

SECOND STOP: A Character Encounter

As the Magic Lantern portion of your class adventure nears its conclusion, out of the darkness appears one of the important “conductors” on the Underground Railroad, traveling through time and space ready to relate real life stories of successful flights to liberty that are at once troubling and inspirational. Somehow, the people, places and methods of the Underground Railroad have nearly been lost in the pages of history. Understandably the topics of slavery, abolition, and the Civil War are not easy to talk about, let alone to try to explain in the classroom. Yet to deny their existence obscures our past and limits our ability to appreciate and comprehend events of today.

Our Showman is a professional actor, writer and director, having performed for Walt Disney World and, more recently, as Artistic Director of the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire. His ability to command and hold the attention of students has been uncanny. Clearly his efforts in creatively presenting the over 40 powerful images on his triennial is both impressive and conducive to the day’s goals.

However, it is the unexpected appearance of a free African-American of the 1850s that will engage students emotionally, lifting the words off a history book, and bringing them to life. Harrowing stories of those “almost caught” and their personal experiences highlight the obstacles and risks each took to conduct their “passengers” along their journey to freedom.

Together, the Showman and our surprise “Visitor” make for a time of self-thought and reflection that students will carry with them long after the trip back to school.

Besides Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, your students will encounter one of these local, lesser known, true-life African-American heroes:



William Goodridge

Born enslaved in Maryland, and freed at 16 in Pennsylvania, he became a wealthy businessman and an important “conductor” and “station master” on the Underground Railroad.

Lydia Hamilton Smith

A prominent figure in the Abolitionist movement, she was best known as a businesswoman and long-time household manager for Thaddeus Stevens, a fierce opponent of slavery and discrimination against African Americans whom students get to know on Stop #1 of their Underground Railroad journey.



Basil Biggs

Orphaned at the age of four, this self-made man was a farmer whose home was used to conceal freedom seekers as a stop on the Underground Railroad.



Frances Harper

Born a freewoman in Maryland, she moved to Pennsylvania and helped freedom seekers find their way to Canada. She was also a noted poet and lecturer on the Abolitionist circuit.

