

# Halfway to Freedom

## Lesson 4: Student Playwrights

### Focus Questions

How did the Illinois Black Laws affect the lives of African Americans in Chicago? What did the abolitionists of Chicago risk by their civil disobedience? How are works of historical fiction produced?

### Core Understandings

Students will understand that the Illinois Black Laws restricted the lives and opportunities of African Americans in Chicago. They will understand that acts of civil disobedience can have serious consequences. They will understand how works of fiction based on historical events are created.

### Knowledge

Students will know the new vocabulary words introduced in *Halfway to Freedom*. They will know key historical figures in the abolitionist movement. They will know the difference between fact and fiction.

### Skills

Students will use their analytical, interpretive, and communication skills to master key historical facts and create a fictional work of art inspired by those facts.

### Common Core ELA Standards

CCSSR1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.  
CCSSR3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.  
CCSS.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

### ISBE Social Science Standards

Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the US.  
Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the US, and other nations.  
Goal 17: Understand world geography and the effects of geography on society, with an emphasis on the US.  
Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the US.

### ISBE Fine Arts Standard

Goal 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

### In This Lesson

Students will create an original skit using characters, themes, and key vocabulary words from *Halfway to Freedom*. The story elements of setting, character, and conclusion are addressed. Note: This lesson was designed as a two-day activity but may be altered at will (see Lesson 5). Researched and written by Kris Ballard.



## Activity

Working in small groups, students will write and perform a skit inspired by the story *Halfway to Freedom*, imagining what happens next after the end of the story.

Begin class by reviewing the vocabulary words for *Halfway to Freedom* to make sure students have a solid understanding of new terms introduced in the story. <http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatchicagostories/halfway/vocabulary.php>

Distribute printouts of the project instructions (at the end of this lesson) and review the following requirements:

- Skits must include the 10 vocabulary words from *Halfway to Freedom*
- Skits must have equal parts for all group members, and all members should share equally in creating and performing
- You may choose to invent new story characters
- Skits should be historically accurate and reflect knowledge learned from the story
- Skits should have a theme and/or moral lesson
- Students will be given one class period to prepare their skits and one class period to perform them
- Skits do not have to be memorized, but students should act out their roles and not simply read aloud from the script
- Skits should be about five minutes in length
- All group members should have a copy of the script in case of another member's absence

Skits will be assessed by both teacher and peers based on overall performance, correct use of vocabulary words, historical accuracy, and creativity. Distribute and review peer-assessment worksheets (at the end of this lesson) before students begin the assignment.

## Materials & Resources

- **Printouts of the *Halfway to Freedom* narrative:**

[http://www.GreatChicagoStories.org/pdf/story/Halfway\\_to\\_Freedom\\_by\\_Melody\\_Herr.pdf](http://www.GreatChicagoStories.org/pdf/story/Halfway_to_Freedom_by_Melody_Herr.pdf)

## Instructional Notes

Consider giving extra points to those that use music and/or costumes in an appropriate manner.

## Extension Activities

“John and Mary Jones and the Importance of Oral History,” one of the Chicago History Museum’s History Lab lessons, offers valuable learning activities about the importance of oral history in gathering historical data. [http://chicagohistory.org/static\\_media/pdf/historylab/CHM-historylabAALL4.pdf](http://chicagohistory.org/static_media/pdf/historylab/CHM-historylabAALL4.pdf)

## Handout: Final Project Instructions

Working in groups of three to five students, you will write and perform a skit inspired by the story *Halfway to Freedom*, imagining what happens next after the end of the story.

Requirements:

- Skits must include the 10 vocabulary words from *Halfway to Freedom*
- Skits must have equal parts for all group members, and all members should share equally in creating and performing
- You may choose to invent new story characters
- Skits should be historically accurate and reflect knowledge learned from the story
- Skits should have a theme and/or moral lesson
- Students will be given one class period to prepare their skits and one class period to perform them
- Skits do not have to be memorized, but students should act out their roles and not simply read aloud from the script
- Skits should be about five minutes in length
- All group members should have a copy of the script in case of another member's absence

Grading and Assessment

Skits will be assessed on overall performance, correct use of vocabulary words, historical accuracy, and creativity. Both teacher and peers will assess these skits.

**Good luck, have fun, and impress us with your writing, acting, and historical interpretation skills!**

## Handout: Peer Assessment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Writer/Actor names: \_\_\_\_\_

- Circle each of the following vocabulary words **if they are used correctly**:  
**abolitionist**    **advocacy**    **fugitive**    *McGuffey Reader*    **mischievous**  
**overseer**    **petition**    **shackles**    **smuggler**    **testify**

- Do all group members have equal parts?
- Is the skit historically accurate, and does it reflect knowledge learned from the story?
- Do students act out their roles and not simply read aloud from the script?
- Is the skit about five minutes in length?
- Does the skit have a theme and moral? What are they?

**Rate the following on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.**

- overall performance
- correct use of vocabulary words and terms
- historical accuracy
- general entertainment