



Finding “Home”: Navigating Heritage and Identity in Slave Narratives and Multicultural Texts

“Long as you remember, chile, nothin’ ain’t ever really gone”

Text Overview

Copper Sun tells the story of fifteen-year-old Amari’s journey from her life in slavery to freedom. After watching her family die and being captured by slave traders in West Africa, Amari survives the Middle Passage journey only to be sold into slavery in South Carolina. At the plantation, she experiences unimaginable cruelty, but also finds community among the slaves and a white indentured servant named Polly, who shares in the text’s narration. Amari, Polly, and a slave boy named Tidbit escape to Fort Mose in Spanish territory and find the promise of a new home.

Recommendation

I recommend that *Copper Sun* be used as a bridge to other historical fiction or literary slave narrative texts. Reluctant adolescent readers will find the narrators’ voices and emerging conceptions of family and freedom familiar as they simultaneously encounter the cultural and historical worlds of African village life, the transatlantic slave trade, plantation slavery, and European colonial conflict.

Connections

Copper Sun could pair well with *Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe), *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Harriet Jacobs), *Beloved*, *A Mercy*, (both Toni Morrison), The Library of Congress’ Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, or other slave narrative texts. The text’s title comes from the poem “Heritage” by Countee Cullen, which provides a connection to works from the Harlem Renaissance.

Formative Assessment

Students may write journal entries or short narrative pieces about a family heirloom, story, or cultural practice in order to show what it conveys about their family’s culture and what similarities and/or differences they see between their family and the larger cultures in which they live.

Summative Assessment

Students may create a character map to illustrate the shifting familial relationships in the text. To accompany their character map, they may write an analytical essay or a creative piece demonstrating how one character preserves and/or recreates part of their family heritage.

Valuing Diversity, Difference and Social Justice

Copper Sun could be used with other multicultural texts that promote cultural pluralism to discuss the preservation of cultural heritage through storytelling, an ideal embodied in Amari’s stories about her Ewe tribe and interrogated by the text’s epigraph, an excerpt from “Heritage” by Countee Cullen. The text provides ample material for discussion of the dehumanization of slavery and the trauma caused by the destruction of families in the slave trade. In addition, the text’s inclusion of Polly’s narrative voice could also lead to discussion about the dehumanization of cyclical poverty and how our views of others may reinforce or challenge cultural norms.