

# Nature's Story in the Underground Railroad

**Imagine** traveling by foot over a forest floor thick with spiny pods from the sweet gum tree. They punish your feet with every step, but still, you move on.

**Imagine** foraging for something to eat, your meal consisting only of pine roots, persimmon, and sassafras buds, but you can almost taste your own freedom.

**Imagine** feeling lost and searching for direction, hoping for a clear night sky and the North Star to guide you, for you know that your place in the Promised Land has been written in the stars.

**In an all-day interdisciplinary program, students in grades 4–9 will explore the role of nature in the Underground Railroad by visiting these four hour-long learning centers:**

## Images

Through primary source photographs and documents, students will explore the devastating history of slavery in our country, the courage of those who sought freedom via the Underground Railroad, and the compassion of abolitionists. In culmination, students will contribute drawings to a freedom quilt for classroom display.

## Voices

History echoes with many voices. Students will create coded messages to direct “passengers” to “stations” on a simulated Underground Railroad. They’ll decode the lyrics to “Follow the Drinking Gourd” and take part in a reader’s theatre play on the life of Harriett Tubman.

## Survival

Once the difficult decision was made to seek freedom, escaping slaves were faced with the ultimate challenge: survival. Students will examine the contents of a runaway’s “stash,” hidden in the base of a tulip poplar tree. They’ll attempt to forage for wild edibles in the forest and stream, discuss quotes from actual fugitives revealing the hardships of finding food, and gain firsthand insight into how fire was both necessary and dangerous.

## Journeys

In a world of GPS devices, it’s hard to think of a time when travelers found their way without even the help of a compass or map. In this learning center, students will navigate by the stars and observe moss growth to determine direction. They’ll also use natural camouflage to conceal a “runaway,” discuss the benefits and risks of waterways to an escaping slave, and walk barefoot on the forest floor.

### **This program is aligned with the following MSDE standards:**

Social Studies 5C4a–c; 6D1c  
Science 1A1b, f; 2D1a, b; 6B1a  
Language Arts 1E1a; 2.1a  
Visual Arts 3.1a–c; 2.1a  
Theatre Arts 3.2a  
Music 2.1a; 2.2a–c



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**For more information or to schedule an environmental education program, contact Youth Program Coordinator Jenny Houghton at [jhoughton@adkinsarboretum.org](mailto:jhoughton@adkinsarboretum.org) or 410-634-2847, ext. 21.**