

Study Guide Littsie and the Underground Railroad

Discussion Questions Chapter 1 Dan

In the first chapter a summer rain is described. Do you think it is a good description? Have you ever experienced rain like that? Why does the author think it is important to open the story with a description about the weather?

In this chapter Littsie describes how she began working for Dr. Drake. She points out to Dr. Drake that he had worked for Dr. Goforth at about the same age. At this time in our history it was common for people to apprentice with someone in order to learn a trade or a profession. How do we learn those things today?

When Littsie goes to pick up Euleen at the Longworth mansion she describes the Fifth Street Market and the Public Landing. Would you have liked to take that walk? Do you know that the Fifth Street Market became Fountain Square and the Public Landing is still there but it looks quite different. Why?

The people were excited that the circus was in town. Why do you think they had a circus parade? TV, videos, movies or photography had not been invented. People only knew what elephants, tigers and lions looked like from drawings. How do you think the children reacted when they saw these animals for the first time? Do you think there was a zoo in Cincinnati at that time? (No, the Cincinnati Zoo started in 1873.)

When the nasty man gave Dan to Littsie what was she worried about?

Actual historical places, people and events mentioned in the first chapter:

Liberty Street	Dr. Drake	Mr. Longworth
Stephen Foster	The Public Landing	Circus Parade
Columbia	Anne Belle Bailey	cholera epidemic
Dr. Goforth	draft horses	Fifth Street Market
Names of Steamboats		

Chapter 2 A Place for Dan

There was a barn behind Littsie's school. Does your school have a barn? Why was it necessary for people to have barns in the city? Do you think that there are still barns left in the city? What are they used for today?

Littsie knew how to get the splinter out of Dan's hoof. How did she know how to do that?

In those days many doctors took care of both people and animals. Who takes care of animals today?

Dr. Locke mentions Mr. Proctor in this chapter when he tells Littsie that they need some candles. Have you heard that name before? What company has that name in it?

Actual historical people, places and events mentioned in this chapter:

Dr. Locke and his school

Mr. Proctor and his store

Chapter 3

Return to the Cabin

Littsie and Megan ride Dan to their village of Columbia. Have you ever heard of a street with the name Columbia in it?

They take the road that follows the Ohio river and watch steamboats being built. Why do you think steamboats were so important to the people of the time. Do you think it would be easier to come from Pittsburgh on a steamboat or a covered wagon? Which would you like to do and why?

They see a train. Why was Dan fidgeting? This train was new to the area. Trains will make a big difference for everyone. Can you think of why and what they will change?

Littsie and Megan were happy to see there family cabin. Have you ever been away for awhile and were you happy to come home? Why couldn't they stay at the cabin?

They find two of their mother's rings. Where do you think the rings were made?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter Three:

Jacob Strader

Columbia

The Little Miami Railroad

Steamboat Yards

Steamboats names

Irish Cladagh Rings

Chapter 4

A Barn Meeting

In this chapter Littsie attends a meeting in a barn. Why do you think that people met in barns?

During the meeting Theodore Weld speaks. Theodore Weld was a very important abolitionist. What he says at the meeting is taken from one of his actual speeches. Do you think it is a good speech? Would you have become an abolitionist?

Angelina Grimke also speaks at the meeting. Why were the people so shocked to hear her speak?

Was it okay for the people who wanted to keep slavery to ring bells and whistles while Mr. Weld was speaking? How should we act at a meeting in a democracy?

When Littsie finds that Dan's mane has been clipped, she is upset. Why does the man in the crowd say that he will ride his clipped horse proudly?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter Four

Ohio Anti- Slavery Society
Levi Coffin
Meeting interruptions

Theodore Weld
James Birney
Barn meetings

Angelina Grimke
John Rankin

Chapter 5

The Right Thing

Mr. Birney explains to Euleen and Littsie the problem that slaves have after they escape? What is that problem? Why is it legal for someone to come and take an escaped slave back?

Where does the fugitive slave want to go? Why?

Mr. Birney explains the Underground Railroad to Littsie and Euleen. Was it really a railroad? Why was it dangerous to be an Underground Railroad Conductor?

Would you have been frightened if you were Euleen or Littsie the first time that they helped a fugitive slave. Many people were involved in helping slaves escape. Who else helped that first night? Why did Euleen and Littsie need a password? What was it?

Some ladies made clothes for escaped slaves what other kinds of help was given? Why do you think the author titled this chapter *The Right Thing*?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter Five:

James Birney, Salmon Chase, Gamaliel Bailey, Tom Duram, William Watson, The Dumas House, *The Philanthropist*, *The Cincinnati Daily Post*, *The Boatman Dance*
The Irish Prayer

Chapter 6

Upsetting Changes

Why is Littsie so upset that her school is closing? Who does she have to take care of? How would you have felt when Littsie was told by the lady at Mr. Chute's school that she and Megan could not come there?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter Six:

The closing of Dr. Locke's school, Mr. Chute's school, The Ryland School, Amanda Drake, Julia Burnet, Eliza Longworth, Harriet and Catherine Beecher, The Western Female Institute

Chapter 7

A New Home

How would you describe the Beecher House? Would you like to go there?

Why was Miss Beecher glad to hear about Dan? Why was Littsie a little hesitant to tell Miss Beecher about Mr. Birney. Since James Birney was a friend of Harriet Beecher do you think she wanted to see slavery end too?

When Miss Beecher discovers that Littsie does not have any books what does she do? What kinds of faces does Miss Beecher think books have? What is the name of the book that Miss Beecher wrote?

Would you like to sleep in a barn?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter Seven:

Walnut Hills, Lane Seminary, The Beecher House, Harriet Beecher, Reverend Lyman Beecher, Miss Dutton, Aunt Esther, and Mina.

Chapter 8

A Special Painter

Who is the special painter that Littsie meets? Whose house is he painting? Whose painting does Euleen show him? What does Mr. Longworth say about his work?

Littsie describes the fun that the children had that summer. What were some of the fun things they did.? Why did they not get to take a bath often? Would you like to ride a pig in a race? Why was Littsie sad when she looked at the beautiful river scene with Kentucky on one side and Ohio on the other?

John Rankin came to visit at the Beecher house. Who was he? Was he part of the Underground Railroad? What was the story that he told? What is a freedom lamp? What kind of dangers did the slaves who were escaping face?

Megan and Littsie had many chores to do. What were some of them? Why didn't Megan like to gather eggs? What kinds of things did Littsie study? How did Megan and Littsie keep warm while they dressed in the winter?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter 8:

Robert Duncanson
Pig races

Nicholas Longworth
Littsie's classes

John Rankin

Chapter 9

Christmas Reunion

How did Littsie get money to buy Christmas presents? Do you think that many people sold their hair to earn money in those days? Why did Megan need a coat so badly? What did Littsie want to buy Euleen? What did Megan do to make Littsie's hair look her better?

Do morning chores stop on Christmas? What did Littsie and Megan smell when they walked in the Beecher's kitchen door? Do you ever have a big meal to celebrate a holiday? What do you have?

Many of the Beecher's friends and family were there. Do you think the author just made up those names? What about the parade? Do you think that actually happened? (Both are historically correct).

Littsie gave Miss Beecher pen wipes. What do you think those were?

Two people gave Littsie food. Do you think they could be considered part of the Underground Railroad?

When Littsie and Euleen meet the four people at the river, Euleen became very quiet. Why?

Why did you Euleen's mother give her a secret name?

What special Christmas present did Euleen get?

What did Mr. Randolph suggest that they put on the back of the sleigh. Why?

Why does Littsie still put a paper star on the top of the Christmas tree?

What kind of a deal does Littsie make with Mr. Randolph?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter 9:

Family and Friends of the Beechers
Mr. Perkins

Christmas parade
Columbia Road

Mina
Mr. Berning

Chapter 10

A New Friend

Miss Beecher married Calvin Stowe and she changes her name. What did she change it too? What book did she write under that name? Why was it important?

Littsie makes a new friend, Elizabeth Blackwell. What did they have in common? How did Elizabeth Blackwell become famous?

Why did Megan feel she had to get a job? Where did she want to work?

Actual people, places and events in Chapter 10

Elizabeth Blackwell
Cotton Mill

Calvin Stowe

Uncle Tom's Cabin

Chapter 11

A Serious Business

Why was the crowd angry with Mr. Birney? What did they do to his office? Why?

What did Littsie and Euleen see the nasty man do? How did Dan help?

What did the policeman say the man did on Christmas night?

Did the crowd scare Mr. Birney? Did he stop writing?

Euleen and Littsie realize they are involved in some very serious business. Does that stop them?

In Littsie and the Underground Railroad we meet two people who are trying to change things through writing. Who are they?

Actual people, places and things in Chapter 11

The mob attacking James Birney's office

Chapter 12

The Mill

Megan finds a job at the cotton mill. Do you think children had to work that hard in mills or did the author make that up? Do you think children of the time worked at other kinds of jobs? What would they be?

What was Megan's job? Was it dangerous?

What was mill fever. Do you think the author had to do a lot of research to find out about the mills?

Who told Littsie to get Megan out of the mill?

Actual people, places and events

Cotton mill scavenger piecer overseer mill fever

Chapter 13

Hard Goodbyes

What did Mr. Randolph find at the Columbia Market? Could he read it? Why not? Why did it frighten the Randolphs?

Why did Euleen want them to go to Canada?

What did Littsie give them? Could you have done that?

Where would their first safe house be?

What was the Wilberforce Settlement?

Actual person, places or events in Chapter 13:

Runaway slave ad Wilberforce Settlement Springboro safe house

Chapter 14 Grown Up

In this chapter the author tells what happened to all the characters. List as many of the characters as you can and tell what happened to them. Littsie and the Underground Railroad

Littsie O'Donnell, orphaned by the cholera epidemic of 1832, tells the story of struggling to raise her little sister and of her involvement in the Underground Railroad. Her friendship with a former slave, Euleen Randolph, is deepened as they both discover the meaning of freedom and the sacrifice it takes to be an Underground Railroad Conductor. Their story brings to life abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, James Birney, Theodore Weld, William Casey and Angelina Grimke. Aided in their adventures by a former circus horse, Dan, they grow up learning that freedom does not come easily; it requires courage and commitment.

Although a sequel, *Littsie and the Underground Railroad* can stand alone. The story depicts many of the issues and problems in our country during the nineteenth century. Set in Cincinnati during the early years of the developing Midwest, Littsie encounters the beginnings of railroads, steamboats, a growing city, the lack of public schools, child labor, slavery, The Underground Railroad, and the lack of social safety nets for children. Besides the abolitionists, Littsie and Euleen also interact with other important people of the time such as: the artist Robert Duncanson, Nicholas and Susan Longworth, Dr. Drake and Dr. Locke.

What Teachers Say

"Jinny Berten's wonderfully written "Littsie" series allows students to experience Ohio history through the eyes of a child, enabling them to make connections to the curricular concepts and naturally set the stage for deep meaningful discussions."
Beth Bonin, Freedom School.

"Littsie and the Underground Railroad brings to life pre-Civil War America in a fast paced, engaging novel that is perfect for middle elementary students. While students can't put the book down, teachers appreciate the historical content that meets the requirements of the social studies curriculum. The "Author's Notes" at the end is a bonus for teachers and students alike."

Linda Wolfe, former teacher, current librarian, Seven Hills School

The Author

Jinny Powers Berten is a graduate of Summit Country Day School and Xavier University. She taught history, government and economics at *St. Ursula Academy* for twelve years and was also the Academy's public relations and special events director. In 1989 she was transferred with her husband to Seattle, Washington where she was the director of the *Friends of the Washington Commission for the Humanities*. Upon return to Cincinnati in 1991 she worked in publicity for the Legal Aid Society. In 1995 Jinny and her husband were transferred to London, England where she took continuing education courses in history at Oxford, University and the London School of Economics. Most recently she was the public relations director for the *Ursulines of*

Cincinnati and editor of the magazine, *Visions*. She has been a volunteer guide at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center since its opening and is active in many civic projects in the Clifton area.

As the mother of four and grandmother of four, she has a keen interest in children's literature. She is especially interested in the effect that history had on the lives of children of the time. She finds Cincinnati history fascinating and is proud of her city and the people who developed it. *Littsie of Cincinnati* and *Littsie and the Underground Railroad* reflect these interests. *Littsie of Cincinnati* received an IPPY award in children's literature and her second book, *Jake and Sam at the Empty Abbey* received a Moonbeam Silver Medal.

Suggested Activities

To the Teacher: Some of these activities are internet dependent.

Chapter 1-2 Dan, A Place for Dan

1. When Littsie walks through the city to meet Eulene at the Longworth mansion she hears many bells. Why do you think there were so many bells? (They not only sounded pretty but the bells let everyone know the time. Watches were expensive and not everyone had one.)

2. In Cincinnati we still have a bell company that has been here since Littsie's time. Find the Verdin Bell Co. on the internet and write a report about it.

3. The circus comes to town and Littsie, Eulene and Megan go to watch the parade. In those days there was not TV, radio, Internet, e-mail, telephones or iPods. People found out that the circus was coming to town because the circus people put up posters. Draw a poster for the circus.

The circus moved from town to town and had to move all the equipment. That was Dan's job. Pretend that you are the owner of a circus and make a list of all the things that must be moved. Don't forget the Big Top.

Chapter 3 Return to the Cabin

Littsie and Megan return to their family's cabin. Littsie describes what it looked like. Draw a picture of what she describes.

Chapter 4 A Barn Meeting

1. A Barn Meeting describes the abolitionist meeting. Have students take a character and act out this chapter. It might be fun to have them dress in costume.

2. Imagine that you are a reporter for a newspaper covering the meeting of the abolitionists in the barn and write a story for your newspaper. Remember that you want to answer the questions: Who, What, When and Where. Consider if you want to tell about the girl and her little sister that you saw there.

Chapter 5 The Right Thing

1. Imagine that you are the first fugitive slave that Euleen and Megan helped. Write down your thoughts.

Chapters 6-7 -8 Upsetting Changes A New Home A Special Painter

1. Go to the internet and see if you can find pictures by Robert Duncanson and John James Audubon. Copy them and make them into a book to show your class.

2. What is a freedom lamp? Bring something from home to show your class that could be used for a freedom lamp.

Chapter 9 Christmas Reunion

1. Megan wound red and green ribbons in Littsie's hair. Try doing that to your hair or a friend's and show your class what it looks like.

2. As Littsie and Dan took the sleigh Christmas night, they stopped on a high ridge and looked at Cincinnati. Draw a picture as Littsie described it.

3. While Littsie and Euleen wait for the "parcel" Euleen says, "I would cross anything in any kind of weather, at any time of night, if it meant I did not have to be a slave." "Nothing is as bad as being owned by someone else."

Think about what she said and write a paper describing how it would feel to be owned by someone else.

Chapter 10 A New Friend

1. See if you can find out more about Elizabeth Blackwell on the internet and tell the class what you found.

Chapter 11 A Serious Business

1. In this chapter a mob attacks Mr. Birney's office and throws linotype out the door. In Littsie's time printers used linotype to print; today we use computers. Linotype has become antique. Do you know anyone who has some so that you could show the class?

Chapter 12 Hard Goodbyes

1. The Randolfs leave for Canada and their first stop is Springboro. Find a map of Ohio and trace their route to Springboro and on to Canada. How many miles would that be? How long do you think it would take them?

Chapter 13 Grown Up

1. Write a book review of *Littsie and the Underground Railroad*.