

# The Slave Dancer



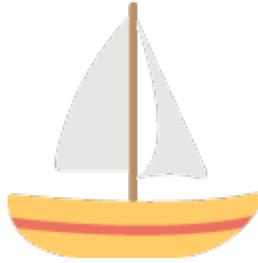
By

Paula Fox

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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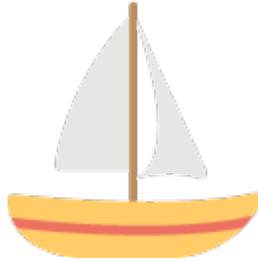
**About the author:** Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit [novelstudies.org](http://novelstudies.org).

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## Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on one chapter of **The Slave Dancer** and is comprised of the following activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include evils of the slave trade, racism, imprisonment and escape, greed, survival, courage and perseverance.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *onomatopoeia*.
7. Identify *singular/plural*
8. Identify *anagrams*
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*
14. Identify *personification*.

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

### Creative and Critical Thinking

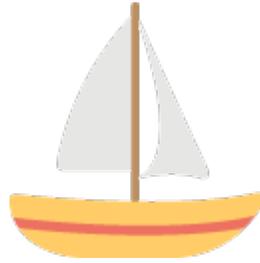
1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete an Observation Chart
9. Complete a KWS Chart
10. Create a friendly letter.

### Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Create an Information Card
4. Design a cover for the novel
5. Create a comic strip

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## Synopsis

One day, thirteen-year old Jessie Bollier is earning pennies playing his fife on the docks of New Orleans; the next, he is kidnapped and thrown aboard a slave ship, where his job is to provide music while shackled slaves “dance” to keep their muscles strong and their bodies profitable. As the endless voyage continues, Jessie grows increasingly sickened by the greed, brutality, and inhumanity of the slave trade, but nothing prepares him for the ultimate horror he will witness before his nightmare ends - a horror that will change his life forever. (Summary courtesy of the publisher)

A complete synopsis can be found online: <http://www.goodreads.com>

## Author Biography

Paula Fox

Paula Fox was born in New York City on April 22, 1923. Rejected by her mother at birth, Paula was left in a foundling home. Her maternal grandmother rescued her and gave the infant to Reverend Elwood Corning and his bedridden mother in Balmville, New York. The Reverend treated Paula kindly and taught her important lessons. Fox later attended Columbia University and married Richard Sigerson, by whom she had 2 sons. She later married literary critic and translator Martin Greenberg, and worked for years as a teacher and tutor for troubled children. Only in her 40s did she begin her first novel, *Poor George*. The novel was received well but sold poorly, a pattern that all her adult novels would follow. She has also won several awards including the 1974 Newbery Medal for her novel, *The Slave Dancer*. She now lives in Brooklyn.





# The Slave Dancer

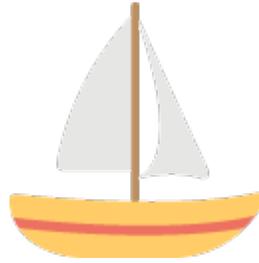


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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 1 – The Errand



### Before you read the chapter:

*Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally.* (Abraham Lincoln)

It is hard to believe today that only a few short generations ago, slavery was an accepted by many Americans. From what you know of slavery, what do you think would be the two worst things about this practice? (You may wish to brainstorm answers with a colleague.)

1
2



### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

sustain	brocade	caparisoned	perilous	profusion
diversion	intoxicated	reluctant	undignified	uncharitable

1. Everyone knew that a trip to Africa during the Monsoons would be most \_\_\_\_\_.
2. After a half bottle of rum, the first mate was quite \_\_\_\_\_.
3. When dressed in the clown's outfit the mayor appeared very \_\_\_\_\_.
4. John was able to \_\_\_\_\_ such a torrid pace for only half the race.
5. The designs of horses were no larger than thimbles and had birds and butterflies circling their \_\_\_\_\_ heads.

6. "That was a most \_\_\_\_\_ thing to do, Rachel," her aunt admonished. "Especially when your sister was feeling so poorly."
7. The rich, \_\_\_\_\_ fabric must have cost a fortune.
8. Kevin was \_\_\_\_\_ to loan his friend the money.
9. While John Dillinger robbed the bank his gang created a loud \_\_\_\_\_ out in the street.
10. There was a great \_\_\_\_\_ of cheap goods on the market after the war.

## Questions



1. What is the **setting** at the beginning of Chapter One?


2. Using resources in your school library or the Internet, find two interesting facts about the city of New Orleans during the time this book took place (1840).

1	
2	

3. Describe how both Jessie and his mother earned money.

Jessie:	
His Mother:	

4. What was your impression of Aunt Agatha? Why do you feel this way about her?


5. Why did Jessie decide to take the long way home from Aunt Agatha's?


6. As Jessie is being kidnapped what clue are we given as to the reason for this action?


7. At first Jessie thought the men were \_\_\_\_\_.

8. What did one of the men say that filled Jessie with despair?


9. Jessie discovers that he has actually met one of the men before. Describe the circumstances in which this happened.

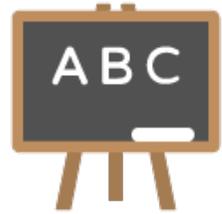

### Good to Know - The Cottonmouth

Jessie is terrified of being bitten by a **cottonmouth** as they make their way through some swampy ground. The cottonmouth (or water moccasin) is a venomous snake found in the southeastern United States. Adults are large and capable of delivering a painful and potentially fatal bite. When irritated they will stand their ground by coiling their bodies and displaying their fangs. They are usually found in or near water, particularly in slow-moving and shallow lakes. They are the world's only semiaquatic viper.



# Language Activity

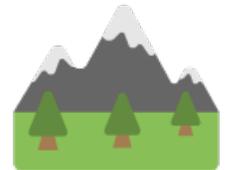
**A.** Many authors enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. Here's one such example: from Chapter One "... three **g**rudgingly **g**iven stubs."



Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

The sound of a rattlesnake	
A soft night breeze	
Your own example	

**B.** Chapter One contains an important literary device called a **cliffhanger**. A cliffhanger usually occurs at the end of a chapter when the author leaves the reader in suspense. How is this true in Chapter One? Why do you think the author ended the chapter this way?



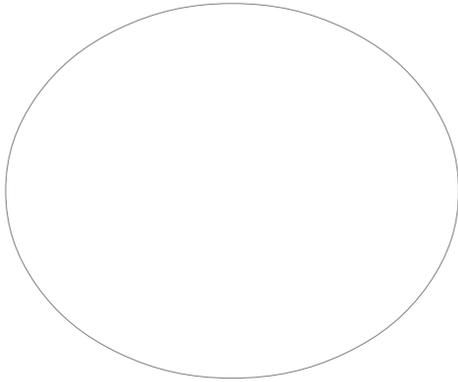

**C.** Place the following words from this chapter in **alphabetical order**.

mouths	1.
men	2.
martial	3.
mother	4.
more	5.
marks	6.
money	7.
my	8.
musty	9.
moon	10.

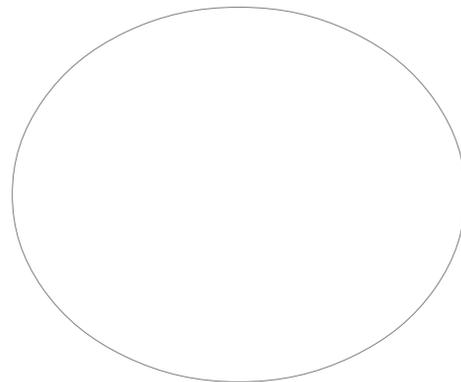
**D.** Choose ten words from this chapter with two or more **syllables**. Indicate the syllables by drawing a line between each syllable. **Example:** some / time.


## E. 5 Ws and an H.

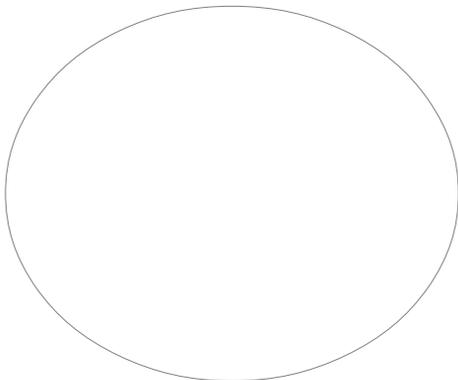
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



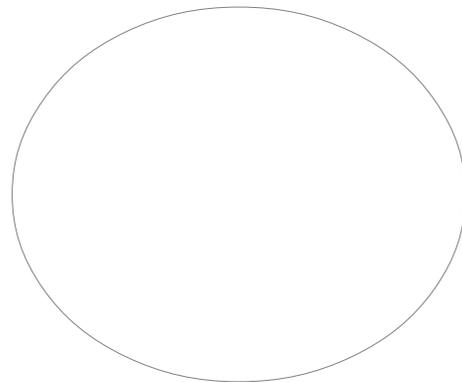
***WHO?***



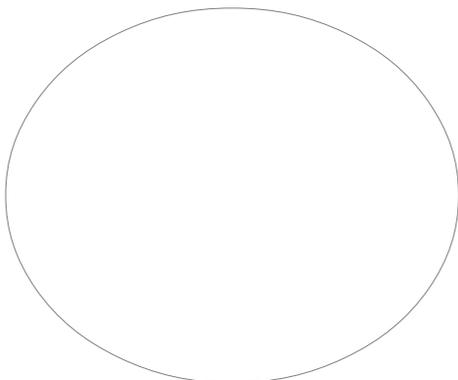
***WHAT?***



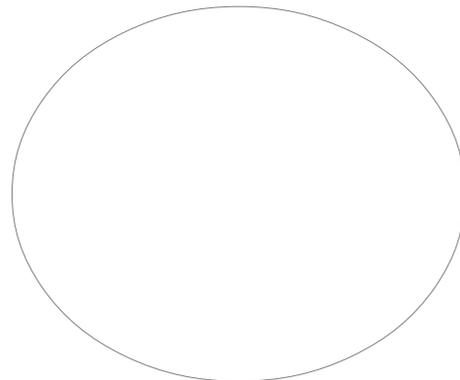
***WHEN?***



***WHERE?***



***WHY?***



***HOW?***

## Extension Activities



### A. Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel. Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in this section of *The Slave Dancer*. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.



1	2
3	4
5	6

## B. Quintet

Unlike **quintuplet** (a set of five children born to the same mother at one birth), a **quintet** is a five-line verse that tells a story. The quintet has a syllable pattern and has the wonderful ability of bringing a visual image to life for the reader.

Here is the structure of the quintet:

### A Creative Title

Line 1 – tells **when** ~ and has 3 syllables

Line 2 – tells **where** ~ and has 5 syllables

Line 3 – tells **what** ~ and has 7 syllables

Line 4 – describes **activity** ~ and has 9 syllables

Line 5 – contains a relevant **thought** ~ and has 3 syllables

### An Example!

Here is an example of a Quintet take from the poem, *Jack and Jill*.

#### Jack and Jill

*Dinner time,  
Up a hill they went,  
To fetch a pail of water,  
Then Jack and Jill tumbled down the hill,  
Poor old Jack.*

Now try your hand at writing a quintet which contains some of the important details from the first chapter of this novel.
