

Harriet Tubman

Although Harriet Tubman was barely 5 feet tall, she stands out as one of the most tremendous figures in our national struggle to end slavery in the second half of the nineteenth century. Tubman was born into slavery in 1820. As she grew up, she discovered that she preferred to work outside rather than in the master's house, even though the outside work took much more endurance. Her father taught her all about plants and animals. He taught her how to negotiate her way through the woods in pitch darkness without making a sound. By the time Harriet was 12, she was unusually robust. She worked in the fields with the strongest men.

One day, she was standing near a slave who suddenly started to run for freedom. The master told her to block his way. She just stood there and the slave ran away. The master threw a two-pound weight at the running slave but hit Harriet in the head instead. She was badly injured and for the rest of her life suffered terrible headaches. Even worse, from then on she would fall asleep suddenly for short or long periods, unable to be awakened.

When Harriet was 29 years old, she decided to escape. Because of her knowledge of nature and her nimbleness of body, Harriet was able to navigate her way safely to the free territory of Pennsylvania. She found work as a cook and immediately began planning to go back into slave territory to get her family.

This began many years of trips back and forth between slave and free states, leading over 300 people to freedom. In all those trips, she never lost a single person. She came to be known as “the black Moses,” after the Biblical figure who delivered his people out of slavery in Egypt.

Unit 16

- Do you think that Harriet Tubman's experience as a slave was typical of the plight faced by others?

- How did Harriet Tubman's emergence from slavery help others to thrive?

- Besides robust, what are some other ways to describe Harriet Tubman?