

## Building the Underground Railroad Performance Tasks

The following performance tasks adhere to the goals, compelling questions, and academic standards that framed the Building the Underground Railroad Tour. Each assessment addresses at least one compelling question and Dimension 3 and/or Dimension 4 from the C3 Framework. We encourage teachers to modify the performance tasks to meet the needs of their classroom and students.

**Tour Goals:** Our goals are to:

- provide the information needed to facilitate conversations about race and slavery in our culture and society
- inspire and teach how to apply the principles and methods of the Underground Railroad to pursue inclusive freedom and promote social justice for all

### **Compelling Questions**

- Why is it important to learn about slavery in the U.S.?
- Why is it important to learn about the Underground Railroad?
- Why is it important to learn about social justice?

---

## **What can Conductors Teach Us about the Underground Railroad?**

Developing Claims and Using Evidence: D3.3

Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions: D4.1; D4.3

Build upon students' understandings of conductors on the Underground Railroad by having them research additional narratives. Using the same format provided on their museum tour student packet, students will be assigned and research an Underground Railroad conductor not featured during their visit (Appendix C). Then, they will use comparing and contrasting, and peer sharing to generate a list of common characteristics of conductors. At the same time, students are encouraged to ask questions which could lead to further research. Ultimately, students will answer the question: What can Conductors Teach Us about the Underground Railroad? (Appendix C).

To extend the learning, teachers could link the past to the present and provide information about modern day abolitionists and freedom fighters. Students could determine if modern day freedom fighters share characteristics with past freedom fighters. Teachers could ask: What is the same and different? What does this tell us about social justice in the U.S.? What would the conductors of the past think about our current society?

To encourage students to communicate and critique conclusions, we recommend using the final discussion as the beginning of a project to write a book or create a video answering the questions: 1.) What can we learn about slavery from interviews with slaves? 2.) Why is it important to learn about slavery in the U.S. Students can then communicate by sharing their findings with an audience online or in person. Students could generate formal claims using evidence to support their claim. Students could also create a mock conversation between a figure from the past and a current member of society. Using evidence, students could determine what the past figure would say and how they would feel about modern society. These discussions could be performed or recorded for public viewing.

---

### **What can we learn about slavery from interviews with former slaves?**

Developing Claims and Using Evidence: D3.3

Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions: D4.1; D4.3

Slavery Narratives: <https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/slavery-narratives>

In this lesson from Stanford History Education Group’s Reading Like a Historian, students engage with interviews from former slaves. The lesson requires students to use historical thinking skills to evaluate the credibility and value of the sources.

*In 1937, the Federal Writers' Project began collecting what would become the largest archive of interviews with former slaves. Few firsthand accounts exist from those who suffered in slavery, making this an exceptional resource for students of history. However, as with all historical documents, there are important considerations for students to bear in mind when reading these sources. In this lesson, students examine three of these accounts to answer the question: What can we learn about slavery from interviews with former slaves?*

*Final Discussion. First, have students update their strengths and limitations list from Question 1. Then engage them in a big-picture discussion about using interviews as evidence of the past. Ask students how they might use these accounts if they were writing a book on slavery. Overall, what can they tell us about slavery? What other sources might they want to find if they were writing a book about slavery in the United States?*

To encourage students to communicate and critique conclusions, we recommend using the final discussion as the beginning of a project to write a book or create a video answering the questions: 1.) What can we learn about slavery from interviews with slaves? 2.) Why is it important to learn about slavery in the U.S. Students can then communicate by sharing their findings with an audience online or in person.

---

### **What was the purpose of *Freedom’s Journal*?**

Taking Informed Action: D4.6.

Freedom’s Journal: <https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/freedoms-journal>

In this lesson from Stanford History Education Group’s Reading Like a Historian, students engage with excerpts from the publication Freedom’s Journal. The lesson requires students to use historical thinking to analyze and evaluate a primary source.

*In the decades prior to the Civil War, some early African American newspapers began to circulate. In this lesson, students examine articles, advertisements and an editorial from the newspaper Freedom’s Journal, to consider the events and challenges that influenced daily life for free African Americans living in Northern states and to answer the historical question: What was the purpose of Freedom’s Journal?*

*The final writing prompt requires students to discuss a. What was the purpose of Freedom’s Journal? b. Whose hypotheses changed across rounds? How and why? c. Drawing from these documents, what issues did freed men and women face in the 1820s? d. How did Freedom’s Journal help support African Americans in the 1820s?*

To encourage students to take informed action by analyzing how the problems faced by the free black population manifested locally, regionally, and nationally over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem. To extend the learning, students could then analyze the current problems faced by the black community and compare and contrast those problems to the pre-Civil War era.

---

### **What does the Underground Railroad teach us about the roles and responsibilities of citizens?**

Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions: D4.3.

Students are encouraged to analyze the information gathered from their visit to the Freedom Center by answering the question, what does the Underground Railroad teach us about the roles and responsibilities of citizens? Using the Think, Pair, Share strategy, students will generate a list of answers to the question. Students then extend their understanding by interpreting provided opinions about the Underground Railroad. See Appendix D for the required text.

Communicate conclusions and take informed action by making the final list public. Post the list online or display it in a newsletter. Considering contacting your local newspaper or school board for opportunities to share student work with a wider audience. You could even record video of students sharing and discussing their answers.

---

### **What does the Underground Railroad teach us about social justice?**

Taking Informed Action: D4.6

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center believes we can pursue inclusive freedom and social justice for all by building on the principles of the Underground Railroad: courage, cooperation, and perseverance. Encourage students to explore the legacy of the Underground Railroad by researching a past or current social justice movement using these concepts. Guide students through the process by providing the following prompts. Detailed directions and a graphic organizer can be found in Appendix E.

- What is the problem addressed by the movement? Who is affected?
- How is the problem impacting people locally, regionally, nationally, and/or globally?
- What caused the problem?
- How is the movement promoting social justice and/or inclusive freedom?
- What are the challenges faced by the movement?
- What have been the successes of the movement?
- What are your suggestions for future progress?

---

**What were the economic, geographic, political, and social effects of the cotton gin?**

Developing Claims and Using Evidence: D3.3

Communicating and Critiquing Conclusions: D4.1

Students use provided texts, video, and map provided in Appendix F to identify the economic, geographic, political, and social/cultural effects of the cotton gin. This task requires students to make connections between historical events and supports further understanding of the cotton economy of the South prior to the Civil War. Then, using the provided information and prior understanding, students make predictions about how the identified effects impacted future events in the U.S.

Students can communicate conclusions by conducting further research and constructing an explanation, using reasoning and correct sequence, and examples, of how the cotton gin and the cotton economy impacted the development of the U.S. These conclusions could take the form of presentations or written papers and could utilize timelines, graphs, and maps. To acknowledge the strengths and limitations of arguments, students could evaluate the strengths and limitations of the arguments presented by their peers.