

Night Journey to Vicksburg by Susan Rowan Masters takes place in the spring of 1863 during the American Civil War. It is the story of 13-year-old Jubilee and his two younger sisters, May Belle and Anna, who flee their Louisiana plantation in search of freedom. Their older friend, Henry Long, wakes Jubi one April night to tell him that he and his sisters are to be sold the next day, most likely to different owners. He brings them new clothes and a small amount of food, drawing a map in the dirt floor of their shack to show them how to escape. Along the way, the three runaways are tormented by mosquitoes, discovered by Rebel soldiers, and adopted by a lost dog. Jubi saves the life of a wounded Union officer, Lieutenant Dunlap, by bandaging a serious gunshot wound in his leg. The officer asks Jubi to bring crucial information to General Grant about a safe landing spot for Union ships. Jubi travels over five miles to deliver the information and is rewarded with freedom, proper care and nourishment, and a family name.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Before reading *Night Journey to Vicksburg* discuss with your students what they already know about the Civil War. After sharing responses, read the title and tell them the story takes place in 1863, a few months before the surrender of Vicksburg to the Union army.

Some questions for discussion might be:

- This story takes place in 1863. What were the major events happening in America and around the world during this time? Where does it fit in chronologically with other events you are studying?
- Look at the cover illustration. Describe what you think is happening. Why are these people traveling at night? What is the significance of Vicksburg?
- Look at the map on the inside cover of the book. Read the names of the places listed. Have students been to these cities or states? What are their impressions of these areas now?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Literature • Social Studies • Art • Science • Health

1. After reading all or part of the book, discuss historical fiction as a type of literature, a mixture of fact and fiction. Some of the people mentioned in the story actually existed and many of the events really occurred. Even those characters that are created by the author probably shared some of the experiences and feelings of real people. Discuss how the reader can distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. Groups of students might try researching events and people mentioned in the story using sources such as the internet, encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, historical documents, newspapers, etc. Have a mini-lesson on how to use these sources and a class “debriefing.” What names and events could they read about in other sources? Which were most likely created by the author?

2. This story exposes children to what life may have been like for three young runaway slaves in 1863, but there is so much more to learn about this time period. Encourage your students to dig a little deeper into the past to discover more information:
 - What else can you learn about life in the south in the mid 1800s? There is a wealth of information on the internet that students can explore. Stock your class library with books about the Civil War and life in America during this time period.
 - While Jubi and his sisters never made a stop on the Underground Railroad, they left their plantation heading for a specific house with a password ready. Encourage your students to read more about this interesting network that led many slaves to freedom.
 - Find out more about the Battle of Vicksburg. Read the historical postscript and search the internet and other books on the Civil War to learn more about this decisive battle. What other decisive battle took place in early July 1863?
3. Jubi was faced with a momentous decision the night Henry Long woke him and convinced him to escape. There were many risks involved in leaving, yet the potential benefits eventually swayed him to go. On chart paper write the question “Should Jubi run away?” and underneath make a T-chart with “pros” above one column and “cons” above the other. As a class, begin filling out the chart, inviting children to add to it later if they think of more examples. Later, have them reflect on a serious decision they have or had to make, and make a T-chart in their reading journals listing the “pros” and “cons” to their question. Students may like to share these with a partner or reading group.
4. Two hymns are recorded on pages 10 and 16. Singing hymns was one of the few pleasures and means of solace slaves enjoyed. Their music has had a tremendous influence on American music ever since. Do a class exploration of the music slaves sang—perhaps your school music teacher could help with some of the research. This study may prompt an interest in music from the past. Encourage students to interview their parents and grandparents about music that has offered them solace or has special meaning to them. If possible, students could bring in tapes to share with the class.
5. On pages 34, 37, and 45 Jubi and his sister “lie” and “steal” to save their lives. Ask students to find and read these examples aloud. Have a discussion about whether it is ever right to do this and what circumstances might make it okay. If students are interested, this may be a good opportunity to introduce them to moral philosophy. You could read a bit from Kant, Gandhi, Montaigne, Sissela Bok, or one of your favorite philosophers who writes about lying or stealing. Another idea is to invite some high school students from a debate team in to teach your students about debating and have them stage a debate with your students.
6. The chapters in this book lend themselves well to creating skits. Invite groups of 4–5 students to choose different chapters to perform for the rest of the class. Costumes and scenery aren’t necessary. Just have students reread the chapter, then act out the main idea. Such dramatization is a fun way to review the story for the whole class. After each skit, ask students to share comments and questions with the actors.

STORY EXTENSIONS

Back to Basics

It is obvious that Jubi and his sisters are very poor. They received only one pair of new clothes and shoes per year, and when times were really tough, they went barefoot (page 4). The only record of their birth was a birth stick their mother made a notch in every year (page 14). When they got sick or bitten by mosquitoes, there was no medicine from the pharmacy, but rather natural remedies like onion leaves to deaden the itching (page 42).

Students may be interested in learning more about natural medicine, still practiced widely around the world. While we are lucky to have the medicine and doctors that Jubi and his sisters never had, it is wise to know some natural ways of healing, too. Through books, the internet, and people in your community, collect a list of "natural remedies" to cure common complaints such as mosquito bites, sore throats, cuts, etc. Ask each student to make a page in a class book, listing a complaint and its natural cure, leaving space at the bottom for students to comment about its effectiveness when they try it.

Students could also make their own "birth sticks," using magic markers to notch their age. If students have baby books or growth charts from their own early years that they would like to share, you might make a class display, including the birth sticks, showing how different families at different times mark the growth of their children.

In the Kitchen

Journey with Jubi by cooking up the foods he and his sisters shared along the way. Peek inside the croker sack Henry Long gives to Jubi and you will find old-fashioned cornbread called hoecakes as well as a chunk of salt pork.

HOECAKES are thin cornbread originally baked on the blade of a hoe over an open fire (pgs. 23-24). You will need 1-1/2 cups cornmeal, 3 tbs. self-rising flour (or 3 tbs. regular flour and 1/2 tsp. of baking powder), 1 tsp. salt (or to taste), hot water, oil, a large bowl, a large spoon, a spatula, and a griddle. Combine the salt, flour, and cornmeal in the bowl, adding enough hot water to make a batter. Pour a little oil on the griddle. When it sizzles, add half the batter. Let the cake brown on one side. Then, adding a little oil first, flip to the other side. When done, repeat with the other half of the batter.

SALT PORK is pork cut from the belly or underside of the hog, preserved in brine in large barrels (pgs. 23-24). You will need salt pork (thick slices of bacon can be substituted), ground pepper, potatoes and cabbage (optional), and a kettle. (Note: As salt pork shrinks during cooking, select a piece one-third larger than seems necessary to feed the class.) Place the pork in the kettle, cover with water, and bring to a boil. As soon as the water boils pour it off to remove the salt. Pour on more boiling water at once. Boil very slowly, almost simmering, until done. When tender take it out, remove the skin and bones, and sprinkle with freshly ground pepper. Serve with plain potatoes and cabbage, each boiled separately.

STUDY GUIDE

NIGHT JOURNEY to Vicksburg



by Susan Rowan Masters

