

EDUCATOR GUIDE

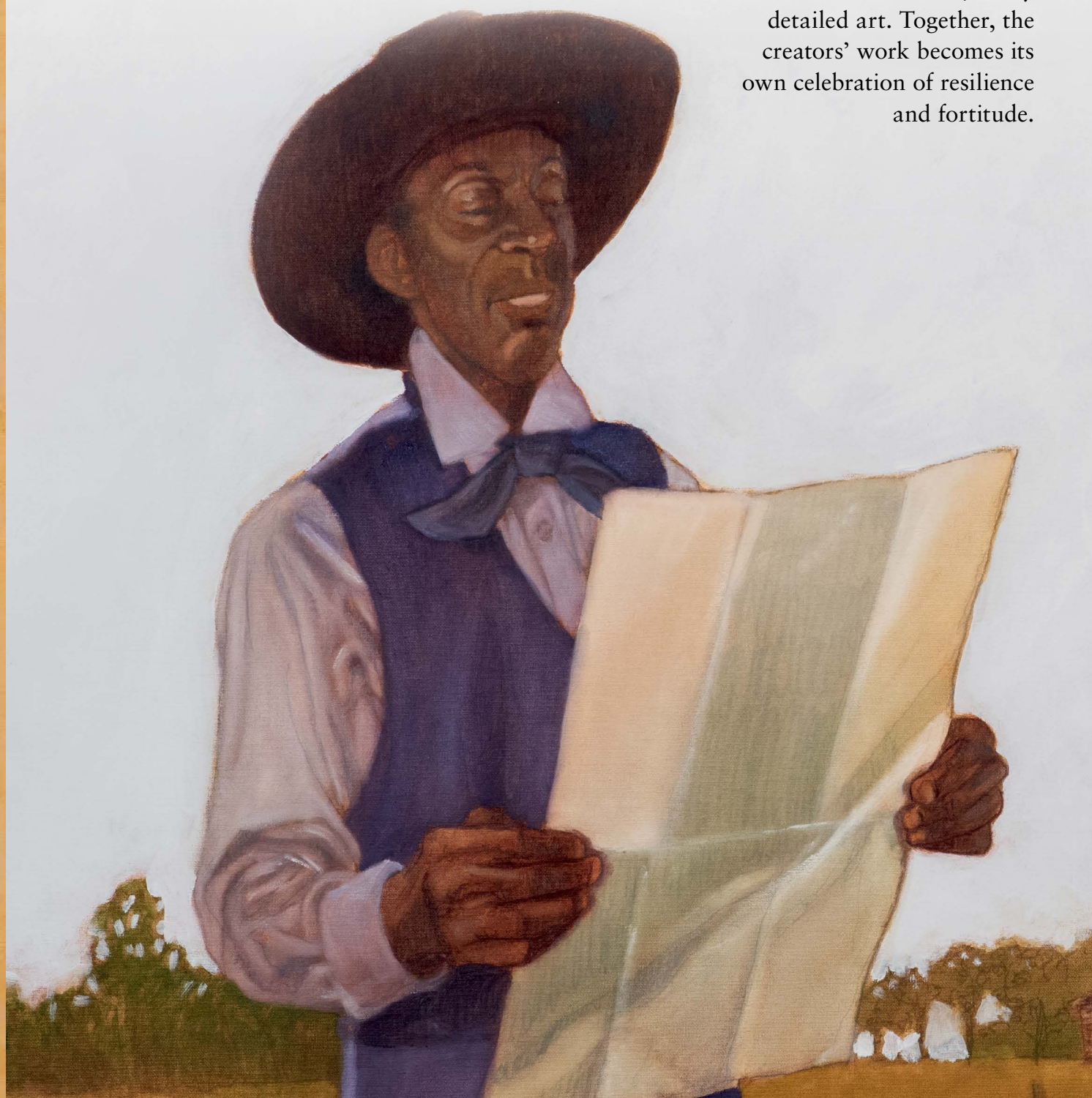


union square
kids

ABOUT THE BOOK

Sojourner Kincaid Rolle's poem about Juneteenth has touched people around the world. It takes readers on a journey of freedom through the thoughts and actions of formerly enslaved Black people. Rolle beautifully captures the range of their choices and emotions in response to their freedom. Her humanization of these experiences is perfectly matched by illustrator

Alex Bostic's luminous, richly detailed art. Together, the creators' work becomes its own celebration of resilience and fortitude.



NOTE TO TEACHERS

This picture book explores themes of freedom and bondage relative to the enslavement of Black people in America. Sojourner Kincaid Rolle presents the history of Juneteenth and the myriad emotions that came with enslavement and freedom. Those emotions permeate the book and may also elicit an emotional response from students. Prepare students for the emotions that may come by making them aware that this human response is appropriate, whether that emotion be the joy of freedom or the sadness of slavery. Giving students access to language to help them process their emotions is important before you begin reading *Free at Last*. Providing sentence starters (I am feeling ... because ...) and making them visible as the class engages with this book will give students a safe means of expression.

It is important to also create a brave and safe environment for students as the class engages in learning and discussions about slavery. Beginning with a class meeting to involve students in the creation of brave and safe expectations will help in establishing community norms and a collective understanding of the importance of, and necessary respect for, the topic.

GRADE LEVEL STANDARDS

This picture book is appropriate for grades 4–6 and could also be used as part of a text set for students in grades 7–8.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2,
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.2**

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.5,
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.5**

Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

VISUAL TIMELINE

Create a visual timeline with captions focused on events leading to Juneteenth for Black people in America.* Give students time to review the visuals, identify noticings and wonderings, and use their observations and questions to explain and lead a class discussion on the concepts of freedom and enslavement.

Some potential discussion questions:

- What does freedom mean to you?
- What are some examples of freedom that you can think of?
- What images and feelings do you associate with freedom?
- What ideas, images, and feelings do you associate with enslavement?

This source from the Library of Congress is a good place to start building the visual timeline: [loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/african/beginnings/](https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/african/beginnings/)

*It is important to begin the visual timeline with images of Black freedom to ensure students understand that the history of Black people is rooted in freedom.

FREE AT LAST

- Play excerpts from the Black spiritual song, “Free at Last” for the class. While listening, students can respond and actively listen by writing, drawing, manipulating Play-Doh or Legos, etc. Give students time to share their responses and the thinking that led to their creations. Ask students to connect their understanding of the concepts of freedom and enslavement to the song.
- On chart paper or a digital platform, write the following questions for students to use for a think, pair, share:
 - What does the song say (summary)?
 - What do you think the song means (understanding)?
 - Why does this song matter (importance)?
- Provide students with an image of the lyrics, an image or sound bite from the closing words of Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech, and the cover of this book. Ask students to make predictions about the book based on the lyrics, quote, and cover.



MAPPING EMANCIPATION

Using the map that illustrates the votes for and against the Thirteenth Amendment, show students the path of emancipation, highlighting the student's location and their state's vote, as well as the approximate location of Galveston, Texas, the setting of this book.

library.stanford.edu/blogs/stanford-libraries-blog/2020/06/mapping-slavery-and-emancipation

VOCABULARY

Use word webs, images, and contextualized sentences to introduce the following vocabulary words.

bound

descendants

forebears

hastening

hollow

reveling

sanctuary

shackles

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *Free at Last* highlights the choices formerly enslaved Black people make when they realize their freedom. What is the connection between choice and freedom?
- What were some of the formerly enslaved people's responses to freedom? What choices did they make?
- How do their responses/choices represent both joy and sadness? Why do you think both responses were appropriate?
- What do their responses/choices tell us about what freedom meant to them?
- What is the relationship between freedom and justice? Enslavement and injustice?
- What symbols of freedom and justice can you find in the illustrations? How do the illustrations enhance your understanding of these concepts?



ACTIVITIES

CELEBRATING FREEDOM

As a class, take a look at the following historical images that chronicle Black freedom. Assign student groups a historical image. Each student group will use a Venn diagram organizer to compare the historical images to the words and images from *Free at Last*. The student groups will collaboratively write two to three sentences explaining how both images represent freedom and justice.



“Reading the Emancipation Proclamation.” 1863.
The Gilder Lehrman Collection.

gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/content-images/07595.jpg

Accessed 2 Jan. 2022.

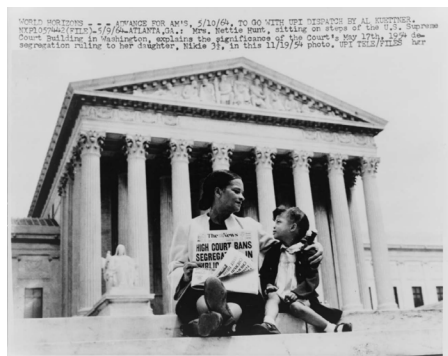


“Emancipation Day, Richmond, VA” Photograph.
Detroit Publishing Company. 1905.

Library of Congress.

loc.gov/item/2016804723/

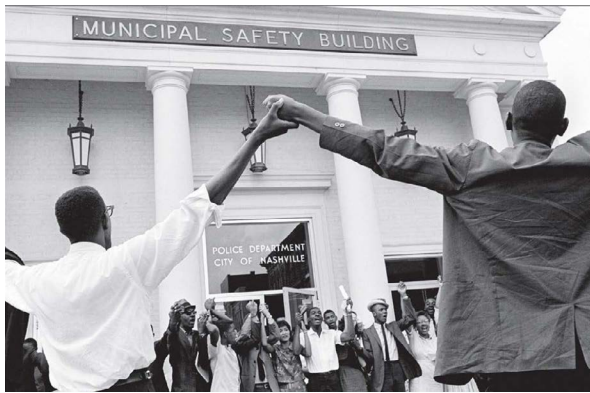
Accessed 2 Jan. 2022.



“Mrs. Nettie Hunt, sitting on the steps of Supreme Court, holding a newspaper, explaining to her daughter Nikie the meaning of the Supreme Court’s decision banning school segregation.” Photography.
New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Collection. 1954. Library of Congress.

loc.gov/pictures/item/00652489/

Accessed 2 Jan. 2022.



Demonstrators sang in front of the Nashville Police Department on August 7, 1961, protesting what they called police brutality in a racial clash two nights earlier. They criticized “inadequate” police protection and called for qualified black personnel to “replace incompetent officers on the police force.” Photo by Eldred Reaney.

fristartmuseum.org/exhibition/we-shall-overcome-civil-rights-and-the-nashville-press-1957-1968/#lg=1&slide=0

Accessed 2 Jan. 2022.



“Come Let Us Build a New World Together.” Poster. 1960. National Museum of American History.

americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1160332

Accessed 2. Jan. 2022



CULTIVATING GENIUS

Using Gholdy Muhammad's Historically Responsive Literacy (HRL) Framework, students will further explore the past, present, and future of Juneteenth celebrations.

The HRL framework provides a thinking frame around five tenets: identity, skill, intellect, criticality, joy.

TENET	STUDENT OUTCOMES	ACTIVITY STUDENTS WILL ...
IDENTITY	Students will learn why Black communities have celebrated Juneteenth for more than a century.	In <i>Free at Last</i> , Rolle writes, "Every year in the Lone Star State, and in towns from sea to sea, sons and daughters of the ones who were held—telling the stories that their families passed down—celebrate the day their forebears could shout 'Free at last! Hallelujah, I'm free!'" Research the origin of Juneteenth celebrations. When? Why? Where did they occur? Any common attributes of the celebration (i.e, on the 4th of July people across the country watch fireworks).
SKILL	Students will make connections between the past and present.	Connections will be used in most of the activities for each tenet.
INTELLECT	Students will learn about Black success following emancipation.	Add at least two additional images with captions to the teacher-created visual timeline that shows Black success from 1865–1965.



TENET	STUDENTS OUTCOMES	ACTIVITY STUDENTS WILL
CRITICALITY	Students will learn how past expressions of freedom and justice like Juneteenth influence present-day activism.	<p>Select a line from the book and connect it to a current form of activism. Students will look for examples in <i>Free at Last</i> to answer this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What line in the book shows something people did after learning of their liberation to seek freedom and justice? <p>Students will find present-day examples to answer this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some present-day examples of activism that seek freedom and justice? (for example, freedom from discrimination). What connections can you make between the two? How might the actions of formerly enslaved people empower people today?
JOY	Students will consider the joy of organizing and participating in a Juneteenth celebration.	<p>Plan your own Juneteenth celebration. Create a flyer that communicates the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What you will do • How you will honor the celebrations of the past • How you will honor the present • Who is invited • Why celebrating Juneteenth is important



RESOURCES

Creating Brave Classrooms

adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/moving-from-safe-classrooms-to-brave-classrooms

A great, accessible guide for correct terminology related to slavery from the National Parks Service.

nps.gov/subjects/undergroundrailroad/language-of-slavery.htm

Learning for Justice's Teaching Hard History Framework

learningforjustice.org/frameworks/teaching-hard-history/american-slavery/k-5-framework

Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy by Gholdy Muhammad

Keisha Rembert is a passionate learner, educator and equity advocate. She was the 2019 Illinois History Teacher of the Year and the 2019 National Council for Teachers of English Middle-Level Educator of the Year. Keisha now instructs future educators and hopes to change our world one student at a time.