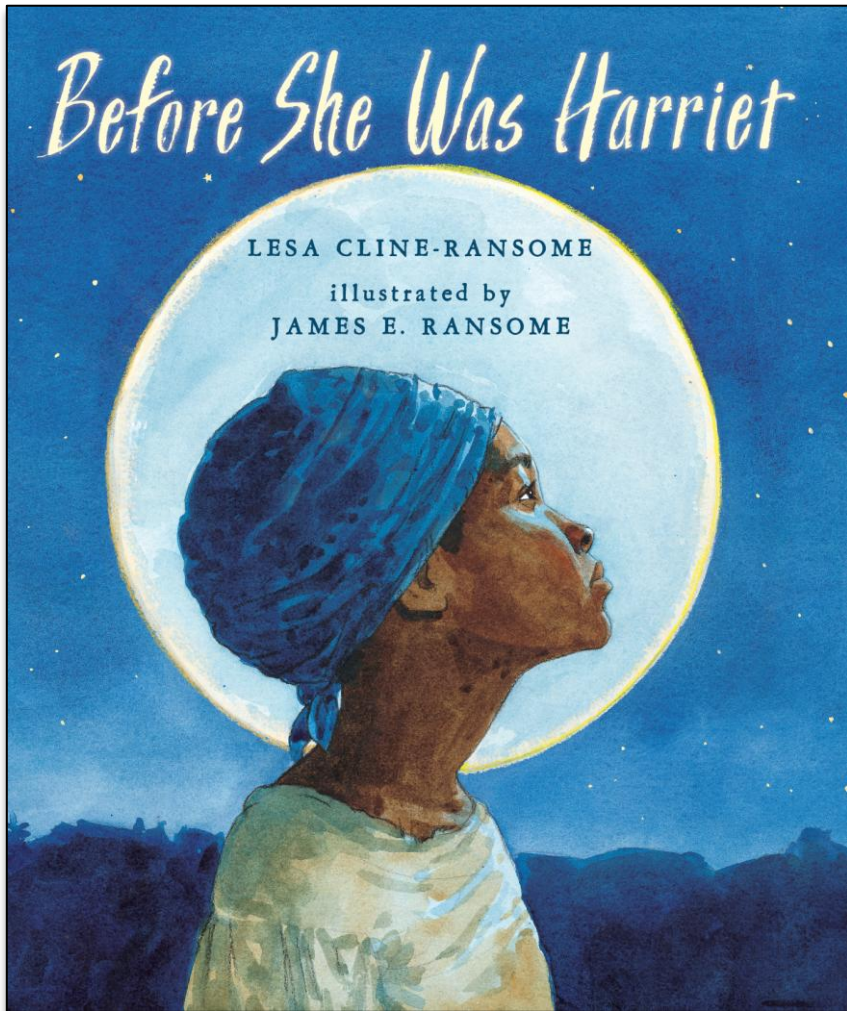




Educator's Guide



9780823420476 • Ages 4-7 • E-book available

Before She Was Harriet

by Lesa Cline-Ransome

illustrated by
James E. Ransome

★ “Memorable . . . lyrical . . .
lavishly detailed.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, Starred

★ “Simple . . . and sophisticated.”
—*Booklist*, Starred

★ “Expertly done.”
—*School Library Journal*, Starred

ABOUT THE BOOK

This poem with exquisite watercolor paintings celebrates the diverse accomplishments of Harriet Tubman, a woman whose courage and compassion make her larger than life.

Harriet Tubman is an American hero, known best as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. As a child she was known as Minty and Araminta, but as she grew older she became known as a nurse, a spy for the Union army, and a suffragist. This powerful poem begins with Harriet as a free adult and alternates with flashbacks to a young Harriet, leading enslaved people from America's South to freedom in the North. The expressive and exquisite watercolor paintings reveal a woman of courage and spirit who championed justice for all people throughout her life.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Have students read about Harriet Tubman on the following website: pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1535.html. Have students write down five facts that they didn't know about Tubman. Then have students write a one-page paper that summarizes Harriet Tubman's work. Encourage them to think of a creative title.

Correlates to CCSS in English Language Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 1-4.2; Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 1-4.8.

Classroom Discussion

The discussion questions are designed to use after the entire book has been read. This enables readers to understand the concept of the before and after of Harriet Tubman's life.

- A *symbol* is an object used to represent something else. Explain the symbolism of the train on the first page. Find other examples of symbolism in the book.
- The title of a book creates interest in the story and hints at what the book is about. Discuss the title of the book. What does the word "*Before*" imply? How does it create intrigue and interest?
- Read aloud the first page of the book. The illustration depicts an elderly Harriet sitting in front of a window. Turn back to the title page and find Harriet in the illustration. Where is she sitting? What is significant about her traveling in daylight? Study the illustration on the last page. Draw a connection between it and the one on p. 2.
- The first illustration shows Harriet in deep thought. What do you think is on her mind? Take a look at the next page when Harriet is younger. Why is she traveling at night? Where is she going? Notice her eyes. What do you think she is seeing? How do the first and second illustrations reflect the before and after in Harriet's life?
- Define injustice. How were Harriet and her people victims of injustice? How does she use her freedom and her voice to speak out against injustice to women?
- What is a general? Explain why Harriet is called General Tubman. What is significant about Harriet sitting at the bow or front of the boat (pp. 7 & 8)? Trace Harriet's leadership skills throughout her life.
- Courage is a central theme in the book. Harriet Tubman is described as having the "courage of a lion." How does it take courage for Harriet to shepherd her people to freedom? Discuss the courage it takes for slaves to follow General Tubman. What are the risks?
- The slave owners couldn't break the spirit of Minty. Discuss the relationship between "spirit" and "courage." Explain how Minty's spirit serves her during her entire life.
- Harriet Tubman was a Union spy. What secrets do you think she reveals to the Union soldiers? Discuss how she might have gotten secrets to the army. She is shown hiding behind a tree as soldiers pass (pp. 9 & 10). Who are the soldiers? Why is she hiding from them?

- Take note of Harriet as she nurses wounded soldiers (pp. 11 & 12). She “tended to them with bandages and words.” What are some words she might have used to comfort them?
- Study the illustration of Aunt Harriet (pp. 13 & 14). Who is the couple with her? What is the season of the year? Notice Aunt Harriet’s outstretched left hand. What is she showing the couple? Why are they smiling? A picket fence symbolizes “an American dream.” Explain the dream that Aunt Harriet grants the couple.

Correlates to CCSS in English Language Standards in Reading Literature: Comprehension & Collaboration. RL. 1-4.1, RL.1-4.3: Craft & Structure RL. 2-4.5; Integration of Knowledge & Ideas RL. 1-4.7; Language: Convention of Standard English L. 1-4.1; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 1-4.1; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 1-4.4.

Classroom Activities

- After reading the entire book, write a paragraph that explains the illustration on the cover of the book. What do you think Harriet is seeing and thinking? Explain the significance of the moon and stars. How is this illustration symbolic of Harriet’s life and work?
Correlates to CCSS in English Language Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 1-4.1.
- Harriet’s father taught her to “read the woods and the stars.” She follows the North Star to take slaves to safety. Have students use books in the library or sites on the Internet to look at a map of the sky. Teachers with access to YouTube may show students the following animation: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Djj3r4XG0E. Then have students write a brief article titled “The North Star as a Compass” for a science magazine.
Correlates to CCSS in English Language Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 1-4-2; Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 1-4.8.
- Divide the class into small groups and assign them one song from the Underground Railroad: www.harriet-tubman.org/songs-of-the-underground-railroad. Have them prepare a class presentation that explains how the lyrics served as code words on the Underground Railroad. Then have the group present a choral reading of the lyrics.
Correlates to CCSS in English Language Standards in Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W. 1-4.7; Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 1-4.
- Refer students to the following website: www.pbs.org/black-culture/shows/list/underground-railroad/stories-freedom/underground-railroad-terminology/d. Have them define the following code words used on the Underground Railroad: Station; Conductor; Passengers; Cargo or Freight; Tracks; Agents; Station Master; Tickets; Stockholders; Freedom Trails; Terminal or Heaven or Promised Land; Drinking Gourd.

- Read aloud the poem “Harriet Tubman” by Eloise Greenfield: www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/harriet-tubman. Allow students to work with a partner and ask them to draw from information in the book to write and illustrate a poem about one of the following roles or names for Harriet: Suffragist, General Tubman, Union Spy, Nurse, Aunt Harriet, Moses, Minty, Araminta.

Correlates to CCSS in English Language Standards in Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing W. 3-4.4.

- Harriet Tubman was buried with military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York. Her grave is simply marked with her name. Why do you think she was buried with military honors? Write an appropriate epitaph for her grave.

Correlates to CCSS in English Language Standards in Writing: Text Types & Purposes W. 1-4.2

Vocabulary/Use of Language

Encourage students to jot down unfamiliar words and try to define them taking clues from context. Such words may include: *twilight*, *ferried*, *suffragist*, and *wisp*.

Internet Resources

Underground Railroad Freedom Center / freedomcenter.org/enabling-freedom/history

This is the official website for the national Underground Railroad Freedom Center, with profiles of many heroes, including Harriet Tubman.

History for Kids / historyforkids.net/underground-railroad.html

The website History for Kids includes background and details on how the Underground Railroad worked.

About the Author and Illustrator



Children’s book author **Lesa Cline-Ransome** and illustrator **James E. Ransome** have collaborated on a number of award-winning books, including *Benny Goodman & Teddy Wilson: Taking the Stage as the First Black-and-White Jazz Band in History* and *Just a Lucky So and So: The Story of Louis Armstrong*. Their newest book is *Before She Was Harriet*, to be published by Holiday House in fall of 2017. The Ransomes live in New York’s Hudson Valley with their four children and one St. Bernard.

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

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