



## Classroom Guide for **JUNETEENTH JAMBOREE**

by **Carole Boston Weatherford**  
illustrated by **Yvonne Buchanan**

### Reading Level

Interest level: Grades K-5

\*Reading level: Grade 3

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.8/.5

Lexile™ Measure: 650

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

### Themes

Emancipation, Moving, Homecoming, Traditions, African American History

### Synopsis

It's a fine day in June. Cassandra's family has just moved from the city back to her parents' hometown in Texas. Cassandra likes her new house, and her new school is okay, but Texas doesn't quite feel like home yet. Cassandra wonders what summer in this new place will hold.

What Cassandra doesn't know is that her family has a surprise for her -- a Texas tradition. As she helps prepare red velvet cake, fried chicken, and piles of other dishes, Cassandra wonders what makes June 19th so important. After all, Memorial Day has passed and the 4th of July is still two weeks away. It isn't until Cassandra and her family arrive downtown that she discovers what the commotion is about. It's Juneteenth, and the town is holding its annual Juneteenth Jamboree. In the process of learning the significance of the celebration, Cassandra realizes that she and her family have indeed come home to family and tradition.

### Background

Juneteenth, a blend of the words "June" and "nineteenth," is an emancipation celebration that is said to have begun on June 19, 1865, when Union Army soldiers arrived in Texas and informed slaves that they were free. It took this news two years, six months, and nineteen days after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation to reach the slaves of Texas. Learning of their freedom, the joyful ex-slaves set out to find family members from whom they had

been separated (thus the emphasis on family reunions at this time), and finally follow their dreams.

Over the years, different legends have been created to explain the reason for the delay in freeing the slaves of Texas, including the story that the messenger was sent from the nation's capitol on a mule. Today, African Americans come together all around the country to celebrate Juneteenth with traditions from the early days, including parades, picnics, music, speeches, crafts, and African dances. It is a celebration of freedom and hope.

In 1980, June 19th was made a legal holiday in Texas. Juneteenth is also celebrated in many others states. Every year, several million people of many different backgrounds celebrate Juneteenth in over 200 cities in the United States.

## **BEFORE READING**

### **Prereading Focus Questions**

Before reading the book, you may wish to have students discuss one or more of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. Why do people hold celebrations? What kinds of moments or events do you think are worth celebrating?
2. Do you have a favorite holiday? Which one is it and why? What special things does your family do for that holiday? What special foods do you have to eat?
3. Have you ever moved? How did you feel when you first started living in your new neighborhood? What made you feel at home?

### **Setting a Purpose for Reading**

Invite students to examine the front cover of the book. What do you think "Juneteenth" means? What does "jamboree" mean? What does the picture suggest? Why do you think people have jamborees?

Suggest students write down some questions they hope to have answered as they read the book. Suggest that students keep their questions in mind as they read.

### **Vocabulary**

Cassandra is told that she will experience "a Texas tradition." Explore the meaning of tradition. Ask students to volunteer different examples of traditions and what makes these traditions special.

Have students scan the story for unfamiliar words such as **tater, cloves, calico, junebugs, fellowship, pinafores, fiddler, patchwork, promenade, spirituals, newfound**. List these words on the chalkboard and briefly discuss students' thoughts about what the words mean. Then suggest that students write a sentence using each word.

## **READING & RESPONDING**

### **Discussion Questions**

After reading the book, you may wish to use some of these questions to generate discussion and expand students' understanding of the text.

1. At the beginning of the story, her parents' hometown in Texas "didn't feel like home yet" to Cassandra. How was Cassandra feeling then? How do her feelings change during the story?
2. Why was Cassandra puzzled when her mother told her they were preparing for a surprise? What reasons for the surprise "Texas tradition" does she consider and why does she rule them out?
3. The story offers two possible explanations about why it took more than two years for news of the Emancipation Proclamation to reach the slaves in Texas. What other possible reasons might explain why it took so long for the news to get to Texas?
4. Why do you think people made corn-husk dolls, showed hand-made quilts, performed African dances, and sang spirituals from slavery days at the Juneteenth celebration?
5. What was written on the slips of paper the balloon seller gave Cassandra and Kufi? Why did the balloon seller have them write their names on the slips of paper before blowing up their balloons?
6. What was the significance of sending all the balloons floating towards the sky? What did Cassandra imagine as the balloons soared higher and higher?
7. How did Cassandra feel about living in Texas after the Juneteenth Jamboree? Did Texas "feel like home" now? What makes you think so?

### Literature Circles\*

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing the roles of group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to items 3, 4, 5, and 6 in the Discussion Questions section above to help students think about the meaning of freedom and why people celebrate the anniversary of gaining freedom. Items 1, 2, and 7 might be used to help students think about issues relating to belonging and traditions.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for passages in the book that describe the different activities of the Juneteenth celebration.
- The **Illustrator** might draw a picture that reflects Cassandra's ideas of how the Texas slaves responded when they received news of their freedom for others in the group to respond to and interpret.
- The **Connector** might report on how Juneteenth is celebrated in other parts of the country.
- The **Summarizer** should provide a brief summary of the group's reading for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might research additional information about the Emancipation Proclamation and how news of the end of slavery reached various regions of the country.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### Reader's Response

Help students personalize what they have read by encouraging them to respond to one or more of the following. Students might respond in sketchbooks, journals, or oral discussion.

1. Cassandra's parents happily and excitedly prepared for the Jamboree. What makes your parents happy? How do they act when they are happy?
2. Do you like surprises? What kinds of surprises have you experienced or participated in?
3. Cassandra's mother lets Cassandra wear a dress that her own mother made for her. Do you know of any heirlooms in your family? Describe your favorite heirloom and tell the story of what makes it special.
4. What do the words "forever free" mean to you?
5. Cassandra's family and community come together to celebrate Juneteenth. Have you ever participated in a similar celebration, where all your family and neighbors are involved? Describe the occasion and how you helped with the preparations.

### **Other Writing Activities**

Ask students to respond to one or more of the following writing activities.

1. Imagine you were at the first Juneteenth celebration. Write a story about your experiences.
2. Create a story based on one of the historical scenes in the balloons featured in the balloon lift-off.
3. What do you think the rest of Cassandra's first summer in Texas was like? Write a story about what Cassandra did during the rest of the summer in her new hometown.
4. Working with a few classmates, try telling the story of *Juneteenth Jamboree* in another form such as a poem, song, or play. Rehearse your work and present it to the rest of the class.
5. After studying the Emancipation Proclamation with the class, ask students to try rewriting it in their own words while adhering to its objective.

### **ESL Teaching Strategies**

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Let pairs of students (one strong English speaker and one ESL student) read the book aloud together, alternating pages.
2. Write brief descriptions of some of the Juneteenth activities and preparations on index cards, one per card. Mix these cards with cards describing activities and preparations for other celebrations such as Thanksgiving Day, Valentine's Day, and so on. Ask ESL students to identify which preparations and activities were involved with the Juneteenth celebrations in the book.

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES**

To integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you may wish to have students complete some of the following activities.

### **Social Studies**

1. If a Juneteenth celebration takes place in your area, have children work with the school librarian or other resource to gather information about when the local celebration started and what

took place. If there isn't a local celebration, discuss with students whether they think there should be one and how they might go about getting such a celebration organized.

2. As a class, start a web about the history of Juneteenth. Have students brainstorm topic strands such as: activities involved (singing spirituals, making corn husk dolls, dancing), people involved (President Lincoln, former slaves), how the celebration started, and so on. After defining the strands, provide a "reference center" for each strand into which reference materials (gathered by small groups of students) can be placed for other students to read, review, and use as resource materials for other projects.

3. Organize a project that might be called "The Long Road to Freedom" in which groups of students learn about different ways that former slaves gained their freedom, such as escaping via the Underground Railroad, being freed by their owners, gaining freedom papers, and so on.

For each means of gaining freedom, provide reference materials such as books, pictures, maps, and videos, and encourage students to search the Internet for additional information. Have students organize their findings for presentation to the class.

4. As a class, research important events relating to slavery from the early 1700s to the 1970s and create a time line reflecting those events.

### **Math**

Have students find out the locations of their parents' hometowns. Create a chart of all the hometowns and have students use appropriate maps to determine the distances of the hometowns from your community. Whose parents grew up furthest away?

For students whose parents grew up in the community, have students speak with relatives to determine the amount of time the family has lived there.

### **Art**

1. Provide information and materials for students to make corn husk dolls.

2. Make a poster advertising a Juneteenth celebration. Don't forget to mention the time and place of the event and the activities that will be held.

3. Create a classroom bulletin board of "What Freedom Means to Me." Decorate it with balloons, one for each student. Have students write their thoughts on strips of paper and tape them onto their balloons.

### **Music**

Listen to a recording of spirituals and read their respective lyrics. Encourage children to join in with the singing. They may also like to learn one or more of the songs and perform them for an audience.

### **Drama**

Several holidays are mentioned in the story. List them on the chalkboard and have students play a game of Charades in which students try to guess which holiday is being acted out. Students may wish to add additional holidays not included in the story to make the game last longer.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

**Carole Boston Weatherford** is a poet and journalist originally from Baltimore, Maryland. She holds an M.F.A. from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and in 1992 was the winner of the North Carolina Writers' Network of Black Writers Competition.

*Juneteenth Jamboree* is Weatherford's first picture book. When asked why she decided to write this book she replied, "I wanted to enhance today's children's appreciation of the freedoms they enjoy. I also aim to heighten children's awareness of—and thus keep alive—cultural traditions. . . .To preserve our rich heritage, we must pass it along to our youth."

Ms. Weatherford lives in High Point, North Carolina with her husband and their two children.

**Yvonne Buchanan** is a full-time illustrator. She graduated from the High School of Art and Design and from Parson's School of Design, both in New York City.

Ms. Buchanan's political illustrations have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Ms. Buchanan's animated children's video, *Follow The Drinking Gourd: The Story Of The Underground Railroad*, won the 1993 Parents' Choice Silver Award and the Chicago International Children's Film Festival Award.

A native New Yorker, Ms. Buchanan currently lives in Brooklyn, New York.

### Resources on the Web

Learn more about *Juneteenth Jamboree* at:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/books/june.html>

*Juneteenth Jamboree* in Spanish:

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/144/pb/celebramos\\_juneteenth](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/144/pb/celebramos_juneteenth)

### Also by Carole Boston Weatherford

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### Book Information

\$7.95, PAPERBACK

ISBN 978-1-60060-248-1

32 pages, 10" x 8", Ages 4 to 8

\*Reading level: Grade 3

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.8/.5

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Lexile Measure: 650

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: I-259

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

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