

*"PRECIOUS NUGGETS OF OUR AMERICAN PAST THAT
BEAR TELLING TO PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND RACES"*

— Marian Smith Holmes, *Smithsonian* —



ON THE TRAIL OF THE ANCESTORS

A

**BLACK
COWBOY'S
RIDE ACROSS
AMERICA**



LISA K. WINKLER

A MAN. A HORSE. A DREAM. AND 5,000 MILES

SAMPLE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Dear Educator:

Thank you for considering *On the Trail of the Ancestors: A Black Cowboy's Ride Across America* to use with your students. In this sample, I've included Chapter 1 and the corresponding educators' guide.

The full guide offers:

- A “do now” called *Saddle Up* for each chapter
- Vocabulary for each chapter
- Discussion questions for each chapter
- *Extend the Journey*: Geography, literature and dramatic activity ideas - varies with chapters.
- *The Horseman's Creed*: a 10-point character education platform aligned to journey, presented with 10 chapters.
- An appendix that includes horse facts, research topics, writing and mathematics lessons and more.

I hope this sample will interest you in adopting the book in your curriculum. I'm eager for your feedback, and available for consultation via email.

Educationally yours,

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SAMPLE CHAPTER

Chapter 1 Crossing the Mississippi River

AS THE FIRST 18-WHEELER TRUCK charged by without slowing and the bridge swayed underneath his horse, Miles questioned his common sense. He had never intended to put himself or his beloved horse, Sankofa, in danger.

To fulfill his commitment to travel the nation on horseback, he had to cross the Mississippi River. Separating east from west, it had served as a throughway in the flights for freedom from slavery and segregation. Determined to honor his forefathers, who had endured much more than heavy traffic, he steeled his nerves and reassured Sankofa, “Stay focused, boy, stay focused.”

Expecting that Sunday traffic would be lighter than during the week, Miles had started early, thinking he'd cross the Hernando Desoto Bridge from Tennessee to Arkansas without difficulty. When he saw how the behemoth vehicles clogged the six-lane, three-mile suspension bridge, he grasped the reins with both hands and used his weight and legs to keep the anxious Sankofa moving forward in a straight line.

Though Miles rode in the far right lane and his support driver crept slowly behind them, when a truck approached, Sankofa's ears twitched nervously. The horse shifted to the right, hopped and did quarter turns so he could see the traffic behind him. Each turn brought horse and rider closer to the three-foot-high railing that presented the only barrier between them and the raging rapids about 100 feet below. Miles glanced down; the boats in the river looked like ants building a colony.

After each vehicle whizzed by, Sankofa relaxed, just long enough to walk a few steps. But as soon as another truck came along, he again became agitated, skipping and stomping, inching further and further to the right, closer to the railing. Each time, Miles brought him back towards the center of the lane. Miles, sweating as he saw the river below, and having no desire to swim,

tightened his hand on the reins and pulled Sankofa back to the left.

“I don't swim well and panic when I'm near a lake or ocean. That river looked more treacherous than any water I'd ever encountered,” he later said.

With the guard rail not even reaching Sankofa's shoulders, Miles pictured himself being thrown over, or the horse catching his foot, tripping, and sending them both over the rail. Despite their years of building trust with each other, Miles felt he was losing control. Disaster imminent, he strengthened his hold on the horse and steered him back.

About halfway across the bridge, when Miles wanted to offer libation to his ancestors, Sankofa stopped prancing as if he'd read Miles' mind. Taking advantage of Sankofa's mood, Miles quickly dripped the contents of his water bottle over the edge of the railing and, without wasting any time, returned to the center of the road.

The libation poured, Sankofa immediately resumed his agitated behavior, again putting them in danger.

When they finally reached the Arkansas side of the river, Miles dismounted, giving Sankofa a break before they continued. The horse, as grateful to be over the bridge as Miles was, neighed, and eagerly drank some water. Miles removed his wide-brimmed cowboy hat and wiped the sweat from his brow with his bandana. He reclasped the barrette that kept his waist-length dreadlocks in place, and returned his hat to his head. Saying a silent prayer of gratitude to his ancestors for keeping him safe during the harrowing, 20-minute river crossing, Miles remounted. Horse and rider, somewhat refreshed and calmer, continued.

Miles sighed. This hasty and frightening libation ceremony struck a sharp contrast to the more peaceful and celebratory one he had observed among family and friends several months before.



SAMPLE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Chapter 1 Crossing the Mississippi River

SADDLE UP If you could travel back in time to meet an ancestor or a famous person, who would it be? Why did you select this person? What would you like to learn about the person's life and the times he or she lived?

VOCABULARY behemoth
imminent
libation

DISCUSSION

1. Do you think Miles made the right decision to ride cross the Mississippi River despite the dangers and how anxious Sankofa became? Why or why not?
2. Can you think of a time when your actions might not have been the best choice?

EXTEND THE JOURNEY

1. In this chapter, Miles is determined to offer libation to his ancestors.

Libation Intent: "... to remember and honor those who walked and worked before us and thus paved the path down which we now walk ... to express recommitment to the legacy they left by preserving and expanding it."—Dr. Maulana Karenga, creator of Kwanzaa (a celebration of African-American heritage and culture), Professor of Africana Studies, California State University, Long Beach

Students can write their own libation intents in the form of poems to honor their ancestors they wrote about in the Saddle Up.

2. Based on the people students wrote about in the "Saddle Up", create a time line to show the different periods in history.
3. Research and Geography: The Mississippi River and its role in history, economist Hernando DeSoto, Tennessee and Arkansas history
4. Have students write newspaper articles about Miles' crossing or reenact the scene in a television show. Students can assume roles of Miles, his driver, truck drivers and other witnesses who might have seen the event.

A SAMPLE OF WHAT OTHER CHAPTER'S INCLUDE

Chapter 2 The Journey Begins

ACTIVITY Creating an in-class artifact museum
GEOGRAPHY New York City
WRITING List writing, preparing for a journey
RESEARCH African Burial Ground

Chapter 2 The Journey Begins

POEM CONNECTION Langston Hughes' Harlem (2)
WRITING Create own dream poems
DISCUSSION Characteristics of an athlete
RESEARCH Activist Stokely Carmichael, Black Power Movement, poet Langston Hughes

Chapter 11 In the Saddle with Jimmy Winkfield

GEOGRAPHY Kentucky
DRAMATIC ACTIVITY Readers Theater about jockey Jimmy Winkfield
RESEARCH The black jockeys, horse racing

