad?
- d.) What happened to Harriet's husband?

5.) Who helped Harriet in her escape to freedom?

- a.) the people of Maryland
- b.) her husband
- c.) Quaker families
- d.) the police

6.) Harriet Tubman suffered a head injury while...

- a.) Falling.
- b.) lifting heavy weights.
- c.) working in the fields.
- d.) protecting a fellow slave.

7.) Harriet Tubman helped as many as _____ slaves to their freedom.

- a.) 300
- b.) 40,000
- c.) 40
- d.) 100

8.) Why did Harriet Tubman travel on Saturdays?

- a.) Because runaway notices would be printed on Sundays
- b.) Because she was too tired during the work week
- c.) To get a head start on the runaway notices that would appear in Monday newspapers
- d.) Because slave hunters never worked on Saturdays

9.) Why did Harriet Tubman ultimately run away from her owners?

- a.) She was very strong
- b.) To reunite with her husband
- c.) She was afraid she would be sold
- d.) To find better pay in the North

10.) What does the word "illiterate" mean in the following sentence?

Since nearly all slaves were illiterate, the hunters simply ignored her and continued their search.

- a.) captured
- b.) unable to read or write
- c.) slow
- d.) quiet