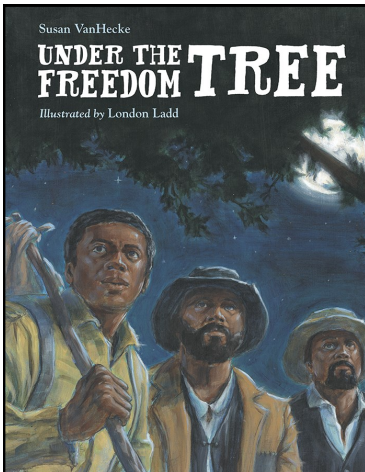


# UNDER THE FREEDOM TREE

## An Educator's Guide

Developed by Debbie Gonzales



By Susan VanHecke

Illustrated by London Ladd

One night in 1861, three escaped slaves made their way from the Confederate line to a Union-held fort where they were declared “contraband of war” and granted protection. As word spread afterward, thousands of runaway slaves poured into the fort. These “contrabands” made a home for themselves, building the first African American community in the country. In 1863 they bore witness to one of the first readings of the Emancipation Proclamation—beneath the sheltering branches of the tree now known as Emancipation Oak.



*A Junior Library Guild Selection*

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Ages 6–9

### About This Guide

This is an abbreviated version of the complete Educator's Guide created by author and educator Debbie Gonzales ([www.debbiegonzales.com](http://www.debbiegonzales.com)). The full guide is correlated to the Core Curriculum State Standards and the Virginia Standards of Learning for English, history/social studies, and Virginia studies and can be found at [www.underthefreedomtree.com](http://www.underthefreedomtree.com). There you'll find more pre- and post-reading discussion questions, historical sequencing and matching manipulatives, as well as compare/contrast and storytelling activities appropriate for grades two to four.

A Readers Theater for *Under the Freedom Tree* is also available at [www.charlesbridge.com](http://www.charlesbridge.com).

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### Pre-Reading Discussion Questions

Look closely at the front cover.

- Describe what you see.
- Who are the three men featured in the illustration?
- What do these three men want?
- What do their expressions communicate to you?
- The moon is high in the sky behind them. What are these men doing at this time of night?
- Predict what you think this story is going to be about.
  - \* How will it begin?
  - \* How will it end?
  - \* What will happen to these three men?

## Pre-Reading Discussion Questions (cont.)

**Look closely at the back cover.**

- Describe what you see.
- What are these men doing?
- Are the men featured in this illustration the same as those featured on the front cover?
- Where are they going?
- Why are they traveling at night?
- What does the illustration have to do with your definition of freedom?

## Post-Reading Discussion Questions

*“What will we find  
'cross the deep water?’  
Better forward than back,  
think the three  
as they course closer to the old oak tree.”*

**Consider the spread featuring silhouettes of the three men rowing a skiff in the dark of night (pages eight and nine). Discuss the following comments and questions.**

- Describe the action in the illustration.
- Explain why these men are doing such a dangerous thing in the middle of the night.
- Tell what is meant by the phrase “Better forward than back.”
- How do you think these men are feeling, both physically and emotionally?
- Tell the story of this illustration in your own words.

*“General  
squints,  
spits,  
strokes his chin.  
Ponders the fate of the three.”*

**Consider the spread featuring the three runaway slaves standing before Union officers around an office table (pages ten and eleven). Discuss the following comments and questions.**

- Who are the men wearing the blue uniforms?
- Guess what is on their minds. What are they thinking about?
- What is meant by the phrase “Heads bowed,/ hopes bold”?
- Do you think the officers had any idea that the decision they were making at that moment would affect not only these three men but the overall history of thousands of others? How so?
- Tell the story of this illustration in your own words.

For more, visit [www.underthefreedomtree.com](http://www.underthefreedomtree.com) and [www.charlesbridge.com](http://www.charlesbridge.com).