



Prologue:

Reading Questions:

1. Where and when does this story open? Who are the named characters?
2. What is the role of women in this uprising (cite evidence from the text)?
3. Why is the author “haunted”?
4. Where does the author look to find “women warriors”?
5. Examine the images carefully: why might the author end this chapter with the statement “I was born to tell these stories.”?

Discussion Questions:

1. What might be the significance of names in this text? Which characters are given names and which characters are not? Why might it be significant to be named in historical records?
2. How are the women depicted in this scene? How does this compare to other depictions of women in this time period?
 - a. Sample Image 1: [Portrait of Mary White 1770](#)
 - b. Sample Image 2: [Free Women of Color with their Children and Servants in a Landscape, ca. 1764-1796.jpg](#)
3. The word “unity” is used repeatedly in this text. Why might this be an important word in this context?
4. What is the mood of this text? How are images and text used together to convey the mood or feeling?

Space for notes while you read.



Wake-Chapter 1: Coming Home

Reading Questions:

1. As the author walks through New York City in 1999, what do they see in reflections and buildings? What is the significance of these images?
2. How is the word “Wake” used in this chapter?
3. What obstacles did the author face as a Black woman attorney and in her daily life?
4. What inspired the author to study history?

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the artwork in this chapter represent or reinforce the idea that “invisible forces have shaped everything around you”? Do you ever feel this way in your own life?
2. “Invisible forces have shaped everything around you... but you’ve lost the words to describe them, this is what it means to live in the Wake of slavery.” Discuss this passage. What does it mean? How does it relate to overall themes of the text?
3. Do you believe that justice has to be fought for? Explain.
4. In what ways can racism and sexism “warp the possibility of justice”?
5. What does it mean to dive into “the erased, the unspoken, the blank spaces” in historical documents? Why might this be necessary?
6. Have you learned about slavery outside of Southern plantations, in school? Have you ever been taught about local sites of enslavement or the slave trade in your area?

Space for notes while you read.



Chapter 2: Dom Regina vs. Negro Slaves

Reading Questions:

1. According to the author, what crucial information about slavery is too often erased by history?
2. What happened in New York in 1712? What is the author searching for?
3. Describe the artwork on pages 2-3 of the chapter, what scenes are being depicted?
4. What were the names of four women defendants found in the municipal court records? What does the author know about them?
5. What does “Dom Regina” mean? What does it represent? How is Dom Regina illustrated in the text, compared to the four Black women defendants?
6. Why does the author turn to “measured use of historical imagination” to tell their story?

Discussion Questions:

1. “History written by the victors always erases resistance. And those of us who live in the wake/ruins learn that we were inferior and needed to be conquered and enslaved.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Evaluate: to what extent have you been taught about resistance of enslaved or oppressed people in school?
2. Carefully examine the artwork in this chapter. What is significant about the images and their placement? Identify and describe artwork in this chapter that represents themes of the book.
3. “It feels like a playground bully who tells you over and over again that he is the strongest in order to make it true... this is how language creates power.” Have you ever experienced this in real life? Who is the “bully” in this text? How does this passage relate to history education today?
4. “This is the way history erases us. What we say was not even considered important enough to record. You think you are reading an accurate chronicle written at the time, but if who we are and what we care about are deemed irrelevant it won’t be in there.” How does this passage connect to African American history as a whole? Can you think of other groups to whom this may apply? Describe. What can be done about this? What is the responsibility of historians towards groups that have been “erased”?



Chapter 3: Some Hard Usage:

Reading Questions:

1. In what ways is Ekua an important figure in her community? What is the significance of the plant left in her coffin?
2. What is the mood of the crowd at the end of Ekua's funeral? What do you predict will happen next?
3. What titles are Adolphe Philipe given in the text? What is the significance of this?
4. What is The Oath that Ekua taught her community?
5. Who starts the rebellion? What is the outcome? What is Amba's fate?
6. What source of information tells us how the rebellion ended? What important information is left out of this account?

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking carefully at the images and text in this chapter, what elements of this story may have been cited directly in the author's research and what might be a product of their "historical imagination"? (Consider creating a "T" Chart).
2. Ekua was an important leader in her community. Can you think of people who are similarly important in your family or community?
3. Ekua was an Obeah woman. [Obeah](#) was frequently outlawed and banned by slave owners and colonial powers. How might African religious and spiritual practices be a threat to those in power?
4. "I might have been born in this land, but Ekua taught me the power of the ancestors." Why might this be important to enslaved Africans in the Americas? Do you ever think about your own ancestors? How might a person benefit from knowing more about them?
5. Why did one woman take dirt from Ekua's grave? What might this symbolize?



Chapter 4: Sarah or Abigail?

Reading Questions:

1. What happened to Sarah and Abigail after the revolt? Why would a pregnant slave woman's execution be delayed?
2. What is a historian's worst nightmare, according to the author?
3. What is the central mystery of this chapter? Where does the author search for clues?
4. Is the author able to solve the mystery by the end of this chapter? How does this seem to impact the author?

Discussion Questions:

1. How does the artwork in this chapter reflect the author's mental state and experiences in researching this history?
2. What is the relationship between the historian and historical subject in illustrations on page 1 of this chapter?
3. What is the significance of the water illustrated on pages 2-5 of the chapter?
4. Why might the author be depicted in silhouette at significant moments in this chapter? What feelings or ideas are being conveyed?

Chapter 5: The Search for the Negro Fiend

Reading Questions:

1. How did the author first learn about the uprising that occurred in 1708?
2. Summarize the events of 1708. What is the historical significance of these events?
3. What names was the author able to identify in official records of the uprising of 1708? Who was not named?
4. Carefully examine the illustrations on page 6-9. What may have motivated the uprising of 1708?
5. What happened to the leaders of the uprising of 1708? Why were they given different sentences?



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6. What did King Edward's statue of 1352 say?
7. Who mourns when the "Negro Fiend" is executed? Why might the author have included this scene?
8. According to the confession recorded in the "Annals of Newtown", what motivated the woman warrior? Why does the author doubt this explanation?
9. According to the author, why wasn't this uprising recorded as a revolt?
10. What challenges does the author face in finding records of this uprising?

Discussion Questions:

1. This chapter begins with the quote: "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." by Audre Lorde. What might this quote mean in the context of this story? How might this quote apply to your own life?
2. The author refers to laws developed in 1708 that were crucial in "turning New York from a society with slaves into a slave society." What might be the author's
3. What is the significance of names in this chapter? What names are provided in official records of the uprising of 1708? Who is not named? Why do you think certain names are included and others are not?
 - a. If you were a journalist in 1708, what might you do differently to create a more accurate historical record?
4. What is the significance of King Edward's statue of 1352? How might this policy have impacted society and politics in colonial America? What might this law have meant for women and enslaved people at the time?
5. According to the author, why wasn't the uprising of 1708 classified as a revolt? What is meant by "feminine fit of pique"?
6. How does the author's encounter at the Queens County Criminal court bring the author "directly against the current configurations of race, gender, power and access,"?
7. The chapter ends with the quote: "The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots." – Michel-Rolph Trouillot. What does this quote mean and how does it relate to themes in this chapter?



Chapter 6: They Cut Off My Voice (So I Grew Two Voices)

Reading Questions:

1. What question does the author ask her students at the beginning of this chapter? How does it relate to themes from this book?
2. What prompted the author to cry in this chapter?
3. Which relative does the author speak to in this chapter?
4. What activities does Nana Harriet engage in throughout her day?
5. What does the author's Grandfather want his son to do? What book is on the table in these panels?
6. What happened when the author's ancestors stood up to the KKK?
7. What event is Nana Harriet preparing for at the end of her story?

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the author and her student seem to feel about the novel *Beloved*? Can you relate to this feeling? Might you feel similarly about any other media (books, movies, videos, songs, etc)?
2. Discuss the quote "Our memories are longer than our lifespans. Haunting is what makes the present waiver". How does this quote relate to the text?
3. What is the meaning of the illustrations on the bottom of page 7?
4. How does the author invoke their ancestors in this chapter? Have you ever done or felt the desire to do something similar? Are there traditions related to honoring ancestors in your culture or family?
5. Discuss the quote "The cut off my voice, so I grew two voices, in two different times." - Sweet Honey in the Rock. How does this quote relate to the text?
6. How is Nana Harriet depicted in this chapter? What is the focus of her journey and character?
7. How does the author's Grandfather's parenting relate to the ideas of Booker T. Washington?
8. What would you do: In your opinion, should the family have given up their home in Omaha or should they have stayed and fought? What might be some consequences or gains for either action?
9. The author says " It is part of living in the wake of slavery. We must defend the dead and fight the violence inflicted on them by their erasure from the record." What does this mean



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in relation to the text? What could this mean for us as individuals and as a society in the present day?

Chapter 7: England and the Slave Trade

Reading Questions:

1. Why does the author head to England in this chapter?
2. What is the hidden history of tea related by the author?
3. How does the author feel about England?
4. What percentage of African captives died in the slave trade? What were notoriously fatal parts of the trip?
5. How is the author treated by employees at the Victoria Tower, in the House of Parliament in London?
6. In what ways did the British regulate and maintain the slave trade?
7. What are some common misconceptions in the way the slave trade is taught?
8. What is the difference between chattel slavery in the US and other slave systems?
9. What is the “gun-slave” cycle?
10. Why did Captains and surgeons keep detailed records on slave ships?
11. What is the “Insurrection of Cargo”?
12. How is the author treated while attempting to do research at Llyod’s of London?

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the significance of tea as a symbol of British culture, as discussed in the text?
2. What spot in England “looks like the evidence room of a crime”, according to the author? Why? Can you think of other locations that might be described that way?
3. What factors must be considered when calculating or analyzing official recorded numbers of enslaved people? What does this mean for our historical records?
4. What obstacles does the author encounter at the Victoria Tower, in the House of Parliament in London? Do you believe that her personhood or the subject matter of her research played a greater role in how she was treated there?



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5. What is the significance of the Brooke diagram? Have you encountered this diagram before?
6. How did the slave trade change over 400 years?
7. What is the author's emotional state as they read through logs from slave ships? What brings the author solace?
8. Why do representatives at Lloyd's of London tell the author that they do not allow research on "that topic"? What is the significance of this for descendants of enslaved people? Might there be similar institutions in the United States?

Chapter 8: The Insurrection of Cargo

Reading Questions:

1. What surprising information was found by quantitative historians who developed a database of 36,000 slave ship voyages?
2. What is the relationship between the number of enslaved women on board and slave revolts?
3. What explanation for this fact is provided?
4. Why was the period of time just after boarding, while ships were still near the coast, a dangerous time for slavers?
5. Why were captured women kept above the decks during the voyage of slave ships?
6. What makes the author decide that she needs a break? What does she do?
7. What questions does the author have about the women who led slave revolts on ships?
8. In the time period of the Unity's voyage, war between what nations created many African captives?
9. Who are the Ahosi? What relationship may they have to slave revolts?

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the meaning of the opening illustration and text? How does this relate to themes of the book so far?
2. What is significant about revolts on slave ships as opposed to other forms of resistance? In what way did they impact the slave trade overall?
3. Why might historians resist the idea that women led slave revolts?



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4. "If you believe something doesn't exist, you don't go looking for it. Worse, if you stumble on it, you still can't see it." The author writes this about historians of the slave trade and their biases about women. How might these biases impact our understanding of slavery as a whole? Where else might we see similar biases in history?
5. Why might slave ship crews "remain oblivious to the agency of enslaved women"? Can you think of other historical or current events examples where the agency of oppressed people is underestimated?
6. How is the author's emotional state when reading about sexual assault of African women, illustrated in this chapter? Are there connections between panels in which the author appears and panels from the past?
7. The author says the documents she's reading are "so evil in their banality". What might this mean? What might this look like in your own life or society today?
8. How does the author deal with powerful feelings while researching? Have you ever felt powerful feelings when reading historical texts? What are your strategies for processing or self-care when this occurs?
9. What inspires the author to continue researching? What inspires you to learn?
10. What is the difference between the way that enslaved Africans are described in primary source text and the way that they are illustrated in this text? What might be the reason for this juxtaposition?
11. What story does the author use historical imagination to tell?

Chapter 9: All Water Has Perfect Memory

Reading Questions:

1. Where and when does this chapter begin?
2. Who is summoned by the King of Dahomey? What is their promise?
3. What conflict is the King of Dahomey facing? What is decided?
4. What is the reputation of enslaved people from Dahomey?
5. What practices are depicted in introducing the captives to Whydah Slave Trading Port?

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the significance of the title of this chapter? How does it relate to themes in the text?



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2. What is the author trying to convey about life in Dahomey in 1769 in these early panels? How does depiction of Africans in these illustrations contrast depictions in historical records included in this text?
3. How is the Brooke diagram used in this chapter? Why might the author choose to include it in this context?



Chapter 10: Ancestry In Progress

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the significance of the illustration of the author on page 1 of this chapter? How does this illustration change?
2. The author states “Our country lives in the afterlife of slavery,” how is this concept illustrated?
3. What is the significance of Thomas Jefferson’s quote in this chapter?
4. “Living in the wake of slavery is haunting, and to experience this haunting is to be nothing less than traumatized.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Where might we find examples of this trauma?
5. “We reach the final stage of healing from trauma when we integrate the past into who we are. It becomes a part of us that we acknowledge and provides understanding to our world.” How might we do this, individually and collectively? What might this look like in your life? What might this look like at a neighborhood, city, state or federal level?
6. “At this wake, we must defend the dead. Our memories must last longer than our lifetimes.” What might that mean in terms of American history? What might this mean in terms of your own life?
7. Look closely at illustrations on the page beginning with “we must use our haunting”. What happens to the primary source documents in the author’s hands? What does she do with it? How does this relate to themes of the book?
8. Discuss the following quotes:
 - a. “They say the trauma[s] of our ancestors are stored inside us; in our bodies, our minds, our spirits. So too is our resilience.”
 - b. “When we go back and retrieve our past, our legacy of resistance through impossible odds, our way out of no way, we redress the void of origins that would erase us. We empower and bring joy to our present. This is ancestry in progress, and it is our superpower. “
9. What is the significance of final images?