



Still Family Reunion/Underground Railroad

I. SYNOPSIS

For more than 120 years the Still family has been holding reunions. In recent years they have gathered in the town of Lawnside, Camden County, which was founded as a refuge for escaped slaves. The reunion is an occasion for expressions of pride in the Still family's African-American history.

The day begins with a church service at the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church. After church, the family gathers at the home of Clarence and Verline Still. A group of visiting students help the family prepare traditional foods such as pork and chicken barbecue, collard greens, and sweet-potato pie.

Gloria Still, the family storyteller, recounts how their ancestor, Charity Still, ran away from slavery in Maryland to join her husband Levin Still, who had purchased his freedom from his owner and settled in New Jersey. Years later Charity Still was reunited with her son, Peter, whom she had been forced to leave behind. Peter eventually managed to buy his own freedom and later that of his family. We also learn about his two brothers born in New Jersey -- William Still, who became active in the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia; and James Still, who was a self-taught herbalist in Medford.

The reunion ends with a toast to freedom as everyone joins together in the "Electric Slide," a popular dance.

II. KEY WORDS

Slave hunters - people who caught runaway slaves and brought them back to their owners

Underground Railroad - an informal network of people who aided the escape of slaves from the South to the North and Canada

Abolitionists - people who opposed slavery and wanted the United States to abolish it

Quakers - members of the religious sect known as the Society of Friends whose belief in the equality of all human beings led many of them to oppose slavery

III. SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

A. STILL FAMILY REUNION

1. Objective

Students will describe the Still family history and the family's relationship to the Underground Railroad.

2. Before Viewing the Program

Download and reproduce the Still Family Reunion questions. Begin the class by explaining that they are going to see a video about an African-American family whose history is related to the Underground Railroad. Distribute the question sheet and go over the questions.

3. After Viewing the Program

The teacher should divide the class into groups of four and ask the students to discuss and write the answers to the questions on their sheets. Then, she should reconvene the entire class to go over their answers.

B. FAMILY HISTORY

3. Objective

Students will identify the ways that family reunions are related to family history.

2. Before Viewing the Program

Explain to the students that one of the themes of this program is family pride. Ask them to pay attention to the various ways that the Stills express their family pride.

3. After Viewing the Program

Ask the students to make a list of the ways that the Stills express their family pride (e.g. stories, poems, the toast, attendance at the reunion, T-shirts, sermons in church, etc.).

B. WRITTEN ACCOUNT OF STILL FAMILY HISTORY

1. Objective

Students will interpret a primary source.

2. After Viewing the Program

Download, reproduce and distribute the account of the Still Family history written by Dr. James Still. Read it aloud to the class, while the students follow along. Explain antiquated language and historical background, such as the fugitive slave laws that required the return of escaped slaves. Ask the students to draw pictures illustrating one of the incidents mentioned in this account.

C. THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN NEW JERSEY

1. Objective

Students will translate information from a primary written source to a geographic representation (i.e., a map).

2. After Viewing the Program

Download, reproduce and distribute the blank map of New Jersey and the description of the Underground Railroad Routes through New Jersey. Read the

account aloud, explaining any terms that need explaining, while the students draw and label on the map the four routes described in the account.

IV. SUGGESTED READINGS

Mann, Peggy and Vivian W. Siegal. *The Man Who Bought Himself: The Story of Peter Still*. New York and London: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975.

Pickard, Kate E. R. *The Kidnapped and the Redeemed*. 1855; Reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968.

Still, James. *Early Recollections and Life of Dr. James Still*. 1877; Reprint, Medford: Medford Historical Society, 1971.

Still, William. *Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, Etc. . . .* Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1872.

Wright, Giles. *Afro-American in New Jersey: A Short History*. Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1989.

http://www.njstatelib.org/NJ_Information/Digital_Collections/Digidox9.php

Wright, Giles. "'Steal Away, Steal Away': A Guide to the Underground Railroad in New Jersey". Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, n.d.

http://www.newjerseyhistory.org/underground_rr.pdf