

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Captive

by

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Book Information

Joyce Hansen, The Captive
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Interest Level: UG

Shortly after the American Revolution, a young Ashanti nobleman is stolen from his people and taken to New England as a slave.

Award: Children's Africana Book Award/Honor;
Coretta Scott King Award/Honors

Topics: Countries/Regions, South Africa; People,
African; People, Royalty; People, Slaves

Main Characters

Ama an Ashanti girl stolen from her family who becomes friends with Kofi as he is trying to return to his family

Aunt Jewel an elderly freed slave who helps the boys when they run away from Mr. Browne

Captain Paul Cuffe a ship captain working against slavery who arranges for a hearing about the three boys' freedom and eventually takes Kofi and Joseph into his home

Joseph a boy who is a slave on the slave ship who becomes friends with Kofi and is sold with him to Mr. Browne

Kofi a twelve-year-old Ashanti boy who is kidnapped and taken to America as a slave

Lucas a friend of Aunt Jewel's who drives the boys to Lynn in his wagon

Master and Mistress Browne a couple who bought Kofi and Joseph as slaves and Timothy as an indentured servant

Oppong Kofi's father's slave who betrays the family

Sharif an Arab trader who holds Ama as his slave, and sells Kofi to slave traders

Timothy an indentured servant working for the captain of the slave ship and a friend of Kofi and Joseph

Vocabulary

indentured servant a person who was bound to work for another for an agreed upon period, often in exchange for passage to America

regret to look back upon something with sadness

somber dark, gloomy, depressing

Synopsis

Kofi is the twelve-year-old son of an Ashanti chief. Kofi's family, including his father's trusted slave, Oppong, travels to attend an important Ashanti ceremony. Before the ceremony, Kofi's father gives him a flute and a goldweight. The goldweight is meant to remind Kofi not to regret the past. While at the ceremony, Oppong betrays the family. Kofi's father and brother are killed while he and another brother are captured by men who intend to sell them as slaves. Kofi convinces his captors he should be returned to his family, and a man named Atta promises to take him home. When Atta does not immediately return him, Kofi prepares to leave Atta's home on his own.

Unable to find his flute, Kofi goes to a market where he meets an Ashanti girl named Ama. Together they flee from Sharif, a trader to whom Ama is enslaved. Sharif finds the pair and sells Kofi to slave traders. As they part, Kofi gives Ama his goldweight.

Kofi is placed on a slave ship where he meets Joseph, a slave boy who works on the ship, and Timothy, a white boy who is an indentured servant. The people on the ship become ill with smallpox, and most of the slaves and many of the crew die. The three boys are fast friends by the end of the trip.

In Boston the three boys are purchased by Master Browne--Kofi and Joseph as slaves and Timothy as an indentured servant. The Brownes have very strict religious beliefs. Master Browne makes the boys work hard and punishes them cruelly when they misbehave. Mistress Browne teaches Kofi to read, but Kofi is very disappointed when he realizes she will not help him return to his family. After Kofi and Joseph receive a brutal punishment from Master

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Browne, all three boys decide to run away.

A free black woman named Aunt Jewel and her friend Lucas help the boys flee to a town called Lynn. As they are enjoying festivities there, Master Browne finds them. After the boys run on board a ship to hide from Master Browne, they are discovered by the ship's captain, Paul Cuffe, the son of a former slave. Master Browne claims the boys belong to him, but Captain Cuffe arranges a court hearing, and the judge allows Kofi and Joseph to live and work with Captain Cuffe. Timothy, however, is returned to Master Browne.

When Kofi arrives at the Cuffe home, he is reunited with Ama, who was also rescued by Captain Cuffe. She still has Kofi's goldweight. Kofi realizes he must not dwell in the past, but live the life he has. He decides to become a great man like his father and Captain Cuffe and devote his life to fighting slavery.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did Oppong betray Kofi's father?

Although Oppong was well-treated in Kofi's family, he was still a slave. He was angry about losing his family, and jealous of Kofi's family. He wanted to be rich, so he took gold in return for betraying Kwame.

Literary Analysis

How was the mood in the Browne's home different from the mood in Kofi's family? What made the two homes feel so different?

Kofi's family was close and warm. They spent much time talking, telling stories, making music, and celebrating. The Browne's home was somber and quiet. Families ate their meals in silence and never laughed, sang, or played.

Inferential Comprehension

What do you think happened to Timothy when he returned to Master Browne's home?

Answer should include something about cruel punishment by Master Browne and the likelihood of Timothy running away again.

Constructing Meaning

In the epilogue, Kofi sees the coast of Africa. He says he will not try to find his village, but will continue his work helping those who escaped from slavery. What would you choose to do if you were Kofi? Why would you make that choice?

Answers will vary, but should include supporting statements.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The beginning of this story is set in West Africa in 1788. The area became a British colony called Sierra Leone and then an independent state. Have students research the history of this part of Africa. Discuss how the slave trade and colonization affected the people, the culture, and the government of the region.

Understanding Literary Features This story is a work of historical fiction, told as a first person narrative from the point of view of Kofi. Have students adapt a section of the story to another genre. The section of the book relating the boys' hearing could be rewritten and acted out as a play. This section could also serve as the basis for a newspaper story written in the third person. The newspaper story might be written for the general public in Lynn or for Quakers living in the area. The story might be quite different when directed at these two different audiences. Share students' writing and discuss how the story might change when rewritten in a different genre. Students may also discuss why the author would have chosen to write the story as a piece of historical fiction rather than in a different genre.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Paul Cuffe, the man who eventually freed Kofi in this

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story, was a real person. A summary of his life is given in the Author's Note in *The Captive*. Cuffe was Quaker, a member of a religious group that was opposed to slavery. The Quakers played an important role in the fight against slavery in the United States. They were instrumental in helping slaves escape the South through the underground railroad and were politically active in the movement to abolish slavery. Have students research the Quakers, their beliefs, and the role they played in history of slavery in America.

Comparing and Contrasting The main character in this story, Kofi, begins the story as the son of a chief. His father was a man of some status and power. Kofi becomes a slave and experiences life as a person held captive and utterly powerless. He is eventually freed by Paul Cuffe. Have students compare and contrast Kofi's lifestyle in each of these three situations: as the son of a chief in Africa, and as a slave in America and as a free man in America. Discuss how he perceives each stage of his life and how his childhood as the son of a chief would color those perceptions.