

Grade 7 - Narrative

The People Could Fly

Hamilton, Virginia. "The People Could Fly." *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers, 1985. (1985)

They say the people could fly. Say that long ago in Africa, some of the people knew magic. And they would walk up on the air like climbin' up on a gate. And they flew like blackbirds over the fields. Black, shiny wings flappin' against the blue up there.

Then, many of the people were captured for Slavery. The ones that could fly shed their wings. They couldn't take their wings across the water on slave ships. Too crowded, don't you know.

The folks were full of misery, then. Got sick with the up and down of the sea. So they forgot about flyin' when they could no longer breathe the sweet scent of Africa.

Say the people who could fly kept their power, although they shed their wings. They looked the same as the other people from Africa who had been coming over, who had dark skin. Say you couldn't tell anymore one who could fly from one who couldn't.

One such who could was an old man, call him Toby. And standin' tall, yet afraid, was a young woman who once had wings. Call her Sarah. Now Sarah carried a babe tied to her back. She trembled to be so hard worked and scorned.

The slaves labored in the fields from sunup to sundown. The owner of the slaves callin' himself their Master. Say he was a hard lump of clay. A hard, glinty coal. A hard rock pile, wouldn't be moved. His Overseer on horseback pointed out the slaves who were slowin' down. So the one called Driver cracked his whip over the slow ones to make them move faster. That whip was a slice-open cut of pain. So they did move faster. Had to.

Sarah hoed and chopped the row as the babe on her back slept.

Say the child grew hungry. That babe started up bawling too loud. Sarah couldn't stop to feed it. Couldn't stop to soothe and quiet it down. She let it cry. She didn't want to. She had no heart to croon to it.

"Keep that thing quiet," called the Overseer. He pointed his finger at the babe. The woman scrunched low. The Driver cracked his whip across the babe anyhow. The babe hollered like any hurt child, and the woman fell to the earth.

The old man that was there, Toby, came and helped her to her feet.

"I must go soon," she told him.

"Soon," he said.

Sarah couldn't stand up straight any longer. She was too weak. The sun burned her face. The babe cried and cried, "Pity me, oh, pity me," say it sounded like. Sarah was so sad and starvin', she sat down in the row.

"Get up, you black cow," called the Overseer. He pointed his hand, and the Driver's whip snarled around Sarah's legs. Her sack dress tore into rags. Her legs bled onto the earth. She couldn't get up.

Toby was there where there was no one to help her and the babe.

“Now before it’s too late,” panted Sarah. “Now, Father!”

“Yes, Daughter, the time is come,” Toby answered. Go, as you know how to go!”

He raised his arms, holding them out to her.

“*Kum...yali, kum buba tambe,*” and more magic words, said so quickly, they sounded like whispers and sighs.

The young woman lifted one foot on the air. Then the other. She flew clumsily at first, with the child now held tightly in her arms. Then she felt the magic, the African mystery. Say she rose just as free as a bird. As light as a feather.

The Overseer rode after her, hollerin’. Sarah flew over the fences. She flew over the woods. Tall trees could not snag her. Nor could the Overseer. She flew like an eagle now, until she was gone from sight. No one dared speak about it. Couldn’t believe it. But it was, because they that was there saw that it was.

Another and another fell from the heat. Toby was there. He cried out to the fallen and reached his arms out to them. “*Kum kunka yali, kum...tambe!*” Whispers and sighs. And they too rose on the air. They rode the hot breezes. The ones flyin’ were black and shinin’ sticks, wheelin’ above the head of the Overseer. They crossed the rows, the fields, the fences, the streams, and were away.

“Seize the old man!” cried the Overseer. “I heard him say the magic *words*. Seize him!”

The one callin’ himself Master come runnin’. The Driver got his ship ready to curl around old Toby and tie him up. The slave owner took his hip gun from its place. He meant to kill old black Toby.

But Toby just laughed. Say he threw back his head and said, “Hee, hee! Don’t you know who I am? Don’t you know some of us in this field?” He said it to their faces. “We are ones who fly!” And he sighed the ancient words that were a dark promise. He said them all around to the other in the field under the whip, *...buba yali...buba tambe...*”

There was a great outcryin’. The bent backs straighten up. Old and young who were called slaves and could fly joined hands. Say like they would ring-sing. But they didn’t shuffle in a circle. They didn’t sing. They rose on the air. They flew in a flock that was black against the heavenly blue. Black crows or black shadows. It didn’t matter, they went so high. Way above the plantation, way over the slavery land. Say they flew away to *Free-dom*.

And the old man, old Toby, flew behind them, takin’ care of them. He wasn’t cryin’. He wasn’t laughin’. He was the seer. His faze fell on the plantation where the slave who could not fly waited.

“*Take us with you!*” Their looks spoke it, but they were afraid to shout it. Toby couldn’t take them with him. Hadn’t the time to teach them to fly. They must wait for a chance to run. “Goodie-bye!” the old man called Toby spoke to them, poor souls! And he was flyin’ gone. So they say. The Overseer told it. The one called Master said it was a lie, a trick of the light. The Driver kept his mouth shut.

The slaves who could not fly told about the people who could fly to their children. When they were free. When they sat close before the fire in the free land, they told it. They did so love

firelight and *Free-dom*, and tellin’.

They say that the children of the ones who could not fly told their children. And now, me, I have told it to you.

1) What happened to the peoples' wings? (LA.7.1.6.a)

- a) melted
- b) molted
- c) shed
- d) shrunk

2) Why is this story considered a folktale? (LA.7.1.6.g)

- a) It is a highly exaggerated story.
- b) It is the life story of Sarah and Tony.
- c) It is written by slaves as they were taken into slavery.
- d) It is a story told around the tradition of the American Black culture.

3) Which detail tells the reader that Sarah is weary? (LA.7.1.6.c)

- a) Sarah flew over the fences.
- b) Sarah hoed and chopped the row.
- c) Sarah couldn't stand up straight any longer.
- d) The driver's whip snarled around Sarah's leg.

4) In paragraph six, what figurative language is "Say he [Master] was a hard lump of clay. A hard, glinty coal."? (LA.7.1.6.c)

- a) simile
- b) idiom
- c) metaphor
- d) personification

5) In paragraph six, what is the meaning of the phrase, "**Say he was a hard lump of clay. A hard, glinty coal.**"? (LA.7.1.6.c)

- a) The Master felt pity for the slaves.
- b) The Master felt kindness for the slaves.
- c) The Master felt sympathy for the slaves.
- d) The Master felt no kindness or pity for the slaves.

6) What type of figurative language is in the sentence, "And they flew like blackbirds over the fields" in paragraph one? (LA.7.1.6.c)

- a) irony
- b) simile
- c) allusion
- d) metaphor

7) In paragraph twenty, what type of figurative language is the phrase "As light as a feather"? (LA.7.1.6.c)

- a) hyperbole
- b) oxymoron
- c) metaphor
- d) simile

C4L Reading - Item Writing Tally Sheet

Grade 7- Narrative

Enter Passage Name Here: The People Could Fly

Gr7 Vocabulary	DOK Level	DOK 1	DOK 2	DOK 3	Item Total
LA 7.1.5 Vocabulary: Students will build literary, general academic, and content specific grade level vocabulary.					
LA 7.1.5.a <i>Determine meaning of words through structural analysis, using knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon roots, prefixes, and suffixes to understand complex words, including words in science, mathematics, and social studies</i>	1, 2				
LA 7.1.5.c <i>Select and apply knowledge of context clues (e.g., word, phrase, sentence and paragraph clues, re-reading) and text features (e.g., glossary, headings, subheadings, index, tables, maps, graphs, charts) appropriate to a particular text to determine meaning of unknown words</i>	2				3-5
LA 7.1.5.d <i>Analyze semantic relationships (e.g., figurative language, connotations, subtle distinctions)</i>	2,3		1		1
Gr7 Comprehension	DOK Level	DOK 1	DOK 2	DOK 3	Item Total
LA 7.1.6 Comprehension: Students will extract and construct meaning using prior knowledge, applying text information, and monitoring comprehension while reading grade level text.					
LA 7.1.6.a <i>Analyze the meaning, reliability, and validity of the text considering author's purpose and perspective</i>	2, 3				
LA 7.1.6.b <i>Identify and analyze elements of narrative text (e.g., character development, setting, plot development, conflict, point of view, theme)</i>	1, 2, 3	1	1		2
LA 7.1.6.c <i>Analyze author's use of literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, personification, idiom, oxymoron, hyperbole, flashback, suspense, symbolism, irony)</i>	2, 3		4		4
LA 7.1.6.f <i>Apply knowledge of text features to locate information and gain meaning from a text (e.g., index, annotations, maps, charts, tables, graphs, headings, subheadings)</i>	1, 2				

<p>LA 7.1.6.g <i>Explain and make inferences based on the characteristics of narrative and informational genres (e.g., textbooks, myths, fantasies, science fiction, drama, periodicals, essays)</i></p>	2		1		1
<p>LA 7.1.6.j <i>Generate and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions, analyzing prior knowledge, information from the text and additional sources, to support answers</i></p>	1, 2, 3	1			1