

Jan Turnquist:

Harriet Beecher Stowe: Catalyst for Civil War
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



About the Performance

Travel back in time with Harriet Beecher Stowe, whom Abraham Lincoln called “the little lady who made this great war.” This famous abolitionist and author speaks about her life, her dedication to ending slavery, and the publication of her best-selling novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Students join in for important lessons in American history, including pre-Civil War America, the Civil War, the Underground Railroad, abolitionist activities, Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, 19th century travel, and life in New England and Europe.



About the Artist

An accomplished actress and historian, and executive director of Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House in Concord, MA, Jan Turnquist brings Alcott and other important women from American History vividly to life. In her performances, she comes in character and full historical dress, tells stories full of audience participation, and answers student questions, providing a unique and insightful experience of history. Jan has presented her work under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Labor, the Federal Women's Council, the National Park Service, and Continental Airlines and has performed at numerous libraries, schools, and universities. She has also appeared on the BBC, PBS, and WCVB.

Program Learning Goals

1. To explore historical and personal contexts for pre-Civil War events.
2. To gain insight into a courageous and accomplished woman of the times, who succeeded despite tremendous odds.
3. To broaden experience in other subject areas through drama.

Essential Questions

1. Why is it important to learn from historical figures?
2. How is "meeting" a historical figure different from learning about them in books or movies?
3. Why is it important to tell stories about the past and historical events?

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Pre-Performance Note for Teachers

This is a performance of living history. Jan Turnquist will be in character as Harriet Beecher Stowe for the entire time she is interacting with students and refer to herself as “Mrs. Stowe.”

Please read and discuss the “Pre-Performance Note for Students” to prepare students for what to expect and how to interact with Mrs. Stowe. Be sure to focus on the phrase “willing suspension of disbelief.” This will enable students to take a more active role in the performance.

Your class is asked to pretend that they are an abolitionist group with a petition to present to Mrs. Stowe (see *Pre-Performance Activity 1 on page 4*). After receiving the petition, Mrs. Stowe will be persuaded to speak, although women in the 1800s did not generally speak in public, and most of her public appearances for abolitionist groups were in the form of silent support. Students do not need to speak “in character” as abolitionists, except in a group voice when they urge Mrs. Stowe to speak. She will then reveal much about pre-Civil War life, her childhood and education, and how she came to write her famous book. As the visit goes on, students will listen and may ask their own questions.

Pre-Performance Note for Students

Harriet Beecher Stowe will visit us in a living history program on _____.

Like a play, living history involves actors and requires the willing suspension of disbelief by its viewers. Harriet Beecher Stowe lived from 1811-1896 and although she will be played by an actress for this visit, please treat her as if she is the real Mrs. Stowe.

Unlike a regular play, living history allows the audience to be a part of the performance. You are invited to respond to Mrs. Stowe’s conversation, but please do not feel pressured to do so. You do not need to be an expert on the 1800s and only need to be yourself.

In her visit, Mrs. Stowe will tell you about her life in the 1800s, her work, and her book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, one of the most influential books in American history. She will, of course, know nothing of modern life. When Mrs. Stowe arrives, please pretend to be an abolitionist group who is fighting for racial equality and the end of slavery. Please show Mrs. Stowe your signed petition and urge her to begin speaking. Your own willing suspension of disbelief during this performance will lead you to the magic of meeting a woman who lived over 100 years ago, and by simply making her welcome, you will have a chance to travel back in time yourself.

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Vocabulary

- **Abolition:** the act of ending the observance or effect of slavery.
- **Abolitionist:** an individual working on advancing the elimination of slavery, often alongside enslaved people.
- **Emancipate:** to free from slavery, restraint, or control of one over another.
- **Reformism:** a movement in the 1800s that sought societal and political changes including women's rights, child labor laws, racial equality, and free education.

Key Facts and Context for Students

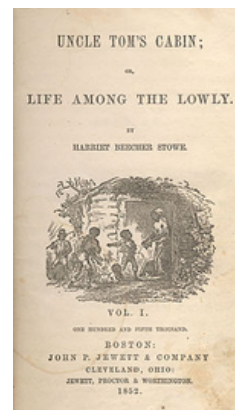


Harriet Beecher Stowe

Harriet Beecher Stowe was born in 1811 to a large religious family who were passionate advocates for civil rights and social reform. Harriet was a talented writer from an early age and wrote 30 books and countless other works throughout her life. Her most famous and influential book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, dramatically affected public opinion about African Americans and slavery leading up to the start of the Civil War. It led Abraham Lincoln to hail her as the "little lady who made this great war."

Uncle Tom's Cabin

In 1851, Harriet was asked to write a series for an abolitionist newspaper about the realities of slavery. Due to its popularity, she expanded the series and published it as the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. The book was immediately popular with white abolitionists and widely protested by defenders of slavery, escalating tensions leading to the Civil War. African-American abolitionists praised the book for its powerful impact, yet critiqued her portrayal of enslaved people. Modern criticism focuses on the novel's stereotypes of African-Americans and "Uncle Tom" has become a derogatory term. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the best-selling novel of the 19th century and has been adapted into many plays and films.



The Age of Reform

In the 1800s, the United States went through a period of massive change. Many people fought for political causes to create a better world. Educational reformists fought for relevant and accessible curriculum. The women's rights movement fought for equal rights for women, including the right to vote. Labor movements sought an eight-hour work day and child labor laws. Abolitionists fought for racial equality and an end to slavery. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* played an important role in advocating for abolition.

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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

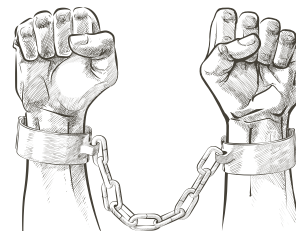
- What do you know about life in the 1800s? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What might a story teach us about history that we might not get from a history book?
- What does “willing suspension of disbelief” mean? Why must we suspend disbelief to enjoy this performance?

Pre-Performance Activities

Activity 1: Petition for Abolition

Learning Goals:

- To understand the meaning of “abolition.”
- To have students collaborate on a petition in support of abolition.



Materials:

Books and vetted websites about slavery and abolition (see *resources on page 9*), “Petition for Abolition” worksheet (see *page 5*), large paper or poster board, coloring/art supplies

Note for the teacher:

Please have the final signed petition hanging up in the classroom for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s visit.

Directions:

1. Discuss slavery and abolition. What is an abolitionist? How did the abolitionists contribute to the end of slavery?
2. Discuss the concept of petitioning. When do people use petitions? What type of information do petitions include? Ask if any of the students in the class have signed a petition. If so, what was the cause?
3. Divide students into small groups. Have each group fill in the “Petition for Abolition” worksheet.
4. Have each group present their petition to the rest of the class.
5. Discuss which points most clearly and firmly state the cause from each petition. Select which ones to use on the final petition and organize them into a presentation order.
6. Have a few students copy the petition onto large paper.
7. Have each student sign it and hang up in the classroom.

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Names: _____

Directions: Research slavery and abolition. Use the prompts below to make arguments in support of abolition. Once complete, sign your names at the bottom.

PETITION FOR ABOLITION

to the President of the United States, Mr. Abraham Lincoln

We the undersigned do hereby protest the Institution of Slavery and call for its immediate abolition.

What ideals and morals during the 1800s supported abolition?

What were common living and working conditions for enslaved people?

What rights are guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights?

Signed:

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Pre-Performance Activities, continued

Activity 2: Debating Controversial Issues

Learning Goals:

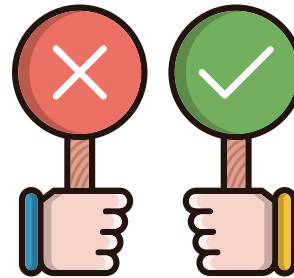
- To understand the two views regarding abolition.
- To create compelling arguments.

Materials:

Paper, pens/pencils

Directions:

1. Define and discuss the word “abolition.”
2. Discuss the two viewpoints on slavery. Emphasize that abolitionists believed slavery was evil and should be eliminated. Those who fought against abolition, however, did not necessarily believe slavery was good, only that it was necessary.
3. Think about controversial issues in today’s society (i.e., taxes, the death penalty, using animals for science, putting unwanted animals to sleep at the pound, etc.).
4. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to choose an issue to debate.
5. Have each group divide in half and take opposing sides. Ask the students to write down their most compelling arguments.
6. Ask volunteers from each group (one from each side) to share their arguments with the class.
7. Discuss the activity with the class. Did anyone’s opinion change after hearing the arguments presented? Why or why not?



Pre-Performance Activity Extensions

- Create a timeline of the events in the United States during Harriet Beecher Stowe’s life (1811 - 1896). Imagine what it would be like to live through those events.
- Read all or part of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. For older students, this could be done independently and for younger students, read a few pages aloud each day. Keep a running list of elements from the story that are surprising.
- Have students research abolitionists. How did they help put an end to slavery?
- Have students think of relevant questions to ask Harriet Beecher Stowe during her visit.

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Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What did you learn about Harriet Beecher Stowe?
- Why was *Uncle Tom's Cabin* such an influential book?
- How does a living history portrayal like this performance compare to learning about history from books or movies? What did you like best about it?

Post-Performance Activities

Activity 1: Taking the Underground Railroad

Learning Goal:

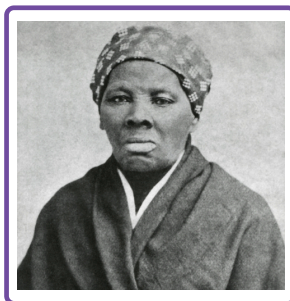
To study the Underground Railroad and how slaves used it to escape to freedom.

Materials:

Book(s): *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold and/or another short story on the Underground Railroad (see reading list in the resources on page 9), map of the United States, paper, pens/pencils

Directions:

1. Discuss the Underground Railroad. What was it? Was it an actual railroad?
2. Read aloud *Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold. Note: *This might be below the reading level of the class, but it is a great illustrated short book.*
3. Discuss what students learned from the story. How did the people travel? Where did they stay? Who were the conductors?
4. Trace on a map the routes that the slaves traveled.
5. Discuss the risks people took by participating in the Underground Railroad.
6. Ask students to imagine that they have to decide whether to take the Underground Railroad. Remind them that escaping to freedom might mean leaving their family behind. Have students create a pro/con list to help make this decision.
7. Have students share their decisions and reasons.



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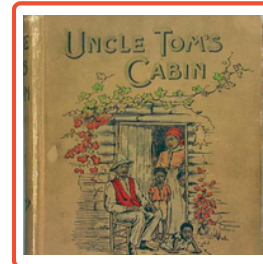
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Post-Performance Activities, continued

Activity 2: Freedom of Writing

Learning Goals:

- To become familiarized with the plot and themes of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- To understand freedom of speech and censorship.



Materials:

[Uncle Tom's Cabin article from the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center](#),

books and vetted websites about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, life in the 1850s, and freedom of speech (see resources on page 9), paper, pens/pencils

Directions:

1. Read the article on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* from the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center.
2. Discuss *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Review the summary and note the basic elements of the story (plot, characters, setting, theme, etc.).
3. Discuss the United States at the time of the novel's publication (1852). Had the Civil War begun? Which states practiced slavery? What was the Underground Railroad?
4. Ask students to think about the repercussions of writing a book on a controversial issue of the time (i.e., slavery). Tell students that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* underwent drastic unauthorized changes because of the controversy over abolition.
5. Divide the class into four groups. Assign one topic to each group to research: the changes that were made to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; freedom of speech (both in relationship to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and more generally); modern critique and interpretation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; other controversial books throughout history and their reception.
6. Have groups present their findings.
7. Discuss each group's findings and reflect on censorship, freedom of speech, and the legacy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Post-Performance Activity Extensions

- Write and illustrate short stories about fighting for a cause. Present the stories to the rest of the class.
- Discuss reform movements. Have students research various reform movements from the past and present.
- Have students write a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe to share their thoughts about her visit and/or opinions about her life and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

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Further Resources

- [Jan Turnquist Artist Website](#)
- [Harriet Beecher Stowe Center](#)
- [Social Justice Books Slavery, Resistance, and Reparations Book List \(all ages\)](#)
- [National Geographic “Reform Movements 1800s” Collection](#)
- Stowe, Harriet Beecher: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852)
- Bryan, Ashley: *Freedom Over Me*, Simon and Schuster (2016)
- Cline-Ransome, Lesa: *Before She Was Harriet*, Holiday House (2017)
- Hale, Nathan: *The Underground Abductor: An Abolitionist Tale about Harriet Tubman*, Harry N. Abrams (2015)
- Hedrick, Joan: *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*, Oxford University Press (1995)
- Ringgold, Faith: *Aunt Harriet’s Underground Railroad in the Sky*, Dragonfly Books (1995)
- Taylor, Yuval (editor): *Growing Up in Slavery: Stories of Young Slaves as Told by Themselves*, Lawrence Hill Books (2005)



Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

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Curricular Connections, continued

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

History and Social Science

Grade 4

- Topic 4: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today (HSS.4.T4)
- Topic 4a: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today: The Northeast (HSS.4.T4a)

Grade 5

- Topic 1: Early colonization and growth of colonies (HSS.5.T1)
- Topic 3: Principles of United States Government (HSS.5.T3)
- Topic 4: The growth of the Republic (HSS.5.T4)
- Topic 5: Slavery, the legacy of the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights for all (HSS.5.T5)

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Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science, continued

Grade 8

- Topic 2: The development of the United States government (HSS.8.T2)
- Topic 4: Rights and responsibilities of citizens (HSS.8.T4)

Grades 9-12

- US History I Topic 1: Origins of the Revolution and the Constitution (HSS.USI.T1)
- US History I Topic 2: Democratization and expansion (HSS.USI.T2)
- US History I Topic 3: Economic growth in the North, South, and West (HSS.USI.T3)
- US History I Topic 4: Social, political, and religious change (HSS.USI.T4)
- US History I Topic 5: The Civil War and Reconstruction: causes and consequences (HSS.USI.T5)

