

Document #: 1A & 1B

Place in the Archives: Rare Book Room

Blindy's Trip to The Archives – Indiana

Cover Sheet

Title of Document – “The Cunning Slave” and “Aunt Rachel”, from Chapter V of Reminiscences of Levi Coffin

Author of Document/s – Levi Coffin

Document Summary

Summary

Coffin provides an account of the 1st escape of a man named only as Jim from Kentucky and of his second escape when he goes back to assist his wife and children in their escape. Coffin also provides an account of a woman named only as Aunt Rachel from Lexington, Kentucky. Coffin details her journey of being sold into slavery in Mississippi, her escape and her return to Lexington to be near her family. Rachel is recaptured and escapes again, finding refuge near Madison, IN with an unnamed "colored" man. Coffin suggests that she then found safety and work at Coffin's home in Newport before local Quakers took her with them to a Meeting in Young's Prairie, Michigan in Cass County and black and Quaker settlement. On her way to Canada, she spent time in Detroit where her injuries from leg irons were treated.

Life skills - decision-making and peer pressure

Other Life Skill Connections – self-image and feelings, coping, lessons in living, getting help, helping others

THE CUNNING SLAVE.

Jim was a shrewd, intelligent chattel, the property of a man living in Kentucky. Having in some unaccountable manner got the idea that freedom was better than bondage, he resolved to make an effort to gain his liberty. He did not make his intention known to his wife or any of his fellow-bondmen, choosing to make the attempt alone. He watched for an opportunity to escape, and when it came he started for the Ohio River. He knew that he was a valuable piece of property, and that his master would pursue him and make strong efforts to capture him, so he let no grass grow under his feet till he reached the bank of the river. He wandered along this in the dark for some time, looking for a way to cross, and finally came to the hut of a colored man. He told his story to the negro living in the hut, and offered him part of the small sum of money he had if he would take him across in a skiff to the Indiana shore. The negro knew where a skiff lay drawn up on the shore, and consented to row him across. Jim reached the other side safely, and landed a short distance above Madison. It was now near daylight, and he must hasten to seek a place of concealment. He was directed how to find George De Baptist, a free colored man, who often aided fugitive slaves. George then lived in Madison, but soon after removed to Detroit, Michigan, for his own safety. Jim made his way to the house of this friendly colored man, and remained secreted during the day. Some time in the day, George De Baptist learned that Jim's master had arrived in town with a posse of men, and that they were rudely entering the houses of colored people, searching for the missing slave. By shrewd management on the part of George, the hunters were baffled, and the next night Jim was conducted through corn-fields and by-ways to a depot of the Underground Railroad. He was forwarded from station to station, at late hours in the night, until he reached William Beard's, in Union County, Indiana. Here he rested a few days, under the roof of that noted and worthy abolitionist, whose house was known for many years as a safe retreat for the oppressed fugitive. From that place he was conducted to our house, a distance of about twenty-five miles, and, after remaining with us one day, he was forwarded on from station to station, till he reached Canada. Here he remained a few months. In telling his story, he said:

"Oh, how sweet it was to breathe free air, to feel that I had no massa who could whip me or sell me. But I was not happy long. I could not enjoy liberty when the thoughts of my poor wife and children in slavery would rise up before me. I thought to myself, I have learned the way and found friends all along the road; now I will go back and fetch my wife and children. I'll go to old massa's plantation, and I'll make believe I am tired of freedom. I'll tell old massa a story that will please him; then I will go to work hard and watch for a chance to slip away my wife and children."

So Jim left Canada and wended his way back to the old plantation in Kentucky. His master was greatly surprised, one morning, to see his missing property come walking up from the negro quarters as if nothing had happened. Jim came up to him and made a low bow, and stood before him as humble as a whipped dog. In answer to the volley of questions and hard names that greeted him, Jim said:

"I thought I wanted to be free, massa, so I run away and went to Canada. But I had a hard time there, and soon got tired of taking care of myself. I thought I would rather live with massa again and be a good servant. I found that Canada was no place for niggers; it's

too cold, and we can't make any money there. Mean white folks cheat poor niggers out of their wages when they hire them. I soon got sick of being free, and wished I was back on the old plantation. And those people called abolitionists, that I met with on the way, are a mean set of rascals. They pretend to help the niggers, but they cheat them all they can. They get all the work out of a nigger they can, and never pay him for it. I tell you, massa, they are mean folks."

In narrating his story, Jim said: "Well, old massa seemed mightily pleased with my lies. He spoke pleasant to me, and said: 'Jim, I hope you will make a good missionary among our people and the neighbors.' I got massa's confidence, and worked well and obeyed him well, and I talked to the niggers before him, in a way to please him. But they could understand me, for I had been doing missionary work among them, and the neighbors' niggers too, but not such missionary work as massa thought I was doing."

Jim worked on faithfully through the fall and winter months, all the time arranging matters for a second flight.

In the spring, when the weather was warm, he succeeded in getting his wife and children and a few of his slave friends across the Ohio River into Indiana. He got safely to the first station of the Underground Railroad, with his party, numbering fourteen, and hurried on with them rapidly from station to station, until they reached our house. They were hotly pursued and had several narrow escapes, but the wise management of their friends on the route prevented them from being captured. They remained at our house several days to rest, as they were much exhausted with night travel, and suffering from exposure, and while they were concealed in our garret, their pursuers passed through the town. The hunters went northward by way of Winchester and Cabin Creek, where there was a large settlement of free colored people. While they were searching in these neighborhoods, we forwarded the fugitives on another route, by way of Spartansburg, Greenville and Mercer County, Ohio, to Sandusky. From this place they were shipped across the lake to Fort Malden, Canada. Jim's opinions, as he had expressed them to his master, now underwent a sudden change. He liked the country and the people, and thought that he could make a living not only for himself, but for his family. As to the abolitionists along the route, he thought they were the best people in the world. Instead of cheating the poor fugitives by getting their services without pay, they fed and clothed them without charge, and would help them on their journey; often using their own horses and wagons, and traveling all night with the fugitives. A few years after I had the pleasure of seeing Jim and his family in their comfortable home in Canada. Jim said he hoped God would forgive him for telling his master so many lies. He said he felt no feelings of homesickness, no longings for massa and the old plantation in Kentucky.

Source Questions for “The Cunning Slave”

1. Students should be divided into groups of two. The first group should read the story of Jim’s escape to Canada and then choose the best BABES character that could retell the story of the escape. The second group should retell of his return to slavery and his second escape with his family, again choosing the best BABES character to tell this part of the story.

2. Question about **decision-making and peer pressure**

Possible Question: Why do you think that Jim decided not to take his family the first time he escaped?

3. Students list and explain other life skills that connect to the Cunning Slave below.

AUNT RACHEL

The subject of this sketch, one of those good old darkey aunties whom we have all known or heard of, was brought up in Lexington, Kentucky. She was a slave, a house servant, and had a kind and indulgent master and mistress, to whom she was much attached. She had the principal charge of household affairs. Her husband belonged to another person in the neighborhood, but was often permitted to visit her. They had a family of several children, and were as happily situated as it was possible for slaves to be. They knew that they were liable to be separated and sold away from each other, and this disturbed their happiness. At last the dreaded misfortune came to them. The husband was sold, and taken to the far South, and the wife never saw him nor heard from him afterward. This was a terrible shock to Aunt Rachel, and had it not been for her children, she said she would have prayed to die. But for their sake she bore her grief, not thinking that she would ever be called upon to part from them, or to experience deeper pangs of sorrow than those she had already known. She knew not what was in store for her. Two years afterward her old master and mistress died, and she and her children were sold at public sale. The children were bid off by citizens of Lexington, but Aunt Rachel was sold to a Southern slave-trader. Now, indeed, came trouble. No one but a mother who has been separated from the children she loves can understand the depth of her distress, or sympathize with the anguish of her heart. Aunt Rachel was torn away from her children and taken South in a gang of slaves, which the trader had bought for the Southern market. In Mississippi she was sold to a cotton planter, and immediately set to work in the cotton field. She had never been accustomed to out-door work, and could not keep up with the other cotton pickers. For this she was cruelly punished, and her allowance of food reduced. Finding that her strength was failing her under this hard treatment, she resolved to run away, and try to make her way back to her old Kentucky home. She hoped, if she lived to get there, to prevail on some of her white friends at Lexington to buy her, and thus enable her to stay near her children. She thought of the great distance she must traverse, and of the dangers and hardships of such an undertaking, but she said to herself: "It is death to stay here, and I had rather die in the attempt to get away."

It was now the beginning of summer, and she thought she could live on berries and fruits the most of the time. She slipped off one night and made good headway during the hours of darkness, hiding in the cane-brakes when daylight appeared. The next night she ventured to the negro quarters of a plantation, and got some provisions. Her long and toilsome journey was attended with much danger and suffering, and occupied the most of the summer. She finally reached her old home in **Lexington**, Kentucky, and secreted herself with a friend. She did not dare yet to make herself known to her children, lest it should lead to her detection, but sometimes could hardly control herself when she saw her youngest child, a little girl three years old, playing in the adjoining yard. She remained in concealment for some time, while her colored friends tried to find some one in Lexington who would purchase her. They were unsuccessful in their attempts, and it was deemed unsafe for her to remain longer in the place, as it had by this time become known to a number of the citizens of Lexington that she had escaped from her master and was there. She thought she would start northward and try to reach Canada, but while

her colored friends were making arrangements for her journey to the North on the Underground Railroad, she received the alarming intelligence that her master from Mississippi had arrived in Lexington in pursuit of her. He had had no clue to her whereabouts, but judged that in her flight she would be guided by that instinct which leads one across rivers and mountains to the spot endeared by associations of home and kindred.

Soon after reaching Lexington he learned that she was secreted somewhere in the town. He offered a reward for her capture, and a diligent search commenced. The police were on the alert, and poor Aunt Rachel was soon captured and dragged to jail for safe keeping. Her master was greatly incensed because she had run away, and put him to so much trouble and expense in pursuing her, and was very abusive and threatening in his language to her. He gave her a few keen cuts with his whip, as tokens of what was in store for her, and told her he would have his pay out of her when he got home; he would double her task, and if she did not perform it he would cut the hide off of her with his whip.

Aunt Rachel trembled but made no reply; she knew that she was in his power. Handcuffs were put on her wrists, and a chain with a heavy ball fastened around her ankle. Thus ironed, she lay in the jail for more than a week, while her master was engaged in buying a small company of slaves for his plantation in Mississippi. When ready to start South, he hired a wagon in which to transport his slaves to Louisville, at which point he intended to put them aboard a down-river boat. Aunt Rachel was placed in the wagon, with her heavy irons on. After a wearisome day's travel, they stopped in front of a tavern, where they intended to spend the night. It was quite dark, for they had been compelled to travel some time after night-fall in order to reach a place where they could find quarters. While her master went into the house to see about getting entertainment, Aunt Rachel gathered up the ball and chain in her manacled hands, slipped out of the hind end of the wagon, and slid down into a deep ravine near the road. She crouched under the side of the bank and lay as still as death. She was soon missed, and the search for her began. Her master, and those he called to his assistance, ran in every direction, with lighted lanterns, looking for her, but they overlooked her hiding-place. She was so near, almost under the wagon, that they did not think of searching where she lay. She remained perfectly still, except the tumultuous throbbing of her heart; and this she thought would surely betray her when those in search passed near her hiding-place. Finally, all became quiet, and the search seemed given up for the night. Then Aunt Rachel gathered up her chain and crawled off into the woods, making her way through the darkness as fast as her fetters would allow. She did not venture to follow any road or beaten path, but wandered on through the woods, as best she could, for two or three miles. Being quite weary under the weight of her irons, she stopped to rest. It was cool weather, late in the fall, and she soon felt chilly. Looking about, she discovered some hogs lying snugly in a leafy bed under the side of a large log, and frightening them away, she crept into their warm bed. She now felt comfortable, and soon fell into a refreshing sleep that lasted an hour or two. When she awoke she felt quite refreshed, and ready to pursue her journey. Her situation was indeed forlorn. She had eluded the grasp of her

master, but manacled as she was, how could she ever make her way to freedom and safety? Must she not perish of hunger in the lonely woods? How could she free herself from her hand fetters, and from the heavy chain that was chafing her ankle and making it sore? As she reflected on these questions, distress filled her mind, and she wept. She knew of no friend but God, and she prayed to him in this hour of need; she asked him to guide and help her. She seemed to feel his presence with her, in answer to her petitions, and a glow of comfort warmed her heart. She moved on, to look for a safe place where she might hide during the day, and came to a small stream of water, on whose banks were a number of large stones. She placed two stones close together and laid her chain across them, then lifting another stone in her fettered hands, she managed by repeated blows and by frequently turning it, to break the chain; thus freeing herself of the greater part of it, and of the heavy ball. Several links, however, were left hanging to the band riveted around her ankle; from this she could not free herself. She lay in the woods during the day, and at night ventured to a house where she saw some colored people. She was kindly received, and furnished with food. The man succeeded in getting her handcuffs off, which was a great relief to her, but having no file, he was unable to relieve her of the iron band on her leg. This colored brother gave her directions for her journey, and put her on a route that would reach the Ohio River, opposite Madison, Indiana. He even ventured to take two of his master's horses out of the field, and help her on her way several miles. The next night her progress was slow on account of her manacled ankle, which by this time was swollen and very painful. Some time before day-light she ventured to approach a hut, which was situated near the road she was traveling. She discovered a negro man kindling a fire, and made herself known to him. He received her kindly, and his wife ministered to her needs. She remained secreted during the day at this hut, and at night felt strengthened and ready to pursue her journey. The man had a file, and succeeded in filing off the rivet, and loosening the band from her leg. He then applied what simple remedies he had at hand, and succeeded in some measure in assuaging the pain and swelling of the ankle. At night this kind friend helped her on her way, and conducted her to the house of a colored man, who lived near the Ohio River, below Madison. This man was a slave, but had a kind and indulgent master, who allowed him the use of a skiff, and permitted him to go over the river to trade. Aunt Rachel prevailed upon him to take her across the river that night, and he landed her near Madison, directing her how to find a settlement of free colored people near that place. At this settlement she fell into the hands of a trusty colored man, who lived about ten miles out in the country, where he owned a good farm, and was comfortably situated. Aunt Rachel found a quiet home at his house, which was fortunate for her, as she was now almost unable to travel. The chafing of the iron band around her ankle had caused inflammation, and made a very painful sore. She was able, however, to move about enough to do housework. She remained at this place all winter, unmolested. In the spring a fugitive was captured in the neighborhood, and Aunt Rachel and her friends became alarmed for her safety. She was put on the Underground Railroad, and brought to our house at Newport. She was anxious to remain with us for awhile, hoping that by some means she might hear from her children, concerning whom she was very anxious. She thought she would be safe from pursuit, for her master in Mississippi would not be likely to spend much more time and money looking after her. My wife needed help at that time, and agreed to hire her for a few weeks. We soon found her to be one of the best housekeepers and cooks we had ever employed. She was careful and

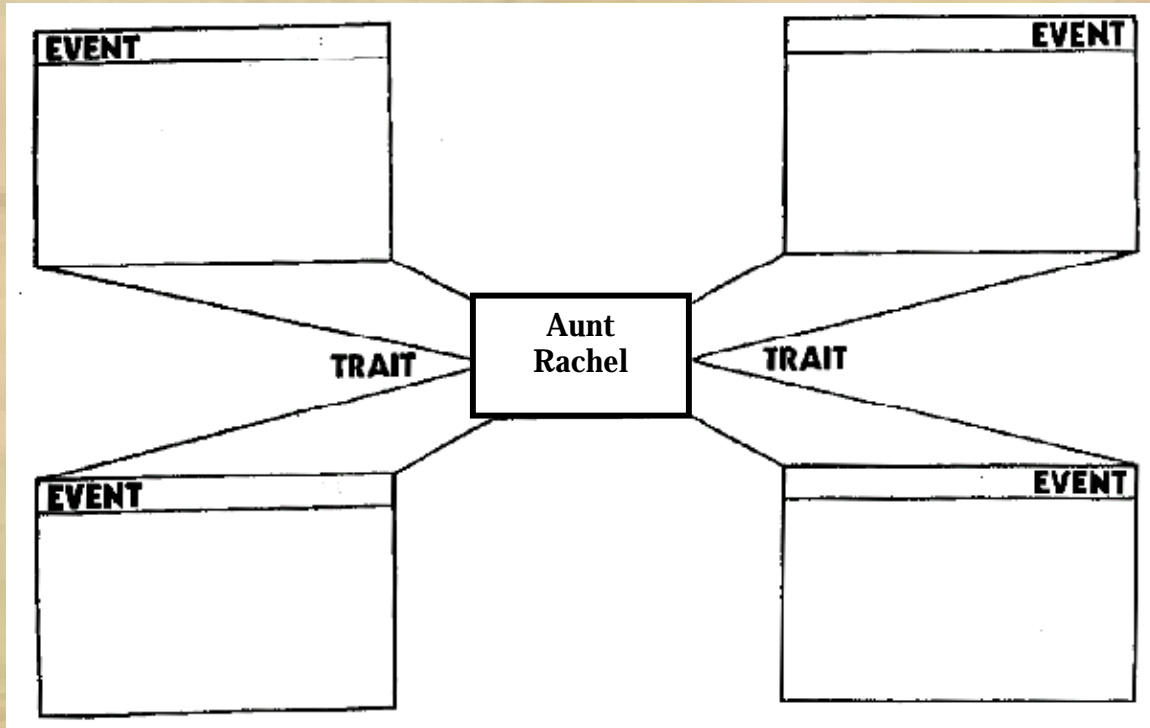
trustworthy, and exemplary in all her ways. We became much attached to her; indeed, the neighbors and all who knew her had a great deal of respect and liking for Aunt Rachel. Every one who heard her story, as she related it in simple yet thrilling language, felt a deep interest in her case. She staid with us more than six months, and would have remained longer had it not been considered unsafe. Some Kentuckians were scouting about through our neighborhood looking for fugitives. They made their headquarters at Richmond, at a hotel which was a well-known resort for negro hunters. Aunt Rachel became alarmed, and we thought it best for her to go on to Canada, where she would be safe. A good opportunity in the way of company for the greater part the way offered just then, very fortunately.

A committee of men and women Friends, appointed by New Garden Quarterly Meeting to attend the opening of a meeting at Young's Prairie, Michigan, were just about starting on this mission. Aunt Rachel was acquainted with most of them, and wished to accompany them, and they were very willing to engage in Underground Railroad work, though the Quarterly Meeting had not appointed them to that service.

We provided Aunt Rachel with warm and comfortable clothing for her journey to the North. A well-filled trunk was placed in one of the carriages, and Aunt Rachel took her seat by one of the women Friends. She presented the appearance of a sedate and comely Quaker woman, quite as suitable to be appointed on the committee as any of the company. Aunt Rachel traveled very agreeably with this committee to Young's Prairie, Cass County, Michigan. She remained at the Friends' settlement there for several days, and was then sent on the mail coach to Detroit. At that city she called on some people to whom we had directed her, and they sent her across to Canada. She found employment in the homes of white families in Windsor and Norwich, where she remained for several months. Then she married a respectable colored man by the name of Keys, who owned a comfortable little home. Here I met with her eight years afterward, when on a visit to the fugitives in Canada, in company with William Beard. The meeting was very unexpected to Aunt Rachel, as she had no previous knowledge of our arrival in the country. We rode up to her little home, and hitched our horses at the gate, some distance from the house. Aunt Rachel was in the yard at the time, picking up kindling wood. She stood still a moment until she recognized me, then dropped her wood and rushed to meet me, shouting and praising God. She exclaimed: "Is it possible the good Lord has sent you here?" then, with tears running down her black cheeks, she threw her arms around me, and asked many blessings on my head. Her emotions and manifestations of joy at meeting me quite unmanned me for a time. She led us into the house, which was snug and comfortable, and introduced us to her husband. He appeared to be a very friendly, kind-hearted man. Aunt Rachel informed me that she had suffered a great deal with her leg, where she had worn that cruel chain. At one time she lay for several months under treatment of some of the best doctors in Detroit. They decided that to save her life the limb must be amputated. She consented that the operation should be performed, and the doctors came with their surgical instruments, but her husband would not give his consent. He believed that she could get well without losing her limb. The doctors yielded, the limb was spared, and she did get well.

Source Questions for “Aunt Rachel”

1. Students should read the story of Aunt Rachel’s life and then fill in the events that led to her escape in the boxes labeled *event* below. List the traits that you think she learned from each event that gave her the strength to escape in the box below that event. Each student should then be one of the BABES characters and retell the events they listed below from that BABES character’s perspective.



2. Question about **decision-making and peer pressure**

Possible Question: Why do you think that Aunt Rachel decided not to stay in Kentucky as she originally planned when she escaped?

3. Students list and explain other life skills that connect to Aunt Rachel’s story in the space provided below.