

THE SELF-EMPOWERMENT OF HARRIET JACOBS

TEACHER TOOL 2

The following are some key points about Harriet Jacobs's life in hiding, which are presented in chapter XXI of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

- Above the porch was a small area or crawl space. It was 9 feet long, 7 feet wide, and 3 feet high at the highest point. Since it was under a roof it sloped down all the way to the floor at one side.
- At first, there was no opening for much air or light to enter.
- Harriet's Uncle Phillip built a "trap door" so that he, Aunt Nancy, and grandmother could talk to Harriet and bring her food.
- She had a bed on the floor, but because the roof sloped down she could not turn over without hitting the roof.
- Mice, rats, and red ants lived in the space and crawled over her.
- The only thing separating her from the outdoors was a thin shingle roof. It was intensely hot in the summer and intensely cold in the winter. One winter she got frostbite in her feet and shoulders.
- She made a peephole about an inch long and wide so she could let some light and fresh air into her hiding place. She read and sewed by the light that came in through this opening.
- Through this peephole she could look out on the street and see her two children and others, including her owner, pass by in the street below.
- Through the hole she could also hear conversations about her; most people thought she had escaped to the North. No one suspected that her grandmother was hiding her just above the porch of her house.
- Although it was very cramped and infested with rats, mice, and insects, it was a safe hiding place. Not even Harriet's children (who lived in the same house) knew she was there.
- She hid in that cramped and unhealthy space for seven long years until she was freed that her children had left Edenton to live in the North. Then she made her own escape on a ship to Philadelphia.
- Harriet Jacobs wrote: "It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day . . . Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave."

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