

LESSON PLAN – READING *THE PEOPLE COULD FLY* (GRADES 3-5)

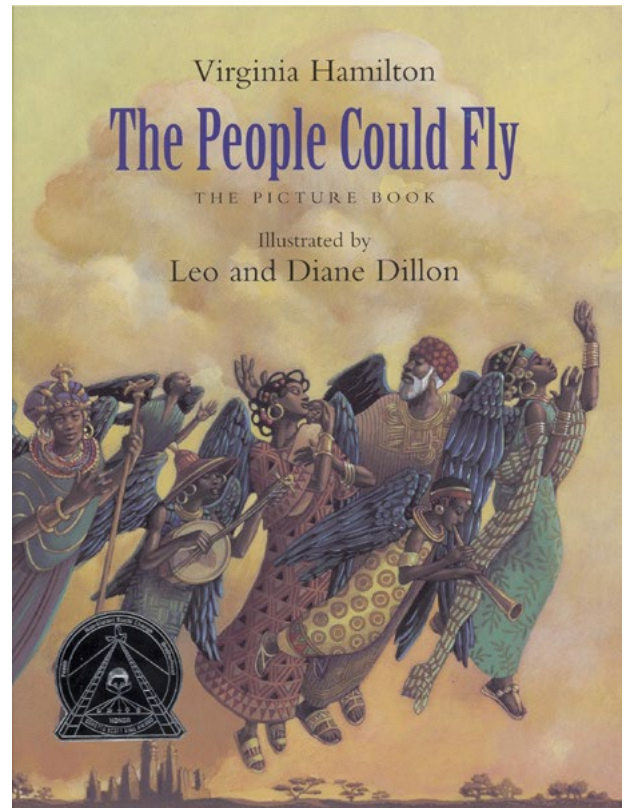
OBJECTIVE: Introduce students to *The People Could Fly: The Picture Book* and the remarkable power of those who escaped the horrible conditions of slavery.

CONTENT AREA: Art, English, Social Studies

TIME ALLOTMENT: One class period (could be extended)

SKILLS: Reading, comprehension, analysis and cultural competency

DESCRIPTION: Explore a notable African-American folktale re-imagined by Virginia Hamilton. This story, in which an old man, tired of the abuse he and others are suffering under the violence of slavery, reclaims his people's magic and power and helps them to liberate themselves. This is a story about the triumph of the human spirit and the fight for freedom.



TEACHER TIP: Great lesson plan for remote learning opportunities and Black History Month. Consider the following terms and how they are reflected in *The People Could Fly*:

Symbolism – An object that stands for a concept or idea

Characterization – How someone or something is reflected

Metaphor – An expression used to reflect a similarity between two things without using “like” or “as”

Allusion – An indirect reference to something

PRE-READING ACTIVITY I

Introduce students to the vocabulary words. On one sheet of paper ask students to draw a picture reflecting these vocabulary words.

- » **folktale** (n): a tale told orally and passed down from generation to generation
- » **tremble** (v): to move or shake quickly from side to side
- » **overseer** (n): a person who manages and directs workers

- » **seize** (v): to grab; to take hold of
- » **outcry** (n): to shout in protest
- » **plantation** (n): a large farm where crops are grown to be sold
- » **ancient** (n): old; belonging to the long past
- » **scorn** (n): extreme dislike and lack of respect
- » **holler** (v): yell or cry out loudly and suddenly

PRE-READING ACTIVITY II

Ask students to create three columns on one sheet of paper. The heading on the left column should be “What I Know”. The heading on the middle column should be “What I Want to Know.” The heading on the final column should be “What I Learned.”

Provide students up to two minutes to flip through the book, only looking at the illustrations. When the time is up, have students fill out the columns “What I Know” and “What I Want to Know.”

READING

Read *The People Could Fly* by Virginia Hamilton and illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. Alternatively, visit the website below to watch a video reading of the book courtesy of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library.

CML Presents: The People Could Fly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uitNI3iPrmM>

POST-READING ACTIVITY I

Ask students the following questions:

- » Why do the enslaved people of Africa forget their magic?
- » We are told that the captured people of Africa have to discard their wings. What do the wings symbolize?
- » Why do you believe Toby remembers the magic of his people?
- » Why do you think Toby and Sarah wait so long before using their magic?
- » Toby alludes to the fate of those he had to leave behind. What do you think happens to them?
- » Why do the people who cannot fly share the tales of those who could?
- » Why does the Master of the plantation deny the stories of the enslaved people flying away?
- » Who is telling the story and what do we know about the narrator?
- » What have you learned? Fill out the “What I Learned” column.

POST-READING ACTIVITY II

Unpack the symbolism of flight. The ability to fly is common in children’s literature. In the book, flight is the ability to escape enslavement, and many enslaved people did exactly that with the help of a network of allies known as the Underground Railroad.

If possible, ask students to take a trip to the banks of the Ohio River and find a safe place to sit. The area along the banks was the gateway to freedom for many freedom seekers heading north. Ask students to create a poster of the landscape with their own interpretation of freedom seekers crossing the river.

SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIVITY

Students may want to learn more about the illustrators, Leo and Diane Dillon. Use the following discussion questions:

- » Take a look at the book covers created by Leo and Diane Dillon. You can see more at this website: <http://leo-and-diane-dillon.blogspot.com/>
- » What do you think each book is about? What story does the artwork tell? What questions do the covers raise and answer?
- » Create a cover for the book of your life! What colors would you use? What symbols? What message are you trying to convey?

For more online learning resources, visit freedomcenter.org