

Safe Passage Video Discussion Guide

The *Safe Passage* video has seven segments: an introduction, five profiles of individuals and a closing segment. You may choose to show each segment separately, as it relates to activities you are doing in class, or you may watch the entire 30-minute program at once. You may find that students retain more of the information in the video if they watch less than 10 or 15 minutes at a time. Watching the entire video can be useful as an introduction or a review of an Underground Railroad unit.

Below are directions for using the viewing worksheets (*Handouts 1* and *2*) and discussion questions for each of the seven segments.

USING THE VIDEO WORKSHEETS

1. Show the video. Use it as an introduction to the ideas and themes that will be discussed throughout the *Safe Passage* unit.
2. Distribute the previewing worksheet (*Handout 1*). Have the students answer the first set of questions.
3. Distribute the viewers' worksheet (*Handout 2*). Instruct the students that as they watch the video they will have to fill in three facts about each of the main people the video discusses. This exercise helps ensure that your students are watching the video closely. If you feel that your students will pay careful attention to the video without this, you can omit this activity or you may use it as a post-viewing check.
4. After viewing the video, students can now answer the post-viewing section (second set of questions) of *Handout 1* or you can collect the viewing worksheets and hand them back to be completed at the end of Lesson 6.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ **Pre-viewing:** It's called civil disobedience. Could you break the law for a principle you knew was right, even though your action would be considered illegal? Watch to see how several people in this segment broke the law regularly to fight against slavery.
- ▶ Once reaching free territory (Ohio), were runaway slaves safe?
- ▶ Explain what might happen to runaway slaves and anyone helping them if the freedom seekers were captured in Ohio.
- ▶ How might the threat of punishment have caused people in Ohio to react to runaway slaves?
- ▶ What would have happened if no one had come to the aid of runaway slaves?
- ▶ Do you believe that many people in Ohio were involved in helping freedom seekers? Why or why not?
- ▶ **Post-viewing:** What examples of civil disobedience did you see or hear references to? What were the penalties if you were a lawbreaking slave? What if you were a lawbreaking abolitionist?

JOHN RANKIN

- ▶ **Pre-viewing:** As you view this segment, listen for the words of “freedom” that John Rankin wrote. What other documents and orators on “freedom” do Rankin’s words bring to mind?
- ▶ In what Ohio town did John Rankin live?
- ▶ How did this location help in his activities with the Underground Railroad?
- ▶ What was John Rankin’s occupation?
- ▶ Explain how John Rankin’s occupation related to his work with the Underground Railroad.
- ▶ Why did John Rankin leave his home in Tennessee?
- ▶ Explain how John Rankin could have served the abolitionist movement if he had stayed in Tennessee.
- ▶ How would you have handled living around people who practiced something in which you did not believe?
- ▶ When Rankin ran his slave school in Kentucky, why did he have to be concerned about Kentucky laws?
- ▶ Was this a good or bad thing?
- ▶ How would you have handled the situation?
- ▶ What distinctive feature did John Rankin’s first house in Ripley, Ohio, have?
- ▶ What did his brother do that troubled John Rankin?
- ▶ How did John Rankin handle the situation?
- ▶ How would you handle a situation where a loved one or close friend was doing something of which you did not approve?
- ▶ Was John Rankin able to convince his brother to change?
- ▶ How did John Rankin’s house on the hilltop above Ripley help him aid freedom seekers?
- ▶ Did Rankin believe that his family was in danger? Why or why not?
- ▶ What changes would you make in your lifestyle if you believed your family was in danger?
- ▶ What are some modern day issues that threaten or endanger families?
- ▶ **Post-viewing:** John Rankin’s life as an abolitionist was shaped by others’ thoughts and actions, as well as his choosing to act on his own beliefs. What examples can you remember where other people’s actions caused Rankin to intensify his feelings on slavery?

JOHN P. PARKER

- ▶ **Pre-viewing:** You are about to be introduced to a portrait in courage. Watch carefully to note how John P. Parker exhibited the traits of courage.
- ▶ Why would freedom seekers sometimes choose to go to John P. Parker’s house and not John Rankin’s home?
- ▶ Describe the incident that caused John P. Parker to flee the South.
- ▶ Explain why John P. Parker had difficulty working in an iron foundry.
- ▶ How did John P. Parker handle harassment from other workers?
- ▶ How could he have handled the harassment better?
- ▶ How might you have handled a similar problem?
- ▶ How was John P. Parker able to gain his freedom?
- ▶ From what you heard on the video, what do you think John P. Parker’s attitude toward helping freedom seekers was upon first settling in Ohio?

- ▶ What event changed John P. Parker's attitude about working in the Underground Railroad movement?
- ▶ Why might John P. Parker have settled in Ripley, Ohio?
- ▶ **Post-viewing:** If John Rankin's story is one of persistence, John P. Parker's is one of survival as well as persistence. In what ways did Parker ensure his survival? In what ways did he persist?

LEVI COFFIN

- ▶ **Pre-viewing:** Levi Coffin came to work in the abolitionist movement because of experiences similar to those of John Rankin. As you view this segment, note these two parallels between Coffin and Rankin: influence of religion and impact of experiences with enslaved people at a young age.
- ▶ Describe the incident that converted Levi Coffin to abolition.
- ▶ Would an incident such as this have changed most people's minds?
- ▶ What was Levi Coffin's reaction upon learning that slave hunters routinely searched the houses of blacks for freedom seekers?
- ▶ Can you imagine your family using their home in a way similar to the way Levi Coffin used his? Why or why not?
- ▶ How did Levi Coffin's beliefs lead him to change his business practices?
- ▶ Do you believe it is a common practice for businesses to reduce profits or take losses on moral principles?
- ▶ How much of your lifestyle would you be willing to give up in order to help others?
- ▶ Levi Coffin's commitment to ex-slaves did not end with the Civil War. What else did he do after the war?
- ▶ Compare the deeds and sacrifices of Levi Coffin, John P. Parker and John Rankin. Did any one of them have a better solution than the other? If so, why? If not, can these kinds of actions be compared and evaluated?
- ▶ **Post-viewing:** Coffin at age seven had a "eureka" experience that convinced him to work against slaveholders the rest of his life. Do you know anyone who has had a similar eye-opening or motivating experience? Have you had such an experience? Discuss the parallels.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

- ▶ **Pre-viewing:** Today, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is viewed as a piece of literature, but when it was written it was viewed as a political statement. As you view this segment, make note of why Stowe wrote this book and what influence it had on pre-Civil War society.
- ▶ What event made the horrors of slavery clear to Harriet Beecher Stowe?
- ▶ A signal event in Harriet Beecher Stowe's life was attending a slave auction as an "entertainment." Similarly, many affluent residents of Washington, D.C., picnicked while viewing the earliest battles of the Civil War. Ancient Romans entertained themselves watching gladiatorial combat. What do these events have in common?
- ▶ How do you believe you would have reacted to seeing such "entertainment"?
- ▶ Why might her friend have seen the slave sale as "entertainment"?
- ▶ Does that make her friend a "bad" person?
- ▶ In today's society, we often are entertained by things that are violent or degrading. How does that compare to what Harriet Beecher Stowe observed?
- ▶ What might Harriet Beecher Stowe have thought about entertainment today?

- ▶ Harriet Beecher Stowe was inspired to write a scene in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from a story told by John Rankin. Why does knowing that a story has some factual basis make it more appealing?
- ▶ Speculate as to what the reaction to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was in the South.
- ▶ **Post-viewing:** Harriet Beecher Stowe took events from real life and converted them to fictional art, which in turn inspired real-life action to resolve important issues. Can you think of similar situations in history where the same sequence has happened?

JOSIAH HENSON

- ▶ **Pre-viewing:** Josiah Henson persevered against substantial odds throughout his life. As you view this segment, make note of the many times when he persevered instead of giving up.
- ▶ On his journey from Maryland to Kentucky, what did Josiah Henson do that showed he was an honorable man?
- ▶ Why he did not try to escape?
- ▶ How might you have reacted?
- ▶ Was Josiah Henson wrong in not trying to escape?
- ▶ What incident led Josiah Henson to escape slavery?
- ▶ Why did Josiah Henson choose to escape then, when he did not try to escape on his journey from Maryland to Kentucky?
- ▶ Did Josiah Henson's character change? After he chose to escape, was he less honorable and honest than before? What changed this moral decision?
- ▶ What is your immediate association to labeling someone as an "Uncle Tom"? What do you see in Josiah Henson's actions/words that would lend support for or contradict this characterization?
- ▶ **Post-viewing:** Josiah Henson had to wrestle with his conscience in delivering fellow slaves to Daviess County. Have you experienced (or do you know of other stories from history where) similar circumstances when you've had a conflict between what you promised and what you thought was right?

CLOSING SEGMENT

- ▶ **Pre-viewing:** If you were a victim of slavery, what would you do to save yourself or your family from suffering under slavery? Watch this segment to see the choices made by one freedom seeker.
- ▶ Discuss the concept of irony. Margaret Garner did not face the full legal consequences of her acts in killing her child because of an argument between Ohio and Kentucky. She and her children were technically "property" in Kentucky and she was returned to her owners in Kentucky. Since she was considered property, she did not have the right to a trial. Discuss the implications of this incident in law, human rights and civil rights.
- ▶ Did all freedom seekers escape slavery permanently?
- ▶ What were the punishments when freedom seekers were captured and returned to slavery?
- ▶ **Post-viewing:** As the Garner story indicates, there was no romance or adventure to the stories of fugitives from enslavement or their supporters on the Underground Railroad network. Reflect on the major themes that emerge from these visual snapshots—heroism, cooperation, perseverance, etc.—and think of an example for each theme of how people made real sacrifices for a cause they knew was right.

VIDEO VIEWING WORKSHEET

Before viewing the *Safe Passage* video, answer the first group of questions. After viewing the video, answer the second group of questions. Write your answers to both sets of questions on a separate piece of paper.

Answer BEFORE viewing the video:

- ▶ How much are you willing to do for someone else's freedom?
- ▶ How much are you willing to risk while pursuing your dreams?
- ▶ Would you be willing to make financial sacrifices to help a stranger?
- ▶ How do you treat someone who is different from you?
- ▶ What are major obstacles in your life that you have overcome?

Answer AFTER viewing the video:

- ▶ Could you spend a lifetime fighting for someone else, as John Rankin did?
- ▶ Could you risk your life in pursuit of your dreams, as John Parker did?
- ▶ Would you risk your financial success and your family's well-being to support a cause you believed in, as Levi Coffin did?
- ▶ Has a book you have read or movie or TV show you have seen made you change your viewpoints? Could a book like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* cause you to change deeply held views?
- ▶ Could you overcome the same obstacles, as Josiah Henson did?

Compare your pre-viewing answers to your post-viewing answers. Has the video caused you to rethink your answers?

HANDOUT 2

SAFE PASSAGE VIEWER'S WORKSHEET

Name _____ Date _____

As you view the video, write down three facts you learned about each of the individuals listed below.

	John Rankin	John P. Parker	Levi Coffin	Harriet Beecher Stowe	Josiah Henson
Fact 1					
Fact 2					
Fact 3					