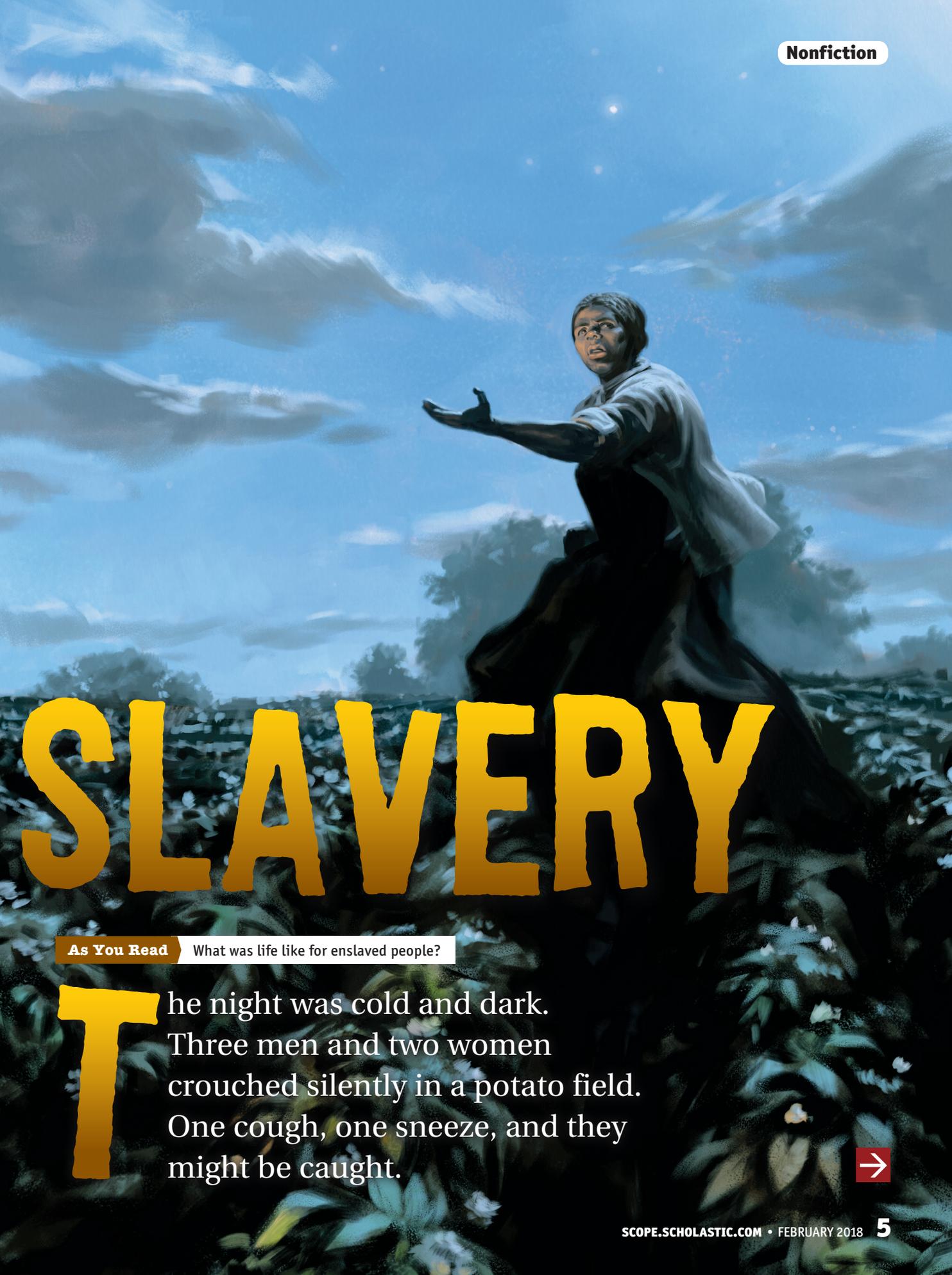


**NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**
reads like fiction but
it's all true

ESCAPE FROM

The incredible true story of **Harriet Tubman**,
who risked her life helping enslaved men,
women, and children escape to freedom

By **Lauren Tarshis**



SLAVERY

As You Read What was life like for enslaved people?

The night was cold and dark. Three men and two women crouched silently in a potato field. One cough, one sneeze, and they might be caught.



The year was 1855, and this small group was trying to get from Maryland to the North. They had been slaves all their lives. Now they were trying to get away. They wanted to be free.

The journey was dangerous. Freezing wind chilled their bones. Hunger tore at their stomachs. Rushing rivers threatened to overtake them. And then there were the slave catchers, cruel men who collected cash rewards for capturing escaped slaves. Slave catchers had bloodhounds that could pick up the scent of a human miles away.

The runaways knew what would happen if they were caught. They would be chained,

tied together, and marched back to their “owners.” They would be whipped—or worse. Slaves were sometimes put to death for trying to flee.

Yet on that cold night, the person leading this group was not afraid. Her name was Harriet Tubman, and she had made this journey many times before.

Stolen Away

Tubman was born on a Maryland farm around 1820. (Few slaves knew their actual birthdays.) Her given name was Araminta, “Minty” for short. (She changed her name to Harriet in 1849.) Though historical records are incomplete, it’s

likely that her mother, Rit, and her father, Benjamin, had at least nine children. Their two oldest daughters, Soph and Linneah, were sold to different slave owners when Tubman was young.

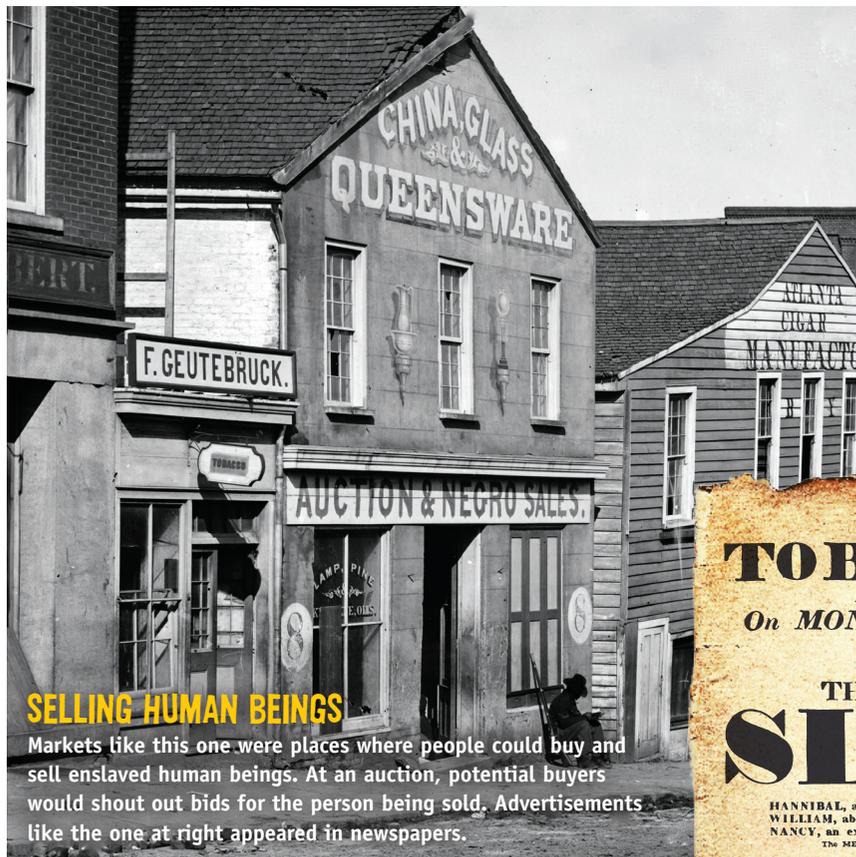
Try to imagine the horror of it: having family members stolen away from you, never to see or hear from them again.

Rit and Benjamin’s owner, Edward Brodess, didn’t believe that selling the girls was wrong. According to the law at the time, Rit, Benjamin, and their children belonged to Brodess. They were his property, just like his horses and plows. Brodess could do whatever he wished with them.

That’s what it meant to be a slave. You had no say over your own life. Everything was controlled by another person.

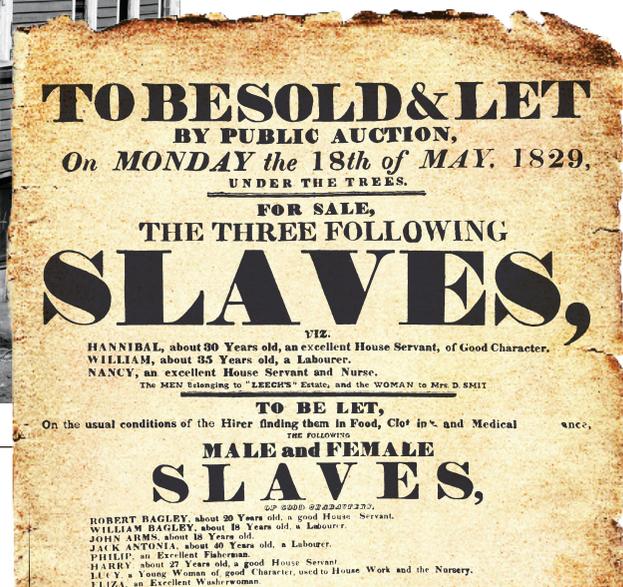
Slavery in America

In 1619, a Dutch slave ship brought the first Africans to the shores of what would become the United States. They were sold in Jamestown, Virginia, beginning a centuries-long legacy of human



SELLING HUMAN BEINGS

Markets like this one were places where people could buy and sell enslaved human beings. At an auction, potential buyers would shout out bids for the person being sold. Advertisements like the one at right appeared in newspapers.





bondage. Over the next 200 years, millions of Africans were kidnapped and shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas.

By the time Tubman was born, farming had become a **lucrative** business in the American South. **Plantation** owners relied on slaves for cheap labor. Slaves worked from sunup to sundown planting and harvesting wheat, tobacco, cotton, and other crops. They also cleaned houses, built furniture, washed clothes, and cooked meals for their “masters.” Even young children were put to work.

Getting Bold

Edward Brodess owned many slaves—too many to keep busy on his own property. So when Tubman was 5 or 6 years old, he began “renting” her to others. For months at a time, Tubman lived far from her



ENSLAVED LIFE

Most enslaved people were forced to live in crowded cabins like these. The cabins boiled in summer and froze in winter. Disease spread quickly.

parents, working for people who mistreated her. The cruelest of these was “Miss Susan,” who hired Tubman to watch over her baby. Tubman was barely big enough to hold the little boy, yet it was her job to take care of him 24 hours a day. Miss Susan kept a whip by her bedside. At night, if the baby’s crying woke her up, she whipped Tubman. Tubman carried scars from these beatings for the rest of her life.

As she got older, Tubman worked mainly outdoors, plowing fields and clearing timber. The work was backbreaking, but it gave her a chance to mingle with the free black people who were sometimes hired to work alongside slaves.

Tubman listened to stories they told of slaves who had escaped to the North by following the North Star. They described escape routes and the kind people who opened their homes to escaping slaves.

A few years later, when Tubman heard that the Brodess family planned to sell her, she recalled these stories. Afraid that she would disappear like her sisters and never see her family again, she decided to run.

Tubman would later say this of her decision to flee: “I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to—liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other.”



hiding places in attics and cellars.

Working in the Underground Railroad was risky. By 1850, helping a runaway slave was against the law, even in free states. If you were caught, you would be fined. You could be sent to jail. Free blacks were often sold into slavery. To

be truly safe, many who had escaped slavery traveled all the way to Canada, where slavery was entirely outlawed.

As a leader of the Underground Railroad, Tubman became well-known for her bravery and success. She was clever but harsh. On one rescue mission, a man in her group, fearful and hungry, wanted to turn back. In Tubman's mind, his departure would threaten the safety of the whole group. She pulled out the pistol she always carried and pointed it at the man's head.

"Move or die," she said.

He kept moving.

As successful as Tubman was, not every mission went smoothly.

Take that night in the potato field in 1855.

Crossing the field had not been part of Tubman's plan. But one of the three men she was leading, Joe Bailey, had an especially large bounty on his

head, and swarms of slave catchers were after him. To evade capture, Tubman had to detour from her preferred routes.

Even so, slave catchers nearly caught them. The group hid in holes in the potato field, shivering in the dirt as their pursuers passed within a few feet of them.

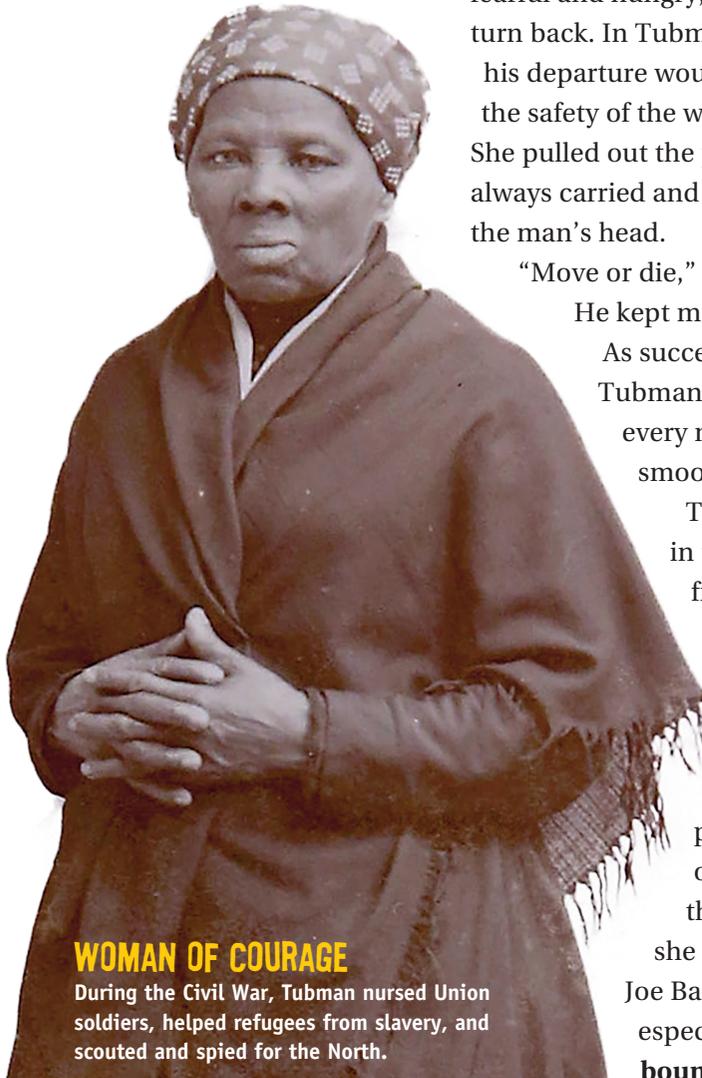
It was the closest Tubman ever came to capture.

Determined Liberator

In all, Tubman led 13 rescue missions, freeing 70 to 80 people. Among those she led to freedom were her parents and all four of her brothers.

Tubman went on to serve in the Civil War, which brought an end to slavery in 1865. But her work was not over. She helped disabled veterans, orphans, and others. And she campaigned for women to be given the right to vote, though she would not live to see that happen in 1920. Tubman died in 1913 in her home in Auburn, New York, surrounded by her family.

Today, Tubman is remembered as one of America's most courageous and important figures. Her legacy shaped the course of American history. ●



WOMAN OF COURAGE

During the Civil War, Tubman nursed Union soldiers, helped refugees from slavery, and scouted and spied for the North.

Writing Contest

Your legacy is how you are remembered and the contributions you make during your life. What is Harriet Tubman's legacy? Answer in a well-organized essay. Send it to **Harriet Tubman Contest**. Five winners will get *Unbound* by Ann E. Burg. See page 2 for details.

Get this activity online.

