



STEALING SOUTH Teacher Guide

*Prepared with assistance from Barbara Murphree,
Librarian, Shaler Area Middle School, Glenshaw, PA*

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Explain the Underground Railroad system to the students. Display a map of the most commonly used routes. View and discuss the History Channel's *Underground Railroad*, 1999. Have copies of *North by*

Night available for students.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Journeys — Will begins this book searching for a perfect place, instead he finds imperfection everywhere. How does his journey change him, physically, emotionally, intellectually? What does he lose? What does he gain?

Mentors — Various people in the story give Will advice or show him how to proceed. Some give good or welcome advice, some give advice that Will finds shocking or upsetting. Find several examples of both types of advice and then think about it—how much of Will's reaction to the advice comes from the actual words and how much from the context or situation? How do you handle advice and does the source matter? Give examples.

Strangers — In Tennessee Williams' most famous last line from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois says, "I have always counted upon the kindness of strangers." By leaving home to make his way in the world, Will places himself in just such a situation. What sorts of strangers does he encounter? What are the plusses? The negatives?

Good and Evil — In a letter to his sister Lucy, Will says, "I want the bad people to stay bad and the good ones to stay good and not mix it up on me. Is that too much to ask?" But most people have virtues and flaws. Sometimes our virtues and our flaws come from the same aspect of our personalities. Think of several characters in the book—what are each person's strengths? Weaknesses? How do they intersect?

INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

Language Arts — Will gains a respite from the loneliness of being a stranger by exchanging letters with people he cares about. Imagine traveling on your own. Who would you most want to hear from and why? Write a letter or an e-mail back to those people. Will you share your worries or will you only share the excitement? Why?

Social Studies — An Opinion: *The Underground Railroad actually prolonged slavery by providing an escape valve for the most rebellious slaves. Without the Railroad, there might have been more Nat Turners, more slave uprisings, more violence against the plantation owners.* Think about this opinion and find out more about the Turner Insurrection. Do you agree or not? Explain your reasons. [Teachers might raise the related question of the timing of the Civil War—if the war had started sooner, provoked by rebellions and reprisals, would the South have won?] Quakers: Who were the Quakers? What is the correct name for this religious group? What beliefs led them to assist runaway slaves? Travel: Will's primary means of transportation is his wagon and team. He always takes care of his horses before he takes care of himself. Why? What are the advantages and disadvantages of wagon transport and travel? How do we move goods today?

Science — Miss Delight mixes up a concoction to make the soul driver violently ill. What plants might she have used to induce such an illness? What other herbal remedies were used in the 1850s for healing? Are any of these still used today?

Geography/Math — Follow Will's journey on maps of Ohio and Kentucky and calculate how many miles he averages each day he travels. How far does he travel from start to finish (excluding the selling trips which are not described in detail). How long in miles and in hours did the river journey take?

Music — Find a copy of the song, "Ezekiel's Wheel." Who was Ezekiel in the Bible? What do you think the wheel represents in this story? Why is Ezekiel a blacksmith? What other references to Ezekiel's Wheel can you find? (Hint: Internet search)

Visual Arts — In addition to songs, quilts were often used as signals for slaves who wished to escape. Can you find quilt designs from the 1850s? What are some of their names? How might those patterns/names be used as a code for runaways? [See: *Hidden in Plain View* by Tobin and Dobard.] Can you design and paint a quilt based on a pattern you've found? Or invent a new one?

Drama — Good drama comes from conflict. This book includes several scenes of interpersonal conflict—choose one to act out.