

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

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### MISSION 2: "Flight to Freedom"

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#### Slave Narrative by Henry Bibb about Running Away (1849)

*Henry Bibb was born in Kentucky to a slave mother and Kentucky state senator, James Bibb. He was hired out at a young age and while he was away his brothers and sisters were sold off. Bibb was traded frequently, and he lived in at least seven southern states. After trying to escape several times, he finally reached Canada in 1837. However, he returned to Kentucky a year later for his wife and child and was recaptured. He made a final, successful escape in 1841 and became an active abolitionist in Detroit. Following the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, he fled to Canada where he founded a school, church, and several antislavery societies. He also established the Voice of the Fugitive, Canada's first African American newspaper. Bibb's autobiography, Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave was published in 1849*

Among other good trades I learned the art of running away to perfection. I made a regular business of it, and never gave it up, until I had broken the bands of slavery, and landed myself safely in Canada, where I was regarded as a man, and not as a thing.

The first time in my life that I ran away, was for ill treatment, in 1825. I was living with a Mr. Vires, in the village of Newcastle. His wife was a very cross woman. She was every day flogging me, boxing, pulling my ears, and scolding, so that I dreaded to enter the room where she was. This first started me to running away from them. I was often gone several days before I was caught. They abuse me for going off, but it did no good. The next time they flogged me, I was off again; but after awhile they got sick of their bargain, and returned me back into the hands of my owners.

By this time. Mr. White had married his second wife. She was what I call a tyrant. I lived with her several months, but she kept me almost half of my time in the woods, running from under the bloody lash. While I was at home she kept me all the time rubbing furniture, washing, scrubbing the floors; and when I was not doing this, she would often seat herself in a large rocking chair, with two pillows about her, and would make me rock her, and keep off the flies. She was too lazy to scratch her own head, and would often make me scratch and comb it for her. She would at other times lie on her bed, in warm weather, and make me fan her while she slept, scratch and rub her feet; but after awhile she got sick of me, and preferred a maiden servant to do such business.

I was then hired out again; but by, this time I had become much better skilled in running away, and would, make calculation to avoid detection, by taking with me a bridle. If any body should see me in the woods, as they, have, and asked "what are you doing here sir? you are a runaway?"--I said, "no, sir, I am looking for our old mare;" at other times, "looking for our cows." For such excuses I was let pass. In fact, the only weapon of self defence that I could use

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successfully, was that of deception. It is useless for a poor helpless slave, to resist a white man in a slaveholding State. Public opinion and the law is against him; and resistance in many cases is death to the slave, while the law declares, that he shall submit or die.

The circumstances in which I was then placed, gave me a longing desire to be free. It kindled a fire of liberty within my breast which has never yet been quenched.... I believed then, as I believe now, that every man has a right to wages for his labor; a right to his own wife and children; a right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness; and a right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.

Source: [Henry Bibb], *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave* (1849), 15-17.