



ordinary PEOPLE  
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COURAGE

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

**Lesson 4: Oral History of The Underground Railroad Compared to the Written Word of Anti-Abolitionists. How did bias shape the counties in Southern Indiana and Northern Kentucky?**

**The Objective:**

The objective of this lesson is for students experience what it is like to have bias in reporting, and the impact that it had on the way people perceived African Americans in Southern Indiana and Northern Kentucky.

**The Overview:**

Students will be exposed to the differences in reporting during the antebellum and Civil War era in New Albany. The New Albany Ledger, and its editor John B. Norman had a distinct agenda to portray African Americans in a negative light. Siding heavily with the Southern cause, he tried to paint abolitionists as radicals and would praise those who helped return "stolen" slaves to their masters in Southern States.

During this lesson, students will be presented with a scenario that actually occurred in New Albany with the arrest of a free man of color, as reported in the Jeffersonville Tribune and then the account of the capture of runaway slaves. Students will collaboratively collect noticings about the excerpts, and then the lesson will culminate in an activity to show if they understand bias as they take on the role of newspaper editor John B. Norman and rewrite the article that was published in the Jeffersonville Republican was Norman would have likely portrayed it in the New Albany Ledger.

**Standards:**

- Indiana Standards: 3rd grade: 3.1.5,3.1.6, 3.1.7, 3.3.3, 4th grade: 4.1.7, 4.1.8, 4.1.15, 5th grade: 5.1.20, 8th grade: 8.1.24,8.1.25, U.S. History: USH 1.3
- Kentucky Standards (2018\*)5th grade: 5th grade: SS-05-5.1.1, 5.2.4, 2.3.1,2.3.2, 8th grade: SS-08-2.1.1, 2.3.1, 4.1.1, 4.2.3, 4.3.2, 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.2.4, U.S. History

**Materials:**

- Article from the News and Tribune- Bicentennial- background reading. This could be given as homework the night before. [https://www.newsandtribune.com/archives/new-albany-bicentennial-the-underground-railroad-part/article\\_3978bdb7-3aa9-5a6d-a146-09f725346e2a.html](https://www.newsandtribune.com/archives/new-albany-bicentennial-the-underground-railroad-part/article_3978bdb7-3aa9-5a6d-a146-09f725346e2a.html)
- Excerpts from Pamela R. Peters book, The Underground Railroad in Floyd County, Indiana
- Excerpt Noticing Graphic Organizer
- Biased Narrative reconstruction template

**Timing:**

- (2) 45-60 minute session. Depending upon work time, and instructionally how excerpts are presented to students (individually or group). 10 minutes for the introduction, 25-30 minutes for the work time, 10 reflection. Day 2 - re writing of the article, sharing of perspectives.



## LESSON PROGRESSION:

**Lesson 1.** Students will be introduced to author Pamela R. Peters through the article linked in the materials (also available as a PDF). This introduction is not included in the lesson progression, and could be assigned as homework/ group reading prior to instruction.

**Lesson 2.** To begin the lesson, present the statement, “Was Indiana, specifically Southern Indiana, really a free state?” Have students discuss this topic based on the article that they read previously. Based on the information presented they should be able to discern that:

- **a.** Indiana was a free state, however, Southern Indiana had a considerable amount of people that sympathized with the ideas of slavery and thought that abolitionists were radical in their thinking.
- **b.** Due to the reporting of the prominent newspaper, The New Albany Ledger, African Americans were cast in a negative light making it hard for them to gain favor with those in the community.

**Lesson 3.** To gain understanding of exactly what African Americans were facing during this time, students will view 4 excerpts from Pamela R. Peters book. These excerpts are from articles printed in the New Albany Ledger, Jeffersonville Republican and narrative research compiled by Ms. Peters.

**Lesson 4.** While reading, students will complete the **Excerpt Noticing Graphic Organizer**. Depending on the level of the students, partners or triads would be encouraged. Allow students ample time to read, annotate and analyze each passage.

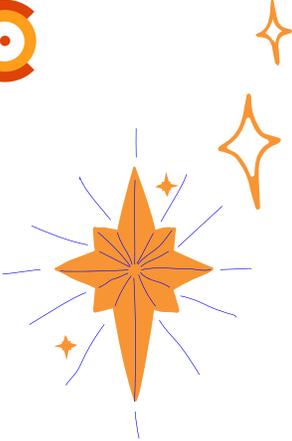
**Lesson 5.** Come together in a reflective circle, and discuss the meaning of the word bias. How did it change the perception that New Albanians had towards free African Americans and runaway slaves?

- For Elementary, this text could be delivered in triads. This is a higher- level text, so it could be helpful to break apart the reading into check points to determine comprehension. For example, when delivering this instruction to a Fourth- grade class, the text was broken down by main ideas after each page. A small class discussion following just to insure comprehension.

### **Evaluation/Assessment:**

#### **Day 2**

- 1. Using what students now know about bias and how one person could influence an entire population of people, reproach the article written in the Jeffersonville Republican about the free man, John Tolson that was arrested. Using the assessment handout provided, students will rewrite the article from the perspective of John B. Norman, the editor of the New Albany Ledger.



# NEW ALBANY BICENTENNIAL: THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD PART 1

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NEW ALBANY – A town's past can be a tricky thing. It's easy to think all of New Albany's history has been documented; every one of its stories has been written and preserved through the years. But some secrets remain as elusive now as they did when they were first whispered decades ago.

For almost 150 years, our city's involvement in the Underground Railroad had remained such a secret. New Albany resident Pam Peters decided to change that. In her 2001 book "The Underground Railroad in Floyd County, Indiana" – she documented the journey of the slaves who sought freedom and the local men and women who risked their lives supporting them.

"I had a very naïve idea of what the Underground Railroad was until I really started studying it," Peters said. "It was more of a movement. You have to think of it not in terms of tunnels and hiding places."

With the Emancipation Proclamation pertaining only to Confederate states, slavery was allowed in Kentucky until the end of the Civil War. Yet only a mile away across the Ohio River, lie Indiana, a free-state since 1816. If Cincinnati had been a portal to freedom, wasn't it likely New Albany had been a gateway as well?

Little written correspondence has survived of these clandestine activities. Peters found her first documented cases of people in New Albany being arrested for abetting slaves as early as 1821, but she assumes the practice existed long before that instance.

"As long as there has been slavery, there have been slaves running away from it," she said. Around this time, aiding slaves was considered a criminal act. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made it illegal to help slaves who had run away from their owners. In fact, any found slaves, even in free-states like Indiana, were mandated to be returned.

Not wanting to get caught, participants in the Underground Railroad used word of mouth to relay their plans. A rich oral history still exists, especially surrounding one church in particular that took part in the plight.

"There's a lot of strong oral history in our community about it being connected to what is now Second Baptist Church. I set about to make sense out of what I was hearing," she said.

Through her meticulous research sifting through old microfilmed newspapers and census records, Peters discovered that what was then called Clock Tower Church was known to have many ties to the abolitionist cause.



During the mid-1800s, the church allowed black members to join their congregation. Records show that the pastor there had baptized, married and buried black members. A sign in the undercroft of the church even indicates the presence of a tunnel that may have once been used as a station in the Underground Railroad.

"Those church people looked on slavery as a sin," Peters said. "The town excused their helping because they looked on it as benevolent activity."

Due to the lack of records, no official count exists of those who traveled through Indiana to escape the bonds of slavery. One can only speculate.

"We don't know how many people made it through here to freedom because that never made it in the paper," Peters said. "My estimation is that at least an average of one slave made it through New Albany during those years a day."

Not all citizens wanted slavery abolished. Anti-black sentiment still ran rampant. Leaders like the editor of the New Albany Daily Ledger wanted slavery to continue because of the town's economic ties to the South. Others had derogatory attitudes in general about black citizens.

"Our whole economy hinged on Southern markets buying our steamboats here," Peters said. Even among white citizens who were against slavery, many still would not have participated in what they deemed criminal activity.

"For the most part, the people of New Albany, especially the church people, were upstanding citizens. They wanted to obey the laws. And so they wouldn't stick their neck out. You didn't want to break the laws by harboring fugitives," Peters said.

At the end of the Civil War, racist sentiments were still all too common in New Albany. Many black people continued on their journey North in the hope of finding better opportunities.

"Slavery, maybe on paper, disappeared in Kentucky at the end of 1865, but peoples' attitudes didn't change. You still have that anti-black bias even with the anti-slavery people," Peters said.

Despite the overt racism and discriminating legislation inflicted upon their community, blacks led the Underground Railroad network. Next week, we'll discover the names of the men and women who were essential to the success of those who did escape.

"The African-American community was the key," Peters said. "They had to work with people from the white community, too. But the African American community, let's face it, were working under all kinds of burdens."



Excerpts 1 & 2  
from  
Pamela R. Peters' book:

# The Underground Railroad in Floyd County, Indiana



## Page 14, Excerpt 1

"Documentation has also been lost since by law enslaved persons were not allowed to learn reading and writing, and a formal education for free blacks was difficult to obtain. Additionally, out of fear neither slave nor free would have wanted to record Underground Railroad activities. Instead, some stories survived through oral tradition.

Yet another reason for the lack of preserved information involves John B. Norman and the New Albany Daily Ledger. Norman, as editor of the Ledger from September 27, 1849, to his death on October 31, 1869, was a Democrat, deeply partisan, a strong foe of abolitionism and notorious for his constant degradation of African Americans. He printed very little, if any positive information about blacks."



## Page 15, Excerpt 2

"There are references to Floyd County citizens as slave catchers as well as reports of incidents where the New Albany police assisted in the capturing of runaway slaves. One such example of the New Albany police involvement was reported in very critical terms in the Jeffersonville Republican, a newspaper edited by Dr. Nathaniel Field. It was reprinted in the Ledger as follows:

*John Talson (a free man of color) was recently arrested in the neighborhood of New Albany by a police officer of that city by the name of Ray upon suspicion of his being a fugitive slave, conveyed to Kentucky and thrown into the Louisville jail, where he still remains awaiting the pleasure of his captor. This Mr. Ray had no authority under the sun for this tyrannical act. Testimony has been forwarded to this place from the State of Virginia confirming the statement of Talson that he is a free man. Two of our citizens visited New Albany a few days ago, and informed Mr. Ray of this fact yet he showed no disposition to release Talson from imprisonment. His behavior on this occasion was perfect in keeping with his occupation. His perfect indifference about the matter proves the necessity of holding such men to a strict account of their acts. It is to be hoped there are in New Albany to vindicate the rights of the oppressed and bring this police officer to justice."*



Excerpts 3 & 4  
from  
Pamela R. Peters' book:

# The Underground Railroad in Floyd County, Indiana



## Page 16, Excerpt 3

"Another incident involving the police occurred during the Civil War. Fifteen slaves, who had been "stolen" according to the Ledger, from their masters in the neighborhood of Lexington, Kentucky, and brought to Louisville by a Michigan regiment, were ordered out of the lines by General Gordon Granger, Commander of the District of Central Kentucky, and crossed the river from Louisville to Indiana "to take the Underground Railroad for the north", as the newspaper expressed it. Six of them were arrested by the sheriff at Silver Creek almost immediately. The Ledger claimed that the hiding place of the remaining nine was known and their arrest was imminent."



## Page 16-17, Excerpt 4

"Norman was fond of using a "tongue-in-cheek" method of reporting the news as it occurred in the African-American community. And if he wasn't ridiculing, he was reporting the unpleasant things that took place there. Yet despite his reputation of being biased against Republicans, the anti-slavery movement and abolitionism, the black community and the idea of more blacks moving into the state, he also had a reputation of being one of the most capable and well-known journalists in Indiana. Norman exerted a lot of influence on New Albany and the surrounding area because of the Ledgers wide readership. His hostile and uncompromising attitude, therefore, became widely known, giving readers a somewhat distorted picture of New Albany as a place that held black persons in low esteem."



Excerpts 5 & 6  
from  
Pamela R. Peters' book:

# The Underground Railroad in Floyd County, Indiana



## Pages 17-18, Excerpt 5

"Throughout the antebellum years, the New Albany Daily Ledger voiced its anti-abolitionist sentiment. This became more pronounced the closer the country became to war and included denouncing intellectual societies in town, whose membership embraced "pillars of the community". It criticized the committees of the Young Men's Christian Association and the Mokuna Society (a literary club) for inviting such "obnoxious" abolitionists as Wendell Phillips to town.....Those who were against slavery were not necessarily all abolitionist. Norman attempted to paint all anti-slavery people as abolitionist--- even President Abraham Lincoln, who was not an abolitionist. In September 1862, Norman attacked President Lincoln when the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was announced:

*The proclamation of the President, announcing the abolition of slavery in all of the rebellious states on the first January next, was read with astonishment and grief by thousands of loyal men yesterday. It struck like a death knell upon the hopes of very many, who despairing of justice and sound commonsense and other quarters, were disposed to place faith in the moderation and patriotism of the President... We would willingly cast the mantle of charity over this last act of the President, if we could believe that there was even a decent pretext for it. But there is none, worthy a president or a man, that he can make, that we can imagine."*



## Pages 18-19, Excerpt 6

"An additional problem Norman created was his "sin of omission". Because of his anti-black attitude, he failed to print positive information about African-Americans. There were no births or marriages listed, and only an occasional obituary of a well-known African-American was printed. As a general rule he printed only the bad news, seldom the positive. This total neglect of the good and the emphasis on the bad became a tool that constantly worked at separating the racist, causing anxiety between them and building up fear, prejudice, suspension, and animosity."



# EXCERPT-NOTICING

## GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

<b>Excerpt Number</b>	<b>★ Student Thinking ★</b> (What is the main idea? What questions do you have? How do you think this was received when printed/told/experienced?)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	



# BIASED REPORTING WRITING TASK

The following article was printed in *The Jeffersonville Republican* edited by Dr. Nathaniel Field. *The Jeffersonville Republican*, was one of many smaller papers that supported the Underground Railroad, and wanted all parts of Indiana to act like they were apart of a free state.

*"One such example of the New Albany police involvement was reported in very critical terms in the Jeffersonville Republican, a newspaper edited by Dr. Nathaniel Field. It was reprinted in the Ledger as follows:*

*John Talson (a free man of color) was recently arrested in the neighborhood of New Albany by a police officer of that city by the name of Ray upon suspicion of his being a fugitive slave, conveyed to Kentucky and thrown into the Louisville jail, where he still remains awaiting the pleasure of his captor. This Mr. Ray had no authority under the sun for this tyrannical act. Testimony has been forwarded to this place from the State of Virginia confirming the statement of Talson that he is a free man. Two of our citizens visited New Albany a few days ago, and informed Mr. Ray of this fact yet he showed no disposition to release Talson from imprisonment. His behavior on this occasion was perfect in keeping with his occupation. His perfect indifference about the matter proves the necessity of holding such men to a strict account of their acts. It is to be hoped there are in New Albany to vindicate the rights of the oppressed and bring this police officer to justice."*

## Directions:

**Part A:** Using what you know about the New Albany Ledger editor John B. Norman, rewrite this article from his perspective. How would Mr. Tolson be portrayed? What message would Mr. Norman tried to send to his readers?

**Part B:** After your research and analyzing of Mr. Norman's actions and influence, why is it important to read information about current events from more than one source? What would happen if all residents of New Albany only read his paper, would success the Underground Railroad been hurt or helped?