

The Underground Railroad

Read the text and answer the questions.

The “Underground Railroad” was not a railroad at all. The Underground Railroad was a network of people, routes, and safe places that helped runaway slaves escape to freedom—usually to the Northern states and Canada. Many people, both white and black, in the North and South, took part in this secretive effort.



The Underground Railroad was very dangerous for runaway slaves. As fugitives, they risked being caught and punished by their masters. Owners placed advertisements in local newspapers, offering rewards for the capture and return of their escaped slaves!

Free blacks in the North were not safe either. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, many free blacks in northern states were kidnapped and sold as slaves. Free black men received very little protection from the law.

Abolitionists were people in the North and South who wanted to end slavery. Many abolitionists aided fugitive slaves along the Underground Railroad. But, being a part of the Underground Railroad was breaking the law, and not all abolitionists were willing to do that. Abolitionists who helped runaway slaves risked fines and imprisonment under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

To protect everyone involved in the Underground Railroad, nothing was written down. All communication was oral, or “word-of-mouth,” and spoken in secret code. Safe houses, called “stations” or “depots” were places where fugitive slaves, called “passengers” hid, ate, and slept. These “stations” were run by “stationmasters,” who were ordinary people that offered protection to fugitive slaves. “Stockholders” were people sympathetic to the slaves, who would donate money or goods. And those who guided the “passengers” were known as “conductors.” The secret paths along the Underground Railroad were called “lines.” Even the railroad itself had a name: “The Freedom Train.” The Underground Railroad’s final destination was Canada, which many slaves called the “Promised Land.”

PART A: Use the text to answer the vocabulary questions.

1. A. Use the text to define "Underground Railroad."
B. What is the significance of the word "underground"?
C. Why was it called a "railroad"?
D. Is "Underground Railroad" figurative or literal? Explain.
E. Why was the Underground Railroad created?
2. What is a synonym for fugitives as it is used in the text?
3. A. Define abolitionists as it is used in the text.
B. Why were some abolitionists involved in the Underground Railroad?
Why were some not involved?

PART B: Use the text to infer whether each statement is **true** or **false**. Write **T** for true and **F** for false. Then for each statement, explain "why."

4. _____ The laws against helping slaves discouraged some abolitionists from participating in the Underground Railroad.
5. _____ When fugitive slaves reached the Northern free states, they were safe from capture.
6. _____ The Fugitive Slave Act made the journey to freedom easier.
7. _____ Slave catchers were not allowed to hunt fugitive slaves in Canada.

PART C: Use the text to complete the graphic organizer by identifying the people and places of the Underground Railroad.

