

Secret Signs of the Underground Railroad



SUBJECT: American History
TOPIC: Underground Railroad/Secret Signs

GRADE: Fifth
LENGTH: One hour

- OBJECTIVES:**
1. Students will be able to explain the significance of the Fugitive Slave Law, especially as it relates to the Underground Railroad.
 2. Students will be able to identify and explain the need for secret signs along the Underground Railroad.
 3. Students will create their own secret signs and routes throughout the school as needed to transport groups of students along the "Underground Railroad".

- MATERIALS:**
1. Riggio, Anita. Secret Signs Along the Underground Railroad. China: Boyds Mills Press, Inc., 1997.
 2. Several different collections of secret signs as used throughout history as deemed appropriate by the teacher.

- PROCEDURE:**
1. Have the students answer the following statement in their American History notebooks:
Brainstorm all the ways you can possibly think of to convey a piece of information without actually talking out loud to a person.
 2. Discuss the students' answers to the above statement.
 3. Read aloud Secret Signs Along the Underground Railroad by Anita Riggio.
 4. Discuss the secret signs used throughout the book to communicate information and compare this list to the students' original ideas.
 5. Have the students predict why such secret signs were needed along the Underground Railroad. Share the "Afterward" section of the book aloud with the students and discuss the impact of the Fugitive Slave Law.

6. Have small groups of students pretend that they must safely deliver groups of students from one place to another in your school. (Ex. Gym to the third floor) They must assume the passengers will know nothing except for the secret signs left for them. Ask them to think of ways - secret signs - that they can convey the following information:
Where are the safe houses?
What is the correct path to follow?
Who or what should be avoided?

ASSESSMENT: The teacher will individually assess each small group's work based on how well they created secret signs that answered the above questions. It is advised that the teacher develop a rubric to assess students' participation.

RESOURCES: Threads of history? Researcher says encoded quilts signaled slaves along the Underground Railroad
www.philly.com/packages/history/life/railroad/FCOVO2.asp

American Sign Language Browser
<http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm>