



# Aunt Harriet's Story

by Katherine Noll



## Characters

|                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| Child 1        | Mistress Susan |
| Child 2        | Young Harriet  |
| Harriet Tubman | Miss Emily     |

### SCENE I

**Child 1:** Aunt Harriet, please tell us a story!

**Child 2:** What was it like to be a slave? Were you afraid to run away?

**Child 1:** I want to hear how you escaped from the plantation. What did it feel like when you were finally free?



**Harriet**

**Tubman:** So many questions! I was afraid to run away. But I was more afraid to live my life as a slave. Everyone, come sit down. I'll tell you a story about when I was little.

**Child 2:** Where did you live, Aunt Harriet?

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** I was born in Maryland. Maryland is a southern state. In Maryland, like many other southern states, it was legal to own slaves. I lived on a big farm, or a plantation. I had to work out in the hot sun all day long. One day I was outside when this woman came and took me away . . . .

## SCENE 2

**Mistress**

**Susan:** Girl, you come along with me. Hop in the wagon.

**Young**

**Harriet:** Yes, ma'am.

**Mistress**

**Susan:** I made arrangements with your master. You will come and live with me. I need someone to clean my house and take care of my baby. I hope you can do a good job.

**Young**

**Harriet:** Yes, ma'am.

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** This woman had hired me to work at her house. But all the money I made went to the master of the plantation, who owned the farm and all the slaves on it.

**Mistress**

**Susan:** Now as soon as we get home I want you to clean and dust the parlor.



**Harriet**

**Tubman:** I had worked inside a house only a few times before. I always liked to be outside. I had never dusted before.

**Young**

**Harriet:** I swept and dusted, ma'am.

**Mistress**

**Susan:** You lazy girl! Look at this room. It's still filthy!

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** I looked around the room. I couldn't believe my eyes! All the dust and dirt I had just cleaned were still there.

**Mistress**

**Susan:** Come with me.

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** That woman whipped me for not cleaning the room right.

**Child 1:**

Aunt Harriet, how terrible!

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** It got worse. Every day I swept and dusted, and every day the dust settled back down. And every day I was whipped. I could not understand what I was doing wrong.

**Mistress**

**Susan:** I've had enough of you! Come with me, you will get your punishment.

**Miss Emily:** What is going on, sister? What is all the fuss about?

**Mistress**

**Susan:** This lazy girl can't clean the parlor. I'm punishing her.

**Miss Emily:** Maybe she never learned how. Leave her with me, I'll show her.



**Harriet**

**Tubman:** Susan's sister, Emily, showed me what I was doing wrong. I had to open all the windows first, so the dust had somewhere to go. Then I had to sweep *before* I dusted the furniture. If someone had shown me from the start how to do it, I would have been able to do it right. But Mistress Susan was a mean woman, and because I was a slave, there was nothing I could do about it.

### SCENE 3

**Mistress**

**Susan:** Hurry up, Harriet. I need you to clean the kitchen and wash the dishes before bed.

**Young**

**Harriet:** Yes, ma'am.

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** If only I could have gone to sleep! Instead, I spent the night sitting next to Mistress Susan's bed, by her baby's cradle. I had to rock the cradle all night long. Mistress Susan slept with a small whip next to the bed. If I fell asleep and the baby started crying, she would whip my neck and shoulders.





**Young**

**Harriet:** Hush, little baby, don't say a word . . .

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** I couldn't help but fall asleep! I was tired from working all day. And when I slept, I could dream I was with my mother and father in our cabin. I missed them so much.

**Mistress**

**Susan:** The baby is crying! What have I told you, you lazy girl?

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** It didn't matter if I said I was sorry, or if I told her I was tired. I would get whipped no matter what.

**Child 1:** Is that how you got those scars on your neck?

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** Yes, it is.

## **SCENE 4**

**Child 2:** How did you survive? That's a terrible way to live.

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** When all those terrible things happened, I knew one day I would be free. I could not live a life in slavery. I knew I would risk anything to escape to the North.

**Child 1:** But once you escaped, you didn't stay in the North. You kept coming back to the South to save other slaves.

**Child 2:** That's right. You helped slaves escape on the Underground Railroad. Was the Underground Railroad a train that ran underground?

**Harriet**

**Tubman:** No. The Underground Railroad was a secret group of people and places used by slaves to get to the North.



**Child 1:** Were you scared to go back to the South?

**Harriet  
Tubman:**

I knew I wouldn't be happy until every slave was free. The worst part of slavery was how families were torn apart. My sisters were sold away to the deep South. Mothers and children were sold away from each other. No person should have to live such a life. I was so happy every time I could help free another slave.

**Child 2:** You are very brave, Aunt Harriet.

**Harriet  
Tubman:**

Thank you, but I only did what I could.

**Child 1:** Now tell us a story about the Underground Railroad!

**Harriet  
Tubman:**

Maybe tomorrow!

**The End**

# Aunt Harriet's Story

## Background

In 1820, Harriet Tubman was born a slave on a plantation in Maryland. From a very young age, Harriet worked as a field hand, a cook, a maid, and a woodcutter.

As a slave, Harriet was beaten regularly. While she was trying to help a runaway slave, an overseer struck Harriet in the head with a lead weight. She was in a coma for several months. For the rest of her life, Harriet suffered blackouts due to this injury. In spite of this handicap, Harriet not only managed to escape to freedom, but she helped over three hundred others flee a life of slavery too.

During the Civil War, Harriet Tubman served as a spy and a nurse for the Union army. When the war was over, she settled in Auburn, New York. She established a home for orphans and the elderly. She died there on March 10, 1913.

## Activity: A Difficult Decision

Divide a large piece of paper or posterboard in half. Ask students to name the benefits of escaping from slavery. (Examples: *You would not have a master. No one could sell you away from your family. You would be paid for your hard work.*) Write their answers on the left side of the chart. Then ask students to name things that might be difficult about trying to escape from slavery. (Examples: *You would be punished, maybe even killed, if you were caught. You might have to leave family behind. You would be going to a*

*strange place where you might not know anyone.*) Write these answers on the right side of the chart. Then ask the class to look at the chart and think about Harriet Tubman's decision to run away, and to help others escape. What does this say about her character?

## Writing Prompt

Write a paragraph summarizing the story that Harriet Tubman tells in the play.

## Discussion Question

This play shows the horrible treatment Harriet Tubman suffered through as a slave. How did you feel when you read the play? What would you have done if you were living in those times? Would you have tried to help slaves escape even though it was dangerous?

## Links



*Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* by Alan Schroeder

(Dial Books for Young Readers, 1996)



Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad

<http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/tubman/tubman.html>

## Key Vocabulary

**plantation:** a large farm in a warm climate where crops such as coffee and cotton are grown