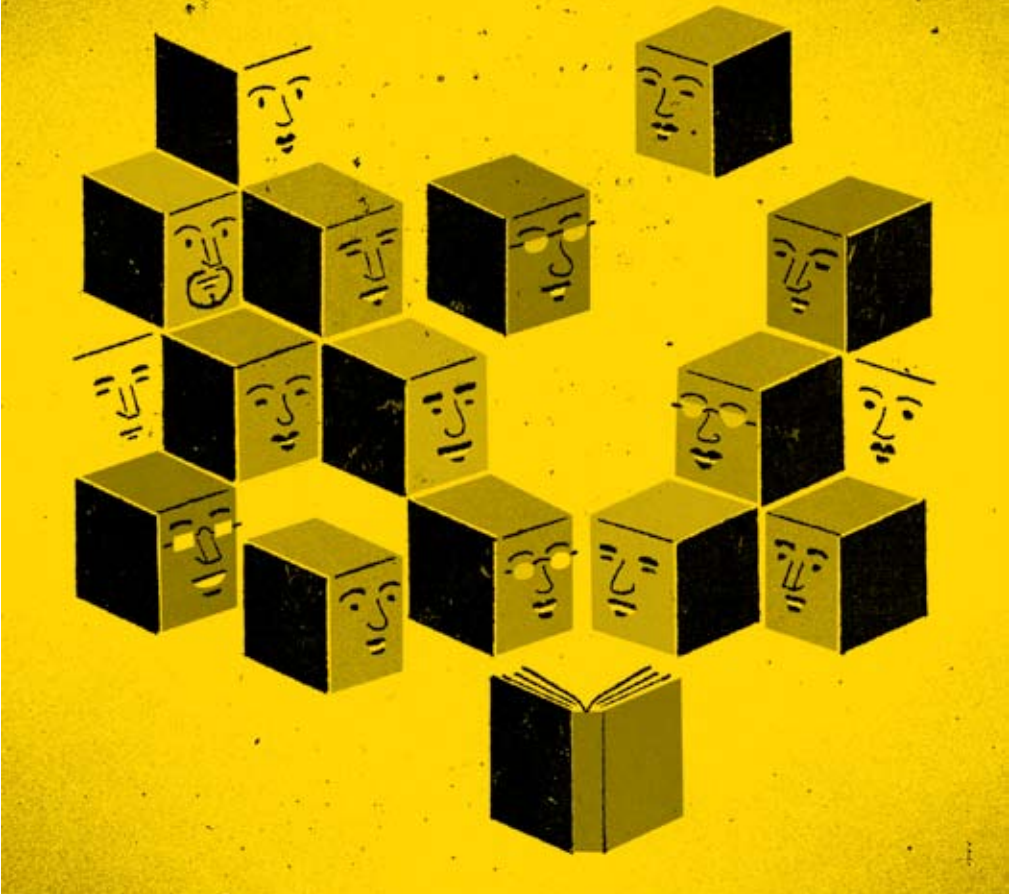


ONE MARYLAND ONE BOOK 2009



SONG YET SUNG

by James McBride

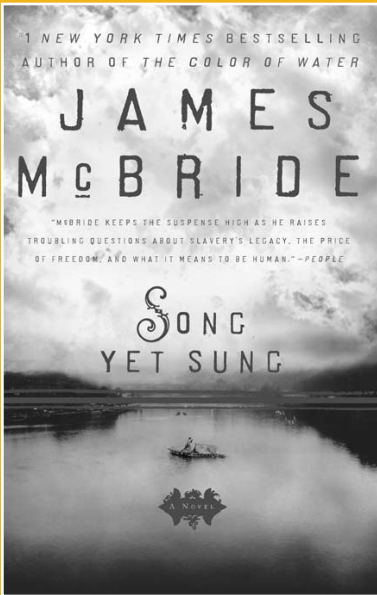
TEACHERS' GUIDE

For Grades 9-12

IMAGINE IF EVERYONE IN MARYLAND READ THE SAME BOOK AT THE SAME TIME. WHAT NEW THINGS WOULD WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT WITH EACH OTHER?

One Maryland One Book, a program of the Maryland Center for the Book at the Maryland Humanities Council, is Maryland's first and only statewide community reading project. It is designed to bring together diverse people in communities across the state through the shared experience of reading the same book and participating in book-centered discussions and other related programs at public libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, museums, bookstores, and other organizations.

The 2009 book selection is *Song Yet Sung* by James McBride. Set on Maryland's Eastern Shore in the 1850s, *Song Yet Sung* weaves an intricate and gripping tale of escaped slaves, free blacks, and slave catchers. It was selected to offer Marylanders the opportunity to discuss topics such as race, identity, the intricacy of relationships, and Maryland history. The Maryland Humanities Council has at the core of its mission a deep commitment to providing Marylanders with an opportunity to gather and discuss issues important to their lives, believing that a great work of literature provides an excellent springboard to do so.



GET THE BOOK

Pick up a copy of *Song Yet Sung* at your local public library or bookstore and start up a conversation with your family, friends, co-workers, or even the person sitting next to you as you ride the bus or train. This is your chance to take a moment and have a meaningful conversation with an old friend or make a new one.

JOIN IN

We invite you to join Honorary Chair, Maryland's First Lady Katie O'Malley, and thousands of other Marylanders at one of the many book discussions and related programs happening around the state in September and October. Look for James McBride at the Baltimore Book Festival at noon on Sunday, September 27, and other venues around the state in late October.

Song Yet Sung by James McBride
26 chapters; 362 pages (excluding the Author's Note)
Classified Adult literature
Riverhead Trade Paperbacks 2009 ed.
ISBN 978-1-59448-350-9

To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to www.onemarylandonebook.org and click on the calendar.

**LETTER FROM THE HONORARY CHAIRPERSON
FIRST LADY KATIE O'MALLEY**



Greetings,

On behalf of the State of Maryland, I am delighted to invite you to participate in One Maryland One Book, our state's community reading project. Last year's inaugural One Maryland One Book programs took place in 22 of 24 jurisdictions across Maryland and drew over 6,000 participants. We are looking toward greater success this year, having confirmed community partners in every Maryland district. This is a great project that offers an opportunity for residents around the state to connect through the shared experience of reading the same book, and then opening new dialogues with one another.

This year's selection is *Song Yet Sung* by James McBride, the award-winning author of *The Color of Water*. Set on the Eastern Shore in the 1850s, *Song Yet Sung* is a fictional story of slavery and freedom in antebellum Maryland. Mr. McBride spent countless hours on the Shore, learning about its history and people. The story reveals interesting characters whose lives provide a springboard for discussing our identity, our relationships, and our families today.

A program of the Maryland Humanities Council, One Maryland One Book is only possible due to the generosity of our community partners and sponsors, whom we thank for their enthusiastic support. I encourage you to take this opportunity to make a little time for reading and conversation in your life, and hope that you will join me and thousands of Marylanders by going to your local public library or bookstore to get a copy of *Song Yet Sung*.

Thank you for being a part of this special project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie O'Malley". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Katie O'Malley
First Lady of Maryland



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



James McBride is an author, musician and screenwriter. His landmark memoir, *The Color of Water*, is considered an American classic and is read in schools and universities across the United States. His debut novel, *Miracle at St. Anna*, was made into a major motion picture directed by Spike Lee. It was released by Disney/Touchstone in September 2008. McBride also wrote the script for the film, now available on DVD. His newest novel, *Song Yet Sung*, was released in paperback in January 2009.

McBride is also a saxophonist who tours with his six piece jazz/R&B band. He served as a sideman with jazz legend Jimmy Scott, among others. He has written songs (music and lyrics) for Anita Baker, Grover Washington, Jr., Purafe, Gary Burton, and even for the PBS television character “Barney.” (He did not write the “I Love You” song for Barney but wishes he did.)

He is a former staff writer for *The Boston Globe*, *People Magazine* and *The Washington Post*. His work has appeared in *Essence*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times*. His April 2007 *National Geographic* story entitled “Hip Hop Planet” is considered a respected treatise on African American music and culture. He has been featured on national radio and television programs in America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

McBride is a native New Yorker and a graduate of New York City public schools. He studied composition at The Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio and received his Masters in Journalism from Columbia University in New York at age 22. He holds several honorary doctorates and is currently a Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University. He is married with three children.

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the days before the Civil War, a group of slaves breaks free in the labyrinthine swamps of Maryland’s Eastern Shore, setting loose a drama of violence and hope among slave catchers, plantation owners, watermen, runaway slaves, and free blacks. Among them is Liz Spocott, a runaway slave, near death, wracked by disturbing visions of the future, and armed with “the Code,” a fiercely guarded cryptic means of communication for slaves on the run. As she makes her desperate flight among the denizens of the swampy marsh lands, Liz’s extraordinary dreams of tomorrow create a freedom-seeking furor among the once complacent slave community. It is one that will thrust them all into a world of haunting choices and inexorably closer to a mysterious, redemptive, and unexpected fate.¹

¹from the back cover

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CORE LEARNING GOALS - ENGLISH

GOAL 1: READING, REVIEWING AND RESPONDING TO TEXT

The student will demonstrate the ability to respond to a text by employing personal experiences and critical analysis.

EXPECTATION 1.1 The student will use effective strategies before, during, and after reading, viewing, and listening to self-selected and assigned materials.

INDICATOR 1.1.1 The student will use pre-reading strategies appropriate to both the text and purpose for reading by surveying the text, accessing prior knowledge, formulating questions, setting purpose(s), and making predictions.

INDICATOR 1.1.2 The student will use during-reading strategies appropriate to both the text and purpose for reading by visualizing, making connections, and using fix-up strategies such as re-reading, questioning, and summarizing.

INDICATOR 1.1.3 The student will use after-reading strategies appropriate to both the text and purpose for reading by summarizing, comparing, contrasting, synthesizing, drawing conclusions, and validating the purpose for reading.

EXPECTATION 1.2 The student will construct, examine, and extend meaning of traditional and contemporary works recognized as having significant literary merit.

INDICATOR 1.2.1 The student will consider the contributions of plot, character, setting, conflict, and point of view when constructing the meaning of a text.

INDICATOR 1.2.2 The student will determine how the speaker, organization, sentence structure, word choice, rhythm, and imagery reveal an author's purpose.

INDICATOR 1.2.3 The student will explain the effectiveness of stylistic elements in a text that communicate an author's purpose.

INDICATOR 1.2.5 The student will extend or further develop meaning by explaining the implications of the text for the reader or contemporary society.

EXPECTATION 1.3 The student will explain and give evidence to support perceptions about print and non-print works.

INDICATOR 1.3.1 The student will explain how language and textual devices create meaning.

INDICATOR 1.3.5 The student will explain how common and universal experiences serve as the source of literary themes that cross time and cultures.

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CORE LEARNING GOALS - ENGLISH (CONT.)

GOAL 4: EVALUATING THE CONTENT, ORGANIZATION, AND LANGUAGE USE OF TEXTS

The student will demonstrate the ability to evaluate the content, organization, and language use of texts.

EXPECTATION 4.1 The student will describe the effect that a given text, heard or read, has on a listener or reader.

INDICATOR 4.1.1 The student will state and explain a personal response to a given text.

EXPECTATION 4.2 The student will assess the effectiveness of choice of details, organizational pattern, word choice, syntax, use of figurative language, and rhetorical devices.

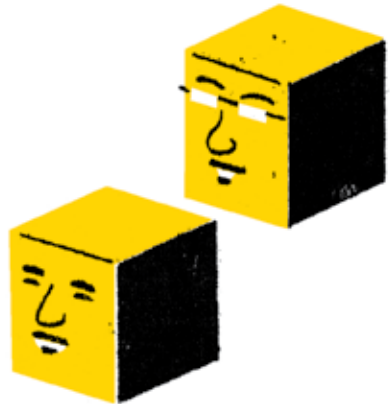
INDICATOR 4.2.1 The student will assess the effectiveness of diction that reveals an author's purpose.

INDICATOR 4.2.2 The student will explain how the specific language and expression used by the writer or speaker affects reader or listener response.

TEACHER'S NOTE: *In an attempt to accurately portray the characters in Song Yet Sung, James McBride uses the vernacular of the time. Because of this, the word "nigger" (with a variety of adjectives preceding it) is used throughout the book. Other potentially objectionable words and phrases: bastard, shit, hell, damned, Negro hussy, black monkey, fucking, limp-dick bastard, half-assed, blow his balls off, hellhole, and shitbag are used on occasion. Please use this information to determine if the language is appropriate for your students.*

THEMES

Major – Freedom / Minor – Human Complexities



BEFORE READING ACTIVITY

The Eastern Shore of Maryland is bordered by Delaware, the Atlantic Ocean, the Chesapeake Bay, and Virginia. Together the three states comprise the Delmarva (Del-Mar-Va) peninsula. In general, Maryland's Eastern Shore is rural with sandy soil and many wetlands. Rivers and creeks still weave through farmlands once worked by slaves. Those same rivers moved human cargo as well as produce and tobacco. *Song Yet Sung* takes place on the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland in the mid-1800s.

ACTIVITY: Students work in pairs to obtain background knowledge. Each pair chooses one of the following websites:

- www.esvatourism.org/history.asp (*up to Historic Hot Spots*)
- www.whispersofangels.com/opposing.html (*first four sections*)
- www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snvoices00.html (*read intro to right of former slaves and read the five narratives*)
- www.mariner.org/chesapeakebay/waterman/wat000.html (*first window and click on "The Bugeye"*)

Students read the information on their chosen site and decide which facts are most important to share with the rest of the class. One person from each group presents the most important facts (orally, on a blackboard, transparency, or whiteboard). Those in other groups record brief notes. All groups have the opportunity to share their facts. At the end of the presentations, discuss generalizations that can be made.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS

- **Woman with No Name:** enslaved woman captured by Patty Cannon who shares the code with Liz
- **Liz Spocott:** a.k.a. the Dreamer; escaped female slave; protagonist
- **Amber:** Kathleen Sullivan's male slave; aids the Dreamer
- **Wiley:** Amber's nephew; also lives on Kathleen Sullivan's farm
- **Mary:** Wiley's mother; female slave owned by Kathleen Sullivan
- **Miss Kathleen Sullivan:** widow and owner of a Dorchester farm and slaves
- **Old Clarence:** store worker; former waterman
- **Woolman:** escaped slave who has become legendary for his "wildness" and strength
- **Jeff Boy:** Miss Kathleen's son
- **Patty Cannon:** reviled kidnapper of slaves and free blacks; lives in Caroline County; antagonist
- **Big Linus:** a slave renowned for his great stature and strength
- **Eb Willard:** Patty Cannon's slave; 12 years old
- **Joe Johnson:** Patty Cannon's son-in-law
- **Stanton and Hodgins:** men who ride with Patty Cannon
- **Denwood Long:** a.k.a. the Gimp; notorious slave catcher hired to find Liz Spocott
- **Blacksmith:** member of the Underground Railroad who communicates with others on the trail to freedom

READING, VOCABULARY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ASSIGNMENT #1 (pages 1 - 50)

Reader's Note: Attempted rape, graphic violence (p. 15)

VOCABULARY:

apparition (p. 2)

garish (p. 5)

pike (p. 14)

bungy (p. 26)

impudence (p. 30)

mongrel (p. 3)

litany (p. 5)

appendage (p. 16)

skiff (p. 30)

rabble-rouser (p. 37)

kowtowing (p. 3)

capitulating (p. 5)

watermen (p. 23)

four-barrel pepperbox (p. 30)

slaked (p. 39)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What evidence does the author give the reader that the protagonist Liz Spocott is special? What character qualities support this assessment?
- 2 Make a list of the elements contained in the code. In what way is this a mystery for both the reader and Liz? As a reader, how do we learn to interpret the code? Through whose eyes?
- 3 Why does the Woman with No Name refuse to let herself be named? How does this influence the way we understand the information she offers to Liz?
- 4 In what ways is Denwood Long (the Gimp) a slave to his personal history?
- 5 Superstitions have been around since the beginning of time. For example, the six-legged dog was seen as a signal of the end of days. Explain why people have superstitions and share any you know.
- 6 How is Liz rewarded for the kindness she showed to the child wounded in the trap? What does this say about her character?
- 7 How does this scene introduce the reader to the story of Woolman? Why is he such a mystery?

ASSIGNMENT #2 (pages 51 - 100)

Reader's note: Graphic violence (p. 63)

VOCABULARY:

derision (p. 53)

gelding (p. 65)

calico (p. 88)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 How is the code communicated from generation to generation? What dangers lie in too many people understanding the code?
- 2 Despite Big Linus' stature, what are his weaknesses?
- 3 How does Liz rely on the kindness of strangers to help her find safety?
- 4 What elements of the code does Liz now understand?
- 5 What information do we know about Patty that solidifies her as the antagonist of this tale?
- 6 How do other characters react to the content of Liz's dreams? What is your reaction to her dreams?

READING, VOCABULARY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ASSIGNMENT #3 (pages 101 - 153)

VOCABULARY:

tumultuous (p. 102)

moot (p. 106)

encroaching (p. 117)

gaiety (p. 117)

mettle (p. 117)

ire (p. 117)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What does the title of the chapter “Eighty Miles” represent? How does it account for the complex role Maryland played in the history of slavery?
- 2 How is weather used to set the tone of scenes throughout the book? Give examples.
- 3 Why does Woolman “declare war?” How does he achieve his goal?
- 4 What is the gospel train? Who is the woman referred to as “Moses?”
- 5 Why is Amber suspicious of falling in love? How does Liz complicate Amber’s fears?
- 6 How does the Blacksmith use his trade to fight slavery?
- 7 Why does the question of Denwood’s dead child return throughout the book? How might it reveal another side to the feared Gimp?

ASSIGNMENT #4 (pages 155 - 197)

VOCABULARY:

blackjack (p. 157)

cowed (p. 161)

morass (p. 173)

libation (p. 181)

absconded (p. 183)

heater (p. 185)

incredulous (p. 187)

bracer (p. 192)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Why does the Dreamer think that blacks aren’t the only slaves?
- 2 If you were the Dreamer today, what would you predict America’s future would be in one hundred years?
- 3 Disregarding his extraordinary size and strength, characterize Woolman. How does he survive and care for a child as a “feral beast?” Could someone like Woolman survive in the United States today?
- 4 Wiley believes that “sins of one cause suffering of many—that was the rule of the world.” What does he mean by that and is that an appropriate statement today?

READING, VOCABULARY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ASSIGNMENT #5 (pages 199 - 248)

VOCABULARY:

dories (p. 205)	flatties (p. 205)	awry (p. 212)
innocuous (p. 216)	chattel (p. 240)	garrulous (p. 241)
yawing (p. 241)	caulking (p. 241)	

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 The Dreamer tells Amber, “You act like running north’s the be-all answer to everything. It ain’t.” Amber disagrees with her. If you had been a slave in the South would you have run or stayed? Explain fully.
- 2 How does “speaking to the pot” suggest the dangers of working for the Underground Railroad?
- 3 The complexities of the characters are apparent by this point in the novel. Which characters did McBride develop the most by revealing human inconsistencies in their behavior and numerous details from their past?
- 4 The Dreamer shared a second dream with Old Clarence, another who aided her. What is/are the reason(s) she shared that dream with Old Clarence? Draw a conclusion that supports Old Clarence’s purpose in the novel.

ASSIGNMENT #6 (pages 249 - 289)

Reader’s Note: Graphic violence (pgs. 264 - 267)

VOCABULARY:

hogshead barrel (p. 252)	Paterson (p. 260)	minié ball (p. 264)
deference (p. 271)	warily (p. 272)	fracas (p. 272)
cur (p. 273)	tonging (p. 281)	ruefully (p. 283)
lilting (<i>of the boat</i>) (p. 283)		

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Does the profanity in the story make it more realistic or does it seem forced and unnecessary?
- 2 Ducky appears briefly in the novel. Take the perspective of the author and explain what Ducky’s role is in the novel—entertainer, comic relief, or something else? Support your answer. Would there be a void in the novel if his character were removed from it?
- 3 The life of a waterman has always been difficult work with long days, a dangerous environment, and often little pay. With whom would a waterman side? Free blacks? Whites? Slaves? Slave owners? Why?
- 4 “Finally the best of them rose up to speak. He was a colored preacher...They wept at his words, and tore their hair and cried...The Woman with No Name said it: It ain’t the song, it’s the singer, she said.” This dream uses less figurative language yet the passage is quite descriptive. What is this dream literally?

READING, VOCABULARY & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ASSIGNMENT #7 (pages 291 - 338)

Reader's Note: Graphic reference (p. 293); graphic violence (pgs. 301, 303)

VOCABULARY:

tethered (p. 294)

billows (p. 311)

cat o' nine tails (p. 313)

baleful (p. 314)

brogans (p. 322)

striker boats (p. 322)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Why are so many people attracted to the Dreamer, and why do so many people believe the Dreamer?
- 2 What is the connection between the slaves and Denwood? How does James McBride manipulate the plot and characters to make that possible?
- 3 Throughout the novel, the Dreamer discusses “freedom,” though at this point, it’s not what she desires. For what does she hunger, and how does this reveal the complexity of human beings?
- 4 Denwood is curious about the slaves’ and runaways’ belief in God and the importance religion bears in their lives. What does Denwood learn from Amber about Amber’s belief system?

ASSIGNMENT #8 (pages 339 - 362)

Reader's Note: Graphic violence (pgs. 348, 349, 355)

VOCABULARY:

blab school (p. 347)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Most referred to Woolman as “the Devil,” “the beast” or “the creature.” How would you describe the side that Liz was able to see? Did he share that part of himself with anyone else? If so, with whom?
- 2 What prompts Liz to kill Woolman? Was it an act of mercy toward Denwood, toward Woolman, or an act of cruelty toward Woolman? Support your response.
- 3 Throughout the novel, the Dreamer rebuffs offers from other slaves to help her escape to freedom, and yet that is exactly what she was doing at the beginning—escaping from her master. Did she change her mind or did she never intend to leave?
- 4 Does this novel offer you a sense of hope for the future or the United States? Explain which character was hopeful at the end and who was not. What seems to make the difference? Gender? Race? Social status?

AFTER READING ACTIVITY

CLASS DISCUSSION

Explain the debating process to your class. Divide students into groups of three or four. Create debatable questions, for example, “Because McBride wanted to make his characters appear more authentic, he shared multiple sides of many characters rather than fully developing only a few. Does this benefit the story or not? About whom do you still have questions?”

Two teams will debate while the rest of the class evaluates the debate to determine who supports their side (pro/con) the best. Every two teams have the same question/statement to debate.

If time does not allow for debates, then have small groups discuss questions or facilitate a discussion with your entire class.

EXTENSION PROJECTS

THE NEWS OF THE TIME

Students work in small groups to create an Eastern Shore newspaper, podcast, v-cast, or Power-Point, reporting events that took place with characters from the novel (though not exclusive to the novel) and which uses places discussed in the book. Present the news to middle school students who study slavery.

THE CODE

While scholars and historians debate the various aspects of the Underground Railroad code, McBride has chosen to weave this mode of communication into *Song Yet Sung*. In the story, elements of the code include “speaking to the pot,” rolling up of the pant leg, quilts, songs, and knots in ropes for communication along the Underground Railroad. If you had to develop your own code or means of secret communication what would you use and what would it mean? Develop your own code and share with others.

SLAVERY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Independently or in pairs, research present-day slavery throughout the world, i.e., Ghana, Benin, Sudan, Haiti, Dominican Republic, United States, United Arab Emirates, China, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, to name a few. Have students create displays, present an assembly, collect money for anti-slavery organizations, etc.



EXTENSION PROJECTS

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN MARYLAND NOTABLE PEOPLE/ NOTABLE PLACES

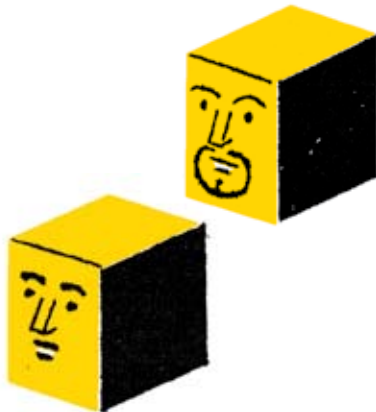
As a class, create a map of known routes and safe houses along the Underground Railroad. Map a possible route through Maryland, but also show how slaves tried to make their way to Canada. Take note of how free-born African Americans, whites, and Native Americans contributed to the effort. Research the information and create a map, webquest, or PowerPoint to share with other students/schools.

OR Profile members of the Underground Railroad who operated as “Conductors” or “Stationmasters” or “Agents.” Research their stories and how they contributed to the cause of freedom. Some suggested names might be: Harriet Tubman, Alexander Milton Ross, William Still, Anderson Ruffin Abbott, Samuel Green, Henry “Box” Brown, and Sojourner Truth, among others.

THE CHESAPEAKE ENVIRONMENT

Students form teams and focus on an aspect of the Chesapeake environment. One team of students researches the culture that emerged around the Chesapeake Bay and explores some of the contemporary environmental issues threatening the estuary. One team researches the extent of the Chesapeake watershed and the effects of pollution on the Bay from places hundreds of miles from the coastline of the Bay itself. Another team researches the role the watermen have played in Maryland’s past, and how they are working to save the Bay today.

OR Go to National Geographic Xpeditions at www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/04/gk2/chesapeake.html to find grade-appropriate lessons and activities on the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed. These activities address not only the environmental issues facing this region, but also the socio-political issues that have shaped its use. This site provides a number of useful links and supplementary reading sources.



OTHER RESOURCES

Katz, William Loren, *Breaking the Chains*, Simon Pulse, 1998.

Lawson, Glenn, *The Last Waterman*, ZAK Books, 1998.

Sherwood, John, *Maryland's Vanishing Lives*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Thomas, Velma Maia, *Lest We Forget: The Passage from Africa to Slavery and Emancipation: A Three-Dimensional Interactive Book with Photographs and Documents from the Black Holocaust Exhibit*, The Crown Publishing Group, 1997.

Library of Congress; photos, narratives, and essays can be found, especially in American Memory
www.loc.gov

Abolitionists, Fugitives, and Runaway Slaves: Surviving Slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore
www.udel.edu/BlackHistory/abolitionists.html

Eastern Shore history
www.esvatourism.org/history.asp

Harriet Tubman, Runaway Slave/Underground Railroad Conductor
www.americancivilwar.com/women/harriet_tubman.html

Discovering the Past/Considering the Future: Lessons from the Eastern Shore
www.udel.edu/BlackHistory/discoveringthepast.html

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center
www.freedomcenter.org

Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History & Culture
<http://nabbhistory.salisbury.edu>

Chesapeake Bay - Our History and Our Future
www.mariner.org/chesapeakebay

Chesapeake Bay Foundation
www.cbf.org

I Abolish: American Anti-slavery Group; includes global human trafficking
www.iabolish.org/slavery_today/index.html

This guide was created by S.P. Mundy, Thomas Gabriel-Ventimiglia, and Maureen O'Neill.

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