

Follow the Drinking Gourd Teacher's Guide

The following Teacher's Guide is designed to help you better prepare your students for the upcoming presentation of *Follow the Drinking Gourd* when the *Northern Stars Planetarium* visits your school in the near future. Please be aware that not all the material in this guide may be appropriate for every age level. This presentation is provided for a variety of grade levels, please use only the material that you feel is appropriate for your students.

Follow the Drinking Gourd was originally produced by : **The New Jersey State Museum Planetarium** and **Raritan Valley Community College Planetarium**. ©1995. Funding for the production of this presentation was generously provided by : **Martin Marietta Astro Space** and **Friends of the New Jersey State Museum**.

The planetarium show follows and explores the *fictional* story *Follow the Drinking Gourd*, written by Jeanette Winter and published in 1988 by Dragonfly Books, a division of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. of New York.

Escaping Slavery in the United States during the Early 1800's

During the era of slavery in the United States, many slaves fled to freedom in the North. In order to reduce the numbers of escaping slaves, slave owners kept slaves illiterate and totally ignorant of geography. They even tried to keep slaves from learning how to tell directions.

Nevertheless, slaves knew perfectly well freedom lay to the north, and they knew how to locate north. They used the *North Star*, or as it is properly named, *Polaris*. *Polaris* lies almost directly north in the sky. Slaves fled using the simple direction "walk towards the North Star." However, unable to plan a route, they risked walking into impassable or dangerous terrain.

A secret network of people was established to help slaves escape slavery. This network came to be known as the *Underground Railroad*. Members of the *Underground Railroad* were aware of the dangers awaiting runaway slaves. About 1831 the *Railroad* began to send travellers into the South to secretly teach slaves specific routes they could navigate using *Polaris*. By the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, about 500 people per year were travelling in the South teaching routes to slaves, and well established escape routes had been made. Scholars estimate that 60,000 to 100,000 slaves successfully fled to freedom.

Polaris became a symbol of freedom to slaves as well as a guide star. As soon as they were old enough to understand, slave children were taught to locate *Polaris* by using the stars of the *Big Dipper*. Slaves passed the travel instructions from plantation to plantation often by song.
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Escaping Slavery in the United States during the Early 1800's (continued)

Slaves brought from the tribal cultures of Africa the custom of creating songs to transmit factual information. In America slaves turned songs into codes that secretly transmitted information they wished to keep from their white masters.

"*Follow the Drinking Gourd*" is a coded song that gives the route for an escape from Alabama and Mississippi. Of all the routes out of the Deep South, this is the only one for which the details survive. The route instructions were given to slaves by an old man named *Peg Leg Joe*. Working as an itinerant carpenter, he spent winters in the South, moving from plantation to plantation, teaching slaves this escape route. Unfortunately, we know nothing more about Peg Leg Joe. The song and its translation are as follows:

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom,
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.

"When the sun comes back" means winter and spring when the altitude of the Sun is higher each day at noon. Quail are a migratory bird that winters in the South. The "*Drinking Gourd*" is the Big Dipper. The "old man" is Peg Leg Joe. The verse tells the slaves to leave in the winter and walk towards the Big Dipper. Leaving in winter made good sense, days were shorter and nights longer, which translates to mean less time to hide and more time to move, since all movement was done under the cover of darkness. Eventually they will meet a guide who will escort them for the remainder of the trip. The song continues:

The river bank makes a very good road,
The dead trees will show you the way,
Left foot, peg foot, travelling on,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

This verse taught slaves to follow the banks of the Tombigbee River north looking for dead trees that were marked with drawings of a left foot and a peg foot. The markings distinguished the Tombigbee River from other north-south rivers that flow in the region.

The river ends between two hills,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
There's another river on the other side,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

These words told the slaves that when they reached the headwaters of the Tombigbee River, they were to continue north over the hills until they met another river. Then they were to travel north along the new river which is the Tennessee River. A number of the southern escape routes converged on the Tennessee River.

Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom if you
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

This verse told the slaves the Tennessee River joined another river. They were to cross that river (which is the Ohio River), and on the north bank, meet a guide from the Underground Railroad who would give them further instructions for the rest of the journey.

Vocabulary

Abolitionist: A person who wanted to end slavery.

Constellation: A group of stars that forms a dot-to-dot picture in the sky.

Drinking Gourd: The “Big Dipper.”

Free States: The states of the north that did *not* allow slavery. Included: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, California

Gourd: The fruit of a vine, similar to a squash or pumpkin, though usually smaller. Gourds were often hollowed out and dried and then used as a drinking utensil.

Latitude: A measure of distance north or south of the equator, measured in degrees. The equator equals 0° and the north pole is 90°. Each degree equals one nautical mile.

Plantation: A large farm in the southern United States for growing usually cotton or tobacco. Most of the work done on plantations was done by slaves who were owned by the *Master* of the *Plantation*.

Polaris: The actual name of “the North Star.”

Quail: A small game bird that lives in the northern United States and southern Canada during the summer months, but migrates to the southern U.S. during the winter months.

Safe House: The house of a member of the Underground railroad. It was a place where escaping slaves were safe to rest during their long trip north to freedom.

Slavery: Forcing people to do work for another without pay. In slavery, people become property that could be bought and sold.

Slave States: The states of the south that allowed slavery. Included: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, Missouri.

The “Master”: The owner of a slave or many slaves.

Tombigbee River: A river that runs south through the states of Mississippi and Alabama. It was a major route of the underground railroad for slaves from Alabama and Mississippi.

Underground Railroad: A network of houses and individuals that helped slaves escape to the north. They provided shelter, hiding places, food, and clothing to runaway slaves. They also directed them to safe pathways and helped to carry them along this path. It was said that the “safe houses” were lined along the pathways from the south to the north like “cars in a secret *underground railroad*.”

The Song: *Follow the Drinking Gourd*

Musical score for the song "Follow the Drinking Gourd". The score is written in 4/4 time and consists of six staves of music. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff is labeled "CHORUS" and the fifth staff is labeled "VERSE".

CHORUS
Fol-low _____ the drink - ing gourd! Fol - low _____ the
drink - ing gourd... For the old man is a - wait - ing for to
VERSE
car - ry you to free - dom If you fol - low the drink - ing gourd. When the
sun comes back, and the first quail calls, _____ fol - low _____ the
drink - ing gourd... For the old man is a - wait - ing for to
car - ry you to free - dom If you fol - low the drink - ing gourd.

When the sun comes back and the first quail calls,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is awaiting for to carry you to freedom,
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.

Chorus:
Follow the Drinking Gourd,
Follow the Drinking Gourd,
For the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.

The river bank makes a very good road,
The dead trees will show you the way,
Left foot, peg foot, travelling on,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

(Chorus)

The river ends between two hills,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
There's another river on the other side,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.

(Chorus)

Where the great big river meets the little river,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
For the old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom
If you Follow the Drinking Gourd.

Plotting the Underground Railroad on a Map

Fill in the blank information using the map provided on the next page.				
Position	Location	Latitude	Distance Travelled	State or Country
1	Mouth of the Tombigbee River		0 miles	
2	Northernmost point on the Tombigbee River			
3	The Point of the Tennessee River Closest to the Tombigbee			
4	Where the Tennessee River meets the Ohio River			
5	Northernmost point of the Ohio River			
6	South shore of Lake Erie			
7	Canada-just north of Lake Erie			

1. Find Positions 1 through 7 on the map. Place an "X" to mark each spot on the map.
2. Notice that the rivers are blue on the map.
3. **Trace** the state borders along the dotted lines with a pencil.
4. **Label** the names of the states. **DO NOT COLOR THE STATES!**
5. Using a red crayon, connect the "X"s with a single line from south to north. This is the route of the Underground Railroad followed in the story of *Follow the Drinking Gourd*.
6. **Color** the free states light blue, the slave states gray, and Canada green.
7. Write the name of the state each of the seven positions are in on the chart above.

More Advanced Questions:

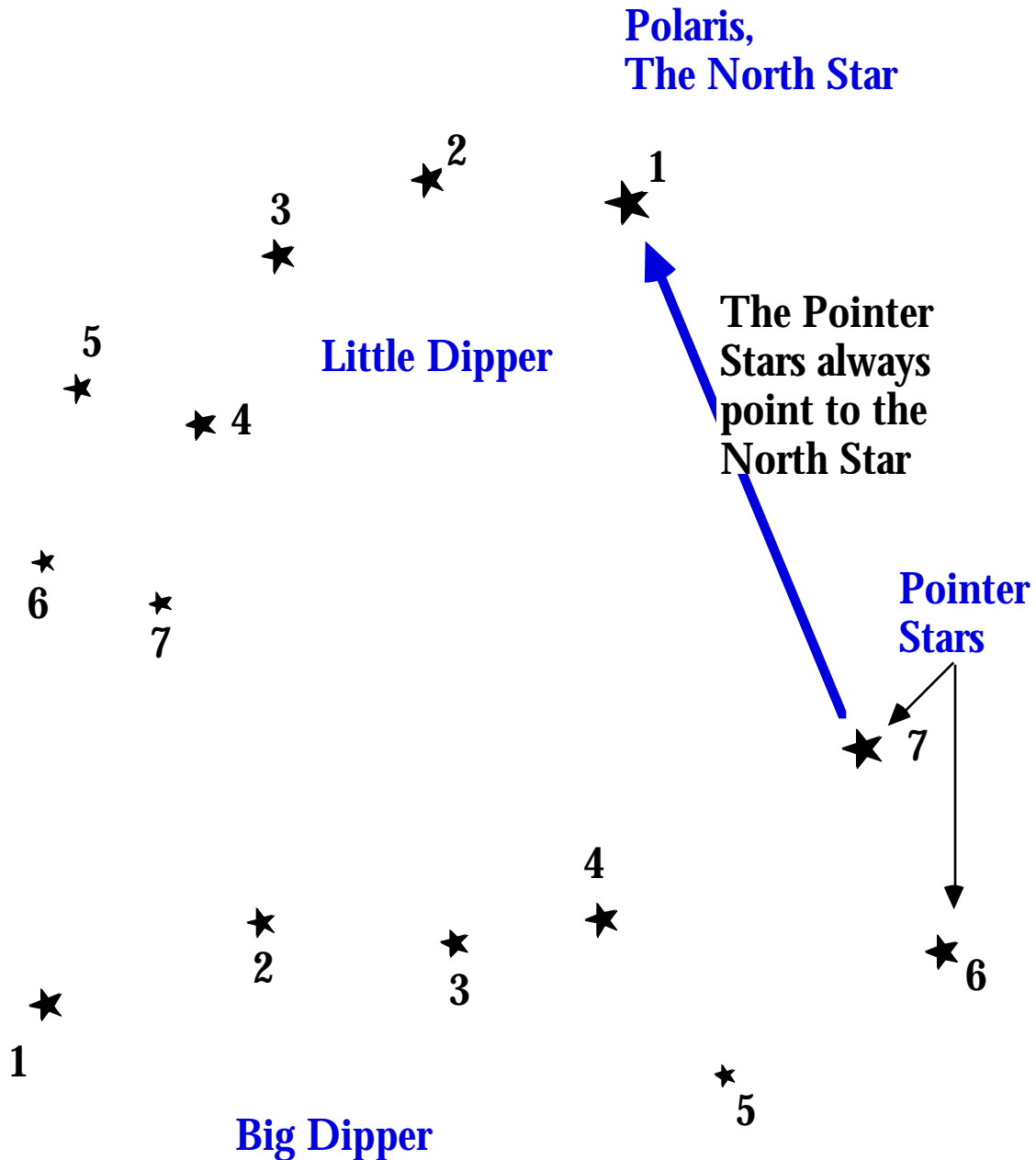
8. Find the approximate latitude of each of the seven positions and write your findings in the chart above.
9. Every degree of latitude = 60 miles. Using the latitudes you found in question 8, determine how many miles travelled to each position from the last. Add up the total mileage for a complete trip on the underground railroad. Remember, most of this trip was done walking. Think about what it was like to have to walk that far.

The Eastern United States During Slavery Era



Big Dipper, Little Dipper & Polaris--the North Star

Connect the stars and see how they are oriented to each other!

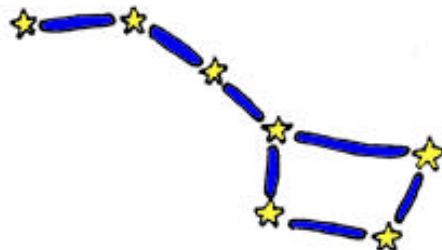


Follow the Drinking Gourd Word Search

Find the following words hidden in the puzzle:
(some words you will find more than once!)

REWARD FLEE FAMILY SCARED NIGHT SUN CLUES SAFEHOUSE
RUN ESCAPE CABIN RIVER HIDE MASTER WAGON TRAIL SLAVERY
TRAVEL FIELD COTTON BRUTALITY DRINKING GOURD PLANTATION
BIG DIPPER CONSTELLATION RAILROAD NORTH UNDERGROUND GO
STAR CANADA SOUTH SONG PEG LEGGED JOE BRAVE WALK SOLD
NO MONEY SKY FREE

T	B	R	C	F	S	N	F	N	G	H	I	D	E	T	W
R	S	A	O	I	L	C	M	R	I	V	E	R	F	X	A
A	A	I	N	E	S	C	A	P	E	Z	J	I	A	P	L
I	F	L	S	L	A	V	E	R	Y	E	P	N	M	E	K
L	E	R	T	D	S	O	N	G	E	?	L	K	I	G	R
T	H	O	E	N	I	G	H	T	Z	D	A	I	L	L	U
R	O	A	L	W	A	G	O	N	S	U	N	N	Y	E	N
A	U	D	L	M	A	S	T	E	R	S	T	G	C	G	H
V	S	N	A	N	O	R	T	H	F	K	A	G	A	G	I
E	E	D	T	S	O	L	D	C	L	Y	T	O	B	E	D
L	S	B	I	G	D	I	P	P	E	R	I	U	I	D	E
?	T	C	O	T	T	O	N	Z	E	H	O	R	N	J	F
T	A	U	N	D	E	R	G	R	O	U	N	D	G	O	R
B	R	U	T	A	L	I	T	Y	C	L	U	E	S	E	E
C	A	N	A	D	A	X	T	S	O	U	T	H	J	T	E
X	W	A	L	K	A	N	D	W	A	L	K	A	N	D	!
Z	L	I	I	N	O	S	K	B	R	A	V	E	V	P	A





Coloring Page

Write a caption to this picture in the lines below the picture.

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