

## **Harriet Tubman Reading Comprehension – How Did She do it?**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

Harriet Tubman was well known as the “conductor” of the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was neither underground nor a railroad; it was a system of trails that led from the slave states of Delaware and Maryland to the free state of Pennsylvania. Harriet Tubman knew the trails well and was said to have guided at least 60-70 slaves to freedom upon the trail. How did she do it?

The borders of Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania, were dangerous places for slaves seeking their freedom. Slave catchers frequented the area, hoping to reap the rewards offered by slave owners for their runaways before or after they crossed the Mason-Dixon Line. Thus, Harriet Tubman, and others who helped slaves escaped to freedom were resourceful and elusive and were quick to learn who to trust and who not to trust.

Tubman, in contrast to popular thought, never relied on the “quilt system” to choose safe houses along the Underground Railroad. Rather, she relied on people she trusted to hide her and guide her in the right directions. She often relied on Quaker families living in Maryland who were willing to break Maryland law to hide her or transport her. To travel, she walked, rode horses or in wagons, sailed on boats, and rode actual trains. She often traveled in disguise or dressed up as a man or elderly person. She traveled on Saturdays as runaway notices in southern newspapers weren’t published until Monday. Tubman even employed acting techniques when necessary. In one particularly harrowing tale, she recognized one of her old masters on a train. The quick-thinking Tubman quickly grabbed a newspaper pretending to read it. Because she was thought to be illiterate, her master thought nothing of it. The newspaper turned out to be an extremely effective prop – even though she held it upside down! In addition, Tubman used songs to communicate danger or safety and had others write letters on her behalf. She even bribed people when necessary.

In the woods, Tubman used various methods to ensure she traveled in the correct direction. She learned to identify the directional flow of rivers and to follow those that flowed north. She often traveled by night and used the north star as a guide. On cloudy nights, she watched for moss that only grew on the north side of the trees. If danger arose, Tubman looked for a quick source of water to hide her scent from the hound dogs that accompanied the slave catchers.

- 1. Why is the word “conductor” in quotes in the first paragraph?**
  - A. To make sure the reader notices that Harriet was conductor of the Underground Railroad
  - B. To make sure that reader notices the word “conductor”
  - C. To make sure the reader knows that Harriet was not a real conductor
  - D. To make sure the reader knows how important her role was
- 2. According to the reader, which of the following could be a misnomer? A misnomer is something that is named inaccurately.**
  - A. The free state of Pennsylvania
  - B. Quilt System
  - C. Mason-Dixon Line
  - D. The Underground Railroad
- 3. Which of the words in the third paragraph means “hard to find?”**
  - A. resourceful
  - B. elusive
  - C. frequented
  - D. seeking
- 4. Why did Harriet Tubman travel on Saturday?**
  - A. Because the north star was clearest on Saturdays
  - B. Because she knew people would not expect slaves to escape on Saturday or Sunday
  - C. Because she knew she would have at least a full day before word of the slaves she was helping escape was published in the newspapers
  - D. Because she knew that slave catchers preferred to operate during the week rather than on weekends
- 5. Which of the following can be inferred about Maryland Quakers?**
  - A. Many were against the practice of slavery
  - B. Many were suspicious of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad
  - C. Many were considered violent criminals in Maryland
  - D. The passage doesn’t give enough information about Quakers to enable the reader to make an inference
- 6. Which of the following IS NOT answered in the passage?**
  - A. Was Harriet Tubman ever captured?
  - B. How did Harriet Tubman elude the hound dogs that accompanied slave catchers?
  - C. To what state did Harriet Tubman hope to bring runaway slaves?
  - D. How did Harriet Tubman use songs?

- 7. Which of the following would be the best main idea for this passage?**
- A. Harriet Tubman will always be remembered as the Conductor of the Underground Railroad
  - B. Harriet Tubman's life was difficult and full of sadness
  - C. Harriet Tubman's adventures led to the escape of 70 slaves
  - D. Harriet Tubman's resourcefulness and instincts served her well as conductor of the Underground Railroad