

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## Content Briefing

### Mission 2: "Flight to Freedom"

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#### About "Flight to Freedom"

"Flight to Freedom" takes place in the slave-holding border state of Kentucky and the free border state of Ohio in the years surrounding the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law. Players play the role of Lucy, an enslaved 14-year-old girl who escapes to Ripley, Ohio, and finds refuge within a community of African American and white abolitionists. Informed by social history scholarship that centralizes the experience – and agency – of African Americans, the game itself is not designed to simulate the economic or political system of slavery (these are addressed in the accompanying curriculum). Rather, it brings to life the everyday forms of resistance undertaken by enslaved communities, and as crucially, the actions undertaken by African Americans to free themselves, through direct action on the Underground Railroad and through political organizing in the North.

"Flight to Freedom" drew upon forty years of scholarship by our nation's most pre-eminent historians of slavery, including the late John Hope Franklin, whose research and writing has helped generations of Americans – of all racial and cultural backgrounds – confront the most brutal chapters of our nation's history with truth, courage, and dignity. The content for "Flight to Freedom" was developed by a team of historians at the American Social History Project/Center for Media & Learning (ASHP), a research center at the City University of New York Graduate Center. ASHP worked in collaboration with African American scholars who are experts in the history of the period – Nikki Taylor, at the time historian at the University of Cincinnati and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (now chair and professor of history at Texas Southern University) and Christopher Moore, at the time a public historian and researcher at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library. Ira Berlin, one of the foremost historians of slavery and Distinguished Professor at the University of Maryland, also served as an advisor.

"Flight to Freedom" is part of a growing body of "serious games" that immerses users in historical and contemporary problems in ways that encourage perspective-taking, discussion, and weighing of multiple kinds of evidence. Educators have found that games can be an effective way to teach about sensitive topics such as human rights, the war on terror, immigration, and environmental crises. The *Mission US* approach is especially effective for reaching struggling learners who have difficulty learning from a textbook.

As students play "Flight to Freedom" and make choices for Lucy, they will earn badges representing different qualities or characteristics their "version" of Lucy has exhibited. The badges represent different ways that slaves, individually and together, responded to the conditions of slavery, in ways that ultimately helped hasten its end. Some badges represent choices that helped slaves preserve Family and Community in the face of enslavement. Others represent choices to develop skills of reading, writing, and speaking (Literacy/Persuasion/Leadership) that helped former slaves and

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freedmen become a powerful force for abolishing slavery. Some badges reflect slaves' efforts to survive slavery by avoiding direct confrontation with slave masters' power. Others represent choices to directly Resist or break the rules of the slave system, by being Self-Reliant, engaging in Sabotage, or otherwise showing a Fighting Spirit.

In small formative studies of Mission 2 with diverse middle school students, Education Development Center researchers found that youngsters were surprised by the arbitrary cruelties of the slave system, and deeply interested in the different ways that slaves could and did resist it. Whatever students' background, game events helped widen their view of how slavery worked, and the ways that enslaved and free people struggled against it. As intended, the game served as a springboard for questions, discussion, and further learning via the curriculum materials.

#### Using "Flight to Freedom" with your students

No history book, novel, or film covers all the ills of slavery; "Flight to Freedom" is no different. Although geared to children, the mission tells some ugly truths about slavery, including the work regimen of enslaved people, the inhumanity of bondage, the cruelty of abuse, the separation of families, and the physical consequences of disobedience. At the same time, the mission combats the stereotype of enslaved people as passive victims by showing the range of ways they survived and challenged oppression. The mission portrays enslaved African Americans with agency and personal power (even when social, economic, and political power was non-existent), and as central actors in their own destinies. Our goal is for all students to develop a greater respect for African Americans' struggle and African American history as a part of American history.

Before integrating "Flight to Freedom" into your curriculum, we strongly encourage you to preview the mission yourself, and make certain it is appropriate for your students and your community. On this site, we have provided a vast array of background information, activities, discussion starters, primary source documents, suggestions for further reading and research, and other resources to assist you in contextualizing "Flight to Freedom" for your students and helping them to understand the difficult choices and circumstances faced by enslaved and free African Americans during this period of history.

In addition, here are some general tips for dealing with sensitive issues in the classroom:

- Preview the issue with your students.
- Set ground rules for classroom talk.
- Debrief and discuss episodes where violent or disturbing events occur.

We hope you will find "Flight to Freedom" a valuable tool for teaching this important—but difficult—period in American history.

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