

A Common Core State Standards-Aligned  
Discussion/Activity Guide for Grades 1-3

# William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad

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Written and Illustrated by Don Tate

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*William Still's parents escaped slavery but had to leave two of their children behind, a tragedy that haunted the family. As a young man, William went to work for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, where he raised money, planned rescues, and helped freedom seekers who had traveled north. And then one day, a strangely familiar man came into William's office, searching for information about his long-lost family. Could it be?*

*Motivated by his own family's experience, William began collecting the stories of thousands of other freedom seekers. As a result, he was able to reunite other families and build a remarkable source of information, including encounters with Harriet Tubman, Henry "Box" Brown, and William and Ellen Craft.*

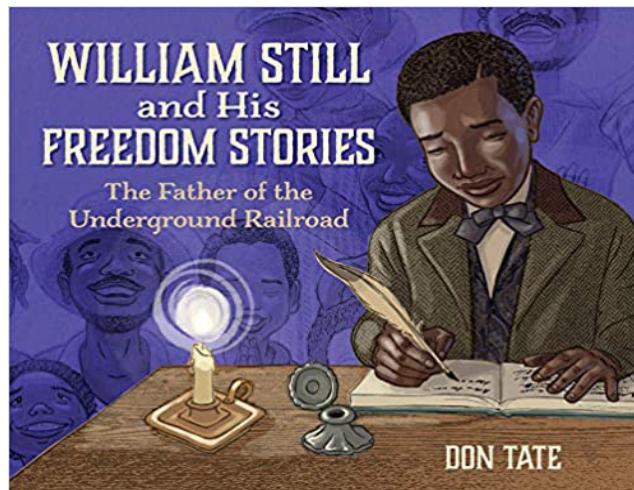
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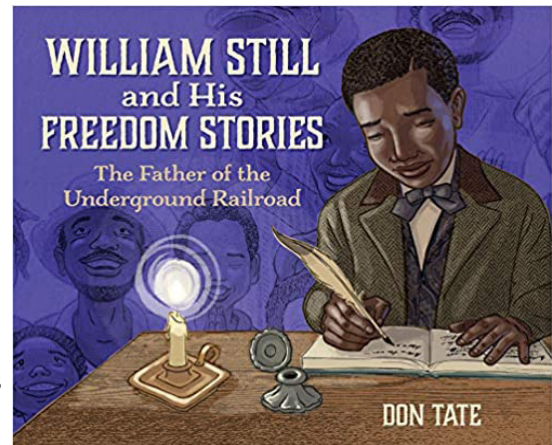
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## Pre-reading Discussion

**Consider the illustration on the front cover.**

- Describe the action taking place on the cover. What is the young man doing?
- Notice that his desk is lit by candle light. Explain why this is so. What does this detail in the illustration suggest about the time in history this story is being told?
- Notice that he is using what is known as a *feather quill pen* as a writing tool. How about you? What tools do you use to write? Describe the similarities and differences between his quill and your tools.
- Notice that there are a number of faces illustrated in the background. How are these people feeling? How do you know? Determine why these characters are represented by outlined drawings rather than being full colored in the foreground. What does this technique suggest about their role in the story?
- Read the title of the book. Define the word *freedom*. What does freedom mean to you?
- Predict what this book is going to be about.

**Meet the author and illustrator – Don Tate.**

- Don Tate has written and illustrated a large number of picture books for children. The majority of his books are about historical people who have *persisted* during hard times. The word *persisted* means carry on, prevail, and brave. He also likes to write about people who have changed the world because of their persistence. Why do you think Don finds this type of story to be inspiring? Do you think by writing and illustrating stories such as these, that Don might be changing the world, too? Explain your answer.
- As a child, Don's grandmother gave him a suitcase filled with found objects. She encouraged him to use the objects to create toys, objects, and art. Why do you think she supported his Don's artistic abilities in this way? Do you think his grandmother might have known that Don would become an accomplished illustrator some day? Explain your answer.
- Don says that "storytelling informs us and entertains us." He believes that drawing is a form of communication, just like reading or math. How about you? Do you agree? Do pictures tell stories? How so?
- If drawing is a form of communication, what story is the illustration on the book cover communication?
- Learn more about Don Tate and his wonderful books by accessing this website at [dontate.com](http://dontate.com).



## Post-reading Discussion

*Torn and tormented, she whispered a parting prayer for her two boys,  
who were big and strong enough to fend for themselves.  
Then she escaped with her two girls.*

- Levin did a remarkable thing by working hard, earning money, and purchasing his freedom. Why do you think that he, being a newly-freed man, was concerned that he might be might be enslaved again?
- Consider the depths of sadness Levin and Sydney must have felt to have to leave family members behind in search of safety.

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*The neighbors called on William. The young boy knew every nook and cranny of the woods.  
William led the man to safety, some twenty miles away.  
The experience defined the rest of his life.*

- List ways that William demonstrated kindness and dependability at a very young age.
- *Leadership* means skill, guidance, and influence. Discuss how William's persistence to learn to read and write helped to develop leadership skills that lasted a lifetime.

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*William's employers were doing the work he hoped to do.  
They were abolitionists who spoke loudly against slavery.  
They sponsored meetings. Signed petitions. Published newspapers.*

- An *abolitionist* is someone who is actively working to stop the practice of slavery. Examine reasons why William would be interested in joining the fight.
- Consider the persistence required to protect people who escaped enslavement.
- List the sacrifices and dangers William and others made to help abolish the horrors of slavery.

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*One evening an unexpected passenger arrived at his office.*

- Consider William's challenging life experiences such as struggling to become educated as a child, guiding runaways through the dangerous woods, and working for abolitionists. Determine how every one of these events prepared him for the moment that he finally met "long-lost but never forgotten" older brother.
- Describe the feelings William must have felt when he met Peter. Discuss how, in a way, a new life had begun for William in that moment.



*From that point forward, William recorded every detail about each freedom seeker who passed through his home or office.*

- Consider the importance of William Still’s documenting the stories of the fugitive slaves. Not only did his work help to reunite families, without his records the experience of escaping to the Freedom Land would not exist. Discuss the huge impact Still’s records had on history.
- Examine the stories of William and Ellen Craft and Henry “Box” Brown. Tell how their experiences help us understand what traveling the Underground Railroad was like.
- Discuss the effect of persistence in William Still’s freedom stories.

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*William’s work now put him in great danger. His records were evidence of crimes committed.*

- Tell how William became responsible to care for the stories of the runaway slaves.
- Explain why caring for their stories put him in a risky place.
- Why did William feel their stories were valuable?
- The word *crime* means that a serious law was broken. How could escaping to safety be considered to be a crime?
- Was the harsh treatment of runaway slaves fair or unjust? Explain your answer.

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*In 1861, a new president was elected. Could Abraham Lincoln reunite the country? Would he choose freedom or slavery? In time, Lincoln did the right thing. He chose freedom.*

- Early in the story Levin, William and Peter’s father, earned money to buy his freedom. Though he was considered to be a ‘free’ man, Levin was fearful that he would be enslaved once again. How is the freedom granted to enslaved people by Lincoln’s executive order different than Levin’s purchased freedom? What changed?
- Identify ways that William continued to serve as a leader during this time in history.

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*Because that’s what stories can do. Protest injustice.  
Soothe. Teach. Inspire. Connect.  
Stories save lives.*

- Explore ways that William’s true stories about the people who traveled the Underground Railroad teach lessons of hope, persistence, and protesting injustice.
- Tell how inspirational stories, such as William’s, can save lives.
- Identify ways that William Still and his freedom stories changed the world.





## The Active Reading Guide

**Objective:** Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe.

### Materials:

- *William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad*, the book
- The Active Reading Guide Template (Guide, pg. 7)
- Pencil

### Procedure:

- Distribute copies of the **Active Reading Guide Template** to the students.
- Read *William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad* to the class.
- First, instruct students to write or illustrate a description of what they knew about William Still before reading the book in the section provided on the template.
- Encourage a discussion about their perceptions of what they thought the story might be about.
- Next, instruct students to write or illustrate topics or concepts that they learned as a result of hearing William Still's story.
- Tell them them to record the facts of the story that were new to them. Direct students to discuss the information that they learned.
- Finally, instruct students to write or illustrate a fact or concept that surprised them as a result of hearing William Still's story.
- Lead a discussion during which students discuss aspects of William Still's story that surprised them. Why were they surprised by the event that took place? Ask them to explain their reasoning.
- Encourage students to describe how they have been changed as a result of learning about William Still's story.
- Invite them to write and illustrate a short review about the story. Have them share their work with the class.

<p><i>Summarize concepts that students were aware of before reading the book.</i></p> <p>→</p>	<p>Background Knowledge &amp; Prediction</p> <p>Before I started reading <i>William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad</i>, I knew that...</p>	
	<p>In the book, I learned that ...</p> <p>New Knowledge</p>	<p><i>Summarize new topics and concepts students learned as a result of reading the book.</i></p> <p>←</p>
<p><i>Summarize concepts that students found were surprising as a result of reading the book.</i></p> <p>→</p>	<p>I was surprised that...</p> <p>Surprising Facts</p>	



## The Active Reading Guide Template

*Background Knowledge & Prediction*

Before I started reading *William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad*, I knew that...

*New Knowledge*

In the book, I learned that ...

*Surprising Facts*

I was surprised that...



## Vertical Puzzle

Use the clues below to solve the Vertical Puzzle. Answers are found on the following page.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ W \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_ A \_\_\_\_\_
7. M \_\_\_\_\_
8. S \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_ T \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_
12. L \_\_\_\_\_

**Clues:**

- War known as the “War between the States”
- Still began working for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery \_\_\_\_\_ as a clerk
- The Fugitive \_\_\_\_\_ Act required the return of runaways
- People on the Underground Railroad traveled to Canada, also known as \_\_\_\_\_
- Elected as president in 1861
- Freedom-seeking people were drawn to this city in Pennsylvania
- Harriet “\_\_\_\_\_” Tubman, named for leading runaways through the Underground Railroad
- Still collected \_\_\_\_\_ about people who escaped on the Underground Railroad
- William’s long-lost older brother
- William hid records of runaway slaves, stories that would prove that they broke the law
- Eventually, William resigned from the Ant-Slavery Society to start a \_\_\_\_\_ business
- Name of William’s father





## Vertical Puzzle Answers

1. C I V I L W A R2. S O C I E T Y3. S L A V E4. F R E E D O M ' S L A N D5. L I N C O L N6. P H I L A D E L P H I A7. M O S E S8. S T O R I E S9. P E T E R10. C R I M E S11. C O A L12. L E V I N**Clues:**

1. War known as the “War between the States”
2. Still began working for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery \_\_\_\_\_ as a clerk
3. The Fugitive \_\_\_\_\_ Act required the return of runaways
4. People on the Underground Railroad traveled to Canada, also known as \_\_\_\_\_
5. Elected as president in 1861
6. Freedom-seeking people were drawn to this city in Pennsylvania
7. Harriet “\_\_\_\_\_” Tubman, named for leading runaways through the Underground Railroad
8. Still collected \_\_\_\_\_ about people who escaped on the Underground Railroad
9. William’s long-lost older brother
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11. Eventually, William resigned from the Ant-Slavery Society to start a \_\_\_\_\_ business
12. Name of William’s father



## Zigzag Timeline

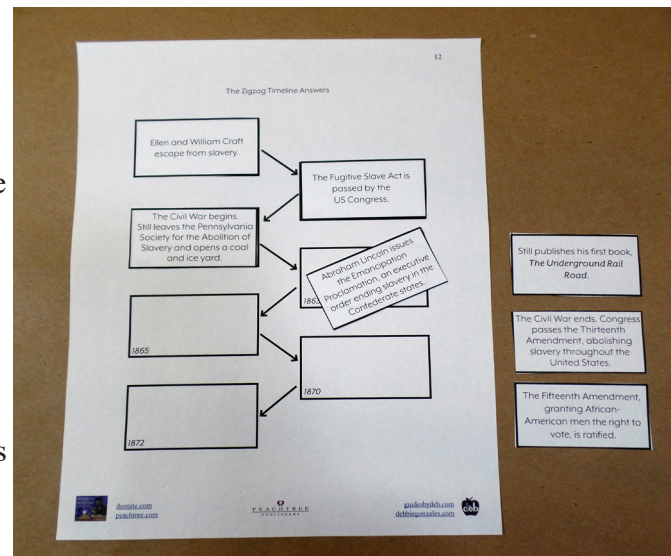
**Objective:** Describe the connection and significance between a series of historical events.

**Materials:**

- *William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad*, the book
- The Zigzag Timeline Event Cards (Guide, pg. 11)
- The Zigzag Timeline Template (Guide, pg. 12)
- The Zigzag Timeline Answers (Guide, pg. 13)
- Scissors
- Tape or gluestick
- Pencil & paper

**Procedure:**

- Distribute a copy of the Zigzag Timeline Template and a set of the Zigzag Timeline Event Cards to each child. Use scissors to trim around the borders of the Zigzag Timeline Event Cards.
- Using *William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad* as a reference, instruct students to match each Zigzag Timeline Event Card to the appropriate time slot on the Zigzag Timeline.
- Instruct students to analyze the content of the timeline. Lead a discussion by asking questions similar to these listed below.
  - ~ Identify moments in William Still's life that seemed hopeless. Explain how he was able to overcome such hopeless situations.
  - ~ Which event do you feel was most monumental in William Still's life? Explain why.
  - ~ Which event had the most impact on African-Americans at that time in history? Explain why.
  - ~ Explain how the historic events recorded on the timeline, the influential people he met, and intriguing personal experiences prepared William Still to write *The Underground Railroad*.
- Instruct students to write and illustrate a short reflection about one of the Zigzag Timeline Event Cards. Have them share their work with the class.



## Zigzag Timeline Event Labels

Still goes to work for the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery.

The Civil War begins.  
Still leaves the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery and opens a coal and ice yard.

The Civil War ends. Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery throughout the United States.

Still publishes his first book, *The Underground Railroad*.

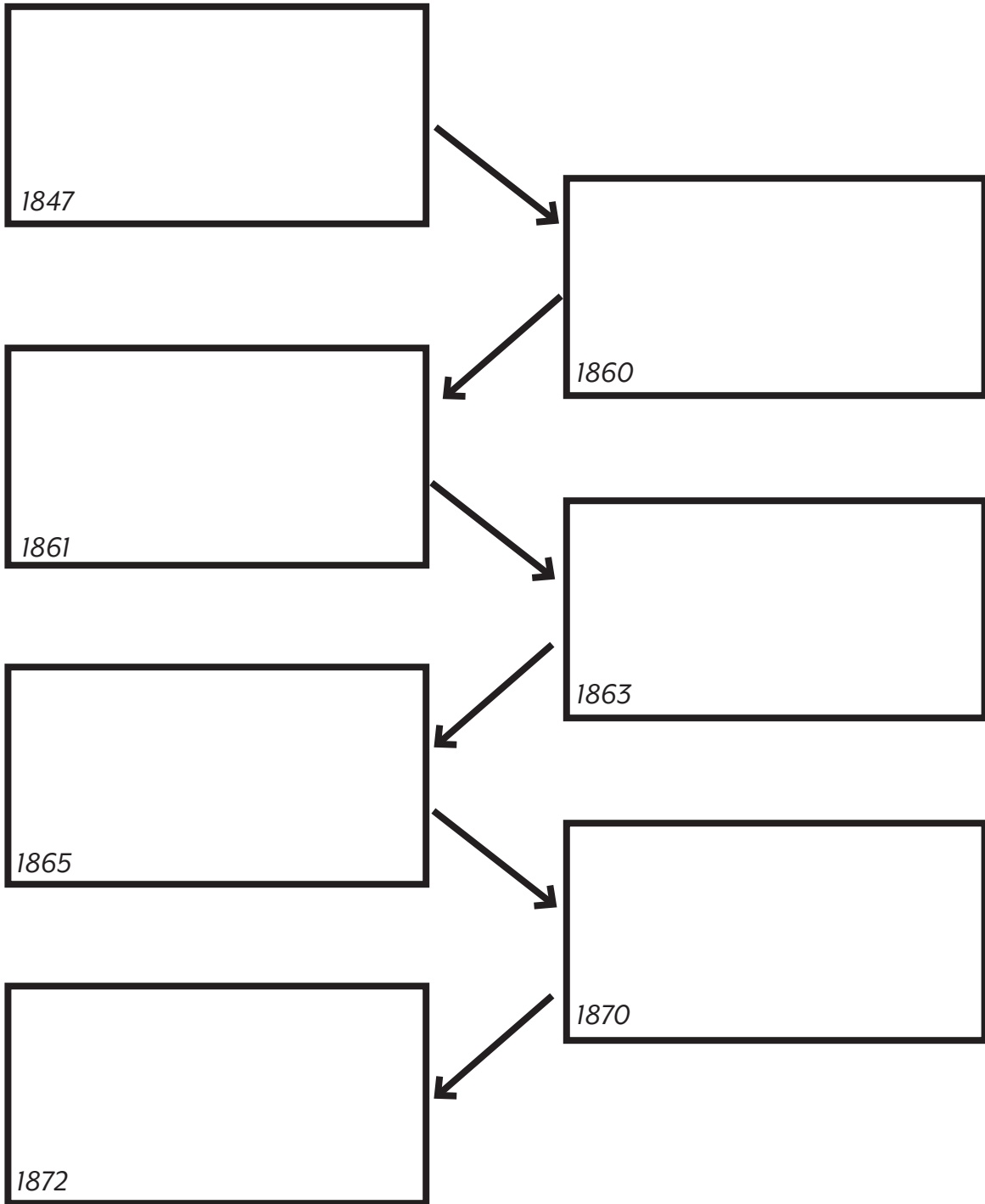
The Fugitive Slave Act is passed by the US Congress.

Abraham Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, an executive order ending slavery in the Confederate states.

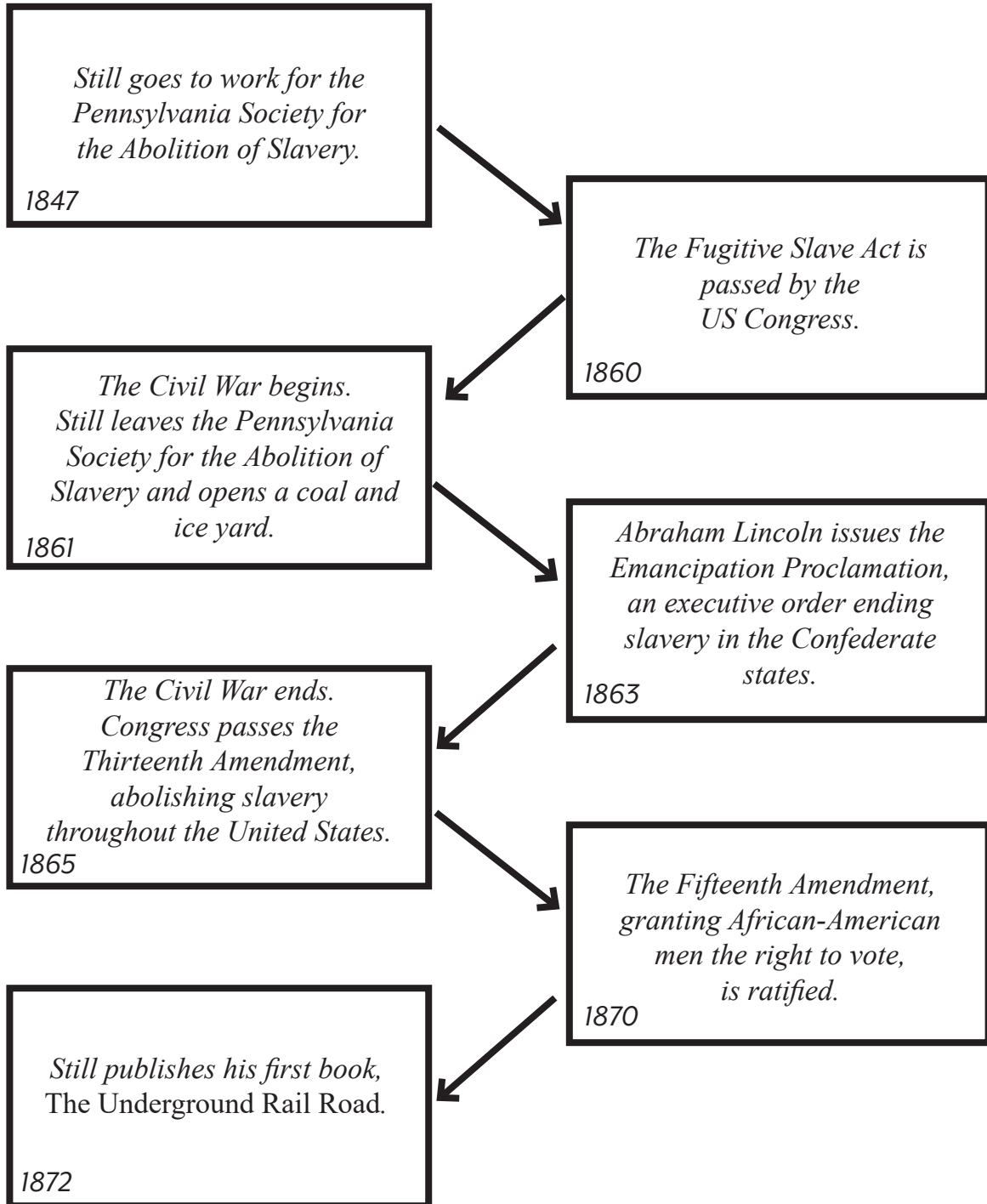
The Fifteenth Amendment, granting African-American men the right to vote, is ratified.



### The Zigzag Timeline Answers



## The Zigzag Timeline Template Answers



## Common Core State Standards Alignment

		Discussion	Active Reading	Vertical Puzzle	Zigzag Timeline
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Informational Text</b>					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.1	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.2	Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.3	Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.4	Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.6	Distinguish between information provided by pictures or other illustrations and information provided by the words in a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.7	Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.10	With prompting and support, read informational texts appropriately complex for grade 1.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.1	Ask and answer such questions as <i>who</i> , <i>what</i> , <i>where</i> , <i>when</i> , <i>why</i> , and <i>how</i> to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.3	Describe the connection between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.6	Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.8	Describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.1	Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.2	Determine the main idea of a text; recount the key details and explain how they support the main idea.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.3	Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.		•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.6	Distinguish their own point of view from that of the author of a text.		•		•
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Foundational Skills</b>					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.1.1	Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print.		•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.1.2	Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).		•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.1.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.1.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.2.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.		•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.2.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.3.3	Know and apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RF.3.4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.	•	•	•	•
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Writing</b>					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.2	Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.		•		•





		Discussion	Active Reading	Vertical Puzzle	Zigzag Timeline
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Writing</b>					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.8	With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.		•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.2	Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.		•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.8	Recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.		•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.		•		•
<b>English Language Arts Standards » Speaking &amp; Listening</b>					
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.1	Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about <i>grade 1 topics and texts</i> with peers and adults in small and larger groups.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.2	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.4	Describe people, places, things, and events with relevant details, expressing ideas and feelings clearly.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.5	Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.		•		•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1.6	Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.1	Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about <i>grade 2 topics and texts</i> with peers and adults in small and larger groups.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.2	Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.6	Produce complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grade 3 topics and texts</i> , building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.2	Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.4	Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.	•	•	•	•
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.6	Speak in complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification.	•	•	•	•

