

**EDUCATOR'S GUIDE FOR
YOUTH PERFORMANCE COMPANY PRODUCTION OF
Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad
February 3-19, 2017**

Dear Teacher,

These educational materials have been prepared by Betty Johnson to help your class enjoy and benefit from the Youth Performance Company performance of the play, *Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad*.

This is YPC's Black History Month show!

Many young people learn about the American Underground Railroad in the 1800s in English, History or Social Studies classes. This show brings history to life with engaging true stories and songs of the period. Learn more about the lives of Harriet Tubman, Harriet Beecher Stowe and many others who participated in one of the greatest collaborations against racism in American history. Lesser-known heroes are also depicted, including the mysterious "Peg Leg" Joe, who moved among the plantations teaching slaves to escape and Henry "Box" Brown, who had himself put in a box and mailed to freedom.

Major themes of the story are courage, persistence, equal rights, and freedom.

The suggested activities below, plus the additional resources, will help your students understand what they experienced at the show and possibly apply it to their own lives. You may want to be prepared to take notes for additional follow-up in your classroom, either right away or later when teachable moments surface.

Synopsis

"Oh Freedom!"

The greatest collaboration against racism in American history, before the Civil Rights Movement, was the Underground Railroad. People of all ethnic backgrounds, of both sexes, and from North and South came together to resist the oppression of slavery by helping escaped slaves make their way to free territory in the years before the Civil War. *"Oh Freedom! The Story of the Underground Railroad"* celebrates these alliances by combining the many stories with songs of the period. Famous participants like Harriet Tubman and Harriet Beecher Stowe are represented as well as lesser known heroes of the movement like John Rankin, whose house on a hill was a beacon for freedom; the mysterious "Peg Leg" Joe who moved among the plantations teaching slaves to escape and "Follow the Drinking Gourd," a song designed to show them the way; and Henry "Box" Brown who had himself put in a box and mailed to freedom. The story inspires all to work together for the good of all as it celebrates a time when Americans were at their courageous best, supporting one another—regardless of background, ethnicity or gender—in the cause to extend to all Americans our greatest, most inalienable right: freedom. (from New Stage Theatre, Jackson, Mississippi)

The play is by Peter Manos, from the nonfiction book of the same name by Peter N. Miller

Before coming to the play

1) Activities to do before you come to the play:

- a) Talk about the history of slavery?
- b) Talk about: What was the Underground Railroad?
- c) Using individual maps of the United States which show only the boundaries for the states, draw the routes for the Underground Railroad. (Find the blank maps on the Internet.)
- d) Talk about the use of music as code.
- e) Talk about metaphors; definition, examples.
- f) Learn the song, "Oh Freedom!."

You can find information about all of these at the end of this guide in the Resources and Activities section,

2) Why was it important for the slaves to escape from the South? Read and discuss the myths about the Underground Railroad -- you'll find them in the Resources below.

After the show

NOTE: The "Resources" section at the end of this guide will give you websites with more background information and suggestions for activities. We think you'll find it useful and valuable as you follow up on the play.

1) Besides the actors themselves, a theatrical production includes many other things that help the audience enjoy and understand the play, make it believable or "real," or create a sense of another place or time. How did each of the following do that for you? Did some seem more important than others?

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| A. Costumes | D. Lighting | G. Music and songs |
| B. Dance or movement | E. The set | H. Props |
| C. Sound | F. Visual effects | I. Other _____ |

2) Why was the music especially important in this play and for the situations described in the play?

4) Writing/reflection. Fill in the blanks:

This play made me realize that _____

This play made me decide that _____

This play made me believe that _____

This play made me wish that _____

This play made me wonder about _____

This play made me feel that _____

This play made me hope that _____

5) Which character in the play was your favorite and why?

6) Write about or draw whichever character you would most like to meet. Why would you like to meet him or her? Where would you meet? What would you talk about? What would you do together?

7) The theme of a story or play is the main idea, the universal message that the reader or spectator derives.

a) What are the themes of this play? (courage, persistence, equal rights, and freedom. Your students may come up with others,)

b) Was there a time in your own life when you had a similar experience or learned a similar lesson? What happened and what did you do?

8) Tell when you saw examples of characters in the play ...

a) ... wanting to be independent. In what ways was independence shown? Were there different ideas about what independence is? Describe a time when you showed independence, or saw someone else expressing independence.

b) ... being courageous or brave? How did you know? (this can include acting on one's convictions, sticking up for someone else, etc.) Describe a time when you were courageous or brave, or saw someone else being courageous or brave.

c) ... being afraid or fearful. afraid or fearful, or what were they afraid of? (This can include fear of the unknown, feeling threatened, etc.) Describe a time when you were afraid and what you did.

d) ... being persistent. How and why were they persistent? Describe a time when you were persistent?

11) Often, stories and plays explore subjects that rouse strong emotions or memories in the reader or spectator. Though they may be important for individuals to acknowledge, they may be difficult or felt to be risky in a group discussion. Writing in a journal or diary is one alternative.

One question to explore in this way might be to pretend you are one of the characters. Write entries in your “personal” diary about what has happened to you, what you’re are going through and how you really felt as each event in the story unfolded. Write, too, what you think of the other characters. Or you could do it through pictures, poetry or other art..

15) Activity: Create a patchwork quilt, with contributions from everyone who saw the play, using events, personalities, objects, and themes from the story. This can be done on fabric such a sheet (using fabric crayons or pieces of colored fabric) or on a large sheet of paper. Use interesting shapes or symbols that can be pieced together in either a regular pattern or in a crazy quilt sort of overlapping pattern or in a picture quilt. Explain why you chose those shapes and the way you fit them together. (This could lead to a discussion about the inter-relationships between the characters and situations in different places, including those which were planned or on purpose, and those which just happened, and how they overlapped.)

RESOURCES

These are all excellent sources for background, information and additional related activities about the Underground Railroad and many of the people who made it a reality. You and your students will benefit from using all three of these guides.

••• Kentucky (Louisville) Opera Study Guide:

kyopera.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/KY-Opera-Oh-Freedom-2014.pdf (Includes definitions and glossary of terms, the characters, maps, music as code (and write your own lyrics), music and lyrics for the song “Oh, Freedom;”, metaphors;

••• New Stage Theatre (in Jackson, Mississippi)

Introduction to the play: <http://newstagetheatre.com/educate/touring/oh-freedom-the-story-of-the-underground-railroad/>

The Study Guide: <http://newstagetheatre.com/manage/wp-content/uploads/OF-Study-Guide-10-21-rev..pdf>

For all grades, except where noted otherwise. Includes important terms, the characters, activities for before the play (map of the Underground Railroad; Music as Code: “Follow the Drinking Gourd” and its decoded messages; the song “Oh, Freedom!”; The Railroad Metaphor & other metaphors(written for grades 6-8); Activities for after the play (Fact or Fiction, Creative Writing Prompts, “I thought it was ..” (grades 6-8); Post-Show Quiz (grades 9-12); student thoughts about various production features of the play)

••• Scholastic magazine-- http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground_railroad/

Includes myths of the Underground Railroad, escape from slavery slideshows and activities: slavery, on the plantation, escape, reaching safety, abolitionists on the Underground Railroad, a new life of freedom, write a letter, additional resources and reading, and more.

--www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/teacher-activity-guide-underground-railroad

For grades 3-5, 6-8, or 9-12.