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ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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THEMATIC GUIDE

Teaching Fiction and Nonfiction Pairings

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Books can open the door to both imagination and discovery by pairing the excitement of fiction with the knowledge of nonfiction. This guide encourages K–5 students to build literacy skills, think critically, and explore the connections between stories and the world around them.

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INTRODUCTION

Pairing fiction and nonfiction texts in the classroom provides students the benefits of two worlds: the excitement and engagement of storytelling and the diverse features and formats of prose. Paired texts hook readers, provide relevance, and open entry points to new ideas. For early elementary-aged students, paired titles provide an opportunity to build knowledge and examine the world even before they can read text. In upper-grade elementary classes, these pairings enhance literacy learning by building vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking. When students read these texts together, they broaden their interests while analyzing differences in style, structure, and point of view.

This guide, designed for grades K–5, provides supports for new readers and suggests texts and activities that can be used in part or in their entirety, during whole-class or small-group instruction. Educators can also choose to adapt these activities for different or additional titles. Essential questions bridge texts and provide opportunities for comparing perspectives and researching facts within fiction. Elementary students will be encouraged to read, write, think, and collaborate, all while exploring the best of both worlds.

PAIR 1:
Buffalo Dreamer &
The Sacred Stone Camp

Buffalo Dreamer
VIOLET DUNCAN

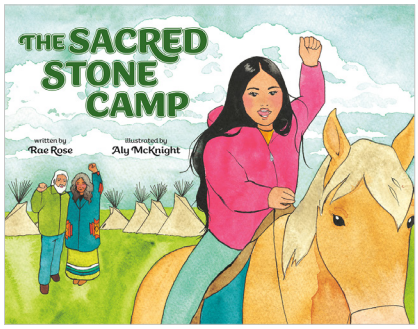
9780593624838
Nancy Paulsen Books | Paperback
$7.99 | 128 pages | Lexile: 790L
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

SUMMARIES

In the historical fiction novel *Buffalo Dreamer*, by Violet Duncan, a young Cree/Apache girl's vivid dreams immerse her in her family's painful but proud history.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can reclaiming the past help restore justice and ensure a better future?



The Sacred Stone Camp
RAE ROSE, Illustrated by ALY McKNIGHT

9780593696637
Dial Books | Hardcover
$18.99 | 40 pages | Lexile: 860L
Also available: **E-Book**

Rae Rose's *The Sacred Stone Camp* is a beautifully illustrated memoir about cultural legacy, environmental stewardship, and community action.

What can communities do to protect and preserve our natural resources?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

"COLORS, SHAPES, LINES" ANALYSIS

The Sacred Stone Camp utilizes vibrant watercolor and graphite art to illustrate the impact of an underground oil pipeline on Indigenous peoples and their land. Because this content might be challenging to young readers, consider using a single image for pre-reading. Ask students to conduct a "Colors, Shapes, Lines" analysis as an introduction to the book and to the idea of environmental activism (prhlink.com/colorsshapeslines). One of the book's central two-page spreads depicts the Dakota Access Pipeline as a black snake threatening the water, fish, and birds on the Standing Rock Sioux's sacred land. The "Colors, Shapes, Lines" protocol prompts even nonreaders to notice the harsh colors that suggest chemical contamination, the jagged shapes of sickened animals, and the black pipe lines that merge seamlessly into long, black snakes. Complete a modified picture walk by repeating the protocol with pages from the front and back of the book, or lead directly into a discussion about how communities can protect and preserve natural resources. Link the paired title, *Buffalo Dreamer*, by highlighting both texts' emphasis on natural resource restoration and cultural preservation.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

REFLECTIVE JOURNALS

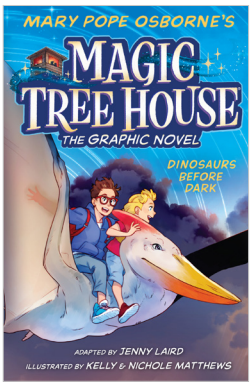
Journaling provides elementary students a low-stakes opportunity to process complex topics and make personal connections to both fiction and nonfiction texts. Journaling helps readers experience these texts through the lens of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, which in turn promotes cultural awareness and the reading-writing connection. Even developing writers can use drawings and sentence stems to reflect and respond to prompts. Provide writing prompts throughout the reading of *The Sacred Stone Camp* and/or *Buffalo Dreamer*. Prompts include:

- Write about a place that is important or "sacred" to you or your loved ones. Why is it important to protect this site?
- Talk about a dream that you can't forget. Why do you suppose this dream stays with you?
- Describe an event you attended where all generations are represented and recognized. What lessons have you learned by listening to the wisdom and experience of elders?
- How does storytelling help us understand the past and preserve the future?

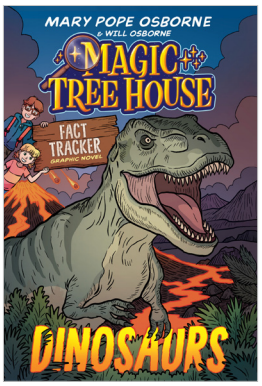
STOP AND JOT

In *Buffalo Dreamer*, Violet Duncan elevates complex topics for older elementary students, such as forced separation and cultural erasure of indigenous peoples. Before reading chapters 2–3, show students before and after assimilation images of Native American children at U.S. government boarding schools (prhlink.com/americanindianschools); (prhlink.com/ouamericanindian). Encourage students to stop and jot their reactions to the photos, and to reflect on how it would feel to leave their homes, families, and cultural traditions. Ask: In *Buffalo Dreamer*, what did the grandfather lose and gain as a result of boarding school? In what ways is he a survivor? Show students images from Orange Shirt Day (orangeshirtday.org) and discuss how activists in Canada and the United States support remembrance and reconciliation around the issue of Native American boarding schools. Discuss: How can reclaiming the past help restore justice and ensure a better future?

PAIR 2:
Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel &
Magic Tree House Fact Tracker: Dinosaurs



Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel
MARY POPE OSBORNE; Adapted by JENNY LAIRD; Illustrated by KELLY MATTHEWS and NICHOLE MATTHEWS
9780593174715
Random House Books for Young Readers | Paperback
$9.99 | 176 pages | Lexile: GN110L
Also available: **E-Book**



Magic Tree House Fact Tracker Graphic Novel: Dinosaurs
MARY POPE OSBORNE
Adapted by JENNY LAIRD
Illustrated by JOMIKE TEJIDO
9780593705841
Random House Books for Young Readers | Paperback
$10.99 | 128 pages | Lexile: GN690L
Also available: **E-Book**

SUMMARIES

Magic Tree House: Dinosaurs Before Dark is the graphic novel adaptation of Mary Pope Osborne's debut tale, where two kids travel back to the prehistoric past.

Magic Tree House Fact Tracker Graphic Novel: Dinosaurs is the nonfiction companion to Mary Pope Osborne's original text, with interesting questions and compelling facts.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How do curiosity and collaboration contribute to learning?

What can we learn about ourselves and our future by studying the natural world?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

VISIBLE THINKING

Before students read either *Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel* or *Magic Tree House Fact Tracker Graphic Novel: Dinosaurs*, provide intentional instruction around reading graphic novels, which makes thinking visible and helps even the most inexperienced readers "see" how to read. Model how to scan graphic novels from left to right, panel by panel, before moving top to bottom. Emphasize the value of patience, time, and careful observation. Introduce and practice using graphic novel vocabulary, such as "panel," "speech balloon," and "thought bubble." Post anchor charts that remind students of these genre-specific characteristics. Perform read-alouds using the whiteboard so students can see the reading process in action. Encourage students to practice these skills in a low-stakes environment with partner-reads. For resources and posters, see this *Magic Tree House* educator's guide (prhlink.com/rhcbmthguide).

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

COMPANION TEXTS

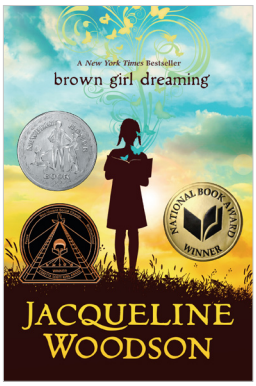
In her author's note to *Magic Tree House Fact Tracker: Dinosaurs*, Mary Pope Osborne explains that once readers finish her fiction stories, she wants them to learn even more with the nonfiction fact trackers. Encourage students to read companion texts with curiosity by offering a choice of activities that can be conducted independently, in partners, or small groups. Choices include:

- Find an animal, plant, historic period, or vocabulary word in *Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel* and look for more information on it in *Magic Tree House Fact Tracker Graphic Novel: Dinosaurs*. Create a Venn diagram or double-bubble map that illustrates which information appears in a specific text versus which aspects can be seen in both.
- Select a page from *Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel* and sketch your own version of one panel. Now add text boxes or speech bubbles that provide additional information you found in *Magic Tree House Fact Tracker Graphic Novel: Dinosaurs*.
- Create a glossary for *Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel* similar to the one in *Magic Tree House Fact Tracker Graphic Novel: Dinosaurs*. Place a star by vocabulary words that appear in both books.
- Select a different animal, plant, or other natural world inhabitant and create your own graphic novel panel or page. Incorporate both fiction and nonfiction elements such as developed characters and fact boxes. Pages can be hand-drawn or digital using a visual storytelling tool such as Canva or MakeBeliefsComix.

QUESTION TRACKERS

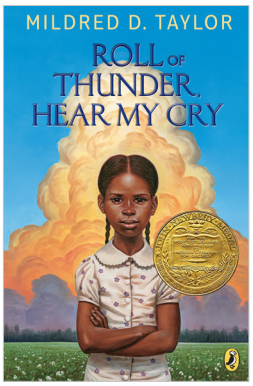
In both *Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel* and *Magic Tree House Fact Tracker Graphic Novel: Dinosaurs*, Jack and Annie learn through curiosity and questioning. Create a real life connection with a recent *ABC News Live* video report entitled "Scientists Discover New Dinosaur in Sahara Desert," about the discovery of Spinosaurus, a forty-foot carnivore not previously seen (prhlink.com/ytsaharadino). In the video clip, a reporter and an archaeologist utilize questioning to generate excitement and engagement in the subject matter. Play the video twice, once for student enjoyment and a second time for students to track the questions and answers that frame the interview. Afterward, students can share and compare their trackers. Discuss: How are the questions and answers in this science interview similar to Jack and Annie's questions in *Dinosaurs Before Dark Graphic Novel*? How do author Mary Pope Osborne and the interviewer on the news clip use questioning to generate interest and invite facts? As readers and observers, how can we use questioning to engage and to learn?

PAIR 3:
Brown Girl Dreaming &
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry



Brown Girl Dreaming
JACQUELINE WOODSON

9780147515827
Nancy Paulsen Books | Paperback
$12.99 | 368 pages | Lexile: 990L
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**



Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry
MILDRED D. TAYLOR

9780140384512
Puffin Books | Paperback
$9.99 | 304 pages | Lexile: 920L
Also available: **E-Book**

SUMMARIES

Brown Girl Dreaming is Jaqueline Woodson's poetic memoir about growing up and finding voice as a Black girl in the Jim Crow South.

Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* tells the story of Cassie Logan and her family, determined to maintain their dignity and their land in Depression-era Mississippi.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How can telling our stories help us establish our place in the world?

What internal and external supports can we draw on to uphold social justice for all?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

THEMES TRACKER

In both *Brown Girl Dreaming* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, land is integral to family identity, history, and pride. Conduct a read-aloud or play a recording of chapter 1 of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, where Papa explains to Cassie the significance of the land she will inherit (prhlink.com/rollofthunderaudio). Ask students to track this theme with text evidence and reader analysis on a two-column note-taker as the class works its way through the novel. Students can collaborate on their tracker in small groups or book circles.

As students read *Brown Girl Dreaming*, ask them to add more evidence to their theme tracker. Students might note how Jacqueline misses the red dirt of her girlhood in South Carolina, or how she throws Mississippi dirt on her father's casket, and they can discuss how dirt represents family history and identity. Ask students to reflect on both texts together: How is land a support for characters as they face injustice? How does the poetry in *Brown Girl Dreaming* help us better understand the storytelling in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

IDENTITY CHART

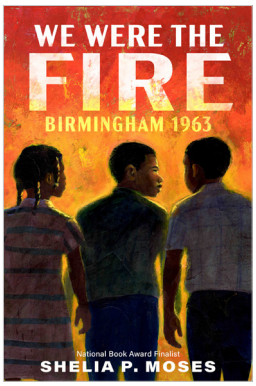
Challenge students to reflect on how identity is formed, both in the texts and in themselves. According to the organization Facing History and Ourselves, identity charts can "deepen students' understanding of themselves, groups, nations, and historical and literary figures." Model how to create an identity chart for a character in *Brown Girl Dreaming* or *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. On the whiteboard, write the character's name in the center of a starburst. At the end of each ray extending from the character's name, fill in a text box with a short, defining characteristic that society might use. Next, draw rays extending towards the center, and label these with ways the character would define him or herself. For example, outward rays for Jaqueline in *Brown Girl Dreaming* might include "colored," "tomboy," and "babyish," while her inward facing rays read "story teller," "nature lover," and "dreamer."

Afterward, students can create their own identity charts, and if they choose, share them with peers in order to build community and challenge stereotypes. For templates and more on identity charts, see this chart from Facing History (prhlink.com/facinghistoryidentity). Supports for younger students or language learners include focusing on only outer or only inner characteristics or performing the activity as a "sketch and tell" with drawings and partner share-outs.

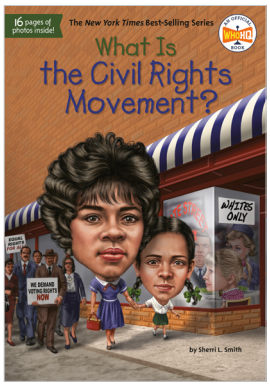
GOLDEN LINES

In *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jaqueline writes poetry about family members, special places, and dreams for the future. Invite the class to find "golden lines" of poetry in her book, providing students a low-stakes invitation to engage in reflection, analysis, and personal connections. To demonstrate, select one of Jacqueline's poems and conduct an initial read-aloud. Now ask students to take a second look at the poem and select a "golden line" that captures their attention. Students select a phrase that interests them due to wording, personal connections, curiosity, or any other reason, and they share their choice and their reason aloud with a partner or the class. Often, students will end up focusing on significant diction, imagery, or thematic elements without the pressure to be "right." As an extension, challenge students to write their own poem based on the structure of a poem from *Brown Girl Dreaming*. Discuss: How does writing help Jacqueline find her voice and establish her identity? How does writing help you tell your story?

PAIR 4:
We Were the Fire: Birmingham 1963
& *What Is the Civil Rights Movement?*



We Were the Fire: Birmingham 1963
SHELIA P. MOSES
9780593407509
Nancy Paulsen Books | Paperback
$8.99 | 176 pages | Lexile: 840L
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**



What Is the Civil Rights Movement?
MILDRED D. TAYLOR
9781524792305
Puffin Books | Paperback
$9.99 | 304 pages | Lexile: 920L
Also available: **E-Book**

SUMMARIES

In Sheila P. Moses's *We Were the Fire*, the year is 1963, and eleven-year-old Rufus Jackson Jones finds himself in the middle of the Birmingham civil rights demonstrations.

Through illustrations, historic photos, and engaging narrative, *What is the Civil Rights Movement*? by Sherri L. Smith introduces readers to a momentous time in history.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

To what extent did the civil rights movement fulfill the promise of equality?

What role did children play in bringing change during the civil rights era?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

HISTORICAL PHOTO ANALYSIS

Introduce students to the civil rights movement and to historical thinking through an analysis of historic news photos. Select one image and model the process using the "Observe, Think, Wonder" routine (prhlink.com/seethinkwonder). Students describe what they see (observe), offer possible contexts (think), and pose reflective questions (wonder). Thinking can be recorded on chart paper or the whiteboard, which students can reference as they analyze additional photos with partners or small groups. (For younger students, consider focusing on one iconic image.) Afterward, discuss the movement's goals and outcomes. Emphasize the participation of leaders and everyday citizens. Include contemporary images to demonstrate equality as a goal in progress. Images can be found at the Library of Congress' website (prhlink.com/aacivilrights) and in *What is the Civil Rights Movement*?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

TEXT-TO-TEXT COMPARISON

Highlight the role and impact of children and youth in the civil rights era by comparing and contrasting multiple texts. Show students the short video "Mighty Times: The Children's March" (prhlink.com/zinnedmarch), which introduces the 1963 Children's Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama. Next, read chapter six, "The Children's Crusade," in *What Is the Civil Rights Movement?* and chapter twenty-three in *We Were the Fire*, where Rufus realizes "But there was no fire. Then it hit me. We were the fire!" (p. 137). Afterward, discuss: Why did police use fire hoses on protestors, including children? What were the police trying to "extinguish"? What did Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. mean when he said "there is a certain kind of fire that no water can put out"? How does examining fiction stories together with historical facts help us build a better understanding of history? How can children serve as changemakers?

QUADRANT ARTWORK

Conduct a quadrant artwork analysis as an exercise in perspective and as a bridge between *What Is the Civil Rights Movement?* and *We Were the Fire*. Project on the whiteboard just one quadrant of Norman Rockwell's famous painting *The Problem We All Live With*, which portrays Ruby Bridges on her first day of elementary school in New Orleans, Louisiana on November 16, 1960 (prhlink.com/metrockwell). The first panel revealed might show only the top-right quadrant, with its red splatter stain against a wall. Provide time for students to jot down their initial impressions and predictions of the image. Continue revealing quadrants and encouraging student note-taking until the entire painting is revealed. Ask students to share their notes and thinking with partners. Afterward, provide background information on this historic event. Direct students to the timeline on page 106 of *What Is the Civil Rights Movement?* and reference other civil rights events that took place in schools during the era, such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and The Little Rock Nine. Discuss: Why did Norman Rockwell choose as his title *The Problem We All Live With*? Is this a problem we all live with still? Explain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Laura Reis Mayer is a professional learning consultant from Asheville, NC. She develops and facilitates learning for national education organizations. A twice-renewed National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT), she taught middle school, high school, and college English, speech, drama, and literacy. She has written more than 50 teacher guides for multiple publishers.

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