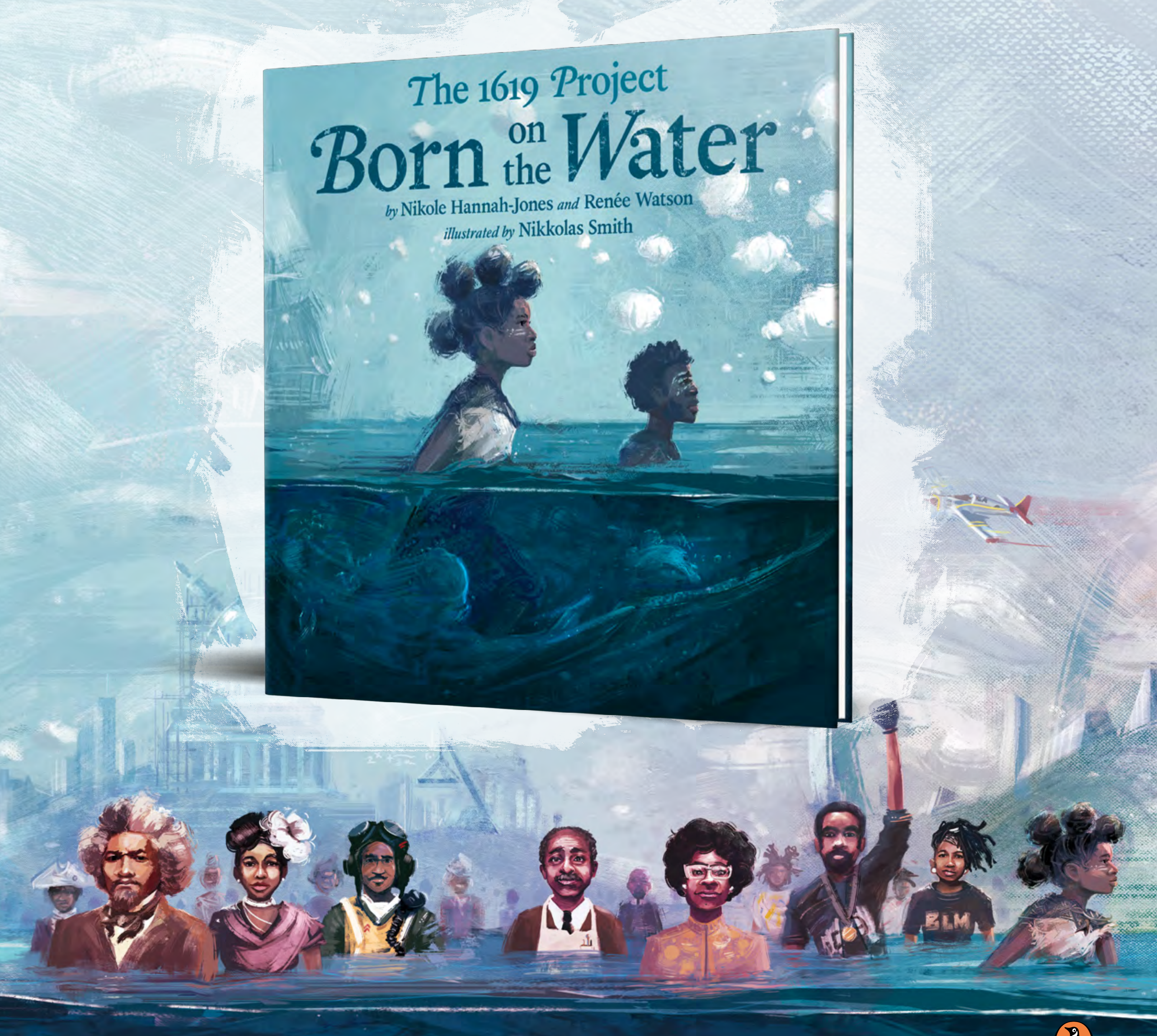
An Educator's Guide to

The 1619 Project Born on the Water



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About the Creators

Nikole Hannah-Jones is a Pulitzer Prize–winning reporter covering racial injustice for the *New York Times Magazine,* and creator of the landmark 1619 Project. In 2017, she received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, known as the Genius Grant, for her work on educational inequality. She has also won a Peabody Award, two George Polk Awards, three National Magazine Awards, and the 2018 John Chancellor Award for Excellence in Journalism from Columbia University. In 2016, Hannah-Jones co-founded the Ida B. Wells Society for Investigative Reporting, a training and mentorship organization geared toward increasing the number of investigative reporters of color. Hannah-Jones is the Knight Chair in Race and Journalism at Howard University, where she founded the Center for Journalism and Democracy. In 2021, she was named one of *Time*'s 100 most influential people in the world.

Renée Watson is a New York Times bestselling author. Her young adult novel *Piecing Me Together* (Bloomsbury, 2017) received a Newbery Honor and a Coretta Scott King Award. Her books for young readers include *Harlem's Little Blackbird: The Story of Florence Mills,* which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award, and *Ways to Make Sunshine,* which received the SCBWI Golden Kite Award. She has given readings and lectures at many renown places including the United Nations, the Library of Congress, and the U.S. Embassy in Japan and New Zealand. Renée is on the Council of Writers for the National Writing Project and is a member of the Academy of American Poets' Education Advisory Council. Renée grew up in Portland, Oregon, and splits her time between Portland and New York City. To learn more about Renée's work, visit her at reneewatson.net.

Nikkolas Smith is a Houston, Texas-born Artivist, picture book author, and Hollywood film illustrator. He is the author-illustrator of *The Golden Girls of Rio*, nominated for an NAACP Image Award, *My Hair Is Poofy & That's Okay*, and *World Cup Women*. As a Black illustrator, Nikkolas is focused on creating captivating art that can spark important conversations around social justice in today's world and inspire meaningful change. Many of his viral, globally shared and published sketches are included in his book *Sunday Sketch: The Art of Nikkolas*. Nikkolas also speaks on his Artivism at conferences, workplaces, and schools around the world, and leads workshops in digital painting, character, and movie poster design. He lives in Los Angeles, California. Learn more here: www.NIKKOLAS.art

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Dear Educator,

“To be Black is something so special.” —Dr. Bettina Love

Born on the Water begins with the oft repeated misstep of a well-intentioned educator: “Trace your roots. Draw a flag that represents your ancestral land.” But as we should all know by now, without a deliberate effort to understand ourselves, the students we teach, and how those identities intersect, our intentions and our impact on the children we teach can end up in harmful misalignment.

When asked about her intentions for *Born on the Water*, Nikole Hannah-Jones said that she wanted to help Black descendants of slavery in the United States craft “an origin story.” That is exactly what Hannah-Jones and her co-author, Reneé Watson, accomplish in this counternarrative to the shame Black children often experience when given this type of assignment.

In lyrical free verse, the authors invite the reader to sit alongside the protagonist as she and her loved ones listen to the family matriarch tell the story of where they are from, from the beginning. The result is a glorious tale of the triumphant humanity of Black people in the face of the attempted dehumanization of enslavement. Nikkolas Smith’s breathtaking illustrations invoke the mood of the poetry on every page.

Each poem and painting is a masterpiece on its own that not only takes readers on a journey across time, space, and identity, but proves the creators’ thesis true. As Bettina Love put it: “To be Black is something so special.” As Hannah-Jones, Watson, and Smith craft a written and visual narrative that convinces readers that Black children are “our ancestors’ wildest dreams,” they demonstrate they, too, are “hope” realized.

CHILDREN WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH

> *“It’s hard to say . . . It hurts me a lot. It hurts me too much to say. It hurts me, but [I’m] too scared not to say. What happened is not right, and it scares me . . . Like with George Floyd. And with others. All the others. It just keeps happening, and it hurts.* **How did this all start?** *. . . It can’t just be about the color of skin.”* —Josiah, age eight

It was January 2021 and we were reading *Memphis, Martin, and the Mountaintop*, a lyrical recounting of the 1968 sanitation strike in Memphis, Tennessee, which was Martin Luther King Jr.’s last act of standing against systemic racism and for justice before he was assassinated. Josiah, in a breakout room with some of his classmates and a literacy specialist, was making connections between the past and the present: “How did this all start?” How did this—these violent acts against Black people—all start? Josiah did not just want to know, he *needed* to.

It was insightful of Josiah to make connections between the past and the present. We cannot make sense of the racism that persists in the United States of America today without looking back. Without looking back, we cannot move forward. As one of Josiah’s classmates, Jonathan, also eight, said, “The past and the present are connected. We should notice how they are. If we look to the past and bring what we learn to the present, we can change. I want to change. I want to include people in things.”

While local school boards and state legislators rush to silence conversations about race and racism in schools, children are observing the world around them and asking pointed questions about racism and the subsequent reckoning they see happening before their very eyes. Children, by their very nature, do not look at injustice and walk away. They "want to change." Children want to dive into conversations about injustice and reimagine the world in order to build a society in which they "include people in things." Contrary to the arguments of adults asserting that engaging our students in conversations about race, and studying the 1619 Project specifically, is divisive, children intuitively know that confronting racism is the only way to dismantle it. It is our students who are poised to and will work toward building "a more perfect Union" and establishing "Justice"—for all.

Educators must be prepared to make space for children's questions, facilitate their inquiries and conversations, and to follow their lead as they take action to galvanize the world within their sphere of influence. This begins with our own personal journeys. If we intend to teach accurate history and empower our students to walk through our nation and the world wide awake, we must become racially conscious ourselves and relentlessly pursue the truth.

Many of us have so much to unlearn. Our education provided us with a version of history that was not inclusive, one that started with "Secondly." As Mourid Barghouti wrote, "It is easy to blur the truth with a simple linguistic trick: start your story from 'Secondly. . .' Start your story with 'Secondly,' and the world will be turned upside-down." What happens when we start with "Firstly" instead? What happens when we follow the lead of a student like Josiah, when we stop ourselves in motion and ask, "How did this all start?" about the injustice of the world, yes, but also about ourselves and our relationship to racial oppression?

THE JOURNEY

Every journey begins with questions. My inquiry led me to journey through Ghana in search of answers. Ultimately, my questions and readings led me to a physical journey across Ghana. I traipsed, heavy-hearted, through Elmina Castle and the "Door of No Return." It was there, in Ghana, where I learned about Sankofa, a Bono Adinkra symbol and word from the Akan Twi and Fante languages that literally mean to "go back and get." Did I ever!

When I walked through the "Door of No Return," after ducking through a dark passageway my ancestors may have been forced through, I turned to look back from the other side and saw "Door of Return" hanging over the doorway. At that very moment, I had a new sense of where I, through my lineage, had come from. I had a deeper understanding of who I am as a Black American. I had *gone back and gotten* my origin story.

Whether physical or metaphorical, moving across borders gives us the opportunity to learn through a different lens than is traditionally offered to us in schooling in the United States of America. As Kris Gutiérrez writes:

> As Engestrom (1999) has theorized in his work, 'instead of just vertical movement across levels, development should be viewed as horizontal movement across borders. (p. 4) A singular focus on vertical forms of expertise makes it more difficult to see the personal, the political, the social and cultural, and how the everyday is imbued with a history. (2020)

In other words, in order to learn with tremendous depth and holistic understanding, we must travel. That journey begins within. We cannot read *Born on the Water* with our students without taking this to heart. No matter our identity, we must embark on our own epistemological journeys and we must travel alongside the children as we all move "horizontally" toward an understanding of who we are individually and collectively that is rooted in historical truths. I recommend texts to support this journey in *A Text Set for Educators* on page 8 of this guide.

MITIGATING HARM

The enslavement of African people in the United States of America was violent and intended to be dehumanizing. The teaching of this, as Learning for Justice calls it, "hard history" has the potential to be triggering. It most likely will be. We *must* teach children the truth, but we must do it mindfully, with a deliberate effort to mitigate harm. We must especially attend to the well-being of our Black students during this unit of study.

It cannot be overstated: **The first step in mitigating harm to children as you teach the hard and triggering history of the enslavement is confronting yourself**. Our own personal biases, internalized racism, and ignorance of historical truths show up in our interactions with children and our teaching moves when we choose not to reckon with prejudices, wrestle with any cognitive dissonance we experience, and unlearn false information. Having a trustworthy teacher who is willing to be vulnerable and learn in tandem with students is critical to their real and perceived safety in a classroom community. As Paolo Freire said:

> Teachers should be conscious every day that they are coming to school to learn and not just to teach . . . We cannot separate one from the other; we create a violence when we try. (1985)

In order to learn from students and encourage them to learn from one another, we must build a classroom community that welcomes critical and courageous conversations, maintains safety during those conversations, and, in the event of students being harmed, restores relationships through honest dialogue. Learning for Justice's *Let's Talk: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students* provides thorough guidance for all grades. Facing History and Ourselves has excellent resources for middle school, including the lesson *Preparing Students for Difficult Conversations*.

In *How the Word is Passed* (71-72), Dr. Clint Smith quotes Yvonne Holden, Director of Operations for the Whitney Plantation in Wallace, Louisiana:

> But also, we can't continue to view enslaved people only through the lens of what happened to them . . . We have to talk about who they were, we have to talk about their resiliency, we have to talk about their resistance, we have to talk about their strength, their determination, and the fact that they passed down legacies. Maybe they're not physical legacies, but they passed down legacies to generations, and those legacies are living well inside of African Americans today. If you can't see them for being people, you can't see me as a person. (2021)

Viewing enslaved Africans through the lens of their humanity rather than "what happened to them" is another important way to mitigate harm. It is a way of starting with "Firstly." When we see enslaved Africans as human beings, we are compelled to see their progeny that way, too. Hannah-Jones, Watson,

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and Smith have taken special care to craft a text that celebrates the abundance, creativity, resilience, resistance, and achievements of the people who came to identify as Black Americans.

The structure of *Born on the Water* is itself a model for what the research says about how educators should be teaching about the enslavement of Africans. We must lay a foundation that celebrates Black Americans from our origins on the continent of Africa to the present day, teach the truth about enslavement through a lens of the humanity of the enslaved, and connect the dots throughout history that elucidate for the Josiahs, which we all have in our classrooms, *how this all started* and galvanize more children to be like Jonathan and "want to change" because in the words of National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman:

> ". . . being American is more than a pride we inherit.
> It's the past we step into and how we repair it."

With *Born on the Water*, Hannah-Jones, Watson, and Smith have given Black children the gift of an origin story—a journey across time, space, and identity—and all children the gift of the truth. I hope that this guide will support you as you seize the opportunity to celebrate Black Americans, process the hard truths of history, and reimagine an inclusive future for our nation. Thank you for being the kind of educator who does hard things. Thank you for standing bravely in the face of the truth. Thank you for *being the change*.

Yours,

Aeriale

AERIALE N. JOHNSON, she/her, is a Reggio-inspired abolitionist educator. She taught public school for twenty-three years in Florida, Alaska, and California. She currently serves as a staff developer for Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at Columbia University. Aeriale strives to help teachers build a democratic classroom where all adults—educators and families—believe in children, allow children to bring the fullness of their humanity into the space, and deliberately relinquish their power to the children. Aeriale is dedicated to antiracism and works every day of her life to disrupt oppressive systems and promote a more just and equitable world wherein all people can thrive.

Pre-reading Considerations for Teachers

A TEXT SET FOR EDUCATORS

Teaching about the enslavement of Africans and racism in the United States of America requires that we educators have a willingness to continuously learn (and unlearn). The attached multimedia text set is not intended to be an exhaustive list but a primer that helps you begin your inquiry. Continued study beyond these texts and the time it takes to read them is imperative. This is a lifelong inquiry.

TEXTS FOR PERSONAL STUDY	TEXTS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO INFORM CLASSROOM PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE
• Inheritance: A project about American history, Black life, and the resilience of memory from the *Atlantic* • The Matter of Black Lives: Writing from The New Yorker edited by Jelani Cobb and David Remnick • The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story edited by Nikole Hannah-Jones and the *New York Times Magazine* • Understanding and Teaching American Slavery edited by Bethany Jay and Cynthia Lynn Lyerly • Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019 edited by Ibram X. Kendi • How to Be an Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi • Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America by Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain • How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America by Clint Smith	• Carter Center for K-12 Black History Education • Facing History and Ourselves • Lee and Low Books Classroom Library Questionnaire • Being the Change by Sara K. Ahmed • Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy by April Baker-Bell • Identity Affirming Classrooms: Spaces that Center Humanity by Erica Buchanan-Rivera • Breathing New Life Into Book Clubs by Sonja Cherry-Paul and Dana Johansen • "Writing about Slavery/Teaching About Slavery?: This Might Help" by P. Gabrielle Foreman, et al • Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice by Geneva Gay • Textured Teaching: A Framework for Culturally Sustaining Practices by Lorena Escoto Germán • Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain by Zaretta Hammond • Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Asking a Different Question by Gloria Ladson-Billings • Teaching Hard History: American Slavery from Learning for Justice • Let's Talk: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students from Learning for Justice *Continues...*

Pre-reading Considerations for Teachers (continued)

TEXTS FOR PERSONAL STUDY	TEXTS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO INFORM CLASSROOM PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE
• The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America by Richard Rothstein • Archaeology of Self by Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz	• We Want to Do More Than Survive by Bettina L. Love • Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy by Gholdy Muhammad • The 1619 Project Curriculum from The Pulitzer Center • "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" by Rudine Sims-Bishop • Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education by Alex Shevrin Venet

PODCASTS FOR PERSONAL STUDY	VIDEOS FOR PERSONAL STUDY
• *1619*, *New York Times*, hosted by Nikole Hannah-Jones • *Black History Year*, PushBlack, hosted by Jay Walker • *Code Switch*, NPR, hosted by Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby • *The Nod*, Gimlet Media, hosted by Brittany Luse and Eric Eddings • *Pod Save the People*, Crooked Media, hosted by DeRay Mckesson, Sam Sinyangwe, Kaya Henderson, and De'Ara Balenger • *School Colors*, Brooklyn Deep, hosted by Mark Winston Griffith and Max Freedman • *Seeing White*, Scene on Radio, hosted by John Biewen and Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika • *Teaching Hard History*, Learning for Justice, hosted by Hasan Kwame Jeffries	• *13th* • *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* • *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* • *Dark Girls* • *Eyes on the Prize* • *Freedom Riders* • *High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America* • *I Am Not Your Negro* • *More Than a Month* • *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* • *Slavery by Another Name* • *Soundtrack for a Revolution* • *When They See Us*

Bringing *Born On The Water* into the Classoom

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to provide learning opportunities for both educators and students. Teaching the history of the enslavement of Africans in the United States of America is new territory for many of us who either teach younger children or are not history educators. This territory is harrowing and, for some, uncomfortable. Included are resources for educators, sample language that you might use with students, and model lessons that provide ample opportunities for students to raise their voices and make choices about how they want to learn and demonstrate their growth. *Born on the Water* can be used at elementary and secondary levels, so there are distinctions between how you might work with younger students versus older ones, but because this work has cross-cutting concepts across grade levels and a continuum of learning on which students could potentially land anywhere, there are no separate sections based on age or grade level. Every class is different, and educators should meet their students (and themselves) exactly where they are.

A WORD ABOUT THE QUESTIONS

As you read through this guide, you will notice that the questions posed are not always specific to *Born on the Water*. They could be used with almost any text. This is intentional. Our job as educators is to teach students to think in ways that are generative and transferable. Teaching students to ask questions that they can ask of any text, including the text that is the world, empowers them to think deeply, whether or not they are in the presence of their teachers and caregivers. Children who question the world on their own are the type of thinkers who change the world!

As I wrote this guide, I conferred with a seventh grader, Jaden, who said, "These questions don't feel like an assignment that I just want to finish so I can get a grade and be done. These questions really make me think beyond the surface level." This is another deliberate choice. When we ask children questions that require them to think "within, about, and beyond the text" as Fountas and Pinnell write, we are inviting them to experience reading as a meaningful opportunity to think deeply and engage in authentic, transformative conversation.

RESOURCES

Students will need a reading notebook that they are already using or a notebook or folder where they can keep all of their work from this unit. It is important that students are able to reflect on their learning by looking back on all of the work they do throughout this unit.

TEACHING HARD HISTORY: A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNING

Learning for Justice, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, has done extensive research and tremendous work developing a framework and creating and providing resources to support educators as we do the difficult but necessary work of teaching children the history of enslavement. They call this K-12 framework *Teaching Hard History*. The framework and all of the accompanying resources—including texts, videos, podcasts and so much more—are available for free at learningforjustice.org. In this framework, Learning for Justice emphasizes some guiding principles that we must consider as we plan this unit. They are:

- Be ready to talk about race.
- Teach about commonalities.
- Center the stories of enslaved people.
- Embed civics education.
- Teach about conflict and change.

CLICK THE LINKS BELOW FOR THE LEARNING FOR JUSTICE FRAMEWORK

- Teaching Hard History
- K-5 Framework
- 6-12 Framework

It is imperative that educators are working to continuously learn more about the history of enslavement in the United States of America and that we know what students should learn throughout their development. In the above links, you will find what Learning for Justice has identified as essential knowledge and objectives for students in grade level bands. As you prepare to teach your students, you might learn something new, too! Please read these thoroughly and consider them as you plan to read *Born on the Water* to your students and extend their learning beyond the text.

AFFIRMING BLACK LIVES

Affirming Black lives and Black ways of being in the world should be a thread that runs through the entire school year, not just during Black History Month or this unit of study. Black children should see themselves positively reflected—as a diverse group of human beings who possess agency—in classroom and school libraries, the curriculum, our pedagogy, and every other aspect of schooling. Black language and literacy practices are funds of knowledge that educators should leverage in order to center students in our instructional decisions. We cannot teach Black American children about the enslavement of their ancestors in a classroom community that does not, first and as a norm, affirm Black people. To do so would be educational malpractice.

One way to affirm Black children is by reading aloud books that center characters with whom they can identify rather than those that perpetuate stereotypes or monolithic narratives. The practice of sharing authentic Black stories does not just benefit Black children. It humanizes all children. As author Derrick Barnes recently wrote:

> Because I write with Black children in mind does not mean that I don't write for other children. It's quite the contrary, actually. The more all children have an opportunity to see others being happy, being valued, being loved, laughing, solving the mystery and saving the day, the closer we will all get to the type of society where we are lifting each other up, celebrating our differences, and hoping desperately to see joy in the faces of other human beings. (2021)

As we select texts, it is important that educators use a framework to guide us toward books that will best nurture our students. Several resources exist to help us do this work. One way you might evaluate your text selection is to use the Lee and Low Books Classroom Library Questionnaire. Another option you might choose is to use a consistent set of questions as you select texts such as these I co-authored with Dr. Kim Parker (2019):

EVALUATING TEXTS FOR LIBERATORY POTENTIAL

Is the text written by an author from the community featured in the text? Is it authentic?

Can the text serve as a mirror, window, and/or sliding glass door as defined by Dr. Rudine Sims-Bishop in "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors?" (1990)

Does the text promote celebration of or healing from the past? Does the text speak truth about the present?

Does the text convey hope for the future through children's agency and self-directed action?

Is the text a counternarrative to stereotypes?

Does the text convey love? Does the text have the potential to help build community?

Will the text affirm students' language practices and/or respectfully expand their language repertoire?

Does the text provoke deep thought? Will it help children develop their own ideas?

Does the text provide a "portal" to students' radical imagination? Will it help children see the world through different lenses or inspire them to reimagine the world?

Begin your *Born on the Water* unit of study by reaffirming Black lives and ways of being. Build a text set that is responsive to the children in your class. Make time to read the texts aloud to your students with ample time for response both during and after you have read the text. A whole group conversation with opportunities for students to also spend time talking in pairs or triads is ideal because it supports students, builds community, and gives educators the opportunity to listen to students as they grow their ideas. Listening to students is critical to ensuring that misconceptions are cleared up immediately and students are not experiencing harm.

After students have engaged in dialogue, have them construct a response to the text in their reading notebooks, if they have one, or you could have them keep a notebook or folder designated for this unit of study. Students' responses might be written, artistic, or both. Allowing children to choose the mode in which they will respond engenders honesty and provides all children with a pathway to success. Some students may get right to work without any prompting; others might need support. Simple open-ended questions like those in the *Text Reflection Protocol* below help students generate ideas. You will return to these questions again and again. You might put them on a chart that hangs in your classroom.

TEXT REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Think about the text you just read/viewed. Use the following questions to help you reflect on what you are learning. You may use pictures and words to show your ideas.

- What are you noticing?
- What are you wondering?
- What are you feeling?
- What are you beginning to think now that you were not thinking before?
- If you could turn your thoughts or feelings into actions right now, what would you do?

Books are not the only type of texts. You might support your written text set with visual texts such as photographs, visual art, and videos, which can include performing arts. Black lives are affirmed in so many types of texts.

CLICK FOR A FULL TEXT SET FOR WEEK ONE.

DAY ONE

Begin Week Two by reading *Born on the Water* to your students. The language and illustrations in the text are so breathtakingly beautiful that the first reading of it must be a teacher read aloud at all grade levels. **It is highly recommended that you read the text several times on your own before reading it to children in order to find the best way to reflect the rhythm, mood, and tone in your reading.**

Before reading the text, you will want to provide students with a book introduction, including showing students some selected illustrations, preferably under a document camera so they can be clearly seen. You might also call attention to vocabulary you know your students will need a preview of prior to reading. Suggested key vocabulary is in the chart below.

KEY VOCABULARY		
democracy	/dəˈmäkrəsē/	a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives
enslaver	/inˈslāvər/	a person who takes away another person's freedom, holds them captive, and controls their actions, including making them perform work without pay
enslaved person	/inˈslāvd/	a person who is the property of another and is forced to obey them against their will
equality	/əˈkwälədē/	when the same freedoms are held by all people, regardless of their individual or group identities
immigration	/iməˈgrāSH(ə)n/	the process of moving to a new country, with plans to live there permanently
legacy	/ˈlegəsē/	something that comes from the past or a person of the past

A book introduction might go something like the following, with adjustments made for the needs of the children you are teaching based on their age. This isn't to suggest that you leave any information out but that you adjust the language to respect students' intellect and support their comprehension.

BOOK INTRODUCTION

A book introduction might go like this:

Readers, I have gathered you here today because we are going to begin a very important unit of study. This book, *Born on the Water*, will be the anchor text for this unit. We will return to it again and again to study details, get ideas, and just to enjoy the beauty of the text. This book was written by Nicole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson. It was illustrated by Nikkolas Smith. *Born on the Water* is written in verse; that means the authors used poems to tell the story.

This book is about so many things, but on the surface, it is about a little girl who learns about her family's heritage from her grandmother. At the beginning of the story, the little girl's teacher gives her class an assignment. Her teacher wants her students to draw a flag that represents their ancestral land. The little girl is not so sure what to do. She is a Black American, and because her ancestors were enslaved, she feels ashamed that she does not know about her family's history before her great-grandparents. I can't wait for you to find out what happens when the little girl gets home and tells her grandmother about her assignment!

But, readers, before we begin, I want to show you a few of the illustrations and discuss some vocabulary with you. Let's take a look at this page ("What Grandma Tells Me"). What do you notice about the people on this page? Take a close look at their facial expressions and gestures. *Elicit student responses and affirm their observations.*

Now we're going to turn to the centerfold of the book and take a look at the illustration there. Whoa! What are you noticing now? What are you wondering? *Elicit student responses and affirm their observations.*

Readers, this ship was called the *White Lion*. It transported the people we saw on the first page we took a look at from the Kingdom of Ndongo in West Central Africa to the English colony of Virginia in 1619. The people were taken from their homes and enslaved. When a person is enslaved, are forced to become property of another person; they lose their freedom. The person who owns them is called an enslaver. An enslaver holds an enslaved person captive, controls their actions—they tell them what they can and cannot do—and makes them work without pay. Enslaving fellow human beings is never okay. But in what became the United States of America, it was legal to enslave people for a long time. Two groups of people were enslaved here. First Indigenous people, and then Africans. Indigenous people and Africans did not deserve to be enslaved. They were, and still are, equal to all other human beings. Enslavers were racist and used the racist idea that Indigenous and African people were inferior to them to justify enslaving other human beings. This is absolutely false. Racism is always wrong. Racism does not just happen between individual people. Racism is also a system that legally permits a different treatment for Black and Brown people than for White people.

Born on the Water tells the story of the Africans who were enslaved. It tells about how they were smart and resourceful. It tells about how they had special skills and talents that built the United States of America. *Born on the Water* tells how enslaved Africans wanted to be free and resisted their bondage in big and small ways. It tells the story of a people who survived and, despite all odds, bonded together and formed a new collective identity.

Let's look at one more part before we begin ("Legacy"). Wow! This page is amazing. What are you noticing? What are you wondering? *Elicit student responses and affirm their observations.*

I am noticing how the poem on this page is titled "Legacy." I know that legacy means something that comes from the past or a person of the past. It's like how my grandmother went to college. Then my mother went to college. After that, I went to college. My family has a legacy of earning a college degree, that was passed from my grandmother, to my mother, and then to me. I wonder what this page could mean.

Readers, let's start at the beginning of *Born on the Water* and read to find out more about how all of these pages fit together to tell the story of a people who are so important to our nation—past, present, and future.

READ:

Read the text from cover to cover, pausing to look closely at the illustrations and, intermittently, when students have observations. Try to keep the reading flowing so that children can capture the story as a whole. Close the reading with a discussion that leans into student's noticings and questions rather than your own. Allow students time to talk to one another while you listen closely and support the conversations as necessary. This is an important way to informally assess what students already know about enslavement and where they are in their antiracist journey.

If the children do not discuss the plot of the text, guide them to think through the following: what happened at the **beginning** (the little girl receives an assignment in school that makes her feel ashamed because she does not know her family's origin story), in the **middle** (Grandma gathers the whole family and tells them their origin story, from their family's beginnings in the Kingdom of Ndongo in West Central Africa all the way through the present day), and at the **end** (the little girl no longer feels ashamed, because she has an origin story and she is proud of the contributions her ancestors have made to the country she calls home).

CLOSURE:

After reading and discussing the text, have students use the *Text Reflection Protocol* to reflect. They should do this work in their notebooks or, if done on individual sheets of paper, place their work in their unit folders.

TEXT REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Think about the text you just read/viewed. Use the following questions to help you reflect on what you are learning. You may use pictures and words to show your ideas.

- What are you noticing?
- What are you wondering?
- What are you feeling?
- What are you beginning to think now that you were not thinking before?
- If you could turn your thoughts or feelings into actions right now, what would you do?

DAYS TWO THROUGH FIVE

On Days Two through Five, you will guide students through a close reading of different sections of the text. The poems are divided into three categories—Before 1619, 1619 to 1865, and 1865 to Present—to help students create schema and clearly delineate time. For this close reading, your students will conduct character analysis by asking questions about the protagonist, her grandmother, and the Africans at different points in history. Use the chart on the next page to determine which poems to read and study each day. A daily book talk about *Born on the Water* could go like this:

BOOK TALK:

Readers, we've read the phenomenal book *Born on the Water*. It is teaching us so much. For the next several days, we are going to reread the text part by part, a few poems at a time, so we can take a closer look and learn even more from the phenomenal human beings in the book. We are going to study them closely, using the same questions every day so we get lots of practice. Studying the people closely will not only help us get to know them better, it will help us get closer to what Ms. Hannah-Jones and Ms. Watson want us to know, understand, and carry in our hearts even after we close the book for the last time as a class. I have divided the poems so that we can study them chronologically—before 1619, the year they were forced onto *The White Lion* and enslaved; from 1619 to June 19, 1865, the day that all enslaved people were finally emancipated; and from that day, Juneteenth, through the present day. Let's dig in.

READ:

DAY TWO	DAY THREE	DAY FOUR	DAY FIVE
Before 1619	1619-June 19, 1865	1619-June 19, 1865 continued	June 19, 1865-Present
"What Grandma Tells Me" "They Had a Language" "Their Hands Had a Knowing" "And They Danced"	"Stolen" "*The White Lion*" "Point Comfort" "Tobacco Fields" "How to Make a Home"	"The Tuckers of Tidewater, Virginia" "William Tucker" "Resist"	"Questions" "Legacy" "Pride"

On all four days, you will reread the poems for that day, pausing after each one so students can consider the character analysis questions, which are below. This is a chart that you will use again and again that you will want to create and hang up in your classroom. **Do not linger too long on each poem, analyzing them to death.** Just spend a few minutes with each one. You will notice that, because you are using the same questions each day, the children will become more fluent at answering them as the week progresses.

The youngest students, kindergarten and first graders, might have whole class and small group conversations and then be encouraged to draw pictures and write labels that represent their ideas in their notebooks. Second and third graders might be expected to record their thoughts in their notebooks using pictures and words after engaging in whole and small group conversations. If you have multiple copies of the text, you might consider having older students, fourth through eighth graders, reread the text, talk, and answer the questions in pairs or triads. You'll want to offer your students the just right amount of support they need to think deeply about the text and articulate that thinking in pictures and/or words.

QUESTIONS TO HELP US THINK ABOUT THE PEOPLE	
Kindergarten through Third Grade	Fourth through Eighth Grade
What do the people in this poem say? What do the people in this poem do? What do the people in this poem think? How do the people in this poem feel? Do the people in this poem have a problem? If they do, are they able to solve it? How do they solve it, or why can't they? Do the people change in this poem or across the book? How do you know? What do you think the characters learned about themselves and the world in the poem(s)? What did you learn because you paid close attention to the people in the poem(s)?	Think about what the people in this poem say, do, think, and feel. What do our observations teach us about what kind of people they are? Do the people in this poem have a problem? If they do, are they able to solve it? How do they solve it, or why can't they? Why did the people solve their problem in that way? Could they have made a different decision? What do their choices make us think about what kind of people they are? Do the people change in this poem or across the book? How do you know? If the people changed, why and how did they change? Are there ways the people stayed the same? Does the way the people stayed the same or changed help you think about the meaning of the book? What do you think the characters learned about themselves and the world in the poem(s)? Do the lessons they learned help you think about the meaning of the book? What did you learn because you paid close attention to the people in the poem(s)?

CLOSURE:

After the children have worked in their notebooks each day, you will want to provide them with an opportunity to share their ideas with their peers. If older students have worked in small groups, you might regroup them so they hear other perspectives. You will want to wrap these lessons up with a whole group conversation about a poignant idea or two you have heard the students discussing. It is important to honor students' ideas by centering them in our instruction.

During closure on Day Five is also a good time to have students pause to reflect on the thinking and work they have done thus far. If they do not consider it on their own, help children connect the dots between the work you did celebrating Black lives during Week One and studying *Born on the Water* during Week Two. This is important to maintaining the humanity and dignity of Black people as you study the enslavement of their ancestors.

DAY ONE

Launch Week Three by reading *Born on the Water* cover to cover one last time. On this read, you will ask students to move beyond interpretation to think analytically about the text. A book talk on this day might go like this:

BOOK TALK:

Readers, when Ms. Hannah-Jones, Ms. Watson, and Mr. Smith decided to write and illustrate this book, they knew that they wanted it to be a gift to Black American children. They wanted them to have an origin story. They wanted them to know their history, where they are from. The authors wanted Black children to be proud of their ancestry. This week we are going to think about whether or not they accomplished their goal and, if they did, how they did it.

READ:

Present the questions below to your students prior to rereading. This is a chart that you will use again and will want to create and hang up in your classroom. Provide students with text-based examples to scaffold their understanding of the expectations. Read the text from cover to cover, pausing to elicit responses from the children.

QUESTIONS TO HELP US THINK ABOUT THE TEXT	
Kindergarten through Third Grade	Fourth through Eighth Grade
Why do you think the authors used poems to tell the story? How do the poems make you feel as a reader? Do the authors use language that sounds beautiful? Do the authors use the same words again and again? Do the authors use any words that give you strong feelings? Do the authors make the words fit on the page in different ways? Does the illustrator help us see things that we could not see with just the words? Are there pages that do not have words? Why would the authors and illustrator make these choices? Whose part of the story are the authors telling? Whose part is missing? Why does that matter?	Why do you think the authors used poems to tell the story? What is an example from the text of how the message would impact the reader differently if they had used prose instead? Do the authors use figurative language? How does it impact you as a reader? Where do you notice repetition in the poems? Why do you think the authors chose to repeat these particular lines? Think about the authors' word choice. Which words stand out to you? Why do you think the authors' chose those words? How do the authors use space on the page to impact the meaning of the text? What is an example? Does the illustrator help us see things that we could not see with just the words? Are there pages that do not have words? Why would the authors and illustrator make these choices? How do these choices impact the reader? From whose perspective did the authors choose to tell the story? Whose perspective did they leave out? How do these choices impact the tone of the story? How does that tone impact the reader?

CLOSURE:

Your closure on this day might go like this:

Readers, we began this lesson thinking about how Ms. Hannah-Jones, Ms. Watson, and Mr. Smith wanted to impact their readers, especially Black children. After this final read, we can see that they chose a genre—poetry—craft moves, and a perspective from which to tell the story that make the text a beautiful masterpiece that not only offers Black children an origin story but gives all children an opportunity to see the enslavement of Black Africans from a perspective that is too often ignored, that of Black Americans. I want you to hold on to this idea. No matter what story we are reading, we'll want to consider whose story is being told and by whom.

DAYS TWO THROUGH FOUR

For the next three days, students will learn about "Where I'm From" poems. You and your students will read them, listen to them, write them, and perform them as a celebration. A poem introduction might go like this:

DAY TWO

POEM INTRODUCTION:

Writers, for the next couple of days, inspired by Ms. Hannah-Jones, Ms. Watson, Mr. Smith, and a few others, we are going to craft our own origin story poems. We are going to think about where we are from, write about that, and celebrate who we are by sharing our writing. The original "Where I'm From" poem is by a poet named George Ella Lyon. We'll read her poem in a moment, but first I want to tell you that although we are all from a particular place, we are also from our experiences. We are from the things we have seen, smelled, heard, tasted, and touched. As we experience the world through our five senses, certain parts of it become an important part of us. We can be from our grandmother's hugs and the foods we love. I'm from corn dogs. So as we listen to Ms. Lyon's poem, we need to listen for her to tell us not just about places that she is from, but things as well. I will read, and you should listen to see what you notice about where she is from.

READ:

Read "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon, pausing to give students a moment to think about what they are noticing and wondering in the poem. There may be a number of things with which the children are unfamiliar. It is not necessary to tell them about everything they do not know. What is important is that they begin to internalize the structure of a "Where I'm From" poem and grasp that their origins do not have to be literal places. After reading, take a moment to discuss what students are noticing and wondering.

Now you will introduce a video of children reciting their own lines to a collective "Where I'm From" poem inspired by a callout from Kwame Alexander and National Public Radio.

POEM INTRODUCTION:

A poem introduction might go like this:

Writers, George Ella Lyon wrote the original "Where I'm From" poem. So many people—poets, teachers, and even children like you—have been inspired by her poem that "Where I'm From" has gone from being one poem by one author to becoming a type of poem. Not too long ago, a poet we love, Kwame Alexander, and National Public Radio did a callout asking listeners to write their own "Where I'm From" poems so that they could pull lines from the different poems and create a collective poem. Right now, we are going to view a video some students made of their "Where I'm From" poems. Let's view to notice what the children have to say about where they are from.

VIEW:

View "Schmuker students recite their "Where I'm From" poems based on the poem by George Ella Lyon." The language and references the children in this video use will likely be much more familiar. After viewing the video, have students talk with one another about what they noticed and any connections they might have made.

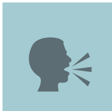
CLOSURE:

Now you should give students the opportunity to begin crafting their own "Where I'm From" poems. Some students will be inspired and get started right away. Others, especially younger children, might need some extra support. It is important that the scaffold you provide gives children access without stifling their language. One way you might do this is to have students think about where they are from through the five senses. Students who are not yet writing conventionally, or students who experience difficulty getting their ideas on the page, might draw pictures or write down a few words that help them remember what they want to include in their poem and record themselves drafting their poem using Flipgrid or something like it. It is important to emphasize to children that they will continue working on their "Where I'm From" poem tomorrow. As you are closing this lesson, give students the opportunity to share a line or two from what they have written so far.

DAY THREE

Today you will share either your own "Where I'm From" (if you're working with younger students in kindergarten through third grade) poem or a video of Renée Watson's, "Where I'm From?" (for students in fourth through eighth grade) to provide further example and inspiration. A poem introduction might go like this:

POEM INTRODUCTION:



Writers, yesterday we began working on our very own poems that tell the story of where we are from through the lens of our lived experiences. Today you are going to listen to another "Where I'm From" poem and think about how it can be a mentor text for us, how we might try

out what the author did in our own writing. First, I want you to return to your own "Where I'm From" poem. Think about what you might want to do to make your poem better today. How will you add more ideas or change the way you express the ones you have already written? As you listen to me recite my poem/view Ms. Watson recite her poem, notice what inspires you, makes you think, or gives you strong feelings. Pay attention to how the author does that. It may be a craft move that you want to try out in your own poem today.

READ/VIEW:

Read your own poem or view "Where I'm From?" by Renée Watson. Ask students what they noticed, what inspired them, made them think, or gave them strong feelings. Wonder alongside the children about how the author did this. What craft moves did they make? After a discussion, which should include opportunities for students to talk to one another, pass out a copy of either your poem or "Where I'm From," which can be found here, and name a few of the craft moves that the students noticed and wondered about. Naming the moves will help students replicate them in their own writing today. You might even create a chart that students can refer to while they are writing. It could look like this:

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?	WHAT DID IT MAKE YOU THINK OR FEEL?	HOW DID THE AUTHOR DO THAT?

Before sending students off to write, remind them that they can try out your craft moves or Ms. Watson's as they revise their own "Where I'm From" poems. Remind students that you will have a celebration tomorrow during which they will share their poems. If they do not feel comfortable sharing in front of their peers, they might make plans to record themselves reciting their poem or to be a part of a smaller group that shares together.

CLOSURE:

Send students off to revise their poems. Allow them to take a copy of your poem or Renée Watson's with them so they can continue to use the poems as a mentor text while they write. Continue to offer students support by conferring with them. As you close this lesson, give students the opportunity to give a preview of tomorrow by sharing a line or two from their poems. Be sure to celebrate each child as they share, giving specific feedback about what their poem made you think or feel and what craft moves they used.

DAY FOUR

Today you will celebrate students' "Where I'm From" poems and give them the opportunity to reflect on their continuous learning. Structure the share so that all students have the opportunity to be successful. This is a celebration! You might play music as children prepare. If you have not already, set up the classroom so that it creates a feeling of intimacy. Teach students to snap as a way to acknowledge that the poet has done something well without too much interruption while they are still reading. Give children space to celebrate one another—offering compliments, making connections, and asking questions.

Celebration day is the day when your classroom community should be at its peak performance, with children full of joy and appreciation for one another.

After sharing their poems, students should reflect. Return to the *Text Reflection Protocol*, now a familiar tool, and have students record their thoughts in their notebooks or on paper that they will put in their folders. End this lesson by having the students talk about their reflections in pairs or triads. Remember to listen closely to what students are saying as a way to informally assess their progress. When the small group conversations come to a close, return to whole group conversation and have the students share out their big ideas. If you heard the students sharing important thoughts with their peers that they are not sharing in the whole group, you might draw attention to those ideas while maintaining student anonymity.

TEXT REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Think about the text you just read/viewed. Use the following questions to help you reflect on what you are learning. You may use pictures and words to show your ideas.

- What are you noticing?
- What are you wondering?
- What are you feeling?
- What are you beginning to think now that you were not thinking before?
- If you could turn your thoughts or feelings into actions right now, what would you do?

Extended Learning

Giving students opportunities to extend what they have learned from *Born on the Water* is critical to modeling and supporting curiosity and the importance of continuous growth. With our youngest students, kindergarteners and first graders, you might facilitate the following modules through whole class study—read alouds, guided inquiry, etc.—across the school year. You might invite students in second through eighth grades to choose a module to research individually or in small groups.

The final product of student research might be a piece of writing in any genre, a video, a podcast, a piece of art, or a visual display. The possibilities are endless. What is important is that students feel empowered to make choices that reflect their learning. Before beginning these projects, you will want to ensure that you have taught your students note-taking skills that will facilitate the creation of a thorough and meaningful final product.

Each module is connected to a key concept students learned while reading *Born on the Water* and includes text recommendations. This list is not all-inclusive. I recommend that you utilize the texts from

the Learning for Justice Teaching Hard History project and your own classroom, school, and public libraries as a resource for creating text sets appropriate for your students. Special care has been taken to primarily include texts written and/or illustrated by Black authors and illustrators. Texts that center Black people that are written and illustrated by Black people tend to be more authentic to and respectful of Black ways of being.

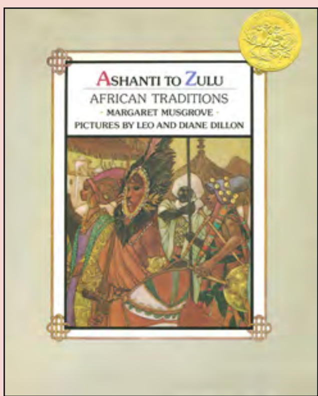
In addition to using text sets, children should use the internet to conduct research. It is out of the purview of this guide, but teaching students to use the internet safely and effectively to conduct research is important to their success. Read "Doing Internet Research at the Elementary Level: Lesson in Information Literacy" by Mary Beth Hertz if you are an elementary teacher and "The 6 Online Research Skills Your Students Need" by Hannah Trierweiler Hudson if you teach middle schoolers.

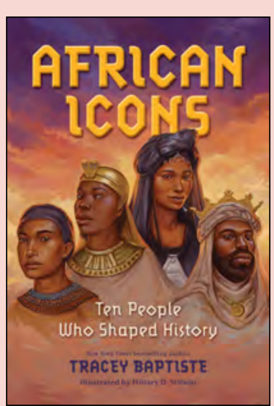
One resource that you can share with students or guide them toward online is the museums that are dedicated to preserving Black American history and educating the public. They will provide information that will enhance student learning. A sampling to help you get students started is below:

MUSEUMS THAT SUPPORT STUDENT RESEARCH
• Association of African American Museums • National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC • African American Museum in Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA • California African American Museum, Los Angeles, CA • The Dusable Museum of African American History, Chicago, IL • The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, Detroit, MI • Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African America History and Culture, Baltimore, MD • National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, OH • African American Museum of Dallas, Dallas, TX • National Museum of African American Music, Nashville, TN • Museum of African American History, Boston, MA • International African American Museum, Charleston, SC • New Orleans African American Museum, New Orleans, LA • Northwest African American Museum ,Seattle, WA • The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY • Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, Kansas City, MO • The August Wilson African American Cultural Center, Pittsburg, PA

MODULE ONE: INCREDIBLE AFRICA!

While reading *Born on the Water*, we learned that thriving African civilizations with rich cultures—like The Kingdon of Ndongo—existed prior to contact with European colonizers and enslavers. Research to find out more about these civilizations.



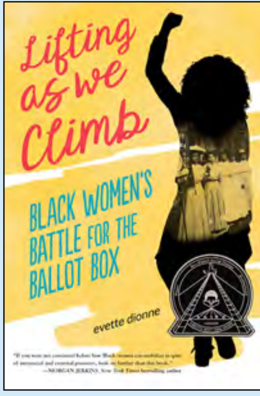


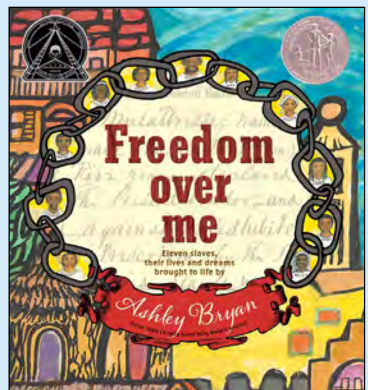
CLICK FOR FULL TEXT SET!

MODULE TWO: THE HISTORY OF BLACK AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

While reading *Born on the Water*, we learned about Black American history in the United States of America from the period of their enslavement and resistance, through their emancipation, and up to today. This is a very long time, so you might choose to learn more about one period of time. For example, you could study:

- Enslavement and resistance
- Emancipation and post-Civil War Reconstruction
- The Harlem Renaissance
- The Civil Rights Movement
- The Black Power Movement
- The Black Lives Matter Movement

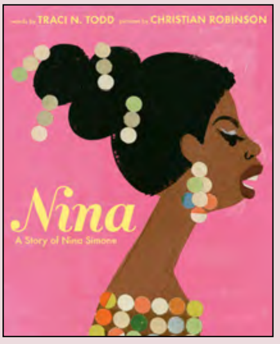


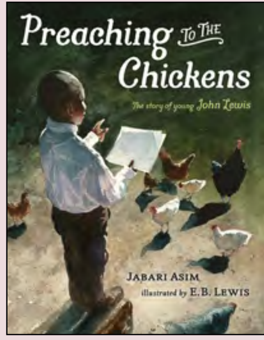


CLICK FOR FULL TEXT SET!

MODULE THREE: BLACK EXCELLENCE IN AMERICA

While reading *Born on the Water*, we learned that despite harrowing circumstances, Black Americans survived and continue to thrive. Black Americans did the grueling labor that built this nation as enslaved people who did not receive compensation. Black Americans have made and continue to make remarkable contributions to the United States of America and its culture. Research to find out more by reading several picture book biographies and stories of resistance and then choosing a person or idea to study deeply.

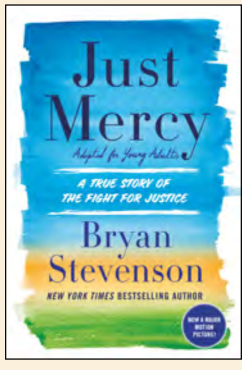


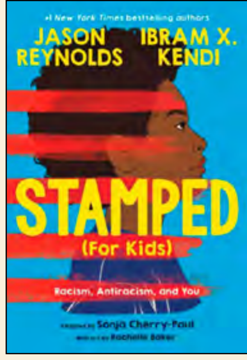


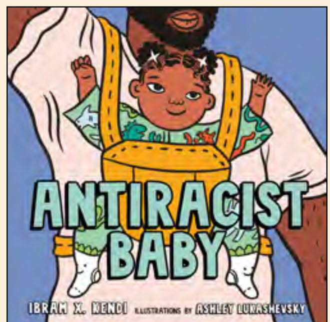
CLICK FOR FULL TEXT SET!

MODULE FOUR: BECOME AN ANTIRACIST!

While reading *Born on the Water*, we learned that White enslavers used the racist belief that the Black Africans they enslaved were inferior to justify keeping them in bondage. We also learned that this way of thinking is completely incorrect. Even still, racist ideas have been passed down as a harmful legacy and continue to have a negative impact on the lives of Black Americans today. It is possible to connect the dots between the enslavement and present-day racist outcomes for Black people. You can read from the following texts to learn more about race, the history of racism, and the ways in which people who choose to be antiracist confront racism. Study so you can learn the truth and become an antiracist, too!







CLICK FOR FULL TEXT SET!