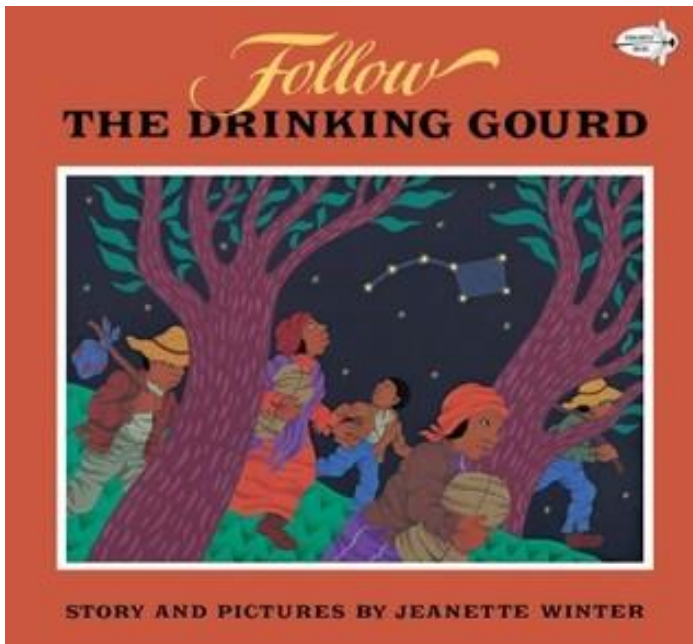


FOLLOW THE DRINKING GOURD

By Jeanette Winter

READING GUIDE

GRADES PREK-2ND



“Winter’s story begins with a peg-leg sailor who aids slaves on their escape on the Underground Railroad. While working for plantation owners, Peg Leg Joe teaches slaves a song about the drinking gourd (Big Dipper).

A couple, their son, and two others make their escape by following the song’s directions. Rich paintings interpret the strong story in a clean, primitive style enhanced by bold colors. The rhythmic compositions have an energetic presence that’s compelling. A fine rendering of history in picture book format.

OBJECTIVE

In reading this story and engaging in a fun learning activity young readers will build reading skills, develop critical thinking skills and make connections between characters in stories and real people.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- Slavery: the practice of owning people as property.
- Underground Railroad: secret routes and methods that slaves took to escape to freedom.

BEFORE READING

Talk about the book and the main character Peg Leg Joe, Molly, James, Isaiah, Old Hattie and George. What do we know about slavery in the United States? Talk about the Underground Railroad and railroad terminology. Can anyone name another famous escape slave who used the Underground Railroad to gain freedom?

DURING READING

While reading the book think about the experiences of story's main characters. How do they connect or how do they know each other?

AFTER READING

Describe the story in your own words. What is the sequence of events? How did characters Molly, James, Isaiah, Old Hattie and George come to escape? What do you think would have happened if they were caught escaping? Why was the song so important? Was it dangerous for the Peg Leg Joe and others like him to teach slaves the song Follow the Drinking Gourd?

Let us listen to the song and sing along. What do the words mean?

Leon Bibb: Recorded Fall, 1962 as part of Harry Belafonte's monumental "Long Road to Freedom" project. Not released until 2001. Note that this is the only version based directly on the Parks original. Leon's son Eric has also recorded a version of the song.

<http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org/Music/5-Bibb,Leon.FollowTheDrinkingGourd.mp3>

Lyrics

When the Sun comes back
And the first quail calls
Follow the drinking gourd,
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you
to freedom
If you follow the drinking gourd
The riverbank makes a very good road.
The dead trees will show you the way.
Left foot, peg foot, traveling on,
Follow the drinking gourd.

The river ends between two hills
Follow the drinking gourd.
There's another river on the other side
Follow the drinking gourd.
When the great big river meets the little river
Follow the drinking gourd.
For the old man is a-waiting for to carry to
freedom
If you follow the drinking gourd.

ACTIVITIES

1. Draw an illustration inspired by the book or song Follow the Drinking Gourd.

RESEARCHING Underground Railroad

Underground Railroad Maps: <https://www.loc.gov/item/75696204/>
<https://www.loc.gov/item/75696205/>
