

Harriet Tubman Exemplar

Harriet Tubman, a name most people know, served as a conductor for the underground rail road, but what got her to do this work? As a conductor, she led hundreds or maybe thousands of formally enslaved people to find freedom by escaping from the South to the North, risking her life every time. The authors of these texts portray how this brave role model barely had a childhood, yet rose up to spend her life ensuring that others would not have to endure all that she did.

Text four describes events from her life that likely shaped her motivation, but also her skill, in helping slaves escape. At the young age of 5, she was hired to care for her master's baby; "Every time a cry was heard her mistress, Miss Susan, would whip her around the neck." This kind of abuse at such a young age might make anyone want to escape. The text goes on to add the important detail that her mother soothed her during these difficult times, as "her mother would nurse her back to health." Her mother's tenderness may have given Harriet an example of kindness, when her White masters only set negative examples for her. Text 4's addition of the fact that her mother nurtured her gives important additional information that offers insight in why Harriet may have been so effective in caring for those she rescued and gain their trust. Text 3 only states that "if Harriet fell asleep the baby's mother whipped her. From a very young age she was determined to get freedom." Omitting the important role of her mother, Text 3 does not shine the same light on her fuller experiences that worked together to shape who she became.

Another event from Text 3 that likely made her want to help others and gain freedom is when a man went to the store without permission, "the overseer wanted to whip him. He asked Harriet to help but she refused....the overseer picked up a heavy iron weight and threw it at him. He missed the young man and hit Harriet instead", knocking her unconscious and causing her to have seizures for the rest of

her life. This likely contributed to later becoming a conductor because of how cruel and unfair people can be. This author portrays the sheer horror Harriet had to endure with such detail, making it seem justified that she escaped and helped others too.

The author of Text 2, Ann Petry, seems to go more deeply into Harriet's mind in how she portrays Harriet. Rather than just giving gory details as Text 3 did, or showing the important roles of those around her, as Text 4 did, Petry describes how Harriet must have "unconsciously absorbed many kinds of knowledge, almost with the air she breathed" that made her understand she was slave, even if not directly told this. She just understood it. That deep, unspoken understanding could have served to keep her in her place, but somehow she had the ability to rise above and envision a new future for herself, and those around her. This may have been the person who told her to look for the North star. This person sparked a vision for Harriet, one she held to tightly. That advice is almost a metaphor for her constant, unwavering dedication to seeking freedom, not just for herself but for everyone. Without Petry giving this detail, the reader might not know what sparked Harriet's vision.

Harriet Tubman may have held deep grudges and built up all her anger to fuel her when she could run away, and she did. However, she also helped others in need as well and cared for them all along, maybe inspired by how she also had people caring for her during her childhood. Even more, she had a vision for a better life, which is not easy to have when messages everywhere suggest you are less than others, or slave status. The authors of these pieces give critical details that enable the reader to piece together a multi-layered understanding of Harriet's life, and the people who may not have attained liberation for themselves, but groomed someone in such a way that she someday would find this for herself and many others.