

# Traveling Underground Railroad Routes Along the Mason-Dixon Line

## MUSEUM CONNECTION: LABOR and THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

---

**Purpose:** In this lesson students will explain how slaves used geographic characteristics to help them escape along the Underground Railroad. Working in groups they will place information about the Mason-Dixon line in chronological order. They will also examine photographs and read information in order to learn how runaways used the geographic characteristics of different places to help them. Working individually, students will use the information to answer questions about the migration to freedom of enslaved African Americans.

**Grade Level and Content Area:** **M** Middle, Social Studies

**Time Frame:** 2-3 class periods

### Social Studies Standards:

Geography 4.1.8.3      Explain the interrelationships among physical and human characteristics that shape the identity of places

### Social Studies VSC:

3.C.1 (Grade 8)      Analyze the geographic characteristics that have influenced migration and settlement patterns

5.C.5.b (Grade 8)      Analyze the experiences of African-American slaves, free blacks and the influence of abolitionists

6.F.1 (Grades 7 and 8)      Interpret information from primary and secondary sources

### Reading and English Language Arts VSC:

2.A.2.b (Grades 7 and 8)      Analyze graphic aids that contribute to meaning

### Objective:

Students will explain how geographic characteristics (both physical and human) were important to fugitive slaves, who escaped slavery using the Underground Railroad.

## VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS

---

**Conductor** – The conductor led fugitive slaves to safety along the Underground Railroad.

**Geographic characteristics**– Divided into physical characteristics and human characteristics, geographic characteristics distinguish one place from another. Physical and human characteristics are explained in the Teacher Background.

**Passengers** – Fugitive slaves who fled from the South along the Underground Railroad were called passengers.

**Rector** – A rector is a clergyman in charge of a parish.

**Slavery** – Slavery is the institution of owning slaves or holding individuals in a condition of servitude.

**Station** – A “safe house” or stopping point along the Underground Railroad was called a station.

**Underground Railroad** – In the years before the Civil War, many slaves used the Underground Railroad—a secret network of “safe houses” and trails—in order to escape to freedom.

## MATERIALS

---

### FOR THE TEACHER:

- ☐ Teacher Resource Sheet 1 – Underground Railroad Routes 1860
- ☐ Teacher Resource Sheet 2 – What is significant about this marker?
- ☐ Teacher Resource Sheet 3 – Answer Key
- ☐ Teacher Resource Sheet 4 – Mason-Dixon Markers

### FOR THE STUDENT:

- ☐ Student Resource Sheet 1 – The Mason-Dixon Line (one copy for each group of four students)
- ☐ Student Resource Sheet 2 – Underground Railroad Photos and Photo Fact Cards (one set for each group of four students)
- ☐ Student Resource Sheet 3 – Geographic Characteristics of Underground Railroad Sites along the Mason-Dixon Line
- ☐ Student Resource Sheet 4 – How Enslaved People Used Geographic Characteristics to Escape
- ☐ Student Resource Sheet 5 – Photo Analysis

## RESOURCES

---

### PUBLICATIONS:

Christian, Charles M. *Black Saga: The African American Experience, A Chronology*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1995.

Ecenbarger, William. *Walkin' the Line: A Journey from Past to Present along the Mason-Dixon*. New York: M. Evans and Company, Inc., 2000.

#### WEB SITES:

The Mason-Dixon Line

[http://freespace.virgin.net/john.cletheroe/usa\\_can/usa/mas\\_dix.htm](http://freespace.virgin.net/john.cletheroe/usa_can/usa/mas_dix.htm)

Taking the Train to Freedom. Underground Railroad: Special Resource Study  
National Park Service

<http://www.nps.gov/undergroundrr/>

The Underground Railroad

National Geographic Society

<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/map.html>

Pathways to Freedom: Maryland & The Underground Railroad

Maryland Public Television

[http://pathways.thinkport.org/flash\\_home.cfm](http://pathways.thinkport.org/flash_home.cfm)

#### TEACHER BACKGROUND

Most active between 1830 and 1860, the Underground Railroad was not a true railroad but rather a network of escape routes for slaves that stretched from the southern slave states into the northern states and Canada. The term “underground” was used because runaways, called “passengers,” were hidden in secret places known as “stations.” These places included safe houses, barns, and haylofts. Every home that welcomed runaways and every individual who offered food, clothing, or other help became part of the Underground Railroad. Those who led “passengers” from one “station” to another were black, white, and Native American anti-slavery activists called “conductors.” Other workers along the Underground Railroad came from all backgrounds and included ministers, shopkeepers, farmers, and former slaves. Harriet Tubman, a runaway slave from Maryland, made at least 11 trips into the South and helped to rescue at least 80 runaways.

The majority of runaways were men between the ages of 16 and 35 years. Women and children also escaped, but they were more likely to be caught. Any runaway who was caught might be beaten then returned to his or her owners and subjected to even harsher conditions. Enacted in 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law made the capture of escaped slaves a lucrative business. It also allowed masters or professional bounty hunters (called “slave hunters”) to capture runaways, even in a free state.

More than 3,200 “workers” along the Underground Railroad helped thousands of runaway slaves escape, sometimes helping them travel hundreds of miles in order to reach freedom. Some runaways made it to the northern states, while others escaped to Canada,

Texas, Mexico, and through Florida to the Caribbean. Fugitive slaves traveled through forests, over fields, through swamps, and across streams and rivers. Often they moved at night and used the stars to navigate. They traveled on coaches, trains, and steamships, but most often by wagon or on foot.

## Geography

Students must understand the meaning of “geographic characteristics”—distinctive characteristics that distinguish one place from another—in order to complete the activities in this lesson. This lesson contains information about the geographic characteristics of places in Maryland that slaves may have used in order to help them in their flight to freedom. Geographic characteristics are divided into two categories: physical characteristics and human characteristics.

*Physical characteristics* describe the natural environment of a place. They include:

- physical features – land forms and bodies of waters
- weather – the short-term conditions of the atmosphere determined by variables such as temperature, wind, moisture, and pressure
- climate – the average temperature and rainfall for a place over hundreds of years
- soil – the thin layer of material on the earth’s surface; sand, silt, and clay are the basic types
- minerals – naturally occurring, non-living solids with a characteristic crystal structure and chemical makeup
- vegetation – four types: forest, grassland, tundra, and desert. Climate affects the vegetation that grows in a place.
- animal life – all the large and small animals that live in a place

*Human characteristics* describe the people of a place (past and present) and their languages, religions, economic activities, political systems, population distribution, and modifications of the environment. Human characteristics include:

- human-made features – modifications people make to land (e.g., buildings, bridges, tunnels, railroad tracks, dams, monuments, piers, cultivated land)
- language – a way of communication with words, symbols, signs, or gestures that are used and understood by a group of people
- religion – a set of beliefs and practices relating to a god or gods and generally agreed upon by a number of people
- political system – structures of power, authority, and government
- economic activities – how people make a living in a place
- population distribution – the pattern of the number of people who live in a place

## LESSON DEVELOPMENT

---

**Note to teacher:** *Due to the expense of color photocopies, you may wish to cut out and laminate copies of Student Resource Sheet 2.*

1. **Motivation:** Divide students into groups of four, and give each group a copy of **Student Resource Sheet 1, The Mason-Dixon Line**. Instruct the students to cut out the information boxes, read the information, and place the boxes in correct chronological order. *(Note: Teachers with reluctant readers may wish to underline or highlight key dates on cards.)*

When students have completed placing the events in chronological order, ask the following questions:

- Why was it important to know who had title to the land along the 40th degree of latitude? *(Taxes could be collected and given to the correct colony.)*
  - Why were Mason and Dixon hired to determine the boundary between Pennsylvania and Maryland? *(The local surveyors disputed the North-South line for 10 years. In 1763 the grandsons of Penn and Calvert signed a contract with Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two astronomer-mathematicians from England, to complete the boundary between the two colonies.)*
  - How did physical features cause Mason and Dixon difficulties? *(They had to cross mountains, walk through forests, and cross flooded rivers.)*
  - How many years did it take to determine the location of the line that divided the colonies of Maryland and Pennsylvania? *(87 years)*
  - In 1780, what did the longest part of the Mason-Dixon Line become? *(The boundary between the slave-holding South and the free North.)*
  - How did the Missouri Compromise affect Maryland and Pennsylvania? *(The Missouri Compromise resulted in the Mason-Dixon Line becoming the line that divided slave and free states.)*
2. Display **Teacher Resource Sheet 1, Underground Railroad Routes 1860**. Ask:
    - Why do you think so many enslaved people traveled through Maryland?
    - From which states were they trying to escape and why?
    - Would this be an easy or hard task? Why?
  3. Explain that during this lesson students will learn how enslaved people used the geographic characteristics along these routes to help them gain their freedom.
  4. Write the following terms on the board: Underground Railroad, conductor, passenger, and stations. Ask if anyone can explain any of the terms. *(See vocabulary section of lesson plan for correct definitions.)* Tell students that the Underground Railroad was not a railroad but a network of secret escape routes for enslaved people trying to find freedom.
  5. Ask students if anyone can name a Marylander who was enslaved and who became a conductor after escaping. *(Harriet Tubman, a runaway slave from Maryland, made at least 19 trips into the South and helped to rescue more than 300 runaways.)*
  6. Explain that enslaved people used the geographic characteristics of different places in

order to help them travel along this secret route. On the board write “geographic characteristics” and under this the words “physical characteristics” and “human characteristics.” Review these concepts with students. (See Teacher Background.)

7. Display **Teacher Resource Sheet 2**, What is significant about this marker? Discuss the photograph, and have students answer the questions. (*Note to the teacher: If students are unfamiliar with photo analysis, you may wish to use Student Resource Sheet 5, Photo Analysis, in order to help them describe the photographs.*)
8. Explain that the Mason-Dixon Line divided some buildings. In Ellerslie, Pennsylvania, it goes through Redeemer United Church of Christ. The building is topped by twin pitched roofs; the one on the right is in Pennsylvania, a free state, and the other is in Maryland, a slave state.
  - What is the arrow pointing to? (*Mason-Dixon marker*)
  - What physical characteristics are in the photograph? (*vegetation–trees; weather and climate–snow and clouds*)
  - What human characteristics do you see? (*human-made features–church, marker; religion–church; language–sign in front of church*)
9. Tell students that they will be looking at photographs and reading information in boxes that will help them learn how runaways used geographic characteristics along the way to cross the Mason-Dixon Line.
10. Divide students into groups of four and give each group a set of **Student Resource Sheet 2**, Underground Railroad Photos and Fact Cards, to cut out.
11. Next give each group a copy of **Student Resource Sheet 3**, Geographic Characteristics of Underground Railroad Sites along the Mason-Dixon Line. Tell them to look carefully at each photo and complete only the first column of the chart by matching the photograph to a textbox.
12. When students have completed this part of the activity, check to be sure they have the correct information matched with each photograph.
13. Then have students use only photograph 1 and information in the textbox that matches it to identify the physical and human characteristics (*physical characteristics - snow, trees, hill; human characteristics–buildings, road, fence, poles*). Students should add this information to the chart.
14. Now have students do the same with photograph 2 and add information to the chart (*physical characteristics–grasses, marsh, coastal plain*).
15. Have students learn more about places along the Mason-Dixon Line by individually completing the chart for photographs 3 through 14.
16. When students have completed this activity, use **Teacher Resource Sheet 3**, Answer Key, to discuss geographic characteristics that were used by enslaved people along the Mason-Dixon Line.
17. **Assessment:** Distribute **Student Resource Sheet 4**, How Enslaved People Used

Geographic Characteristics to Escape, and tell them to read and answer the questions. Answers should be related to the geographic characteristics listed on the chart.

18. **Closure:** Display **Teacher Resource Sheet 4, Mason-Dixon Markers**. Ask: What will come to mind the next time you cross the state line from Maryland into Pennsylvania or Delaware?

## THOUGHTFUL APPLICATIONS

---

- The northeast region of the United States has many historical markers, trails, and sites related to the Underground Railroad. Think about what you have just learned, and design a poster that could be used to advertise information about geographic characteristics used by passengers on the Underground Railroad.
- The Maryland Society of Surveyors (<http://www.marylandsurveyor.org>) is resurveying the Mason-Dixon Line. Contact your local chapter for speakers and resources.

## LESSON EXTENSIONS

---

- There were many routes to freedom—west, north, and east into the coastal islands of the Carolinas—and many means of “conduct” and passage provided by individuals, families, and communities. Collections on display in the “Things Hold, Lines Connect” gallery at the Reginald F. Lewis Museum document the flight of several individuals from Montgomery County, Maryland, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For example, Ann Marie Weems made a daring escape in 1855 along the Underground Railroad. Students may explore how Weems’ story relates to this gallery’s title.
- Visit the National Park Service Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/undergroundrr/>) in order to learn more about other Underground Railroad routes, conductors, passengers, and safe houses.

This page left intentionally blank.

## Underground Railroad Routes 1860



Map from *The Underground Railroad*, by Raymond Bial (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995).

This page left intentionally blank.

What is significant about this marker?



The **Mason-Dixon Line** divided some buildings. In Ellerslie, Pennsylvania, the line goes through Redeemer United Church of Christ. The building is topped by twin pitched roofs—the one on the right is in **Pennsylvania**, a free state, and the other is in **Maryland**, a slave state.

- What is the arrow pointing to?
- What physical characteristics are in the photograph?
- What human characteristics are in the photograph?

This page left intentionally blank.

## Answer Key

Photo/Fact Card	Physical Characteristics	Human Characteristics
1-E road in Garrett County	Hill, snow, trees	barn, house, road, fence, telephone poles
2-L marsh near Tuckahoe	grasses, marsh, coastal plain	
3-F churches in Cumberland	hill/mountain, trees, grass	light poles, churches, flag
4-D slave house	trees, grass	building
5-N Mason-Dixon marker		monument, walkway
6-G foggy morning	fog, sun, crops, trees	barn, cultivated land
7-J railroad tracks		railroad tracks
8-B Potomac River	river, trees	
9-K field of geese	flat land (plain), geese	cultivated land
10-I Thomas Garrett tombstone	grass	tombstone
11-H moss on tree	trees, soil	
12-A frozen creek	creek, trees, ice	
13-M Pocomoke Swamp	swamp, birds, forest, soil	
14-C mountains and farm	mountains, valley, trees	Barn, cultivated land

This page left intentionally blank.

## Mason-Dixon Markers



This page left intentionally blank.

## The Mason-Dixon Line

In 1820 debates in Congress raged over whether Missouri should enter the Union as a slave state. As part of the Missouri Compromise slavery became illegal north of 36 degrees north latitude. This decision resulted in the creation of the Mason-Dixon Line as a symbol of the division between slave states and free states.

On March 1, 1780, the Pennsylvania Assembly passed a law calling for the gradual end of slavery. The longest part of the Mason-Dixon Line became the boundary not just between Maryland and Pennsylvania but between two larger regions: the slave-holding South and the free North.

In 1681, King Charles II gave William Penn a large tract of land in America whose southern border was the 40th degree of latitude. Penn also received the Three Lower Counties of what is now the state of Delaware. Problems would eventually arise because no one knew precisely where the 40th degree of latitude was located on the land.

In 1632, King Charles I gave Cecilius Calvert, the second Lord Baltimore, a large tract of land north of Virginia. Calvert named the land Maryland in honor of Queen Henrietta Maria. The charter said that the northern border of Maryland was the 40th degree of latitude.

The settlers in Maryland and Pennsylvania living on or near the 40th degree of latitude at first didn't care which colony they were in because both colonies had fertile land. But titles to land eventually became a problem and tax collection was difficult. In 1750, three commissioners on each side were appointed to work on setting a specific boundary between the two colonies.

On September 11, 1768, Mason and Dixon left America, 4 years and 10 months after they had started the job. They had battled accidents, mountains, forests, flooded rivers, and wild animals. The boundary they drew is still recognized by the United States government. Today modern equipment shows the remarkable accuracy of the work they did.

On December 22, 1750, two surveyors from each of the colonies started on Fenwick Island to begin the East -West line across the peninsula. John Watson and William Parsons represented the Penns, and John Emory and Thomas Jones represented the Calverts.

In November 1763, Mason and Dixon arrived in Philadelphia. They accepted the middle point established by colonial surveyors 13 years earlier. They moved north to a point between the 39th and 40th parallels about 15 miles south of Philadelphia. From here they moved westward 230 miles, marking the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania.

On November 9, 1768, the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania was formally approved, ending 87 years of disputes between the Penns and the Calverts. Ironically, as a result of the Revolutionary War 8 years later, they lost their land when their proprietorships ended as the United States was created.

The local surveyors successfully established the East -West boundary from Fenwick, but a dispute arose about the north -south line. The dispute lasted 10 years. In 1763, the grandsons of Penn and Calvert signed a contract with Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two astronomer -mathematicians from England, to complete the boundary between the two colonies.

### Underground Railroad Photos



This page left intentionally blank.



This page left intentionally blank.

## Photo Fact Cards

Runaways often took to the water to throw dogs off their scent. Desperate to be free, they crossed rivers and creeks at night even when the creeks were frozen and the ice could possibly break.

A

Maryland is only 2 miles wide in Hancock. The Potomac River forms the border to the south and the Mason-Dixon Line is the border to the north. This location was a popular spot for enslaved African Americans running away from Virginia.

B

When traveling over mountains and through valleys and forests, runaways often followed animal tracks to help them navigate and find food. Streams, rivers, and cultivated land also provided a supply of food and water.

C

In Delaware, enslaved African Americans often lived in their master's house. William Ross had 1,400 acres of land and owned 14 slaves, some of whom lived in a small house built beside his mansion.

D

The Underground Railroad was neither "underground" nor a "railroad." It was a network of people and places organized to help runaways reach freedom in the North. Runaways often hid in barns during the day.

E

Many runaways passed through Cumberland in the 1850s and were helped by the rector of the Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Enslaved people as well as freemen are listed in the parish record.

F

Runaways could carry little food and were exposed to all kinds of weather. They traveled through unfamiliar countryside and often crisscrossed fields to avoid slave catchers and their bloodhounds. Fog helped runaways on their journey.

G

Escaping slaves followed the North Star when possible. On starless nights or during daylight they often looked at the moss on trees to determine which way was north. Moss grows on the north side of trees.

H

This page left intentionally blank.

Photo Fact Cards

Thomas Garrett was an Underground Railroad conductor. He owned a shoe store in Wilmington, Delaware, where he hid runaways. When it was safe for them to leave, he gave them shoes to wear on their journey. I

Before the Civil War, many enslaved African Americans tried to escape using the railroads. The people who worked for the railroads were not sympathetic to runaways because they were afraid of being faced with lawsuits from their owners. J

Geese were important to runaways. They provided food along their journey, but they also might provide cues to directions. Geese fly north in summer and south in winter. "Flying geese" was a quilt pattern used to help runaways. K

Frederick Douglass was born in Tuckahoe, Maryland, in a region of creeks and marshes. As a young man, he worked in the shipyards of Baltimore. He later escaped to the North where, in 1847, he founded the abolitionist newspaper, The North Star. L

In the Pocomoke Swamp, slaves cut cypress trees in order to make shingles for roofs. The swamp, full of birds and other wildlife, was a difficult place for slave catchers to go. It was called a "flowing Underground Railroad." M

Stone markers were erected every 5 miles along the Mason-Dixon Line. When runaways found these markers on the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania, they knew they had reached the beginning of their freedom. N

This page left intentionally blank.

### Geographic Characteristics of Underground Railroad Sites Along the Mason-Dixon Line

Photo Number - Card Letter	Physical Characteristics	Human Characteristics
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		
9.		
10.		
11.		
12.		
13.		
14.		

This page left intentionally blank.

## How Enslaved People Used Geographic Characteristics to Escape



*Twenty Eight Fugitives Escaping From the Eastern Shore of Maryland* by William Still

1. Enslaved African Americans could not always rely on safe houses for food or protection. Explain how they might have used geographic characteristics to survive.

---

---

---

---

2. How did escaping slaves use the geographic characteristics of Maryland and Delaware to find their way?

---

---

---

---

This page left intentionally blank.

## Photo Analysis

### Step 1: Photo Qualities

Complete the following information about your photograph:

Size \_\_\_\_\_

Format: Color \_\_\_\_\_ or Black and White \_\_\_\_\_

Is a date or source given? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If so, what is the date? \_\_\_\_\_

Where did it come from? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was the photographer? \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 2: Observation and First Impressions

Study the photograph for a few minutes. What are your first impressions?

What do you see?

Use the table below to identify the objects, peoples and activities or events in the photograph.

Objects	People	Activities

**Step 3: Questions:**

Based on what you see, what questions do you have about the photograph?

Why do you think the photograph was taken?

What does the photograph tell you about what was happening in the United States at the time?