

Heart and Soul Reading Guide

HEART AND SOUL

The Story of America and African Americans



KADIR NELSON

Questions and Ideas for Consideration

Address: Consider Nelson's narrator and language choices to uniquely address the reader. What effect does this have on meaning/message?

Nonfiction: As school districts are encouraged by evolving curriculum standards to include more informational and nonfiction texts, how might this book fit such an objective? How does it function as nonfiction?

History: How does this book present history in a unique way, and what are the benefits of doing so? How does it compare to *Surrender Tree*?

Rhetorical Strategies: What purposeful strategies or techniques does Nelson use to present his ideas? What effect do these have on the way he tells this story and the meaning it might have for readers?

Illustrations: Nelson is considered by many to be a remarkable artist. How does his illustrations and the style he chooses affect the text?

Quotes: Why might Nelson begin each section with a quote, and what effect on the text do the particular quotes he chooses have?

Culture: In what ways does this book speak not only to African American culture and history, but a range of complex cultural elements (including race/ethnicity, gender, religion, geography, class, etc)?

Connection: How do you think readers (both African American and other readers) might connect to this text in meaningful ways?

Daybook Possibilities

- Check out some of Kadir Nelson's other books, and perhaps especially *We Are the Ship* or *Nelson Mandela*. How do they compare?
- Research typical history textbooks or curriculum plans, and write about how you can incorporate children's nonfiction to supplement such instruction, especially for culturally significant topics.
- Find books that have been awarded the NCTE Orbis Pictus Award for excellence in the writing of nonfiction for children. What values does this award stress, and what do you note about the winners?
- Propose a book that does similar work as *Heart and Soul*, but highlights another cultural group. What would you include in the history and what kind of illustrations would you use?
- Compare the work of *Heart and Soul* with Walter Dean Myers's *We Are America*. In what ways do these books relate to others we've read this semester, including Shaun Tan's *The Arrival*.
- Map textual connections by looking at similar themes, models of childhood, or ideologies in books we've read so far. In what ways do two or more books seem similar, but actually differ?

Suggested Critical Reading

"Harriet Tubman in Pictures: Cultural Consciousness and the Art of Picture Books" by Audrey Thompson

"Paths to Freedom: Literacy and Folk Traditions in Recent Narratives about Slavery and Emancipation" by Karen Michele Chandler

"Obamafiction for Children: Imagining the Forty-Fourth U.S. President" by Philip Nel

"Emerging Literacy of (an)other kind: Speakerly Children's Picture Books" by Michelle Pagni Stewart

Background and Context

Told through the intimate voice of a one-hundred-year-old African-American female narrator, Kadir Nelson's *Heart and Soul* won the 2012 Coretta Scott King Award. Offering a stunningly artistic depiction of American history, *Heart and Soul* is one of Nelson's many nonfiction children's picture books. This week, we will pair with the similarly remarkable work of Walter Dean and Christopher Myers: *We Are America*.