Harriet Tubman

Pre-reading

Questions:
- Who was Harriet Tubman?
- What do you know about her?

Definitions:
- Apt – right for the situation
- Rebellious – disobeying rules or going against authority
- Overseer – one who keeps watch over and directs the work of laborers
- Seizure – a sudden loss of control of the body

Reading

They called her Moses. It was an apt nickname. In the years before the Civil War, Harriet Tubman led more than 300 slaves, including her parents, to freedom along the Underground Railroad.

She was born into slavery in Maryland. The year was 1820. She was one of eleven children of Harriet and Benjamin Ross. At an early age she showed a rebellious spirit and dreamed of freedom.

When she was fifteen, she blocked a doorway to prevent an overseer from catching a fleeing slave. Enraged, the overseer picked up a heavy metal weight and threw it at the runaway. Instead, he hit Harriet in the head. She was unconscious for days. For the rest of her life, she had a rough scar on her forehead and suffered from seizures.

In 1844 she married John Tubman. She began to plan an escape to the North to freedom, but John would have no part of it. She fled without him in 1850. She traveled by night through swamps and streams so dogs could not track her scent.

She had heard of safe houses where runaway slaves would be fed and sheltered. They were part of a movement called the Underground Railroad. With the help of this system, Harriet made it to Philadelphia. A year later she made the first of many trips back to Maryland. During each trip, she guided other slaves along the Underground Railroad.

During the Civil War, Harriet Tubman worked as a spy, a cook, and a nurse. She did anything she could to help the Union cause. After the war she settled in New York. She founded a home for sick, poor, and homeless blacks. She lived there until her death in 1913.
Understanding

1. What was the Underground Railroad? __________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

2. At what age did Harriet Tubman escape slavery? ____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

3. What does the word prevent mean? ______________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

4. What was Harriet’s nickname? Why? ____________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

5. Why was she said to have a “rebellious spirit”? __________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

6. How many slaves did she lead to freedom? _______________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

7. What was the “Union cause”? __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________________

8. What does enraged mean? _______________________________________________________________
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Writing

Write about Harriet Tubman. What did you already know about her? What new things did you discover?

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