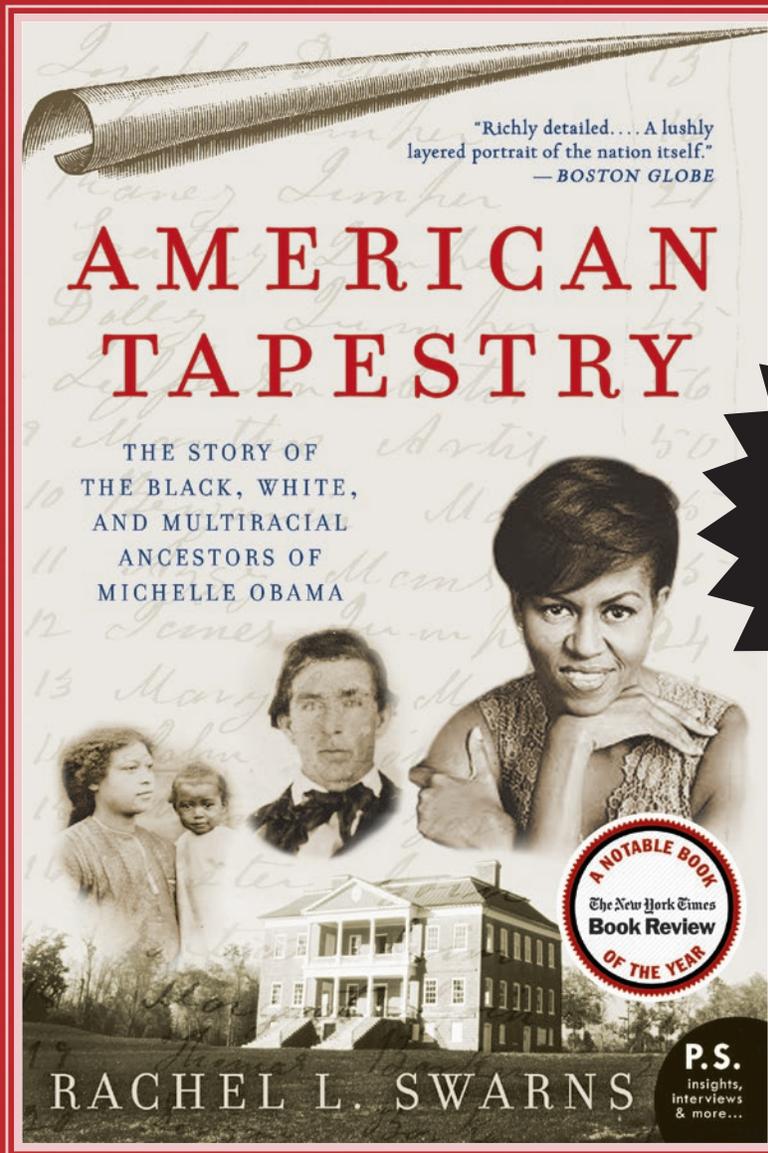


# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



**ALIGNED  
TO THE  
COMMON  
CORE**

“Reaching back to the Revolutionary War and moving up through the present with rich and illustrative detail, Swarns shows the ways in which Mrs. Obama’s family was touched by every major shift in the nation’s history. This is a most compelling read and more evidence for our interconnectedness as a people.”

—Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard University professor  
and host and executive producer of PBS’s *Finding Your Roots*



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## About This Book

In *American Tapestry: The Story of the Black, White, and Multiracial Ancestors of Michelle Obama* the author, Rachel L. Swarns, details the recently discovered family history of the First Lady of the United States. It is the remarkable story of an American family that went from slavery to the White House in five generations, and it is a history that provides a very personal and relevant lens with which to view American history from the 1800's to 2012. Swarns masterfully shows how history can be lost through distance and silence, and then reclaimed using research and DNA technology. Although Michelle Obama's family's story deals with a painful chapter in our nation's history, it is, in the end, both a message of hope and a powerful reminder of the American Dream.

*American Tapestry: The Story of the Black, White, and Multiracial Ancestors of Michelle Obama* meets the standard for **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity** for all high school grade levels. Schools are encouraged to adopt the text at the grade level where it best fits with ELA and Social Studies curriculum. It is a perfect compliment to courses in American History, American Literature, and Multicultural Literature.

The questions and activities in this teaching guide were written to support standards-based instruction and are directly linked to many of the Common Core State Standards for ELA and Social Studies. The primary areas of connection are in the ELA standards for **Reading: Informational Texts** for grades 11–12 and in the literacy standards for **Key Ideas and Details** and **Craft and Structure in History/Social Studies**. A complete list of the Common Core State Standards can be found at <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards>.

## BEFORE YOU READ

Ask students to create a family tree from memory. How many generations can they identify? Spend some time discussing how family history gets lost and how it gets preserved. How does it make them feel to think that one day their descendants may not be able to name them? Why is it important to learn about our own family history? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1**

## NOTE TO TEACHERS

*American Tapestry* reveals a family history that is as rich and complex and the history of our nation. The interwoven narratives may be, at times, a challenge for students to contextualize. As you begin a study of this book, teachers are encouraged to use large sheets of chart paper for each of Michelle Obama's ancestors to create a family tree in the classroom (a complete genealogy chart can be found on the front and end pages of the book). Students should fill in each person's chart with key facts and details that they discover during their reading. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4**

## OTHER RESOURCES

For additional guides aligned to the common core, please visit [academic.hc.com/commoncore](http://academic.hc.com/commoncore)

## Prologue

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Rachel L. Swarns says that Melvinia's decision to stay in Jonesboro, Georgia after the end of the Civil War was "the only message Melvinia would ever leave." What message do you think her choice might be sending? What could it suggest about her relationship with the white man that fathered her children?
2. How long did Melvinia stay in Jonesboro before she headed north?
3. How many generations separate Melvinia and her descendant Michelle Obama?
4. When did Michelle Obama learn about Melvinia? How much of her ancestry did she know about when her husband was elected as President of the United States?
5. How many of your direct ancestors (grandparents, great grandparents) do you know by name? How much information do you know about them?
6. How are Jewell Barclay and Joan Tribble connected to Michelle Obama? Describe the similarities and differences between Ms. Barclay and Ms. Tribble.
7. What information about her ancestry did Michelle Obama share with guests at the first Thanksgiving dinner that she hosted in the White House? What did she say about the way learning that one of her direct ancestors had been a slave affected her?
8. How did Ms. Barclay and Ms. Tribble find out about their potential connection to Michelle Obama? Describe their reactions to the news. Why was it more difficult for Ms. Tribble to accept?
9. Describe the primary sources that Ms. Swarns used to research Michelle Obama's family ancestry.
10. Was it surprising for you to learn how prevalent mixed-race ancestry was in the late 1800s? At that time, was it legal for people of different races to marry or have children together?
11. What factors make it especially difficult to trace the ancestry of many African American families?
12. As First Lady of the United States, how did Michelle Obama bring attention to the issue of slavery?
13. Explain how DNA testing could help answer questions about Michelle Obama's ancestry.
14. At the end of the prologue, Swarns writes that "Even in these contemporary times, when so many Americans embrace their multiracial roots, there are those among the living would prefer such old secrets to sleep with the dead, to remain untouched, unresolved." If your family history contained a potentially painful secret, would you want to know about it? Explain your answer.

## Part I: Migration

### PHOEBE THE WANDERER

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What are the connotations of the word “wanderer”? What type of personality do you think a person needs to become a wanderer?
2. How long after the Civil War was Phoebe Moten born? Would she have been born free or a slave? Would she have known people that had been enslaved?
3. What are sharecroppers? How is sharecropping different from slavery? How is it similar?
4. How old was Phoebe when she left Villa Ridge and headed north?
5. Define the term “mulatto.” What are the connotations of this word today? What were the connotations of the word in the 1800’s?
6. After the Civil War, why did many people with multiracial roots choose to stay quiet about their parentage?
7. Right after the Civil War, what was life in Villa Ridge like for African Americans? How did it begin to change in the mid 1880s?
8. What personal tragedies preceded Phoebe’s decision to leave Villa Ridge?
9. Who was Phoebe’s first husband? Why did Phoebe select a December wedding date? What tragedy struck shortly after their union? How did this tragedy affect Phoebe?
10. What was “housekeeping”? What were the benefits of this type of work? What were the drawbacks? How did Phoebe’s decision to seek work as a domestic shape the rest of her life?

### ST. LOUIS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What sorts of stories did Phoebe tell her children? What do these stories reveal about her personality?
2. What record exists to let historians know that Phoebe briefly lived in Edwardsville?
3. Describe Phoebe’s second husband, James Preston Johnson. Why was he a good fit for Phoebe? What secret did she keep from him?
4. Where did Phoebe and James move? What was the city like at the turn of the century?
5. Describe the living conditions for poor immigrants and migrants in the city of St. Louis.
6. What were race relations like in St. Louis? What sorts of opportunities did African Americans have?
7. What did John W. Wheeler, owner of the black newspaper, Palladium, urge parents to do?
8. Where did Phoebe and James go after leaving St. Louis? What events may have led to their decision to move?

## SIREN SONG OF THE NORTH

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Explain the allusion in this chapter's title. What does the use of the term "siren song" foreshadow about life in the North?
2. Explain the term "Great Migration".
3. Why did Carrie Tinsley Coleman and her husband, John, move North? Where did they end up settling?
4. At the turn of the century, what was life like for African Americans in Baltimore? What sorts of opportunities were available?
5. Around 1910, the racial climate in Baltimore began to change. Describe some of the ordinances that were put in place.
6. How did Carrie and John end up caring for Rebecca Jumper Coleman? How is Rebecca related to Michelle Obama?
7. Where did the Colemans move after adopting Rebecca? What might have led them to decide to relocate?

## A FAMILY GROWS IN CHICAGO

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What tragedy befell Phoebe's family after they moved to Chicago? What helped her get through this difficult time?
2. How was life in Chicago different than life in the South had been for African Americans?
3. Describe the social and economic advantages available to African Americans with lighter skin. Why do you think these advantages existed? If having the physical indicators of mixed-race ancestry was a social advantage, why did many African Americans choose not to talk about their family history?
4. What prestigious job did James land? What factors helped make this job a social stepping-stone for African American men?
5. How is LaVaughn Robinson related to Michelle Obama?
6. What was the racial climate like in Chicago during LaVaughn's childhood?
7. Explain how World War I created economic opportunities for African Americans and led to the first big wave of the Great Migration.
8. What was significant about living in Hyde Park?

## EXPLODING DREAMS

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How did white residents of Hyde Park respond to the black families that purchased homes in the neighborhood? Why did they react this way?
2. Why was the summer of 1919 known as the "Red Summer"? What factors contributed to the outbreak of racial violence?
3. How did Phoebe react to the increasingly hostile environment? How would you have responded?
4. Where did James and Phoebe move after leaving Chicago? How did this move change the lives of their children?
5. What role did education play in the lives of James and Phoebe's children?
6. Describe LaVaughn's childhood in Evanston.
7. When did the Johnson family decide to leave Evanston? What factors may have contributed to their decision to move on?

## A CHILD OF THE JAZZ AGE

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How is Purnell Shields related to Michelle Obama? How is he related to Dolphus Shields and Melvinia?
2. Where was Purnell born? What was the racial climate in Alabama like in the 1920s? Why did he and his mother, Annie, move to Chicago?
3. Who was Oscar De Priest?
4. Describe Purnell's interest in jazz music. What has Michelle Obama said she remembers about her grandfather?

## A MAN OF PROMISE

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How is Fraser Robinson Jr. related to Michelle Obama?
2. Where did Fraser grow up?
3. What stood out about Fraser when he was a child and young adult? What subjects and activities did he excel in?
4. How did the Bethel AME church respond to the decision of the Boy Scouts of America not to accept African American scouts?
5. How much information about their family history did Fraser Sr. share with his children? What hints about his life suggest that his ancestors may have been enslaved?
6. What city did Fraser Jr. decide to move after he graduated from high school? Why did he decide to go North?
7. Summarize the possible reasons for Fraser's involvement in the Full Gospel Mission church.

## STUMBLING BACKWARDS

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. After she separated from her husband James how did life change for Phoebe?
2. How was Phoebe's life in Chicago different from the life she led with James before moving to Evanston?
3. How old was LaVaughn when her parents separated? What did LaVaughn do to help her mother?
4. How did Phoebe respond to adversity? What does her response tell you about her personality?
5. Describe the role the church played in the lives of Phoebe and LaVaughn. Which church did they choose to attend? Why do you think it appealed to them?

## LOVE IN HARD TIMES

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What did Purnell Shields and Rebecca Jumper Coleman have in common? How old were they when they got married?
2. How did Fraser Robinson Jr. and LaVaughn Johnson meet?
3. Explain the similarities in the early years of the married lives of Rebecca and LaVaughn, Mrs. Obama's maternal and pater-

nal grandmothers.

4. How did the Great Depression affect the Shields and Robinson families?
5. Why do Fraser's children suspect that their father may have witnessed or experienced racially motivated violence while growing up in South Carolina?
6. Why were Michelle Obama's grandparents passionate about exercising their right to vote?
7. Describe Purnell Robinson's attitude concerning racism. Why might he have felt this way?
8. What event significantly strained Fraser's relationship with his mother and siblings?
9. What events created stress in Fraser and LaVaughn's marriage? What was the result of this stress?

## STRUGGLE AND STRIVING

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How did the Fraser and LaVaughn's separation affect LaVaughn's relationship with her mother Phoebe?
2. What type of work was LaVaughn able to get? Why was she able to avoid being stuck working as in domestic services? Was she able to support her children and herself on her salary?
3. What values did LaVaughn instill in her sons? What talents did she encourage them to cultivate?
4. How did serving in the military during World War II change Fraser?
5. After returning from the war Fraser began to be involved in his son's lives. In what ways do you think he was a good father? In what ways was he a less-than-perfect father? What values do you think he passed on to his children?
6. Rachel L. Swarns uses the term "pioneer" to describe Phoebe Moten Johnson. In what ways does Phoebe embody this description? What values do you think she passed down to her descendants? What information did she keep from her children and grandchildren?
7. What event led to the reconciliation of LaVaughn and Fraser? Why was their daughter surprised to learn that her parents had been separated before she was born?
8. What "lessons" did Fraser teach his sons about interacting with white men and women? What do these "lessons" suggest about Fraser's personal experiences with racism?
9. How important was education in the Robinson family?
10. Who is Marian Shields? How did she meet Fraser "Diddley" Robinson III? How are they related to Michelle Obama?
11. What interests did Purnell Shields pass down to his grandchildren? What information did he withhold from them?
12. Why do members of the Robinson and Shields families suspect their parents and grandparents chose not to discuss their ancestry with them?

## THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH: CLEVELAND

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Explain how Michelle Obama's grandfather, Purnell Shields, and Jewell Barclay are related. What common ancestor do they share? How did their families get separated?
2. Describe Jewell's interactions with her grandfather, Dolphus Shields. Did he tell her anything about his mother, Melvinia, and his father?
3. What did the family assume about the father of Dolphus Shields? What did they assume about the circumstances surrounding his conception and birth?
4. What modern tool did Rachel L. Swarns use to unlock the secret of Dolphus' parentage? Explain how this testing process works. Why did Jewell agree to help?

## Part II: The Demise of Reconstruction and the Rise of Jim Crow

### A MAN ON THE RISE

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Approximately how old was Dolphus Shields when the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect? How much do you think he remembered about his time in bondage?
2. Describe the racial climate in Georgia immediately following the Civil War.
3. Dolphus was said to have possessed both drive and ambition. What career did he choose to pursue? Why was this a good choice for cultivating his talent and ambition?
4. How did slave owners attempt to use religion to control their human property? Were they successful?
5. Describe the rise of the black church in the South and the role pastors and deacons played in the African American community.
6. What specific skills did Dolphus have that set him apart from the majority of African American men of his time? Where do some of his descendants speculate that he may have learned some of these skills?
7. Who did Dolphus marry? Explain the connection that she had to Dolphus mother, Melvinia. Do you think their reunion was an act of chance, or did they purposefully seek each other out after Emancipation? Explain your answer.
8. After Emancipation, what steps did white lawmakers in Georgia take in an attempt to take the right to vote away from African American men?
9. Why did Dolphus decide to leave Cartersville? Who did he leave behind?

### LEFT BEHIND

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What natural resources helped make Birmingham the industrial capital of the New South? What images do you associate with the Birmingham's nickname: "Magic City"?
2. What were living conditions like in Birmingham? What percentage of the city's population was African American? Why was Birmingham an appealing place for people to migrate to?

3. What trade did Dolphus Shields practice? How successful was he?
4. Examine the ways that the demise of Dolphus and Alice's marriage impacted each of them? Who had the most difficult time? What does their story reveal about the opportunities available to women? How much have things changed since then?
5. What trade did Melvinia begin to practice after Dolphus moved to Birmingham? What do you think her choice of career reveals about her?
6. How was Henry Shields different from his brother Dolphus? What skills did Dolphus have that gave him significant advantages in life? Where do you think he learned these skills? What did people who knew Melvinia (Mr. Wise and Mrs. Applin) suspect about her Dolphus and Henry's father? Why do you think Melvinia never talked about her life in Jonesboro?
7. Why does the fact that Henry was born well after the end of the Civil War create ambiguity concerning the relationship between Melvinia and Dolphus and Henry's suspected white father?
8. Explain the steps that Georgia's white legislators took to marginalize blacks. Why do you think they believed it was necessary to keep African Americans from being able to vote? What reason did they give in an attempt to justify lynching?
9. How do you think the racially motivated violence in Cartersville affected Melvinia and Henry? How would it have affected you?
10. Contrast the relationships that Dolphus had with his extended family with Henry's relationships. What was their relationship like with each other? Why do you think two men had such different experiences? How does their relationships help explain how branches of a family tree can become distant and divided over time?

## NEITHER BLACK NOR WHITE

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Describe Jerry Suter. What remarkable things did he accomplish during his lifetime? How prosperous was he? How is he connected to Phoebe Moten?
2. What is about photographs of Mary Moten that suggests that she had a complex racial lineage? What do her descendants believe about her racial heritage?
3. Why did Jerry change his last name from "Sutton" to "Suter"? How does this sort of name change make tracing ancestry difficult?
4. Discuss the complexity of racial categorization in the latter part of the nineteenth century. How did government census takers classify people of multiracial origin? What advantages were associated with being multiracial? What decisions about identity did people of mixed race backgrounds have to make?
5. How is Jim Jumper related to Michelle Obama? What circumstances caused him to become immersed in the African American community rather than staying within a circle of others with similar multiracial heritage or assimilating into white society? Who did Jim choose to marry? How would his choice impact his descendants?
6. Who are Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois? Why did they want the census bureau to drop the mulatto category from census records? When was the category dropped?
7. What did Booker T. Washington believe about the South? Do you agree or disagree with him? Why would African Americans have wanted to leave the South? Why might they have wanted to stay?
8. What happened to Jim and Eliza Jumper? What happened to their children?

## THE RECKONING

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How is Fraser Robinson Sr. related to Michelle Obama? Where did he grow up? How many generations was he from slavery?
2. How did Fraser Sr. lose his arm?
3. Who was Frank Nesmith? How did he change the course of Fraser Sr.'s life?
4. What was unusual about race relationships in Georgetown, South Carolina? Explain the compromise that allowed African Americans in Georgetown to exert political influence.
5. Describe the event that caused an outbreak of racially charged violence in Georgetown. How old would Fraser Sr. have been at the time? How do his descendants suspect the violence may have affected him?
6. What was the goal of the "White Supremacy Club"? Describe the tactics that they used to accomplish their goal.

## BIRMINGHAM, THE MAGIC CITY

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How did Dolphus Shields become involved in the creation of Trinity Baptist Church?
2. In addition to being places for worship, what other roles did the church play in African American communities?
3. What was Dolphus Shields' one weakness? How many wives did he have? How do you think this could have impacted how close his children and grandchildren stayed with one another?
4. Describe the steps that white officials took to segregate Birmingham. Were you surprised to learn that segregation was instituted well after the end of the Civil War? What specific changes in the way that African Americans were treated did Dolphus experience in his own life?
5. What personal family tragedies did Dolphus experience? How does so much loss appear to have changed him?
6. Who is Robert Lee Shields? Which one of Dolphus' wives was his mother? What was his mother's life like after Dolphus left her?
7. What was Robert Lee's career? What happened to his wife, Annie, and his son, Purnell, after Robert Lee died? In time, what happened to Purnell's relationship with his grandfather and cousins?

## TWO BROTHERS, TWO DESTINIES

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What was the racial climate like in Kingston, Georgia during Henry Shields' lifetime?
2. What family responsibilities did Henry assume? How often did his older brother, Dolphus, visit? What were those visits like? Describe the relationship between Henry and Dolphus. Was their relationship made stronger or weaker after their mother's death?
3. What name did the coroner write on Melvinia's death certificate? Does anyone know how he got that name? Where do you think it could have come from? What possible inaccuracies and omissions were on Melvinia's death certificate?
4. How did Henry Shields die? How was he remembered? How do you think he should be remembered?

## THE ONE-ARMED PATRIARCH

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What is a “patriarch”? Explain the paradox in the title of this chapter.
2. Describe Fraser Sr.’s public personality. What factors do you think contributed to his success?
3. Who did Fraser Sr. marry? What does her name suggest about her family’s history?
4. Many of Michelle Obama’s forbearers, including Fraser Sr., made the choice to integrate or live in integrated neighborhoods at a time when most communities were segregated. What factors do you think led to their decision to seek out integrated areas for their families?
5. What type of father was Fraser Sr.? What positive values did he instill in his children? What characteristics do his grandchildren suspect he passed down to his son, Fraser Jr.?
6. Why do you think Rosella kept her family history a secret?
7. How did Michelle Obama first learn about her father’s family’s ties to slavery?

## TWILIGHT

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Describe Dolphus Shields’ standing and reputation in his community. Create a list some of his significant accomplishments. Which accomplishment do you think he would have been the most proud of? Explain your answer.
2. Who is Bobbie Holt? How is she connected to Dolphus Shields?
3. How did the city of Birmingham change during Dolphus’ lifetime?
4. How did Dolphus respond to racial violence and discrimination? Did he seem bitter or angry? In what specific ways was he able to bridge the racial gap?
5. Who was Charles McClelland “Mack” Shields? What are the similarities between Mack and Dolphus Shields? How does Bobbie Holt suspect the two men may have been related?
6. What characteristics did Dolphus Shields share with Birmingham’s black elite? What was the one thing that separated him from being a part of the privileged class?
7. When Dolphus Shields died, someone placed a question mark in the place for his father’s name. Do you think he knew who his father was? Defend your answer.
8. What legislative milestone occurred at the same time as Dolphus’ death? What did this ruling suggest about the future of civil rights in America?

## THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH: ATLANTA

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How did the white descendants of Henry Shields find out that their ancestor owned slaves? How did they react to the news? What was the most upsetting possibility for them to consider regarding what had happened between a white male member of their family and Melvinia?
2. What are the various possibilities regarding the identity of Dolphus Shields’ father? What are the possibilities regarding the nature of his relationship with Melvinia? Which possibility do you think is the most likely? Explain your answer.

3. Why were the white members of Shields family surprised to learn that their ancestor owned human property? What are they worried might happen once people learn about this painful chapter of their family's past?
4. Can a person do bad things and still be considered a "good" person? Defend your answer.
5. Should people be held responsible for the mistakes of their family? Defend your answer.
6. How would you react if you discovered that one of your ancestors had done something illegal or immoral? Would you want to face the truth, like Joan Tribble, or would you want to keep the knowledge a secret? Explain your answer.

## Part III: Slavery and Emancipation

### A SLAVE GIRL NAMED MELVINIA

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Where and when was Melvinia born? Who was her original owner? What unusual request did he make in his will? What does his request suggest about Melvinia?
2. Explain why it is nearly impossible to re-create in detail the lives of enslaved African Americans.
3. Why was a slave owner's death often a traumatic event? How did Mr. Patterson try to prepare for his own death? What does his request suggest about the way he interacted with his slaves?
4. How prevalent was corporal punishment in the 1800's? Which groups of people could legally be beaten or whipped?
5. How monetarily valuable were slaves? Are you surprised by the cost of slave ownership? How valuable was Melvinia compared to the other slaves owned by Mr. Patterson? What happened to his slaves when Mr. Patterson died? Where was Melvinia sent?

### JOURNEY TO GEORGIA

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How was the reality of the lives of most slaves different from the images of plantations popularized in film and literature? How was the farm Melvinia moved to in Georgia different from Mr. Patterson's farm in South Carolina?
2. How pervasive was slavery in America during the time leading up to the Civil War?
3. How wealthy was Henry Shields? What sort of family did he come from? How did he end up owning three slaves, including Melvinia?
4. For a struggling farmer, how beneficial was it to own a single slave?
5. How much was Henry Shields' farm worth when he bought it in 1850? In comparison, how valuable was the human property that he inherited from his father-in-law?
6. Explain the potential benefits and potential liabilities that existed for slaves living on small farms like the Shields' farm. Do you think life would be better or worse for slaves if they were on a large plantation? Explain your answer.
7. How many children did Henry Shields have? What do you think Melvinia's relationship with them was like?

## SOUTH CAROLINA GOLD

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Explain what the cash crop in South Carolina was and how cultivation of this crop is linked to Africa. What were living and working conditions like for agricultural slaves in South Carolina?
2. Why are there even fewer written records of slaves from large plantations in South Carolina than there are from smaller farms in Georgia?
3. The records that do exist suggest that one of Michelle Obama's paternal forebears, Caesar Cohen, may have been connected to a prominent Jewish family. Explain the possible connection.
4. Why do you think that marriages between slaves were not recognized as legal unions? In spite of this, describe Tira and Caesar's wedding and marriage. Why do you think her peers described Tira as "a lawful wife"?
5. What detail about Tira and Caesar's family suggests that Tira had a meaningful relationship with her white mistress?
6. What is Gullah? Why would the fact that Michelle Obama's great-great-grandfather, Jim Robinson, spoke Gullah be a clue to his descendants that he grew up on a South Carolina rice plantation?
7. During the 2008 presidential campaign, researcher Toni Carrier found evidence that suggested that Jim Robinson had belonged to a man named Francis Withers. Explain the evidence that led to this possible conclusion. What has more detailed evidence revealed about Jim Robinson's probable owner?
8. Explain the connection between William Nesmith and Jim Robinson. How did their relationship impact their sons? How do you think Nesmith and Robinson managed to form this sort of connection in spite of the circumstances?

## A CHILD IS BORN

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Based on what you do know about Melvinia's childhood and adulthood, what do you think she was like as a teenager? Support your opinion with evidence from the text.
2. How big of impact did owning slaves have on the Henry Shields' financial circumstances?
3. Why were the teenage years often perilous for young women in bondage?
4. Who was Harriet Jacobs? How do we know so much about her life? Describe her interactions with white men.
5. How commonplace was sexual contact between white men and female slaves? Were there any laws that governed this sort of contact? Is a consensual sexual relationship possible if one of the people involved is not free? Is a consensual sexual relationship possible if one of the people involved has more power than the other? Defend your answer.
6. Swarns writes that Melvinia's silence "echoes across the centuries." Why do you think she never named the man that fathered her children?
7. Describe each of the five Shields men that lived on the farm with Melvinia. Out of the five, which one do you think is the most likely to have fathered Dolphus Shields? Explain your reasoning.
8. Explain the different types of relationships existed between white men and enslaved women.
9. How did slave owners usually respond to their slaves being impregnated by themselves or their male family members? How did their wives respond? How commonplace were mixed-race offspring during slavery? Was there any social stigma associated with fathering children by a slave? Could those children legally be acknowledged or claimed as descendants? How did some white fathers provide for their African American children and mistresses?
10. Did the Shields family acknowledge Melvinia's son? How do we know?

## BORN FREE

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Where did Dolly Jumper grow up? Why wasn't she a slave? How did town officials keep track of which African Americans were free and which were not? What was life like for free African Americans living in states that allowed slavery?
2. Explain the history of the name "Jumper" in southern Virginia. How is the name connected to the Tuscarora Indians? What role did Hagar Jumper play in securing liberty for herself and her descendants?
3. Describe the restrictive laws that were put in place to limit the equality of free blacks. What do you think the ultimate goal of these laws was? Do these laws remind you of oppressive laws that have been used to oppress other groups of people in history?
4. Explain the Dred Scott decision. How did this decision specifically impact the lives of free African Americans?
5. Discuss the relationship between enslaved and free blacks living in the same communities. What were the sources of tension between the two groups? What issues did they unite over?
6. What role did free blacks play during the Civil War? Which side did most of them eventually align with? Why?

## EXODUS

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Which ancestors of Mrs. Obama were escaped slaves? What state did they escape from? Where did they settle?
2. What was the journey from slavery to freedom like for runaway slaves? What does it tell you about the character and spirit of Michelle Obama's ancestors that they would have attempted such a journey?
3. What role did escaped slaves play during the Civil War? How did the war impact the number of slaves that attempted escape? Which side did they align with?
4. What do Mary Moten's descendants believe about her ancestry? What historical facts would support their claims?
5. Who was Edward Coles? What role did he play in the emergence of the state of Illinois as a preferred destination for escaped slaves? Was Illinois "the promised land"? Explain your answer.

## THE CIVIL WAR

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. How quickly did the white Shields men enlist to fight for the Confederacy? Who was the first to enlist? What happened to him? Who were the next two of Henry Shields' sons to enlist? What event happened to Melvinia during this time?
2. Describe the role that Phoebe Moten's adventurous stepfather, Jerry Suter, played during the Civil War? What was the significance of the date that he claimed as his birthday?
3. Who were the last two of the white Shields men to enlist? What reasons could they have had for being reluctant to join the military? Why did they eventually enlist?
4. What historical clue suggests that Charles Shields may have been the father of Melvinia's children?
5. How was Clayton County impacted by the Civil War? What was life like for the women and children that were left at home while their husbands, fathers, and sons fought in the war?

6. Describe the various responses that former slaves had to the news that the war was over and they were free? What was one of the first things that many former slaves did after being emancipated?
7. What did Melvinia do after she was granted her liberty? What are the different reasons that could you explain her choice? Why do you think she made the decision she made? Support your position with specific detail from the text.

## UNEASY FREEDOM

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. What steps did some white Southerners take to try to hold back newly free African Americans immediately after the Civil War?
2. What was the Freedmen's Bureau? What obstacles did they encounter?
3. In addition to the devastating economic impact of the war, what natural disaster created hardship for rural South Georgia farmers like the Shields family?
4. Describe the restrictions placed on blacks in Illinois after the end of the Civil War. Were you surprised that there was so much oppression in the North?
5. How did African Americans react to the newly granted right to be legally married? Why do you think having a legally recognized union was so important to them?
6. Summarize the immediate impact that the end of the Civil War had on Michelle Obama's ancestors that were alive at the time. What were the immediate benefits? What were the challenges?

## MELVINIA'S SECRET

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2

1. Before reading this chapter, who did you suspect was most likely the father of Melvinia's children? Explain your reasons for coming to this conclusion.
2. What questions about Melvinia's past can DNA technology answer? What questions remain unanswered?
3. What do both the black and white descendants of Henry Shields prefer to think about the relationship between Charles and Melvinia? What evidence suggests that they may be correct? What other possibility exists? Which of the two possibilities do you think is most probable? Explain your reasoning.
4. Why have many of the white descendants been hesitant to have their names linked to the story of Melvinia and Charles Shields?
5. Why is the fact that Joan Tribble's daughter married across the color line significant to her family's story? What does it suggest about our nation?

**Writing Prompts**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.12.10 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.10**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.11-12.1a-b**

1. On page 286 Swarns asks an interesting question: “How do you measure freedom”? Think about the history of blacks in America. Was freedom as simple as being emancipated from slavery? Do you think all people are completely free today? How do you measure your own freedom? Are you completely free? Compose an argumentative paper that answers Swarns’s question. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**
2. What do you believe about the nature of Charles and Melvinia’s relationship? Was it, as Jewell Barclay suggested, “a love story”—or was it a coercive or abusive relationship? Compose an argumentative paper about the nature of the relationship. Clearly articulate how you reached your conclusion and use specific details from the text to support your thesis. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**
3. One theme that emerges over the course of Swarns’s narrative is the remarkable ability of the First Lady’s ancestors to bridge the racial divide, working and living with people of different races. What personal characteristics made them especially adept at navigating these uncharted, and often dangerous, relationships? What can you learn from them about your own interactions with people from backgrounds different than your own? Why is it important to relate to a variety of people? Using the stories in *American Tapestry* as your starting point, compose an argumentative paper about the value of engaging with people from different cultures or backgrounds. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
4. Swarns writes that “The legacy of slavery and segregation still reverberates in our contemporary political discourse, in the raw debate over affirmative action, in the periodic calls for reparations for African Americans, in the simmering questions over how to atone—and whether there is any need to atone—for one of the darkest stains on the nation’s conscience.” Do you believe that America needs to atone for slavery? Develop a well-supported argument stating your opinion about why atonement is or is not needed. If you believe that atonement is needed, explain what type of atonement you feel would be appropriate. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**
5. One of the white descendants of Henry Shields said that examining the past was painful because “we are on the wrong side of history.” In speaking about slavery, Michelle Obama said “A lot of times these stories get buried, because sometimes the pain of them makes it hard to want to remember.” Do you believe that it is necessary to confront and deal with painful chapters of the past, or is it okay to just keep moving forward? How should nations deal with the shameful chapters in their past? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
6. One pleasurable aspect of reading history is discovering personal connections to the past. Which individual in *American Tapestry* could you relate to the most? Did they remind you of yourself, or someone you know? Compose a narrative essay describing your personal connection to one of the people in the book. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
7. Many of the people profiled in the book never had a formal obituary written for them. Using details from the book, compose an appropriate obituary for one of Michelle Obama’s ancestors. Create a “Celebration of Life” for the person you selected. Include a photograph, a historically relevant poem or other verse, and musical selections from the time in which the person you selected lived. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5**
8. Examine the life of one of the remarkable women in Michelle Obama’s family tree (you may also choose to profile Michelle Obama or her mother). Compose a narrative nonfiction account of their life, including a discussion of the role of women in the time period that they lived and the cultural barriers that they faced and overcame. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**

9. How is our identity defined? Rachel L. Swarns offers the following observation on page 148: “But if identity is largely an internal construct determined, in part, by genetics, family traditions, and community customs, it is also shaped by personal circumstances.” Compose a narrative essay in which you examine your own personal identity. Explain the role that genetics, family traditions, and community customs have played in defining who you are, and examine the personal choices you have made in defining yourself. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
10. President Obama’s election has been called a “historic” presidency. Explain how revelations about the First Lady’s family history add weight and significance to this idea. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9**
11. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote the following words in his “I Have a Dream” speech: “I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.” Relate this quote to *American Tapestry*. Have all Americans reached the sort of community that King dreamed of? Have any? What do you think needs to happen for King’s vision to be realized? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.1a-e CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**
12. Do you think parents should protect their children from the truth if the truth may be painful and/or upsetting? Have you ever found out that your parents hid something from you in order to protect you? How can a parent know what and when to tell their children about difficult truths? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10**
13. In writing about Fraser Robinson Jr. Rachel L. Swarns states, “Even in the smallest of places, there are people who seem destined for greatness.” Do you believe that some people are “destined” for greatness? Who do you think is “Most Likely to Succeed” in your own class? What characteristics make someone seem poised for success? Are they things a person is just born with, or are they qualities developed with effort? Are the qualities necessary for greatness different today than they were a hundred years ago? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1a-e**
14. In writing about the collapse of Reconstruction, African American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois observed: “The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back towards slavery.” Relate this quote to the book. In what specific ways did people “push back” and try to strip African Americans of their freedoms? How did these efforts specifically impact the lives of Michelle Obama’s ancestors? How did they respond to the challenge? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3**
15. Consider the title of Swarns’s book: *American Tapestry*. What makes the story a uniquely American story? Explain how the story of Michelle Obama’s family exemplifies the American Dream. How did each of her forebears embody the American Spirit? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.3 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**

## Topics for Further Research

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.8

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-17.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-17.8

**Note to Teachers:** If you live within a reasonable distance from one of the branches of the National Archives <http://www.archives.gov/> it is highly recommended that you schedule a field trip for your class to learn about this valuable resource for researching genealogy. Even if you can't visit one of the physical locations, they have many resources available online that can assist students.

1. How much do you know about your own family tree? Using the same primary sources that Swarns used (historical documents such as census records, personal interviews) research your own family history and compose your own "American Tapestry." Begin by interviewing your oldest living family members, then use census records and other documents to trace your ancestors back as far as you can. Create a multi-media presentation about your family history and share your findings with the class. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.6 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5
2. Visit an older local cemetery and find a gravestone that you find compelling for some reason. Write down all the information that is included on the gravestone (you may wish to do a crayon rubbing of the actual stone) and use the details you've gathered to start researching the life of the person whose grave you selected and the time period and region in which they lived. After you've completed your research, compose a piece of narrative nonfiction about the life of the person. Make sure that all of the details you include are historically accurate and cite your research. Examine the bibliography of one of the chapters of *American Tapestry* to get a sense of the type of research required to write narrative nonfiction. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3
3. Several of Michelle Obama's ancestors worked as Pullman porters. Research the history of the Pullman Company. What were the benefits of working as a Pullman porter? What were the challenges? Why was the Pullman strike significant? What do you think is the lasting legacy of the Pullman Company? CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2a-e
4. Research the rise of the black church in America. How did the church begin? What was the church's role during slavery and reconstruction? What role did the church play in the civil rights movement? Reference specific churches and church leaders in your paper. You may wish to include an analysis of a sermon from the Civil Rights era in your discussion. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9
5. In Chapter 25, Swarns tells the story of Hagar Jumper, a slave who successfully fought for her freedom in court. Like Hagar, some African Americans were able to win their emancipation prior to the official end of slavery by going through the judicial process. Analyze the court case of an African American who successfully or unsuccessfully petitioned for their emancipation. Use primary documents related to the case and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments of both the prosecution and the defense. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.8
6. Research the history of voting rights. When was the right of African Americans to vote first acknowledged? How has this right been challenged? Over the years, what efforts have been made to disenfranchise black voters? Have these efforts been successful? Why is the ability to vote an important civil right? CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9
7. In a speech calling for an end to modern slavery, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton referred to *American Tapestry*. "You might have seen over the weekend a long story about Mrs. Obama's roots going back to the time of our own period of slavery and the family that nurtured her, which has roots in the fields and the houses of a time when Americans owned slaves. So as we recommit ourselves to end modern slavery, we should take a moment to reflect on how far we have come, here in our country and around the world, but how much farther we still have to go to find a way to free those 27 million victims and to ensure that there are no longer any victims in the future." Research the issue of modern slavery and human trafficking and then create a Public Service Announcement to raise awareness of the problem. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2

8. Over the course of the book, Rachel L. Swarns references numerous figures that are important to African American history. Select one of the historical figures mentioned in the book and research their biography and the contribution they made to American culture and/or history. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8**
9. Michelle Obama's fraternal line has roots in South Carolina. Research the history of slavery in South Carolina and the development of the Gullah language and culture. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8**
10. Purnell Shields loved jazz music. Research the history of jazz and the emergence of the Jazz Age. You may wish to start your research by watching Ken Burns's documentary, *Jazz*. Why is jazz considered a uniquely American form of music? How is the history of jazz music intertwined with African American history? Select a specific jazz musician and complete an analysis of their music. Compile your research into a multimedia presentation. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6**
11. Several of Michelle Obama's relatives served in the military. Research the history of African Americans in the military. Focus your exploration on the role they played a specific war or conflict. If you have a family member that served in the military, there are numerous resources to help you research their military service. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**
12. The *Dred Scott* decision had a devastating impact on the rights of African Americans. Read the primary documents related to the Dred Scott case (a link to these documents is included in this guide). Analyze the arguments for the prosecution, defense, and the judge's ruling. What were the ramifications of the decision? How was it overturned? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.5 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.8**
13. Marriage Equality is one of the most controversial issues in today's political landscape. Research the history of marriage rights in America. When did African Americans gain the right to marry? What limitations were placed on this right? When did interracial marriages gain legal recognition? Why is a legally recognized union a right that is so important to people? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**
14. In modern American society individuals embrace having a biracial or multiracial heritage. Research the history of the legal classification of multiracial identity. At what point in America's history did racial classification become limited to black and white? What was the justification for this decision? How was an identity selected if a person was multiracial? More recently, people have demanded that official documents include more diverse racial classifications that accurately reflect their identity. What changes have been made to the way that race is categorized? What makes this an important issue? How is data regarding race used by organizations (marketing, the government, schools, private corporations)? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.9**
15. Examine the role that owning land played in the social advancement of Michelle Obama's ancestors. You may choose to compare the theme of home ownership in *American Tapestry* with Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*. Why has owning a home been considered a cornerstone of the American Dream? How does the current housing crisis threaten this belief? **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2a-f**

## Online Resources

“A Paper Trail to the White House”: Interactive resource featuring images of documents from the research for *American Tapestry*.  
<http://documents.nytimes.com/one-paper-trail-to-the-white-house>

*Atlanta Journal* article about the dedication of a memorial in honor of Melvinia in Rex, Georgia. The dedication ceremony united black and white descendants of Henry Shields.

<http://www.ajc.com/news/lifestyles/georgia-familys-descendents-include-michelle-obama/nQWrJ/>

Rachel L. Swarns's official Facebook page: features links to help students research their ancestry and share their story.

[https://www.facebook.com/rachel.l.swarns/app\\_401042979933903](https://www.facebook.com/rachel.l.swarns/app_401042979933903)

“In First Lady's Roots, a Complex Path from Slavery”: Link to the original *New York Times* article on Michelle Obama's genealogy. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/08/us/politics/08genealogy.html>

“Meet Your Cousin, the First Lady: A Family Story, Long Hidden”: *New York Times* article about the revelations in *American Tapestry*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/us/dna-gives-new-insights-into-michelle-obamas-roots.html>

“The First Family: A New Glimpse of Michelle Obama's White Ancestors”: A brief *New York Times* article featuring a photo of Henry and Charles Shields that surfaced after the publication of *American Tapestry*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/06/22/us/first-lady-family-q-and-a.html>

Interview with Rachel L. Swarns on *All Things Considered*.

<http://www.npr.org/2012/07/01/156000966/the-complex-tapestry-of-michelle-obamas-ancestry>

Website for the National Archives: <http://www.archives.gov/>

African American Civil War Museum: This website includes links that can be used to search for military service records.

<http://www.afroamcivilwar.org/>

Website for Faces of America: This program, hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., traces the genealogy of famous Americans. The website features video segments from the show and educational resources. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/facesofamerica/>

Interactive Graphic of Michelle Obama's family tree.

<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/10/08/us/politics/20091008-obama-family-tree.html>

Library of Congress Digital Reference page featuring primary sources related to the Dred Scott case.

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/DredScott.html>

## Other Titles of Interest

*All Aunt Hagar's Children* by Edward P. Jones

*Beloved* by Toni Morrison

*Black Boy* by Richard Wright

*Dreams From My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* by Barack Obama

*The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* by Annette Gordon-Reed

*The House Behind the Cedars* by Charles W. Chesnutt

*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself* by Harriett A. Jacobs

*Life Upon These Shores: Looking at African American History, 1513-2008* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass

*A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry

*Roots: The Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley

*The Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois

*The Sweet Hell Inside: The Rise of and Elite Black Family in the Segregated South* by Edward Ball

## About this Guide's Author

**Amy Jurskis** is the author of the teaching guides for *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot and *In the Garden of Beasts* by Erik Larson. She holds a B.A. in English from the University of Georgia and a MAT from Agnes Scott College. A former department chair for language arts in a title one public school in Atlanta, she currently teaches English at a private academy in West Palm Beach, Florida.