



# Zora Neale Hurston

Adapted for Young Readers by  
Ibram X. Kendi

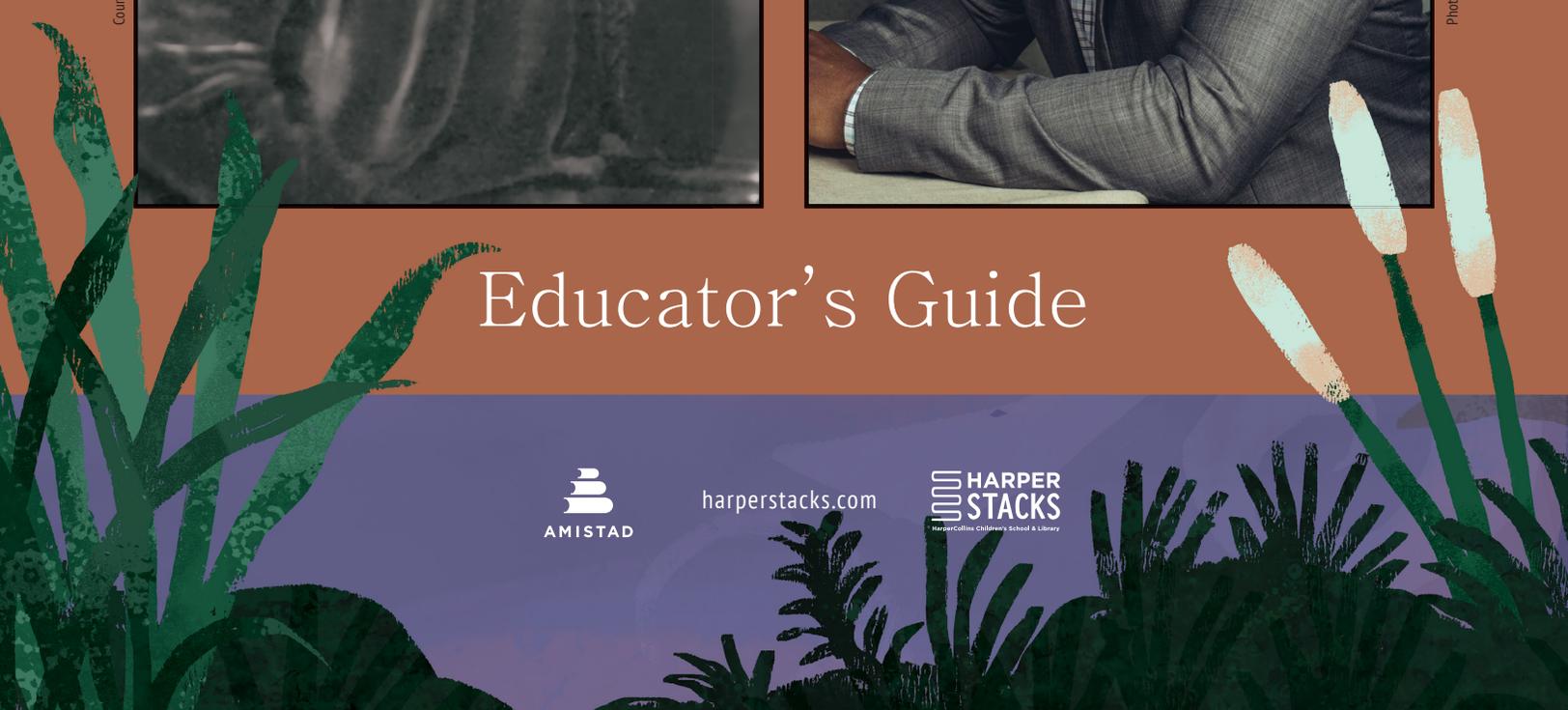
RESOURCES  
FOR GRADES  
K-12



Courtesy of Zora Neale Hurston Trust



Photo credit Stephen Voss



## Educator's Guide



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HarperCollins Children's School & Library

## Dear Reader,

What an honor it is to now have the opportunity to share Zora Neale Hurston's stories with new generations. HarperCollins Children's Books is collaborating with the Zora Neale Hurston Trust, national-bestselling and award-winning author and educator Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, and some of the brightest and most dynamic artists of today, to adapt her works into picture books, board books, and novels for young readers.

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi shared with us how he has long admired Ms. Hurston ever since he'd read her classic novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, as a freshman in college. "But when I read in graduate school her short stories, her incredible folklore collection, *Mules and Men*, and her fascinating study of *Voodoo in Haiti and Jamaica*," Dr. Kendi continued, "I realized I was reading one of America's greatest writers, folklorists, and intellectuals. I realized I was reading treasures. I realized these treasures had been kept from far too many Americans.

"Not long ago I found myself rereading the folktales Ms. Hurston collected and wishing there were versions of them I could read to Imani, my rambunctious and inquisitive daughter. There is so much humor and wisdom and wonder in these stories. I believe every child in America should be able to benefit from their brilliance. I believe every child should be able to benefit from Ms. Hurston's brilliance. It occurred to me that adapting stories for a younger audience would make them both relevant and accessible to a whole new generation and audience of readers."

On behalf of Dr. Kendi, the trust, and HarperCollins, we extend appreciation to all of you who support Zora's works in your respective industries and to Zora's fans, supporters, and family members for your participation in this celebration of Zora Neale Hurston's love of children.

Sincerely,

*Luana Horry,*

Editorial Director at Amistad Books for Young Readers and HarperCollins Children's Books



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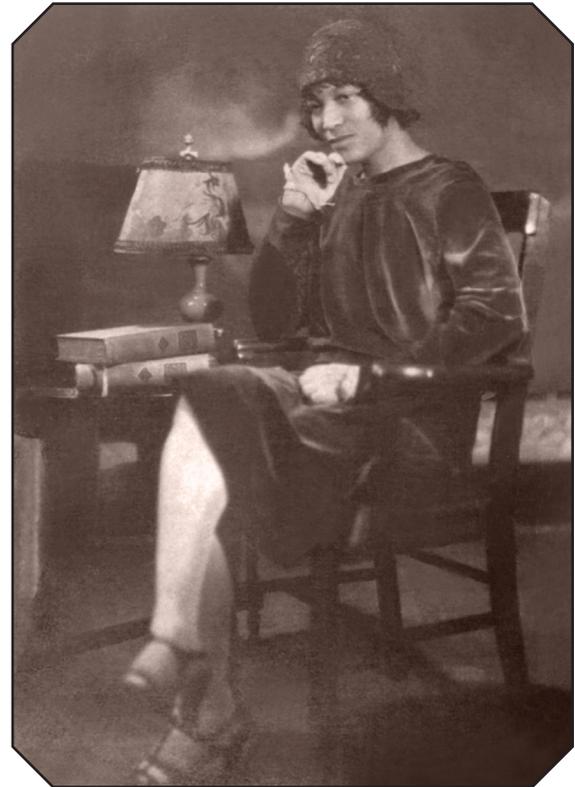
## The Hurston Legacy

Black American folklorist and writer Zora Neale Hurston remains a literary touchstone of the Harlem Renaissance and the very bedrock of authority on Black American experiences in the African Diaspora. With her extensive research and knowledge of Black folklore, religious practices, and culture, Hurston not only collected invaluable firsthand accounts of Black Southern life in the early 20th century, but she also crafted an unprecedented literature that to this day offers readers vital engagement with Black American subjectivity. In many ways, we owe our current understanding of Black American cultural history to Hurston's illuminating craft, her deep expertise, and her infamous stubbornness.

There is no wrong time to expose young readers to Hurston's powerful works that were so controversial in her own time and are so celebrated in ours. Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is her most popular work today and has long been a pillar of secondary English Language Arts education. This guide provides resources and recommendations for introducing readers to Hurston's world of stories—those she collected and those she created—in upper elementary, middle, and high school classrooms. This scaffolded and developmentally mindful engagement with Hurston's anthropological and literary legacy offers young readers a springboard into historically enriched, cross-disciplinary learning that supports the development of their critical and creative skills at all levels.

## About the Creators

Zora Neale Hurston was a novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist. She wrote four novels (*Jonah's Gourd Vine*, 1934; *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937; *Moses, Man of the Mountains*, 1939; and *Seraph on the Suwanee*, 1948); two books of folklore (*Mules and Men*, 1935; and *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-tales from the Gulf States*, 2001); a work of anthropological research (*Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, 1938); an autobiography (*Dust Tracks on a Road*, 1942); an international bestselling nonfiction work (*Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo,"* 2018); and over fifty short stories, essays, and plays. She attended Howard University, Barnard College, and Columbia University and was the first Black graduate of Barnard College in 1928. She was born on January 7, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, and grew up in Eatonville, Florida.



Courtesy of Zora Neale Hurston Trust

## About the Creators



Photo credit: Stephen Voss

Ibram X. Kendi is a National Book Award–winning and #1 *New York Times* bestselling author. His books include *Antiracist Baby*; *Goodnight Racism*; *How to Be an Antiracist*; and *How to Raise an Antiracist*. Kendi is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Boston University and the director of the BU Center for Antiracist Research. In 2020, *Time* magazine named Kendi one of the 100 most influential people in the world. He has also been awarded a 2021 MacArthur Fellowship.



Photo credit: Livia Radwanski

Jazzmen Lee-Johnson is a visual artist, scholar, composer, and curator. She received her BFA in film, animation, and video at Rhode Island School of Design, her MA in public humanities at Brown University, and a heavy dose of education working with youth in Baltimore, South Africa, New York, and Providence. Jazzmen was the 2019 inaugural Artist in Residence at the Rhode Island Department of Health, the 2020 Artist Fellow at the RISD Museum, and a 2021 Fitt Artist-in-Residence at the John Nicholas Brown Center for Humanities and Cultural Heritage at Brown University.



Photo credit: David Banks and Kendrick Brinson

Loveis Wise is an illustrator and designer from Washington, DC. They are currently based in Los Angeles, and their work often speaks to themes of joy and liberation. Some of Loveis’s illustrated books include *The People Remember*, *Ablaze with Color*, and *Becoming Charley*. More of their work can be found through *the New Yorker*, Google, Adobe, and *the New York Times*.



Photo credit: Asaad Miller

Kah Yangni is an illustrator living in Philadelphia who makes heartfelt art about justice, queerness, and joy. Their children’s books include *The Making of Butterflies* written by Zora Neale Hurston and Ibram X. Kendi and *Not He or She, I’m Me* written by A. M. Wild. They’ve worked with *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Vice Media*, and *Chronicle Books*, as well as with causes like the Transgender Law Center and the Movement for Black Lives, and their poster work is in the permanent collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Kah’s artistic mission is to heal themselves and others by making art that focuses on radical optimism and the power we have to make the world a better place.

# Teaching Zora Neale Hurston at all Levels

## *Barracoon* and *The Making of Butterflies* in Middle School

Potential abounds for middle school classrooms when *The Making of Butterflies* and *Barracoon* are put into conversation. Both books exist because of Hurston's anthropological fieldwork; in the classroom both can be used to enhance curricula across disciplines.

English Language Arts: bolster a unit on American oral traditions and introduce Ebonics (African American English)

Social Studies: explore Black American folktales and personal narratives as historical primary sources.

Environmental Science: introduce ecosystems, biodiversity, and the human trade's impact on both. Discuss the ecological knowledge carried to the U.S. by enslaved Africans.

Art: discuss visual storytelling and the artistic style of both books' illustrations. Considering how image composition contributes to narrative.

## *Barracoon* and *Magnolia Flower* in Middle School

*Magnolia Flower* and *Barracoon* together offer rich context and humanization to a middle school curriculum.

History: Use *Magnolia Flower* and *Barracoon* to introduce Indigenous and formerly enslaved perspectives. Explore what they challenge in the historical record. Alternatively, use these books to highlight Hurston's anthropological storywork as primary sources.

English Language Arts: Scaffold a unit on textual analysis through the inclusion of nature in both *Magnolia Flower* and *Barracoon*. Discuss the role freed communities', Florida Maroon and Alabama AfricaTown, language, and stories play in narrative and characterization.

## *The Making of Butterflies* in High School

Hurston's butterflies can help eliminate the classroom crickets! Picture books can be less intimidating than novels while still offering rich

visual and textual complexity to spark authentic conversations. This will help build students' trust in their own critical voices and confidence to engage with more of Hurston's works. Consider a unit that uses *The Making of Butterflies* to introduce the concept of counternarratives and connect it to novels like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

## *Magnolia Flower* in High School

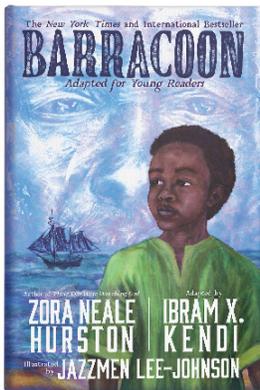
Use *Magnolia Flower* to break down the picture book as a deceptively simple literary vehicle. Have students focus on a specific literary device like tone, metaphor, allegory, language, imagery, or cultural references and connect those observations to the same device(s) at work in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* or Hurston's short stories.

Compare *Magnolia Flower* to a picture book featuring another Indigenous or Black American narrative; then to a picture book with a prevailing European folktale or White-centered narrative. Use student observations to discuss the role of picture books in challenging dominant perspectives. Connect this discussion to Hurston's novels and other works of the Harlem Renaissance.

## *Barracoon* in High School

Explore Hurston's indelible anthropological contributions (example *Barracoon*) and how that relates to her fiction. Place *Barracoon* in conversation with Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Introduce students to other Harlem Renaissance creators (Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Billie Holiday, Augusta Savage, Duke Ellington, etc.) and their works. Explore the folk roots and Black American cultural callbacks of the Harlem Renaissance. Use the dialogue between *Barracoon* and Hurston's fiction as a foundation. Introduce students to the power of "bearing witness" in art. In small groups, listen to songs, look at visual art, and read written works aloud. Ask about students' initial impressions and their connection to the idea of bearing witness.



## About the Book

Sitting on his porch in the Alabama afternoon heat and sharing peaches from his own tree, Cudjo Lewis, one of the last of the approximately 300,000 Africans trafficked across the Middle Passage to the United States, spends several weeks sharing his life story with author Zora Neale Hurston. A childhood in West Africa, a violent capture and terror-filled sea crossing, five unbearable years of enslavement, and decades of triumphs and tragedies as a freed man are all faithfully recorded in Cudjo's own words and dialect and accompanied by new introduction to ground Cudjo's experiences in detailed historical context.

## Discussion Questions

1. Cudjo Lewis (Kossula)'s story about his life is told with a frame story—Cudjo's story is inside the story of Zora Neale Hurston's visits with him. What do you make of this choice? How does it shape your understanding as a reader?
2. What does the title *Barracoon* mean to you after reading the book? Why do you think Hurston chose this term for the book's title?
3. Like all the Black American folktales and stories collected by Zora Neale Hurston, Cudjo's story was shared by being spoken aloud. What changes when an oral story is written down? What is significant about Hurston's decision to write Cudjo's story in his own dialect?
4. Consider the significance of food, both in the frame story and in Kossula's story. Think about both its presence and its absence. Think about its role in the storytelling—how is the story and your understanding of different characters shaped by food?
5. Kossula makes a point several times of saying that he is not using his story to pretend that he is more than he is or has done more than he has done. Why do you think this is so important for him to make clear? How do these insertions contribute to his story? How are they part of his storytelling rather than disruptions?
6. If Kossula is the protagonist of his story, who or what are the antagonists? What do they have in common? How do they each shape Kossula's story and life?
7. The introduction of the book discusses the fact that different African nations are as distinct and separate from each other as European nations. What is the significance of this in Kossula's life? How does this sense of distinction show up throughout the story?
8. Apologists will claim that those who bought, sold, and enslaved human beings were "products of their time" and cannot be judged by modern standards of right and wrong. How does Cudjo's story argue against this? Why is this evidence to the contrary important?
9. Consider community. Where does Kossula find community in his story? What is his role in his communities? How do togetherness and loss intertwine for him?
10. *Barracoon* includes not only Cudjo's story but also the frame story about Zora Neale Hurston's visits with him. What do we learn about Hurston from her narration? What do we learn about the methods she used when collecting stories?

## Extension Activities

### Timelines Intertwine

Have students make a detailed timeline of Kossula’s story, right up to Zora Neale Hurston’s initial visit to his house. Next, have students research U.S. historical events that occurred during the same time period. The Civil War and Reconstruction Era will certainly feature, but encourage students to explore specific laws, major abolitionist and other activist writings or protests, developments in labor and industrialism, social movements like the Harlem Renaissance, etc. Students can then hand draw or use graphic design tools like Canva to create a visual timeline that puts Kossula’s story alongside U.S. history. Have students write a brief reflection piece about how U.S. history wove into Kossula’s story.

### Gather All and Listen

Recordings from Zora Neale Hurston’s anthropological work are available in the Library of Congress digital collections. As a class, listen to Hurston’s interview with Wallace Quarterman, another formerly enslaved person like Cudjo Lewis, and to some of the work songs Hurston recorded. Ask students to share their initial reactions, especially in connection to *Barracoon*. Then, in groups or individually, have students respond to the following questions:

- How do these recordings present information students might not have otherwise heard?
- What is Hurston’s role in the recordings? How does she frame the interview and songs?

### Storytelling Through Score

In groups, have students collaborate on a playlist. Each group will choose a chapter of *Barracoon* and choose up to five songs (with or

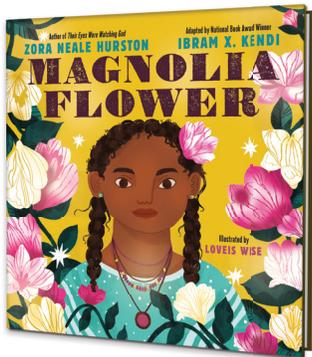
without lyrics) that will provide the chapter’s “score.” Have the groups write a brief reflective piece to describe the connection between their chosen songs, the events in their chosen chapter, and their own experience as readers. Encourage students to explore music genres of the African Diaspora, including the music of the Harlem Renaissance written and performed by some of Hurston’s own contemporaries.

### Research is a Story Too

Give students two research track options: 1) students choose a detail from Kossula’s story to research further—students should articulate which detail they have chosen and why; or 2) students choose another previously enslaved person’s narrative and life to research. Students’ research should include primary and secondary sources—a school or public librarian is a great resource to help—and their final product should discuss how their research connects to or adds context to Kossula’s story. Students can present their research in a written form like a paper, something audiovisual like a podcast or Tik Tok, or a creative product like an informative picture book or zine.

### Anthropology Begins at Home

Have students interview a family member about the history of their family or to share a particular family story. Students should record and then transcribe their family member’s story. (Note: if there are barriers to interviewing a family member, give students an alternative such as interviewing the principal about the history of their school.) As a class, discuss the process of translating an interviewee’s story from an oral telling to a written one. Which do they prefer? What challenges did they face transcribing the story? Was anything lost or gained in the translation to written form? What does oral storytelling do that written storytelling cannot?



## About the Book

When a brook excitedly asks the Mighty River for a story about the people it has seen, the River obliges with a sweet and powerful tale of love. The love of family, the love of those seeking freedom during the devastation of slavery and settler colonialism, and the fierce love of those who join together in resistance.

## Pre-reading activity

Before reading, take the students on a book tour. Consider the jacket art and design, the endpapers, and the title page illustration. Ask students:

- What about these parts of the book grabs your attention?
- How do the different parts relate to each other? What elements do they have in common?
- What do the jacket, endpapers, and title page seem to be telling you about the story to come? What kind of story are you expecting?

## Discussion Questions

1. Why does Brook want River to tell it a story? When have you asked a grown-up for a story from their life or about something they saw happen?
2. What do you think of the book's title? If you could give the story another title, what would you choose?
3. What connections can you make between Magnolia Flower the character and the actual flowers of the magnolia trees? Look again at the book's endpapers and title page illustration. What words describe these flowers? Which words also describe Magnolia Flower (the character) as she's drawn and as she's written?
4. Why doesn't Bentley like John? What do you think it means to be a "man of words" rather than a "man of metals?" Do you agree or disagree with Bentley?
5. What do you think of Magnolia Flower's decision to defy her father? Did she make a good choice? When have you needed to break a rule to help someone?
6. Try looking at the illustrations without reading the text. What story would you tell to explain what's going on in the images? Is it similar or different from the story told in the text?
7. Who has power in this story? What do they do with their power? How do their actions move the story forward?
8. If a body of water or tree or mountain or some other part of nature was going to tell a story about you and your community, what would it say?
9. What do you think the author wants readers to remember most from this story? What message is the author trying to share? How can you tell?
10. What's something new that you learned from reading this book? How can you find out even more?

## Extension Activities

### Like Father, Like Daughter

Have students make a chart to compare Bentley and his daughter Magnolia. How are they alike? How are they different? What connections can students draw between both characters' journeys and choices? Using their chart, have students write a "compare and contrast" paragraph.

### Learning What the Rivers Know

Have students get into groups to research Maroon communities in Florida. Group members can work together or each can take on answering a different question: Who were Maroons and why did they form communities? What kind of land did they settle on and why? How did the free and escaped Black peoples work and live together with the Seminole nation? What other Maroon communities existed and where? When students have completed their research, they'll write and share a brief group report that includes where they found their information.

### Choose Their Adventure

Because the story is told from River's perspective, readers don't see Magnolia Flower's life between when she leaves her home and eventually returns. Have students fill in this gap by writing about Magnolia Flower and John. Students can write a poem or prose, working in pairs or alone. Their narrator can be Magnolia, John, another person they invent, or a part of nature like the River, and students should include at least one illustration (drawing, painting, collage, etc.). For their story, students can consider questions like: Where do Magnolia and John go and live? Who do they meet? What problems do they encounter and how do they solve them? Why do they decide to return to visit their trees?

### Story Sleuths

Have students submit at least one question they have now that they have read the story. It could be about details the story doesn't provide, what happens next after the end, something related to the text or art, information they'd like to know about the author or illustrator, etc. Put students into small groups and have each group choose a question (not written by any of the group members) and try to answer it. Groups that choose a question about the text or plot should support their answer with evidence from the book. Groups answering questions about the author or illustrator, the setting, represented cultures, etc. should support their answer with relevant online or print sources. And so on.

### Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down

Have students write a book review for *Magnolia Flower* explaining why they would or would not recommend the story to other readers. Along with their review, students will include three read-alike books in their recommendation. Have students work with their school or public librarian to search for similar books based on whatever qualities of *Magnolia Flower* they deem most important.



## About the Book

When the Creator was through making the world and beautifying the bare ground with bright trees and flowers, the flowers cried out that they were lonely. And what's a Creator to do but keep on creating? So "flutter-bys" (soon to be known as butterflies) of every color, shape, and size were born.

## Pre-reading activity

Before opening the book with students, ask them to consider the book while closed. As students respond, paraphrase their answers and connect the different observations to what students think will happen in the story. Discuss:

- Some books are tall (portrait) and some are wide (landscape), but this book is square. How does the shape of the book make students feel as they look at it?
- What is happening in the cover image? How do students know?
- Flip the book over and allow students to examine the back cover image. What's a connection that students can make between the front cover and back cover?

Prompt students to keep thinking about the book's shape and artwork as you read together. An artist's choices always play a role in our understanding of a story.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why tell a story about the making of butterflies? Think about what the story tells us. Why are butterflies important?
2. All of a picture book artist's choices can help us understand a story better. Why do you think the artist chose to give the Creator butterfly wings?
3. This kind of story is called a folktale. What other folktales or fairy tales does this story remind you of?

## Extension Activities

### A Flowering Community

In groups or as a class, ask students to list some other things that "keep flowers company"—like other insects, animals, and plants. In the story, Creator gathers bright scraps of color and releases them to create butterflies. Have students describe or draw how Creator would make bees or rabbits or other responses in their list.

### The Butterflies of Making

Introduce students to some different butterfly species, perhaps ones that can be found locally. Have students choose one kind of butterfly, then have them use colorful paper scraps and other found materials to (re)create their butterfly and its favorite flower. Enhance this activity by displaying the butterflies or sending the art to decorate a community space, nursing home, public library, etc.

### Flutter-by Stories

Do a comparative reading of *The Making of Butterflies*, *A River of Mariposas* by Mirelle Ortega, and *Remember* by Joy Harjo and illustrated by Michaela Goade. What connections can students make between these three texts and their images? What themes do they have in common? In what ways do they differ? Have students write down their ideas or share them in groups.

# Further Resources

## About Zora

- Zora Neale Hurston Official Website
- *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* by Valerie Boyd
- *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* edited by Carla Kaplan
- *Zora Neale Hurston: A Resource Guide* (Library of Congress)
- Zora Neale Hurston Collection at University of Florida
- Zora Neale Hurston Digital Archive at UCF
- *The Life and Times of Zora Neale Hurston* by Aron Myers (radio documentary)
- *The Films of Zora Neale Hurston* (PBS)

## More by Zora

- *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
- *Moses, Man of the Mountain*
- *Seraph on the Suwanee*
- *Jonah's Gourd Vine*
- *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-tales from the Gulf States*
- *Mules and Men*
- *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo"*
- *You Don't Know Us Negroes and Other Essays*
- *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick*
- *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*
- *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*
- Hurston, Z. N. (1927). *Cudjo's own story of the last African slaver. The Journal of Negro History*, 12(4), 648-663.
- Hurston, Z. (1931). *Hoodoo in America. The Journal of American Folklore*, 44(174), 317-417.
- Hurston, Z. N. (1991). *Folklore and music. Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 12(1), 182-198.
- Zora Neale Hurston and the WPA in Florida
- The Zora Neale Hurston Plays at the Library of Congress

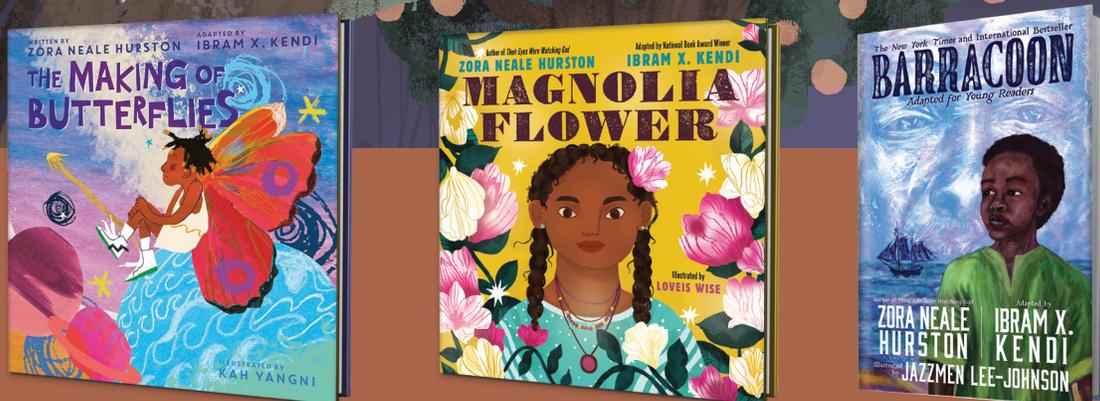
## Crossovers and Connections

- *Zora Neale Hurston in the Classroom: "With a Harp and a Sword in My Hands"* (NCTE)
- Zora Neale Hurston Dust Tracks Heritage Trail
- Folklore in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (EDSITEment)
- *Rereading the Harlem Renaissance: Race, Class, and Gender in the Fiction of Jesse Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy West* by Sharon L. Jones
- A New African American Identity: The Harlem Renaissance (National Museum of African American History & Culture)
- Clotilda: America's Last Slave Ship and the Community of Africatown (National Museum of African American History & Culture)
- People's Historians (Zinn Education Project)
- Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories (Library of Congress)
- *The Extensive Knowledge and Skills of Enslaved Africans: Facts that Stand in Opposition to Lies* by Dana P. Saxon

## Picture Books in the Classroom

- *Picture This: How Pictures Work* by Molly Bang
- *The Whole Book Approach* by Megan Dowd Lambert
- *50 Ways to Use Picture Books in Secondary Classrooms* by Sheree Springer
- *A Framework for Using Notable Social Studies Picture Books in High School* by Brianne Pitts, Jennifer Pontius-Vandenberg, and Darren Guido

This guide was written by Anastasia M. Collins. Stacy (she/they) is a librarian, youth literature scholar, and an anti-oppression educator. You can follow them at @DarkLiterata.



## Praise for *The Making of Butterflies*

“[T]he artwork creates an eye-catching collage of images in every spread...Kendi expertly distills this word-of-mouth tale for young readers...An old tale is given fresh new life.”

— *Kirkus Reviews*

## Praise for *Magnolia Flower*

“[A] powerful example of Black and Native resistance—an aspect of history that far too often goes undiscussed. Wise’s earth-toned, opalescent illustrations make the trees, water, and flowers feel just as key to the tale as the humans. The excellent marriage between lyrical text and stunning visuals makes for a moving, memorable story.

An artfully rendered tale of life and love that also conveys an essential but often overlooked chapter in U.S. history.”

— *Kirkus Reviews (starred review)*

## Praise for *Barracoon*

“It is [an] important historic document that provides an intimate look at slavery in America...Belongs in every library.”

— *Booklist (starred review)*

“[An] essential text.”

— *Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Books (starred review)*



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