



# Communication on the Underground Railroad

With Emphasis on Core Democratic Values

**Oral Reading: Read the document The Underground Railroad in Michigan to the class before starting these lessons.**

## Lesson 1: Follow the Drinking Gourd

Alignment: Social Studies GLICKS/Elementary  
H.CP.03.02 , G.L.M.03.03, H.T.C.05.01, SS.HI.05.04

Alignment: English Language Arts GLICKS/Elementary

- Comprehension – apply significant knowledge from what is read in grade level appropriate science and social studies.
- Narrative Text –Students will identify and describe characters’ thoughts and motivations.
- Writing - Students will write a narrative piece using personification, setting and actions that reveal important character traits.

## Introduction and Discussion

Enslaved Africans sang songs as they worked by day and visited at night. These songs told stories on how to escape and travel North to freedom. They sang songs to guide them north and these songs indicated where they could find safe houses. One of the more important songs was Follow the Drinking Gourd. The drinking gourd was a dipper the Enslaved Africans used to drink water from a bucket. This drinking gourd became a symbol of the “Big Dipper.” The big dipper is a group of stars where the bowl of the big dipper points to the little dipper. At the end of the Little Dippers’ handle is the North Star of Polaris. Polaris is always above the North Pole. If the enslaved Africans could find Polaris, they could find the path to freedom.

### Objective (1)

The student will read Follow the Drinking Gourd, highlight the code words and join a group to decipher the instructions written into the song. Use a map to help orient the class.

Teacher – Read the Lyrics of Follow the Drinking Gourd to the students. Remind the students that the song contains instructions for the enslaved Africans to follow. Remind the students to look for the geographical cues. Give each student a copy of Follow the Drinking Gourd.

### Objective (2)

The student will read each stanza and discuss the meaning.

Teacher – After 10 minutes ask the class to discuss the words they have highlighted. Write their responses on the board. (You may wish to print out one sheet per student of the Grading Rubric that follows.) Discuss the following:

## Follow the Drinking Gourd

Stanza One:

\*The enslaved Africans were told to follow the drinking gourd because they did not have compasses and the North Star would guide them in the right direction.

Stanza Two

\*"When the sun comes back," means winter.

\*... "and the first quail calls" means that these migratory birds come south.

\*The old man is Peg Leg Joe.

This verse tells the enslaved Africans to leave in the winter and they will meet a guide to escort them.

Stanza Three

\*The river bank makes a very good road." is an instruction to follow the Tombigbee River.

\*"The dead trees show you the way"" means that the moss grows on the north side of dead trees. The trees were marked with a left foot and a peg foot.

Stanza Four

\*The instructions are to reach the headwaters of the river and continue north over the hills until they reach another river. This will be the Tennessee River.

Stanza Five

\*"Where the great big river meets the little river," tells that the Tennessee River will meet another river. They would cross the river to freedom. This was the fifth and final stanza.

Objective (3)

Students will sing the song or listen to the song, clapping to the beat.

Objective (4)

Students will break into 5 groups and create a mural for each stanza of the song. Put the mural together to depict the song.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

The Student will	Consistently Evident 2	Somewhat Evident 1	Not Evident 0
Identify the purpose of the song			
Identify code words in the song			
Clap to the beat of the rhythmic pattern			
Work cooperatively with his/her group			
Create a mural to depict the song			
Bonus: Find additional songs or spirituals sung on the Underground Railroad.			

Notes:

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