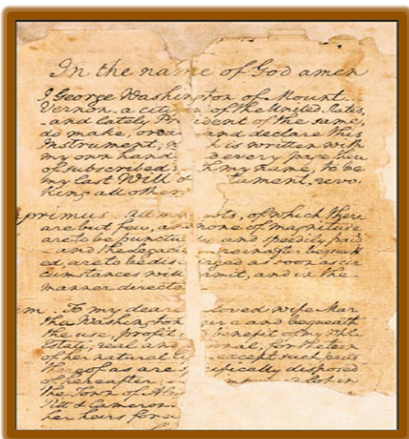


Methods of Freedom

Prior to the Civil War slaves gained their freedom in one of three ways. The most obvious, and most dangerous, was to simply run away. The Underground Railroad assisted them to escape to the northern states, and in many cases all the way to Canada. Other slaves managed the journey on their own. But for every slave who gained their freedom this way, there were several who were recaptured and brought back into captivity. And as the Civil War approached, laws about runaways made even the northern states a perilous sanctuary. For instance, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law permitted slave hunters to take escaped slaves (and oftentimes free Blacks accused of being runaways) back to the South.



Another way a slave could gain their freedom was by emancipation. Basically, this meant that their owner legally documented that he or she was giving the slave their freedom. This was fairly common, with many owners leaving such instructions in their wills. Of course, there could be problems. Emancipating a slave when they were getting to be elderly and unable to work left the slave in a desperate situation. Uneducated and without the skills to provide for him or herself, a slave was presented with a whole new set of problems.

Another method a slave could obtain their freedom involved the slave purchasing his or her own freedom. While technically everything a slave owned belonged to his or her master, it was not uncommon that slaves earned money on the side. Slaves with skills, such as blacksmith, silversmith, carpentry, or other forms of craftsmanship normally could do jobs after they finished their master's work, and keep the money. By saving this extra income, a slave could eventually save enough to purchase their own freedom, and even that of their families. This was a process of years, if not decades, though, and required great financial discipline, as well as an owner who would allow the slave to thus purchase his freedom.





Methods of Freedom Questions

1. For each method a slave could gain their freedom there were difficulties or problems they might face. Using evidence from the passage, explain the problems a slave may encounter.

2. In paragraph two, the author explains that slaves could gain their freedom through a process known as emancipation. The author goes on to explain the problem this way, "Uneducated and without the skills to provide for him or herself, a slave was presented with a whole new set of problems." What problems might an emancipated elderly slave face?