

A photograph of three dancers in a dramatic pose against a blue background. One dancer in a bright orange, ruffled dress is being lifted by a dancer in a black dress. A third dancer in a yellow shirt is in a crouching position in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

STÖRLING
DANCE THEATER

UNDERGROUND

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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The Culture House is a 501c(3) non-profit arts academy located in Olathe Kansas, dedicated to providing quality arts education for the whole family. With classes in ballet, tap, jazz, modern, theater, musical theater, instrumental music and voice, more than 500 families call The Culture House home for exploring their creative gifts. Nurturing students age three through senior adult, annual showcases and performances, summer camps and community outreach are all a part of the organization's repertoire. In addition, there are free programs for underserved members of our community, including the award-winning STAR program. The Culture House underscores excellence in arts education with teaching uncompromising values that help students navigate the world around them.

The Culture House is home to **Störling Dance Theater**, a professional company comprised of some of the most gifted artists in our region. These talented dancers blend ballet, modern and physical theater into a unique dance experience. Störling Dance Theater brings passion and light to the human experience. Through story, Störling reaches into the hearts and minds of its audience to bring transforming truth to a world of complacency and hopelessness.

UNDERGROUND

Störling Dance Theater's *Underground* has been called "one of the most vivid, heartfelt, and theatrically astute pieces of dance theater ever to grace a Kansas City stage," (*Kansas City Star*) and named one of the top ten performances of the decade! (*The Independent*)

Choreographed by the duo of Mona Störling-Enna and Tobin James, *Underground* is a visual tapestry based on true stories of the Underground Railroad. With a cast of more than 50, featuring the talented artists of Störling Dance Theater, the production of this dramatic historical depiction has been hailed as a cultural gift, making it the perfect celebration of the Black History Month and a beautiful portrayal of the American Spirit.

For its fourth consecutive year, *Underground* will inspire and challenge, awaken and encourage – embraced by a wide and diverse audience from across Kansas City and beyond.



ACT I: LIFE ON THE PLANTATION

Runaway

As the story opens, Tambo, a plantation slave, can be seen running from slave catchers. A gunshot can be heard in the distance, and Tambo's fate is unknown.

Summertime

It is a hot, summer day on the plantation and the slaves are in the cotton fields. As they work, the plantation owner, Mr. Walker and his family wander through the fields, observing their land and the work being done. Soon, an elderly slave, Mama Joy, is brutalized and a fight breaks out between the slaves and their overseers. Jed is beaten as his wife Sari looks on in horror.

Meanwhile, Victoria, another slave woman and mother, arrives—looking for her husband, Tambo. She and the other slaves move and work through the fields, but as they do, they reach out in desperation, wanting only to be seen as human beings. One by one they slowly leave Victoria alone to search for Tambo.

Dreaming of Tambo

Victoria still longs to find her husband, Tambo, and she envisions herself free and happy with him. Their dance is a joyous one, filled with love and affection, but as it ends we see that it has been a dream. Victoria and the other slaves comfort each other after a horrible day of fear, misery, and violence.

Waking Up the House

It's morning on the plantation, and it is Victoria's job to awaken the Walker daughters, Elise and Caroline. Their mother enters and each girl is given a new dress. The three of them dance in delight at what the day holds for them. Victoria is ever mindful of her missing husband, and looks longingly out the window, hoping for his return.

My Master's Party

It is evening at the plantation and a grand party is underway. The slaves, dressed in the colors of the draperies, stand ready to serve a feast of food and drink. There is happy dancing and celebrating, and Elise Walker is surrounded by friends and family—the center of attention on this magnificent night.

In the middle of the celebration, a slave trader shows up, dragging the dead body of Tambo into the grand hall. Victoria is heartbroken and grief-stricken but is not allowed to care for Tambo. The other slaves see Tambo and are mournful and dance solemnly. Elise is also distressed to see Tambo,

ACT I: LIFE ON THE PLANTATION (continued)

and cries at Victoria's grief. Throughout it all, the party goes on with laughter, singing, drinking and dancing. Mr. Walker forces Elise to dance and not upset their guests. She dances but feels only sadness for Victoria and Tambo and suffocated by the partygoers. As Victoria cleans away Tambo's blood, Elise also stands nearby, miserable and inconsolable.

No Place for My Heart

Victoria arrives at her slave home with the blood of Tambo still on her hands. She is tortured by his loss and feels completely alone. We see her mother, Grandma Hattie, putting her children to bed, as well as the family of Jed, Sari, and their son sharing a meal. As Victoria struggles to accept the death of her husband, she cannot bear her loss and decides to run away. Grandma Hattie pleads with her to stay, and reminds Victoria that she will be leaving her small children behind. Victoria sadly runs to her children, sobbing uncontrollably and totally heartbroken.

Our Day of Rest

On this day, the slaves are given some time to rest. Children run and play and are treated to a story by Grandma Hattie. The older boys try to show off, doing tricks and trying to get the slave girls' attention. Elise Walker is also there, as she enjoys spending time with the slaves—especially her friend, Victoria. They all dance together and try to enjoy this time away from the fields. However, Mr. Walker and a slave trader arrive, and decide that Jed and Sari's son is to be sold. Sari is completely distraught and Jed tries to fight for his son. Instead, Jed is forced to the ground and whipped. Elise Walker begs her father not to sell the young boy, but she is refused. She looks to Victoria for forgiveness, but realizes the brutality of her father and of slavery, and that Victoria can never forgive her, and runs off.

Forbidden Fruit

Sari helps a beaten Jed home and they try to deal with the loss of their son. Victoria, Grandma Hattie and the children prepare for bed. We hear the spiritual, "Go Down, Moses" as a horrified and grief-stricken Sari dances in anguish. She cannot accept that her son is gone forever. Victoria gently puts her children to bed but has already planned to escape with Jed and Sari. The three tell Grandma Hattie of their plan to run away, who cannot look at them as they struggle to say goodbye. As they make one final turn and leave, Grandma Hattie runs after them in agony, realizing she will never see them again.

ACT II: QUAKERS: UNLIKELY FRIENDS

Main Street

In a Northern town, several Quakers enjoy an evening of song and dance. They live and work closely with the slaves that can also be seen gathering on Main Street. After a joyous dance, a slave trader approaches and snatches a slave girl who is sweeping. Corrie, a young Quaker woman, is very upset by this and begs her husband to help. However, the church bells sound, and it is time for them to go.

Church

This is the daily life of the church, with girls giggling and gossiping, and all of the Quaker community coming together to pray, sing, and worship. Corrie arrives, still distressed about seeing the slave girl being taken away. She tells the church members what she saw as she hopes they will want to join the great effort to help free the slaves. The church members struggle and argue with each other about what to do. Some of them leave, while others realize the mountains they will need to climb if they are to fight slavery. In the end, the bells sound, and the church goes solemnly leave, knowing their church has lost some of its innocence and that great tasks lay ahead. In the shadows, a chain of slaves miserably migrates from one owner to the next.

Am I Not a Brother?

At a Quaker home, a traveling preacher arrives and shares stories of about the horrors of slavery. The Quakers lift and honor the preacher and listen with great interest. They all grasp hands and realize that they must fight slavery together. As they move outside under the starlight, they are joyful as they dance in peace with the preacher. The song, "How Can I Keep from Singing?" reminds the Quakers that their faith will guide them through the very tumultuous times they will face.

ACT III: THE MUDDY PATH TO FREEDOM

Dead Trees Show the Way

Jed, Sari, and Victoria, still on the run, stop in a forest of dead trees that are marked to show the path to the Underground Railroad. As they rest, they hear the sounds of slave catchers close behind them, and they begin to run again. The catchers find a knapsack dropped by the slaves and continue the chase.

Deep Goes the Water

Jed, Sari, and Victoria must cross a deep and violent river as they continue to run from the slave catchers. As the water tosses the three around, we see the catchers just on the river's bank. The slaves continue to try to get across the river, but Sari is tired and cannot swim any longer. As Jed and Victoria reach the other side, Sari is pulled under and does not make it. Jed is heartbroken, and Victoria helps him carry on.

Midnight at Church

Corrie is at church, taking care of the altar, showing her true devotion to her faith, and reading from the Bible. She is startled by the arrival of Jed and Victoria who think the church is empty. They are terribly frightened to discover Corrie and turn to run away. The slave catchers are just outside, however, leaving Jed and Victoria nowhere to run. Corrie tells them to hide behind the altar as the slave catchers burst in with guns, looking for the runaways. Corrie risks her own life and tells them to leave, but they refuse and continue to search. She holds a cross from the altar and protects Jed and Victoria, and the slave catchers, frustrated, finally give up and leave.

At Hannah's House

Hannah reads from her Bible and puts a lantern in the window. Corrie arrives with Jed and Victoria, who is unconscious and has hurt her foot. Hannah and Corrie begin to take care of the runaways, washing Victoria's foot and giving Jed a drink. They four of them hold hands and pray. They come together as human beings, sharing the same dream and sharing their faith. They find community with each other from a surprising place.

STÖRLING

DANCE THEATER

UNDERGROUND

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



The following classroom activities, created by Drs. Donna M. Davis and S. Marie McCarther from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, are designed to allow students the opportunity for further reflection about the production, *Underground*. Each of the activities relates very closely to state (Kansas and/or Missouri) standards in either social studies or writing and asks students to think critically about what they have seen. The goal of the activities is to extend the learning from the theatrical experience into the classroom and beyond.

LETTER WRITING

Directions: Invite students to write a letter to a character from *Underground*, telling them about the lives of the people in their community today. They should describe their clothing, housing, school, foods, and what they do for fun.

Alternate Choice: Students may write a letter in the voice of a character from *Underground* to someone living in the 21st Century. In their letter, they should describe a typical day, including how they spend their time, and what their life is like.



Background: The American folksong *Follow the Drinking Gourd* was first published in 1928. The Drinking Gourd song was

ANALYZING POETRY/LYRICS

(Follow the Drinking Gourd)

Directions: Students will create their own personal map that illustrates their favorite place (playground, school, home, etc.). Then, they will write a short explanation of what they have created, describing in detail their favorite place and telling why they chose it.

EXPOSITORY WRITING

Ask students to think about the characteristics of a hero and to identify the heroes in *Underground*. Then, invite students to list one hero in their world and to write a short essay about why they believe this person is heroic. They may use a personal example or someone in the public eye.

CREATIVE MOVEMENT AND REFLECTIVE WRITING

In teams of 2 – 4, students will create a short dance (body movement) that expresses and displays one of the emotions from any of the characters or scenes in *Underground*. Others in the class can guess the emotion each team is illustrating. Then, individual students will write short reflection pieces about how they felt performing their dance. Or, they may write a story about a time when they felt the emotion expressed in their dance.

JOURNAL ENTRY

Invite students to imagine they are the character of Victoria on the evening she decides to run away from her family, knowing that she will never see them again. They will write a journal entry describing Victoria's feelings, hopes, fears, and dreams.

Alternate Choice: Students may imagine they are one of the Quakers who decide they must help those in bondage to escape. In a journal entry, they should describe in detail how and why they came to their decision, and their hopes and dreams for the future.

WRITING DIALOGUE

In small groups, students will select a scene from *Underground* and write dialogue for the characters in it. The dialogue should convey the feelings and emotions captured in the production. Students will then assign parts and act it out.



PERSUASIVE WRITING

Invite students to imagine they are the traveling preacher in *Underground* who speaks to the Quaker community and convinces them to join the fight against slavery. What arguments might he have used to encourage them to act? In a persuasive essay, outline at least three critical arguments in support of the Underground Railroad.

Alternate Choice: Students may identify a current issue about which they feel passionate and write a paper arguing their individual conviction. This essay should have a very clear thesis statement, introduction, body and conclusion.

EXPOSITORY WRITING

Students will identify the protagonists and antagonists in *Underground*. Then, they will identify who they think are modern day protagonists and antagonists (in their school, community, nation, or world) and discuss in detail the controversies and conflicts surrounding these interconnected relationships. Their paper should have a very clear thesis statement and introduction, and be supported by a cohesive body and conclusion.

Alternate Choice: Students may write an essay that identifies a current injustice they believe is happening in their world and how a protagonist (or protagonist groups) of today might go about confronting it. Their paper should have a very clear thesis statement and introduction, and be supported by a cohesive body and conclusion.



PERSUASIVE WRITING

(Theater/Ballet Review)

Students will write an engaging and cohesive review of *Underground* that provides a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. Their piece should develop a focused argument that illustrates very clearly their understanding of the production and their recommendations for future, potential audience members.

NARRATIVE WRITING

At the end of *Underground*, the characters hear an excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* speech. Ask students to write a narrative that tells what happens next. In their narrative, they should discuss in detail what they see the characters doing to improve their neighborhood, community, nation, and world.



POETRY/LYRIC ANALYSIS

Students will read and analyze the lyrics from the song, *How Can I Keep From Singing?* In this analysis, they must explicate the lyrics, providing line examples to support their claims. They should respond to the following questions: What is the speaker trying to say? What is the overall theme of the song? How does this theme relate to the action in **Underground**? Can students connect this theme to their own lives, and if so, how?

***How Can I Keep from Singing?* Lyrics:**

*My life goes on in endless song
Above earth's lamentations,
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.*

*Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear its music ringing,
It sounds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?*

*While though the tempest loudly roars,
I hear the truth, it liveth.
And though the darkness 'round me close,
Songs in the night it giveth.*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that rock I'm clinging.
Since love is lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?*

*When tyrants tremble in their fear
And hear their death knell ringing,
When friends rejoice both far and near
How can I keep from singing?*

*In prison cell and dungeon vile
Our thoughts to them are winging,
When friends by shame are undefiled
How can I keep from singing?*

FOCUSED RESEARCH PAPER

For this project, students will conduct individual research on the history of the Underground Railroad. Using standard research skills including information gathering and note taking from a variety of media sources (online resources, texts, first-person narratives, journal articles, photographs, field trips, etc.), students will compose a formal research paper that describes in detail the evolution and continuation of the Underground Railroad. This paper must conform to appropriate style mandates (MLA or APA).

Alternate Choice: For this paper, students will conduct individual research on the current plight of those in modern day slave conditions. Using standard research skills including information gathering and note taking from a variety of media sources (online resources, texts, first-person narratives, journal articles, photographs, field trips, etc.), students will compose a formal research paper that describes in detail the ongoing problem of human trafficking (where it is taking place, who its most vulnerable victims are, and how prevalent or widespread it is, etc.). Then, they may identify the best avenues for combating this problem and/or advocacy strategies. This paper must conform to appropriate style mandates (MLA or APA).



UNDERGROUND

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

- 1) The Underground Railroad: Escape from Slavery:
http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground_railroad/
- 2) The Underground Railroad: Books and Links:
<http://www.freedomcenter.org/>
- 3) Teaching the Underground Railroad:
<http://www.nku.edu/~undergroundrr/lessonplans/>
- 4) National Geographic: The Underground Railroad:
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/lp2.html> and:
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad/j1.html>
- 5) Follow the Drinking Gourd: A Cultural History:
<http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org/index.htm> and
<http://www.osblackhistory.com/drinkinggourd.php>
- 6) The Underground Railroad: Lessons for Teachers:
<http://www.thinkfinity.org/search>
- 7) Am I Not a Brother? (Africans in America/Resource Bank):
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h67.html>
- 8) Quindaro, Kansas on the Underground Railroad:
<http://www.kckpl.lib.ks.us/kscoll/lochist/quindaro/intro.htm>
- 9) The Underground Railroad in Kansas (Kansas Historical Society):
<http://www.kshs.org/cool3/chair.htm>
- 10) The Symbolism of the Underground Railroad Quilts:
<http://www.quilthistory.com/ugrrquilts.htm>
- 11) Kansas Department of Education/State Curricular Standards
<http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1678>
- 12) Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education/Curriculum
<http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/aboutus.htm>