



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2007 Volume III: Maps and Mapmaking

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## **The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Freedom: Using Slave Narratives and Negro Spirituals as Maps**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 07.03.01, published September 2007  
by Sheila L. Carter-Jones

This unit gives a theoretical and historical basis for the inclusion of the African American voice in the reporting of the history of slavery in America. Students will participate in creative dramatics activities as ways of understanding real events in the lives of enslaved Africans in America and the function of the Underground Railroad. They will also refine and broaden their understanding of important human qualities: courage, perseverance, respect for the dignity of human life and the concept of freedom-as justice. Intellectually, they will have the opportunity to engage concrete stimuli with an imaginative response, increase their ability to be intellectual risk-takers, and generate optional ways to think, feel, and do and to solve problems.

Through writing and map making/reading/interpreting skills students will have the opportunity to identify and come to terms with some of their own feelings, perspectives and understandings of slavery and the physical and psychic geography of plantation life. Using literary devices to engage real people in history as literary characters, all students will learn historical truths and understand how they each are a part of and not apart from American history. Let me add here that the following lessons provide learning activities for the eighth grade but can be adapted in small ways to be suitable learning activities for any grade level.

(Developed for Communications, History, and Community, grades 6-12; recommended for Communications and History, grades 4-12)

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