NCSS Notable Trade Book Lesson Plan
*Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad*

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*Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad* is a remarkable picture book that opens with a young farm girl discovering an unknown person hiding in her family’s barn. What should she do? It’s not legal or safe to assist a runaway slave in the South during the Civil War. Whatever she does, her action (or inaction) will have consequences that may affect the life of another person in a positive or negative manner. This lesson focuses on the costs and benefits of the choices made by the farm girl. Young readers will use the wonderful illustrations to follow the tale’s linear storyline. Older students will be fascinated by the combination of embedded visual clues and unstated communication that defines the Civil War and Underground Railroad. The author’s endnote reveals the inspiration for the book and invites readers to write their own story.

| Book Title | *Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad* (2013) by Henry Cole  
New York, NY: Scholastic Press  
ISBN: 978-0-545-39997-5  
Recommended for Grades: 3-5  
Time Allocation: One class period (between 30 and 45 minutes) |
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<td>Book Summary</td>
<td><em>Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad</em> is a remarkable picture book that takes place during the Civil War. It tells the story of a young Southern farm girl who protects a runaway slave. After discovering the fugitive hiding in the barn, she not only keeps this information from bounty hunters seeking a reward, she manages to covertly get food to the unseen person in need. The power of actions over words is clearly conveyed at the end of the story when the person in need rewards the worthy farm girl in a perfect manner.</td>
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| NCSS Standards | II. Time, Continuity, and Change  
VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption  
X. Civic Ideals and Practices |
| Materials | • Visual 1- *Unspoken* Cost/Benefit Analysis (Appendix A)  
• Choice Cards- Printed on cardstock (Appendix C)  
• Copy of *Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad* by Henry Cole [Scholastic, 2012]  
• Optional- document camera  
• Visual 2 -Economics Concepts Experienced by the Farm Girl (Appendix D)  
• Paper and pencils for student responses |
| Objectives | 1. Students will be introduced to the concepts of costs and |
benefits.

2. Students will interact with a book that takes place during the period of the American Civil War (1861-1865).
3. Students will complete a group activity based on a class-created Cost/Benefit Analysis Chart.
4. Students will make an independent decision based on the costs and benefits of a fictional situation.

### Procedures

#### Exploration

1. Prepare and collect materials prior to class. Reproduce visual and statement cards.
2. Introduce the lesson by telling the students the historical event this activity features is the Underground Railroad. Inform the students the Underground Railroad was not actually a railroad and was not located underground. Rather it was network of secret routes and safe houses used by slaves to escape to freedom before and during the American Civil War (1861-1865).

#### Development

Assessment:

1. Continue the lesson by sharing the picture book *Unspoken: A Story from the Underground Railroad* by Henry Cole. This includes showing the students the pictures and discussing the content. Note: Displaying the story’s illustrations using a document camera is an effective method of conveying the content.
2. Read the author’s note at the back of the book upon completion of the story. This will provide background information concerning the Civil War and the Underground Railroad as addressed in the activity. (If time is a factor just read the two paragraphs on the last page under the “IF YOU WERE” section.)
3. Tell the students the main character, a farm girl living in Virginia during the Civil War, had to make some choices. Should she help a fugitive escape to freedom or obey the law and turn this person over to the bounty hunters?
4. Display the visual, (Appendix A), and read the introduction and directions. Review the terms Cost, Benefit, and Alternatives. Define **cost** as what takes place whenever someone makes a personal decision to use limited resources, **benefit** as the reward gained from an action or activity and **alternatives** as the different possibilities from which a choice may be made.
5. Solicit responses from the students concerning the possible costs and benefits of each alternative as it pertains to the farm girl’s situation and record the answers.
6. Fill in the visual with suggestions from the student. Accept all feasible suggestions. Typical answers can be found in Appendix
### Expansion

**B; Possible Student Responses.**

7. **Closure.** Return to the concepts of costs, benefits, and alternatives. Have the students construct together their own definitions of these concepts.

**Assessment**

1. Inform the students that they will now get to make their own decision on what choice they might make if they were the farm girl and found a fugitive hiding in the barn.

2. Read the choice cards to the students. The contents of these four cards include: (1.) Help the unknown person stay hidden. (Even though it is not legal and may not be safe.) (2.) Ignore the unknown person. (You can always pretend you did not know there was someone hiding in the barn) (3.) Call attention to the person hiding in the barn. (It could be a runaway slave and you may get a reward.) (4.) Quietly tell your mother and grandparents that there is someone hiding in the barn. (They are adults. Let them figure out what to do.)

3. Place each card in a different corner of the room.

4. Ask the students to *vote with their feet.* This means they are to get out of their seats and go stand by the statement card they think would be the best choice if they were the farm girl.

5. Allow the students in each group to quickly discuss why they selected this choice. Ask each group to share with the class why they choose that option and what were the incentives for that choice. Instruct the students to return to their seats and, copy the statement on the choice they selected and, using complete sentences, write three reasons they made that choice. While responses will vary, these can serve as a measure of student understanding.

6. **Lesson summary.** Ask the students to tell you what the lesson was about. What activities were they involved in? What ideas were they thinking about?

1. Conclude the lesson by asking the students if there could have been any other choices for the farm girl to make in this situation.

2. Remind students all choices have costs and benefits.

3. Check for understanding by reviewing the economic concepts found in the story. Display Visual 2 (Appendix D) and discuss how each concept applied to the farm girl’s situation. Possible responses include:

   1.) Alternatives - the different possibilities from which a choice may be made. *The farm girl had alternatives. For example, she could have helped the hiding person, ignored the*
person, or told the bounty hunters.

2.) Benefit – reward gained from an action or activity. *The farm girl could have benefited financially or morally.*

3.) Choice - takes place whenever someone makes a personal decision to use limited resources. *The farm girl’s decision to help the fugitive affected both her and someone else.*

4.) Cost – the benefit given up when a choice is made. *The cost to the farm girl of not telling that there was someone hiding in the barn would have been great if her secret was discovered. She could have been punished and her family may have lost their farm.*

5.) Cost-benefit analysis –an analysis of the cost effectiveness of different alternatives in order to see whether the benefits outweigh the costs. *The farm girl could have made a chart to help her figure out what to do.*

6.) Incentive- an expected reward or penalty that motivates a person to take an action. *The farm girl’s positive incentive of helping someone escape to freedom was great. So was the negative incentive which was being punished for breaking the law, if caught.*

7.) Natural resources – “gifts of nature”; they are present without human intervention. *The farm girl was surrounded by natural resources. Some of these, like the potatoes and corn, she shared with the person hiding in the barn.*

8.) Opportunity cost – that which is given up when a choice is made. When deciding how to spend a resource it is one’s second best alternative; the alternative given up. *The farm girl’s opportunity cost for keeping the person in the barn hidden was giving up the reward money.*
**Extension Activities**

1. Conduct a classroom discussion based on these “What do you think?” questions.
   - What do you think is the gender and age of the unknown person hiding in the barn?
   - Why do you think the unknown person was hiding?
   - Where do you think the farm girl’s father is?
   - Do you think the adults in this story were aware there was a fugitive hiding in the barn?

2. Challenge the students to create a list of some “real life” situations that require decision-making. Possible topics could include: what book to check out at the library, to pack lunch or buy the school lunch, what activities to do over the weekend.

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**References**


**Web-based References**


The history of Loudon County, Virginia: Journey to freedom was risky for slaves and guides. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.loudounhistory.org/history/underground-railroad.htm

