Lesson Plan #10 for *Genius of Freedom: William Still & the Underground Railroad* by Liz Taylor

**Grade level:** Middle or High School

**Topics:** Underground Railroad, Vigilance Committee, William Still

**Pennsylvania History Standards:** 8.1.6 B, 8.1.9 B, 8.2.9 A, 8.2.9 B, 8.2.9 D, 8.3.9 A, 8.3.9 B, 8.3.9 D

**Pennsylvania Core Standards:** 8.5.6-8 B, 8.5.9-10 B, 8.5.11-12 B, 8.5.6-8 C, 8.5.9-10 C, 8.5.11-12 F

**African American History, Prentice Hall textbook:** 297-299

**Overview:** Featured within the *Genius of Freedom* exhibit is William Still’s *The Under-ground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters &c., Narrating the Hardships, Hair-breadth Escapes, and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom, as Related by Themselves and Others or Witnessed by the Author: Together with Sketches of Some of the Largest Stockholders and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers of the Road*. This book, published in 1872, includes Still’s records of his interviews with fugitive slaves or freedom seekers. Still, the chairman of the General Vigilance Committee of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, aided many fugitive slaves who were able to get to Philadelphia to escape farther north, often to Canada. His book is a treasure trove of primary sources that are easily understood by students who cannot help but comprehend the strength of these freedom seekers’ drive for freedom. In this lesson, students read one of the passages in Still’s work and answer a series of questions about it. The following day, students create a nametag and engage in a “meet and greet” in order to find out about more of the people aided by William Still.

**Materials Needed**
- Attached excerpts from Still’s book. These are from the 2007 abridged version. Teachers can select their own excerpts from the original version of Still’s work which is available on the web.
- Attached document analysis sheet
- Index cards with an unlined side
- “Meet and Greet” Invitation
- “Meet and Greet” matrix or Underground Railroad Reunion matrix
- “Thank You Note to William Still” extension activity sheet

**Procedure**
1. Teacher queries class about what they know about the Underground Railroad.
2. Students write answers on sticky notes and post them on the board.
3. Teacher reads some of the answers out, noting what is true and what is myth (or simply incorrect). Teacher should reinforce the fact that freedom seekers largely struck out on their own and did not often receive much help until they got to the North and into the care of “conductors” like William Still. A good teacher resource is http://stillfamily.library.temple.edu/historical-perspective/william-still-significance
4. Place students in groups of three.
5. Students read Still’s record of one freedom seeker.
6. Students work together to analyze the record using the analysis worksheet. (As an alternative, students can work independently on this as a homework assignment.)
7. Each student creates a nametag for using the back of an index card. The card instructions should state the following:

   Please create a nametag for your Freedom Seeker that you will wear. Include the following:
   - Name (prominently and legibly written)
   - Former home
   - Sketch of the Freedom Seeker (optional)
   - Create or bring in a small prop to help in the telling of the story of escape (optional)

8. Students should affix the nametag to their shirt with tape to indicate that they are ready for the next part of the activity.
9. Pass out invitation to the students and read aloud.
10. Pass out matrix (you can choose which format you prefer) to the students. Explain that they will engage in a “meet and greet” in which they will meet other freedom seekers who received help from William Still. Each of the boxes should be filled out. Do not record information about the freedom seeker that you are portraying!
11. Debrief: Students in a whole class discussion will identify some of the patterns that became evident during the meet and greet. Students should also note things that surprised them and things they learned that they did not previously know.
UNDERGROUND RAIL ROAD.
A RECORD OF FACTS, AUTHENTIC NARRATIVES, LETTERS, &c.

NARRATING THE HARDSHIPS, ESCAPES, AND STRUGGLES OF THE SLAVES IN THEIR EFFORTS FOR FREEDOM.
BY THEMSELVES AND OTHERS, OR WITNESSED BY THE AUTHOR.

BY
WILLIAM STILL,
PORTER & COATES,
PHILADELPHIA.
SOLD ONLY BY SUBSCRIBER,
1872.
CARISSA DAVIS

ARIVED DRESSED IN WHITE ATTIRE
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recorded the paper I was highly delighted to receive them I was
Dear Brother,

I hope this letter finds you well and in good health. It is with a heavy heart that I write to you, knowing that you must be weary of the trials and tribulations that have befallen our nation. The recent events have taken a toll on all of us, and I pray that we may find strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

The Underground Railroad

I understand that your journey has been fraught with danger and uncertainty. I cannot begin to imagine the fear and exhaustion that you must have felt along the way. But I am proud of you, dear brother, and I know that you will continue to fight bravely for what is right.

I look forward to the day when we can reunite and share stories of our experiences. Until then, please take care of yourself and know that you are not alone.

Yours truly,

April 16, 1859

[Signature]

---

John Doe

W. Jones

No more the present...
The governor was sitting at the end of the table, his words hanging in the air. "We need to find a way to prevent this from happening again." He paused, taking a deep breath. "We cannot afford to lose another life."

The governor listened intently as he read the latest report. "The situation is grave. We must act quickly." He stood up, addressing the room. "Every action we take is a step towards preventing another tragedy."
CAPTAIN LAMARRE has been associated with the Union and in the escape of slaves.

I have never been a leader in the campaign to aid the Confederacy, but I have been a friend to liberty and a foe to oppression. I have always stood for the rights of man and against the wrongs of the South. I have always stood for the freedom of the slaves and against the slave trade.

THOS. CHAMPION

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
A visit to children and two other scenes toicksing. I first hap

The children and two other scenes toicksing. I first hap

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MOTHER ESCAPING WITH SEVEN CHILDREN

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Dear Mr. Wilson,

I hope you are well and that everything in Canada is doing well. Your letter arrived safely, and I am glad to hear from you. My family and I have been well, thank you for your concern.

I have been unable to write earlier because I have been busy with other matters. However, I am writing now to let you know that I am well and that everything is going as planned.

I understand that there are challenges on your end as well, but please know that I am here for you and will do whatever I can to assist you. In the meantime, please take care of yourself and your family.

Best regards,

[Signature]

Dean B. St John—1st District of Nevada
The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was a network of abolitionists who helped enslaved African Americans escape to freedom in the Northern United States and Canada. It was composed of individuals, families, and groups who provided assistance to escaped slaves, including food, shelter, guidance, and safe passage. The network was known by various names, including the Conductor's Express, the Underground System, and the Underground Railroad. The agents of this movement were known as conductors or freedom guides, who were often risked by local authorities and were often顺德 by the U.S. government. The ultimate goal of the movement was to facilitate the emancipation of enslaved African Americans and end the institution of slavery.
Robert Brown, ALIAS THOMAS JONES

THE YEAR OF THE MEETING (or the year that we met) - 1859

Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Crossing the river, the river, the river...
tell me why the blood-did me. The trader and considerate was again
my arms around my master's neck, I pressed and prayed him to
the neighbor? I said, I don't know, he said, in a day were
with me for my master. 'Coming up to him, I cried out, Lord,
but run for my master. Coming up to him, I cried out, Lord,
off to the trader called C. A. D -- a etc., but I never stopped running,
as he could call. C. A. D -- a etc., but I never stopped running,
three two parts of his trader after me, and cried out to Lord.
The trader shook the trader both on the chest hot foot. The trader
shook the trader both on the chest hot foot. The trader
and run behind, look off my vest and doubled my pace. He con-
were so near. I hear, I look off my feet and run, look off my foot
right up to the almost on my heels and grabbed me, they
William Holland (a considerate), and the trader was making
words as follows:

When you see a trader with a considerate appearance, him. As they show
how a trader with a considerate appearance, him. As they show
how a trader with a considerate appearance, him.

Arrival from Virginia, 1858

L. Alfred S. Horton
I didn't know what was in store for me and went to a railroad in the hope of finding work. However, I was disappointed and ended up working in a factory, which was not what I had expected. The union leader told me that the work was difficult and dangerous. I decided to leave and travel to New York, where I found a job as a clerk in a department store. I worked hard and saved money to buy a ticket to go back to my hometown. I arrived back and was greeted by my family and friends. I realized that I had made a mistake and decided to stay and work hard. Eventually, I was promoted and became a manager. I felt happy and satisfied with my life.
Dear Brother--It is with pleasure I write you in hand.

Arrival from Richmond, 1859

S. Spooner was an extraordinary man, this Conference indicated
Stevens Brown

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ON ARRIVAL FROM NICHOUND.

This is a letter from my brother to his family, expressing his love and feelings. He mentions his home and the people he loves. He writes about his thoughts and memories, and ends with a wish for a happy New Year.

ON AN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD.

Stevens Brown
made and intelligent.

1855. Pete, just be described as a man of principled blood, well...

The importance of Samuel Sparrows.

such passers by who would be closely watched and a well-placed agent on

even more so than he looked... In John's words...

commanded, waited, looking quite respectable, and dandies...

Stubborn. Mr. Sparrow's had the feel of a Man of Service.

possess of the Secretary of the Committee. Considering it

"understanding." Can be said in this old school, although the held

After this final effective Peter had more confidence in this

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

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Pete Matthews’ Alias Samuel Sparrows

"I meant as well be in the Pentiment, etc."

"Pete Matthews’ Alias Samuel Sparrows"
Document Analysis

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD: AUTHENTIC NARRATIVES AND FIRST-HAND ACCOUNTS
By William Still

1. Name of freedom seeker

2. Complete physical description

3. Name and position of previous master

4. Condition of servitude/Reason for escape, as told to William Still

5. Method/Description of escape

6. Summary of any correspondence received from the freed-person, if applicable.

7. Any other interesting miscellany
Underground Railroad Reunion

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am pleased to invite you to attend a reunion of freed people who requested assistance of the General Vigilance Committee of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery during the 1850s. The reception will be held ________________, 1866 at our headquarters in Philadelphia. Please be sure to wear a nametag and be ready to recount your experiences taking your freedom and living now as freed people. I am so looking forward to this gathering.

Love and respects,

W. Still
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Conditions of enslavement; impetus to flee</th>
<th>Means and outcome of escape</th>
<th>Interesting detail</th>
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While enjoying the festivities, please circulate and meet other successful Freedom Seekers. Ask them their stories and tell them yours. Enjoy!

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Former home/master</th>
<th>Reason for seeking freedom</th>
<th>Method of escape</th>
<th>Details of life as a free person</th>
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Show Some Appreciation!

Yesterday, you attended a party I hosted at Belmont Mansion. Today, it’s time for you gentlemen and gentlewomen to write me, William Still, a gracious thank you note. Using the paper provided, write me a note in which you tell me how much you enjoyed my hospitality and, more importantly, let me know:

♦ Who was the most interesting person you met? Why did you find their story so compelling?
♦ With whom did you find you had the most in common in terms of either background, means of escape, and/or life as a free person?
♦ What are some generalizations you can make about the other party guests? Describe at least two common themes, trends, or characteristics you noticed as you met your fellow beneficiaries of the Underground Railroad.