

Reading *Seven Miles to Freedom*

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SUMMARY

During this activity, you and your child will actively read *Seven Miles to Freedom*, using the suggested reading questions.

WHY

Through this activity, your child will have fun while learning about a courageous slave in the Civil War. In the process, your child will build reading skills, including the ability to compare and contrast, and to make connections between characters in stories and real people.

TIME

- 30 minutes

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in kindergarten through 4th grade.

YOU NEED

- This Reading Guide
- *Step Back in Time* sheets (*attached*)
- *Seven Miles to Freedom* book, written by Janet Halfmann and illustrated by Duane Smith

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **anxious:** afraid or nervous about what may happen
- **auction:** a sale at which things are sold to those who offer to pay the most
- **deliberate:** slow or not hurried, purposeful
- **field glasses:** a tool for seeing at a distance
- **foreman:** a person in charge of a group of workers
- **navigation:** the science of getting ships from place to place, especially the method of figuring out position, course, and distance traveled
- **plantation:** a planted area, especially an agricultural estate worked by laborers
- **slave quarters:** the housing where slaves live
- **surrender:** to give oneself over to something

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls/>

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CHALLENGE WORDS (CONTINUED)

- **steamer:** a ship powered by steam
- **yearn:** to desire eagerly

PARENT PREPARATION

- If you have time, read the story yourself before sharing it with your child. Also read the Step Back in Time sheet and the notes on the last page of the book.
- If you have time, preview some of the reading suggestions below. Pick just a few suggestions that look interesting and fun for you.

BEFORE YOU READ

- Talk together about the title of the book. Can you think of any places that are about seven miles from your home? What kinds of activities can you do when you get to those places? About how long does it take for you to travel to those places?

DURING READING

- As you read, listen for the names of places. Charleston, Castle Pinckney, Fort Ripley, Fort Johnson, Fort Sumter, and Fort Moultrie are identified on the map on the back of the book. As you read about Robert Smalls' escape, trace his route past the forts.
- As you read, listen for Robert's different jobs. Which ones does he get paid for? Which ones does his master get paid for? When you're done reading the story, read the last page of the book with historical information about Robert. What jobs did Robert have after he was free?

AFTER READING

- Talk about Robert's escape plan. At what points might something have gone wrong? What would have happened to Robert, his family, and his crewmates if the plan had gone wrong?
 - Have you ever read another story when someone has a detailed plan where everything needs to go right? What happened to the characters in



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AFTER READING (CONTINUED)

- that story? Did everything go right, or did they have to change their plans in the middle?
- Have you ever had to make a detailed plan? Did everything go right, or did you have to change plans in the middle?
 - Robert Smalls took a boat that belonged to someone else and never returned it. What reasons did he have for taking the boat? Do you think it was fair for him to take the boat? Why or why not?

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For more information, visit the National Museum of American History website <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls>.

About the Civil War

In the middle of the 1800s, the United States was splitting apart. Factories and business were bringing wealth to the North while the South depended on an economy based on plantations farmed by **slaves**. In the North, most people wanted to stop the spread of slavery, and **abolitionists** wanted to end it altogether. In the South, slaveholders and small farmers feared that their way of life would disappear under the power of the North.



Robert Smalls lived in South Carolina, which was a Confederate state. He escaped and helped fight for the Union.

Image from *Seven Miles to Freedom*.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected president and seven southern states **seceded** from the United States, creating the Confederate States of America. When President Lincoln refused to remove U.S. troops from Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, Confederate guns fired on the fort. Then four more states **seceded** and joined the Confederacy.

A long and bloody war followed between the South (the Confederacy) and the North (the Union). In 1865, after five years of fighting, the North won the war, slavery ended, and the country was reunited.

For more information on the Civil War, visit the exhibition *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War* (www.americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/).

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About the Navy during the Civil War

The Union and the Confederacy had different ways of using their navies. The Union's main goal was to **blockade** Confederate ports to keep the South from getting supplies. The Confederate navy's major goal was keeping supplies moving by sea, using fast ships called "**blockade runners**" to speed past the Union **blockade**.

About Robert Smalls

Robert Smalls (1839–1915) was born a **slave** in Beaufort, South Carolina. He became a skilled boat pilot and on May 12, 1862, he used his skills to steal the ship *CSS Planter* with his boat crew and family, who all were **slaves**. Once his ship reached the Union **blockade**, he offered the Union navy the *CSS Planter*. Having escaped into Northern territory, he was no longer a **slave**. He fought alongside the Union navy until the end of the Civil War. After the war, Robert Smalls worked for the South Carolina state and national governments, and represented South Carolina in the U.S. Congress for five terms.



Robert Smalls learned to navigate the waters near Charleston, South Carolina by studying maps.
Image from *Seven Miles to Freedom*.

abolitionist: a person who wants to stop or abolish slavery

blockade: an act of war in which one side uses ships to stop people or supplies from leaving or entering the other side

seceded: separated from a nation and became independent

slave: someone who is owned by another person and is forced to work for that person without pay

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Read the “Reading Guide” sheets for specific directions

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Read for understanding.
- Answer questions using written resources.
- Hypothesize alternate endings and the impact of chance, decisions, and ideas.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Discussion exhibits understanding of story and historical details.
- Discussion exhibits logical connections and comparisons.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

2F: Draw upon data in historical maps.

3H: Explain causes in historical actions.

3I: Challenge arguments of historical inevitability.

K-4 Historical Content Standards

4B: The student understands ordinary people who have exemplified values and principles of American democracy.

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

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IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards (Continued)

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving