

RISING UP

Season 2 of the acclaimed series **UNDERGROUND**, premiering March 8, 2017 on WGN America, reveals the heroes who rose up to fight for freedom for all, who worked to overthrow a corrupt and unforgiving establishment, and who accepted that freedom means laying their lives on the line for others. Beyond capturing a critical moment in history, the series explores the importance of literacy and its ability to facilitate escape, both literal and figurative.

DISCOVERY

Consider the role that forced illiteracy played in perpetuating slavery in the South and why slaveholders feared their slaves becoming literate.

- Gain an overview of education and culture in antebellum America at pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/education/history.html.
- Learn how African Americans went about trying to get an education prior to, during, and after the Civil War at <https://academic.udayton.edu/race/04needs/education06.htm>.

Next, explore why slaves seized every opportunity to become literate by reading primary accounts of African Americans in the antebellum era and how they took extraordinary risks to gain an education at <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/identity/text8/slavefree.pdf>.

- Then learn about early efforts to educate African American children of the era at <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/identity/text8/equalopportunity.pdf>.
- Discover the lengths to which slaves went as they attempted to become educated at <http://spartacus-educational.com/USASeducation.htm>.

Finally, research how slave narratives, like those by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, besides documenting the horrors of slavery, undermined the slaveholders' efforts to impose illiteracy and inspired all those fighting for racial equality.

- Read excerpts of Frederick Douglass' slave narrative at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/narrative-of-the-life-of-frederick-douglass-an-american-slave-chapter-vi>.
- Read selections from Harriet Jacobs' narrative at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>.
- Explore the Library of Congress' extensive collection of slave narratives at loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection.

DISCUSSION

- What role did illiteracy play in propagating slavery in the South?
- Why did slave owners fear the possibility of slaves becoming literate?
- What did literacy represent to slaves?
- To what extent did the forced illiteracy of slave times carry over into Jim Crow era voting requirements? Is there a connection to voter identity rules today?
- What is the meaning and importance of literacy in the multilingual society we live in today?
- Illiteracy is still used as a tool of oppression in certain parts of the world. Is this problem one that the international community should attempt to combat, and if so, how?

UNDERGROUND, produced by John Legend and created by Misha Green and Joe Pokaski, stars Jurnee Smollett-Bell, Aldis Hodge, Jessica De Gouw, Alano Miller, Amirah Vann, Christopher Meloni, and joining the cast in Season 2, Aisha Hinds as Harriet Tubman.



UNDERGROUND

SEASON 2 PREMIERES ON WGN AMERICA, MARCH 8, 2017