

Name: _____ Class: _____

Betwixt & Between

Growing up African American in Revolutionary Times

By Leslie Anderson Morales
2000

During a majority of the 1700s, the Thirteen Colonies, what would eventually become the United States, were controlled by England. The colonies gained independence after the American Revolution, which lasted from 1775 to 1783. In this informational text, Leslie Anderson Morales discusses African Americans' experiences during this period of time. As you read, take notes on how African Americans were treated in the colonies.

- [1] What was it like to be African American in the 1700s? A lot depended on where you lived. An enslaved African who was one of 300 on a Virginia tobacco plantation¹ had a different life from his brother who was the only slave owned by a New York shoemaker.

Black men and women worked in many trades and occupations.² In 1770, one in five Americans were of African descent.³ Without them buildings would not have been built, farms would not have been tended, and merchants⁴ would not have grown rich.



"James Hopkins's Plantation Slaves Planting Sweet Potatoes" by Library of Congress is in the public domain.

Children worked alongside adults in the fields, kitchens, stables, and shops. Even young children had chores to do and little time to play. They survived in a world where boys and girls could be sold for \$4,500.

African Americans hated slavery and tried to escape whenever they could. Some who fled from slavery joined the British. They hoped to gain freedom in return for their labor. For example, Ralph and Nancy Henry escaped from slavery to the British lines,⁵ where their daughter, Molly, was born free.

- [5] Some enslaved men and women earned small wages from their owners. They saved for years to buy freedom for themselves, family, and friends. It was a hard struggle, though. In 1790, the first U.S. Census⁶ counted more than 750,000 African Americans. Only about 60,000 were free.

Whether slave or free, adults taught children their African heritage — history, customs, songs, and skills. It didn't matter where you or your ancestors had come from in Africa. What mattered was freedom — the freedom you had known in Africa or the freedom you dreamed of in America.

1. an area of land that has plants that are grown for food
2. jobs
3. the background of a person
4. a person who buys and sells goods for money
5. borders
6. an official count of a population

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which sentence describes the central idea of the text?
 - A. When many Africans came to America, it was under the belief that they would have freedom.
 - B. While African American men and women had to work all the time, children were allowed to play and learn.
 - C. Many enslaved African Americans were paid for their work and were able to buy their freedom eventually.
 - D. In the 1700s, many African Americans were slaves and forced to work for no, or very little, money.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Black men and women worked in many trades and occupations. In 1770, one in five Americans were of African descent." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "For example, Ralph and Nancy Henry escaped from slavery to the British lines, where their daughter, Molly, was born free." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "They saved for years to buy freedom for themselves, family, and friends. It was a hard struggle, though." (Paragraph 5)
 - D. "What mattered was freedom — the freedom you had known in Africa or the freedom you dreamed of in America." (Paragraph 6)

3. Which alternate title best expresses the main idea of the text?
 - A. How to Escape Slavery in the 1700s
 - B. Slavery in America During the 1700s
 - C. The Complete History of Slavery in America
 - D. Life in Africa Before Slavery in America

4. How does the text help readers understand how horrible it was to be a slave?

Name: _____

Date: _____

“The People Could Fly” Vocabulary

Directions: Use Google (or a dictionary) to define these four words. Next to each word, write the definition IN YOUR OWN WORDS!

Word	Definition
Croon	
Snag	
Shuffle	
Plantation	

Practice and Apply

Identify the vocabulary word that is tied in meaning to the italicized word in each question. Provide reasons for your choices.

1. Which word goes with *song*? Why?
2. Which word goes with *farm*? Why?
3. Which word goes with *thorn*? Why?
4. Which word goes with *dance*? Why?

Fill in the Blank

Fill in the blank with the correct vocabulary word. (**Croon, Snagged, Shuffles, Plantations**)

1. Walking with my daughter takes forever because she constantly _____ her feet.
2. In order to get her baby to sleep, the mom will _____ a lullabye.
3. My pants _____ on a nail and ripped open.
4. In the south, before the Civil War, many _____ used slave labor to grow their crops.

66	“The ones flyin’ were black and shinin’ sticks, wheelin’ above the head of the Overseer.”		
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Part 3- Open ended analysis. Please answer in complete sentences.

Reread lines 98-105. What theme is expressed in this paragraph?

What did the ability to fly symbolize for the slaves on this plantation, and why was it important to them?

After Toby and the people flew away, why did the Driver keep “his mouth shut” and the Master say it was “a trick of light”?

Background-- Between the 1600s and 1800s, millions of Africans were taken forcibly to the Americas as enslaved people. Their labor spurred the growth of large-scale farming in the colonies. Despite the hardships of oppression, these people nurtured a strong sense of tradition, passing stories from generation to generation. Virginia Hamilton (1934–2002) grew up listening to such stories. As an adult, she put many of them into writing and wrote a number of her own books about African American history and culture.

The People Could Fly

Retold by Virginia Hamilton

SETTING A PURPOSE As you read, think about what this folk tale says about the importance of hope in the lives of oppressed people.

They say the people could fly. Say that long ago in Africa, some of the people knew magic. And they would walk up on the air like climbin' up on a gate. And they flew like blackbirds over the fields. Black, shiny wings flappin' against the blue up there.

Then, many of the people were captured for Slavery. The ones that could fly shed their wings. They couldn't take their wings across the water on the slave ships. Too crowded, don't you know.

The folks were full of misery, then. Got sick with the up and down of the sea. So they forgot about flyin' when they could no longer breathe the sweet scent of Africa. Say the people who could fly kept their power, although they shed their wings. They kept their secret magic in the land of slavery. They looked the same as the other people from Africa who had been coming over, who had dark skin. Say you couldn't tell anymore one who could fly from one who couldn't.

One such who could was an old man, call him Toby. And standin' tall, yet afraid, was a young woman who once had wings. Call her Sarah. Now Sarah carried a babe tied to her back. She trembled to be so hard worked and scorned.

The slaves labored in the fields from sunup to sundown. The owner of the slaves callin' himself their Master. Say he was a hard lump of clay. A hard, glinty coal. A hard rock pile, wouldn't be moved. His Overseer[1] on horseback pointed out the slaves who were

slowin' down. So the one called Driver cracked his whip over the slow ones to make them move faster. That whip was a slice-open cut of pain. So they did move faster. Had to.

Sarah hoed and chopped the row as the babe on her back slept.

Say the child grew hungry. That babe started up bawling too loud. Sarah couldn't stop to feed it. Couldn't stop to soothe and quiet it down. She let it cry. She didn't want to. She had no heart to croon to it.

"Keep that thing quiet," called the Overseer. He pointed his finger at the babe. The woman scrunched low. The Driver cracked his whip across the babe anyhow. The babe hollered like any hurt child, and the woman fell to the earth.

The old man that was there, Toby, came and helped her to her feet.

"I must go soon," she told him.

"Soon," he said.

Sarah couldn't stand up straight any longer. She was too weak. The sun burned her face. The babe cried and cried, "Pity me, oh, pity me," say it sounded like. Sarah was so sad and starvin', she sat down in the row.

"Get up, you black cow," called the Overseer. He pointed his hand, and the Driver's whip snarled around Sarah's legs.

Her sack dress tore into rags. Her legs bled onto the earth.

She couldn't get up.

Toby was there where there was no one to help her and the babe.

"Now, before it's too late," panted Sarah. "Now, Father!"

"Yes, Daughter, the time is come," Toby answered. "Go, as you know how to go!"

He raised his arms, holding them out to her. "Kum . . . yali, kum buba tambe," and more magic words, said so quickly, they sounded like whispers and sighs.

The young woman lifted one foot on the air. Then the other. She flew clumsily at first, with the child now held tightly in her arms. Then she felt the magic, the African mystery. Say she rose just as free as a bird. As light as a feather.

The Overseer rode after her, hollerin'. Sarah flew over the fences. She flew over the woods. Tall trees could not snag her. Nor could the Overseer. She flew like an eagle now, until she was gone from sight. No one dared speak about it. Couldn't believe it. But it was, because they that was there saw that it was.



Say the next day was dead hot in the fields. A young man slave fell from the heat. The Driver come and whipped him. Toby come over and spoke words to the fallen one. The words of ancient Africa once heard are never remembered completely. The young man forgot them as soon as he heard them. They went way inside him. He got up and rolled over on the air. He rode it awhile. And he flew away.

Another and another fell from the heat. Toby was there. He cried out to the fallen and reached his arms out to them. "Kum kunka yali, kum . . . tambe!" Whispers and sighs. And they too rose on the air. They rode the hot breezes. The ones flyin' were black and shinin' sticks, wheelin' above the head of the Overseer. They crossed the rows, the fields, the fences, the streams, and were away.

"Seize the old man!" cried the Overseer.

"I heard him say the magic words. Seize him!"

The one callin' himself Master come runnin'. The Driver got his whip ready to curl around old Toby and tie him up. The slave owner took his hip gun from its place. He meant to kill old black Toby.

But Toby just laughed. Say he threw back his head and said, "Hee, hee! Don't you know who I am? Don't you know some of us in this field?" He said it to their faces. "We are ones who fly!"

And he sighed the ancient words that were a dark promise. He said them all around to the others in the field under the whip, "... buba yali ... buba tambe ..."

There was a great outcryin'. The bent backs straighted up. Old and young who were called slaves and could fly joined hands. Say like they would ring-sing. But they didn't shuffle in a circle. They didn't sing. They rose on the air. They flew in a flock that was black against the heavenly blue. Black crows or black shadows. It didn't matter, they went so high. Way above the plantation, way over the slavery land. Say they flew away to Free-dom.

And the old man, old Toby, flew behind them, takin' care of them. He wasn't cryin'. He wasn't laughin'. He was the seer. His gaze fell on the plantation where the slaves who could not fly waited.

"Take us with you!" Their looks spoke it, but they were afraid to shout it. Toby couldn't take them with him. Hadn't the time to teach them to fly. They must wait for a chance to run.

"Goodie-bye!" the old man called Toby spoke to them, poor souls! And he was flyin' gone.

So they say. The Overseer told it. The one called Master said it was a lie, a trick of the light. The Driver kept his mouth shut. The slaves who could not fly told about the people who could fly to their children. When they were free. When they sat close before the fire in the free land, they told it. They did so love firelight and Free-dom, and tellin'. They say that the children of the ones who could not fly told their children. And now, me, I have told it to you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

“The People Could Fly”

Part 1- Summary

Title: _____

Setting: _____

Conflict: _____

Characters: _____

Main Events:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Outcome/Resolution: _____

Put It Together in a Paragraph

“The People Could Fly” is a folktale that originated among people held captive as slaves. It is about

Part 2- Figurative Language Analysis

Page #	Figurative Language	Figurative Language Type	What does this description tell readers?
64	"Say he was a hard lump of clay. A hard, glinty coal. A hard rock pile" (Hamilton 64).	Metaphor	
65	"Say she rose just as free as a bird. As light as a feather" (Hamilton 65).		
65	"She flew like an eagle now" (Hamilton 65).		

The People Could Fly

Multiple Choice

Identify the choice that best completes the statement or answers the question.

Comprehension

Read each of the following questions. Then choose the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. Which element makes this story a folk tale?
- A It has characters with supernatural abilities.
 - B The conflict is between good and evil.
 - C It is a fictional account of a real event in history.
 - D It includes flying as a symbol for freedom.
- _____ 2. When did some of the people first have the ability to fly?
- A when they were free in Africa
 - B when they were on the slave ships
 - C when they were tired of working on the plantations
 - D when they heard Toby speak the magic words
- _____ 3. Why did the people who could fly shed their wings and stop flying?
- A because they were treated brutally on plantations
 - B because they forgot how to fly
 - C because slave owners put chains on them
 - D because they could not take their wings on the slave ships
- _____ 4. What causes Sarah, the young man slave, and the others to fly away?
- A The Driver whips them.
 - B They fall from the heat.
 - C They suddenly grow wings again.
 - D Toby says the magic words from Africa.
- _____ 5. What type of figurative language is in the phrase "She flew like an eagle"?
- A metaphor
 - B personification
 - C simile
 - D dialect
- _____ 6. Which metaphor is used to describe the Master of the plantation?
- A a dark promise
 - B black and shinin' stick
 - C a slice-open cut of pain
 - D a hard lump of clay

Name: _____

ID: A

- _____ 7. What did the ones who could not fly do in the end?
- A They learned to fly later when Toby returned.
 - B They told the story to their children who eventually became free.
 - C They refused to believe that the other people could fly.
 - D They sang out joyfully to celebrate their friends' freedom.

Vocabulary

Choose the answer that best explains the meaning of each underlined word.

- _____ 8. To croon means to
- A speak magic words.
 - B fly to great heights.
 - C cry out in pain.
 - D sing softly.
- _____ 9. What might happen if you were to snag your pants on a nail.
- A Your pants would be hanging in a closet.
 - B The nail would rip a hole in your pants.
 - C Your pants would feel very tight.
 - D The nail would make your pants legs shorter.
- _____ 10. How would a person who shuffles be moving?
- A slowly
 - B quickly
 - C vertically
 - D impatiently

Short Answer

Written Response

Answer the following questions based on your knowledge of the story.

1. What did the ability to fly symbolize for the slaves on this plantation, and why was it important to them?
2. After Toby and the people flew away, why did the Driver keep "his mouth shut" and the Master say it was "a trick of light"?

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Name: _____

Date: _____

“The People Could Fly”

Part 1- Summary

Title: _____

Setting: _____

Conflict: _____

Characters: _____

Main Events:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Outcome/Resolution: _____

Put It Together in a Paragraph

“The People Could Fly” is a folktale that originated among people held captive as slaves. It is about

Part 2- Figurative Language Analysis

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The People Could Fly Answer Section

MULTIPLE CHOICE

- | | |
|------------|--------|
| 1. ANS: A | PTS: 8 |
| 2. ANS: A | PTS: 8 |
| 3. ANS: D | PTS: 8 |
| 4. ANS: D | PTS: 8 |
| 5. ANS: C | PTS: 8 |
| 6. ANS: D | PTS: 8 |
| 7. ANS: B | PTS: 8 |
| 8. ANS: D | PTS: 8 |
| 9. ANS: B | PTS: 8 |
| 10. ANS: A | PTS: 8 |

SHORT ANSWER

- ANS:
For the slaves on this plantation, the ability to fly symbolized freedom. This ability gave them hope that their trouble would some day end. For people who are enslaved and suffering terrible cruelty, that would be a very important thing to hope for, and it would help them endure the injustice.

PTS: 10
- ANS:
The Driver and the Master did not want to admit that some of the people could fly. They did not want to acknowledge it because it would give the slaves who were left behind hope that they too could be free someday.

PTS: 10