

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM USE



Debut author Eden Royce arrives with a joyous story of love, bravery, friendship, and family, filled to the brim with magic great and small.



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GUIDE FOR
CLASSROOM
USE

It's 1963, and things are changing for Jezebel Turner. But the biggest change comes when Jez and her twin brother, Jay, turn eleven and their uncle tells them he's going to train them in rootwork—African American folk magic that has been the legacy of their family for generations.

And it's not a moment too soon. Because when evil both natural and supernatural comes to show itself in town, it's going to take every bit of the magic Jez has inside to see her through.

PRAISE FOR *ROOT MAGIC*:

"Eden Royce's debut is a spellbinding southern gothic tale of bravery, family, and historic truths that need to be told. Black Girl Magic has never been more powerful."

Ronald L. Smith
author of *Hoodoo*

"Royce pulls back a curtain and invites the reader to a world within a world, a place in time full of both danger and magic. You won't just read it; you'll live it."

Saundra Mitchell, author
of *Shadowed Summer* and *All the Things We Do in the Dark*

"A terrific, wondrous glimpse of Gullah Geechee culture, richly detailed and inviting. Blending familial and ancestral lore with folk magic, Royce's novel set in a racist South, resonates powerfully. An original, compelling must-read."

Jewell Parker Rhodes,
New York Times
bestselling author of
Ghost Boys

"A poignant, necessary entry into the children's literary canon, Root Magic brings to life the history and culture of Gullah people while highlighting the timeless plight of Black Americans. Add in a fun, magical adventure and you get everything I want in a book!"

Justina Ireland,
New York Times bestselling
author of *Dread Nation*

★ *"This richly detailed narrative offers elements of magical realism against a backdrop of social change."*

Kirkus Reviews



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eden Royce is from Charleston, South Carolina, and is a member of the Gullah Geechee nation. Her short stories have appeared in various print and online publications, including *Fiyah*, and she is the recipient of the Speculative Literature Foundation's Diverse Worlds grant. *Root Magic* is her first book. Eden now lives in England with her husband and cat. You can find her online at www.edenroyce.com.

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AN
EDUCATOR'S
GUIDE FOR
CLASSROOM
USE

A LETTER FROM EDEN ROYCE, AUTHOR OF *ROOT MAGIC*:

Dear Reader,

Root Magic began as series of short stories because writing an entire novel seemed like too massive of an undertaking. Little by little I wrote scenes to connect the individual stories into one narrative, and I discovered it wasn't an impossible task to write a historical middle-grade novel about twins learning their own family's ancestral magic and using it to succeed and thrive.

While adding those scenes (and deleting others) I found the story of Jez and Jay and the rest of the Turner family emerging. That story includes struggles and triumphs, passing on knowledge, and always their love for each other. When I addressed the pain of losing someone dear to you, I paired it with the Gullah Geechee belief that death is not the end and we always have a connection to those who have gone before.

Jez and Jay learn this in *Root Magic*, and along the way make tough decisions, practice empathy, face down bullies, and realize it's best not to judge a book by its cover.

Root Magic isn't just a book about family, friendship, and monsters. It's also a book about folklore, traditions, ancestry, and a real, living magic that is still practiced today.

I hope you'll love spending time with Jez and Jay. Thank you so much for reading.

With sincere appreciation,



A South Carolina marshland creek. | Credit: Bill Lea, Southern Research Station, U.S. Forest Service



AN
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GUIDE FOR
CLASSROOM
USE

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Educational Activities by Anastasia Collins

Have students write their responses to the following prompt: What is something that you've learned (like a recipe, a story, how to build a kite, etc.) that has been passed down in your family? Who in your family shared it with you, and before that, who shared it with them? How is it special? Why is it important for families to pass along knowledge?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

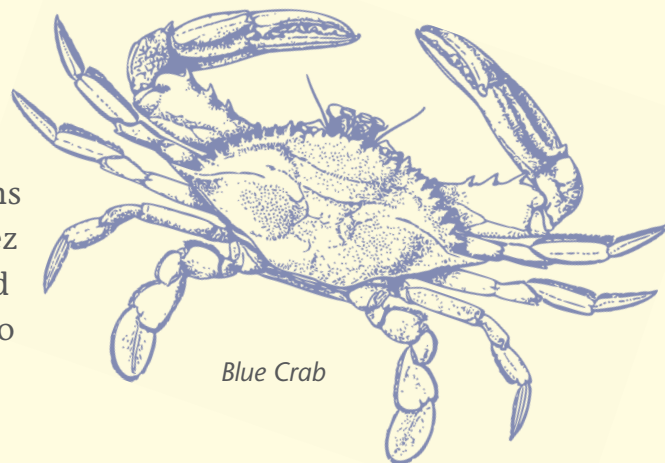
- 1 Jezebel and Jay's mother isn't wild about the idea of them learning rootwork. She says the twins "should be busy being kids." (Page 21) What does she mean by this? What is it about rootwork or its role in the family and community that contributes to the twins having to be more than just kids?
- 2 Jez is excited to learn rootwork. She notes that some of her classmates ridicule it even though their families use her uncle's medicines. Why might people who benefit from a cultural practice still look down on it? Can you think of other examples of this?
- 3 On the first day of school, Miss Watson reads Jez's class a poem by Langston Hughes called "I, Too." Do you know it? If not, look it up online, or visit your school's library and read it. What is the poem saying? How does it relate to Miss Watson's point that "sometimes Negro history is told by people who don't think we're important"? (Page 40) Or to Doc's point that "if [Gullah Geechee] ways disappear from the world...all we'll have left is what other people think of us"? (Page 19)
- 4 Doc says "Dark is not ugly." (Page 50) Why does he say this? What are some ways that darkness is portrayed negatively in this story? How does the association between darkness and negativity or danger impact Black individuals and communities?



Magnolia



5 Though both of them are part of a rootworking family, Jay and Jez have very different experiences at school. Jay seems to have several friends while Jez steadily feels more isolated and ridiculed. Why does Jay seem to have an easier time at school than Jez?



Blue Crab

6 Despite dealing with a lot of adversity—from classmates and spirits alike—Jez is reluctant to tell the adults in her life about any of it. Why do you think she tries to keep the trouble to herself? Do you think she makes the right choice? What would you do in her place?

7 Jez gets an enormous surprise when her doll, Dinah, suddenly starts moving. Discuss Dinah's role in the story and in Jez's life. In what ways is she an extension of Gran? Of Jez's feelings? How does Dinah's role change when she comes to life?

8 Doc talks to both twins about learning to tap into and trust their intuition. In your own words, describe what intuition is and why it's an important resource. How does Jez's intuition serve her in the story? When has your intuition served you?

9 Gran pays the twins an unexpected visit for their eleventh birthday. Just before she leaves, she tells them "*Hice da famblee*. Raise the family." (Page 114) What do you think she means by this? Does "family" only refer their direct relatives? How do Jez and Jay "raise the family" in the text?

10 Jez's mother is adamant about the twins attending school and getting an education. Doc insists as well that they keep up with their schoolwork while learning rootwork. Even when Jez comes home upset, her mother insists that Jez must go back. Why is school so important to Doc and their mother? What does school—particularly a newly integrated school—represent to Jez's family? Why is school important for you?

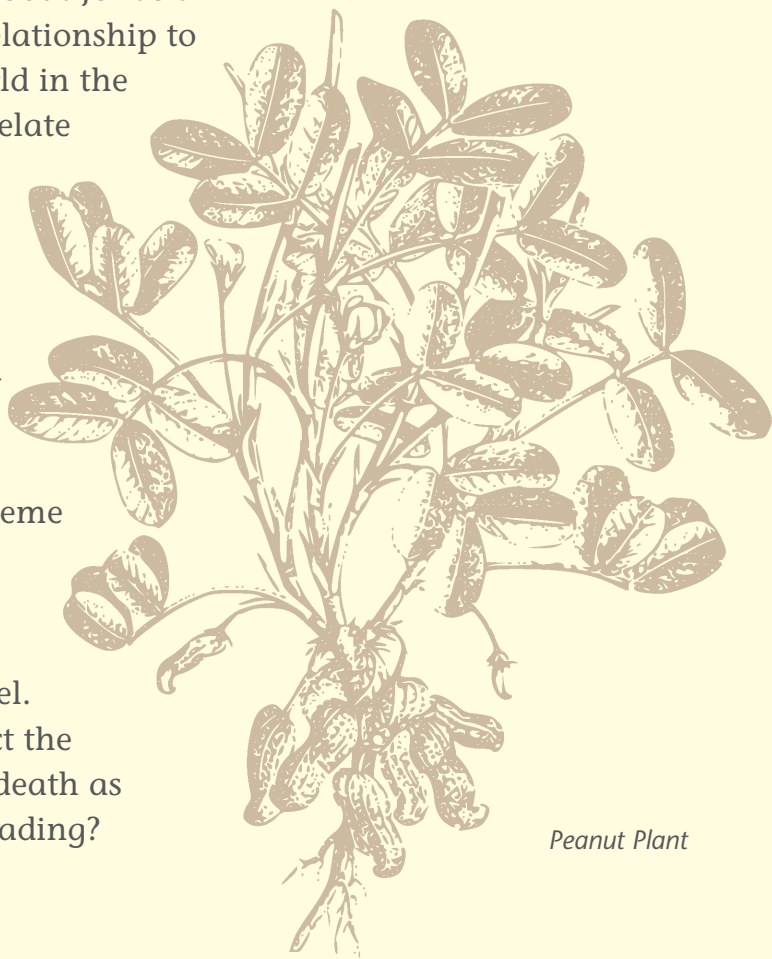


Okra



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GUIDE FOR
CLASSROOM
USE

- 11 When Jez questions whether a poet or writer can be an artist, her mother tells her that “if a person is creating with the work of their mind and hands, they’re an artist.” (Page 145) Do you agree with this definition? What would you add? What’s something that you create with your mind and hands?
- 12 Discuss Sheriff Edwards’ visits. He stops by the Turner’s farm multiple times, often to update or warn them, but Jez’s mother worries he’s doing more harm than good. What do you think? Why does Sheriff Edwards seem to have less power to help than Deputy Collins has to hurt?
- 13 We’re introduced to several antagonists over the course of the novel. Make a list and describe how each is harmful. How do these characters disrupt spaces that should be safe? In what ways are the characters and the harm they inflict different? Which antagonist would you say is the most dangerous, and why?
- 14 As Doc teaches the twins more and more elements of rootwork, Jez questions the need to harm animals. She asks if there’s a way to perform rituals without hurting other creatures. Doc tells her that if anyone can figure out a way, Jez can. What do you make of this? What does it tell you about Jez as a practitioner and her relationship to the (super)natural world in the novel? How does this relate to Jez’s choices when faced with the truth about Susie?
- 15 The novel opens and closes with a funeral—one a loss and the other a recovery. Consider death as a theme and discuss some of the ways that life and death are present and intertwined in the novel. How does death impact the characters? How does death as a theme shape your reading?



Peanut Plant



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USE

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

MAPPING MAGIC

- In the story, the characters and the magic have a deep connection to place. Working in groups or by yourself, make a map of the Turner farm, including Doc's cabin and the marsh. As you draw the map, make a legend for the story's different magical elements and incidents (haint encounters, protection charms, etc.) and mark where they take place. What do you notice about the locations where the supernatural occurs?

PICTURE A BOO-HAG

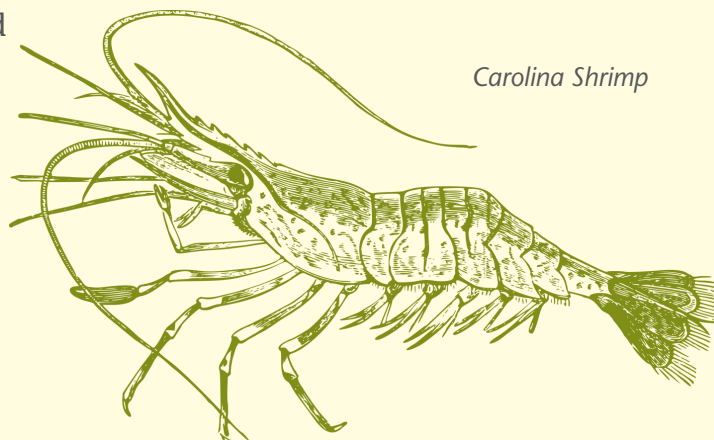
- Jez gives a fascinating and grotesque description of Susie without her skin. Using the details from the text, try drawing Susie the human girl and Susie the boo-hag. Even though Susie is a dangerous creature straight out of Jez's root magic notes, Jez still trusts and helps her. How might you draw Susie to be scary *and* friendly? (Don't forget her skin!)

SEGREGATION INVESTIGATION

- *Root Magic* is set in 1963, the year that South Carolina finally integrated its schools (the last state to do so) and that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. These two events are linked both historically and in their impact on Jez and her family. Research desegregation during the Civil Rights Era and the figures like President John F. Kennedy, who supported it. Why was it so important? Why was it opposed? Did your home state have segregated schools? When did it integrate them? Look up some of the ways that the problem of segregation in schools still exists today. How it is being challenged?

FANTASTIC FEAST

- Think about the role that food plays in Jez's family and in Gullah Geechee culture. List all the ways that food appears in the text. What role does food play in your family and community? Do you have any special comfort foods? Imagine that you get to plan a whole meal for a celebration. What would you include and why? Which dishes are part of your heritage or family favorites?



Carolina Shrimp



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EXPLORING CULTURAL MAGIC

- Rootwork is very important to Jez's family and deeply embedded in Gullah Geechee culture. In *Root Magic* we learn a lot about it through Jez and Jay's lessons and experiences. Do you know of other Black cultures in the U.S. or around the world that include magic practice? Research one such culture and explore how magic is used or practiced and why it's important in the culture. Pick some specific elements (such as practitioner tools, key rituals or symbols, creatures and spirits, etc.) and create a brief guide similar to Jez's root book with drawings and cultural descriptions.



This approximately 1400 year-old Southern Live Oak is on Johns Island, South Carolina. | Credit: Galen Parks Smith

These educational activities were written by **Anastasia Collins** (she/her/hers) who holds an M.S. in LIS and an M.A. in Children's Literature, and is the Research & Instruction Librarian for Children's Literature at the Simmons University Library. She is also the author of the Simmons Anti-Oppression Guide. Outside of librarianship, Stacy is a children's literature scholar and reviewer with Kirkus Reviews and Horn Book Magazine as well as a trauma-informed facilitator with the Anti-Racism Collaborative of Massachusetts. You can follow her online at [@DarkLiterata](https://www.instagram.com/DarkLiterata).



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CLASSROOM
USE

GULLAH GEECHEE PEOPLE

by Sara Makeba Daise

Gullah Geechee Cultural History Interpreter Sara Makeba Daise presents background and context for the setting and characters of ROOT MAGIC:

Surrounded by water, stolen to harvest rice, indigo, and Sea Island cotton in labor camps, Gullah Geechee people's enslaved ancestors retained and elaborated upon their broad African heritages. Rich in spiritual beliefs, plant knowledge, foodways, music, artistry, and communal customs, they forged new lives in a foreign environment.

Though these Africans came from different places, many agreed there was no separation between the sacred and the secular. Everything was sacred. They also believed in ancestral communication for protection and guidance. Throughout slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Era, and into the present day, Gullah Geechee people remain connected with the past, the future, and a faith in the supernatural.

TRAVELING THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

Gullah Geechee culture encompasses a magic, history and spirit that began in West and Western Central Africa, and traveled across time, space and ocean to the southern coasts of North America via the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Africans

with diverse spiritual beliefs were captured and enslaved from countries including present-day Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Gambia, Guinea, Angola, and Nigeria. Those from regions known as the "Grain Coast" cultivated rice for their sustenance, and possessed advanced knowledge about rice production. Southern slave owners paid higher prices for Africans with these agricultural skills, recognizing rice as a valuable cash crop.

The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor was established in 2006, and includes coastal areas extending south from Pender County, NC to St. John's County, FL. This area stretches 30 miles inland and is the historical and present home of many Gullah Geechee people. Today, Gullah Geechee people and culture thrive and evolve throughout the United States and beyond.

Map of Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor | Credit: Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission





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A UNIQUE LANGUAGE

The Gullah Geechee language is a Creole language formed in African slave castles and Southern slave labor camps. In order to communicate with each other and their captors, enslaved Africans from various countries and ethnic groups blended over 100 different African dialects, African rules of language, and the English language of their captors, creating a musical language still spoken today.

Young Gullah Geechee speakers are often ostracized, dismissed, or disciplined in schools because their first language isn't understood or respected, despite community advocacy on behalf of the language and its origins. Generations of Gullah Geechee people have learned to “code-switch”—the process of shifting between different languages or codes based on the environment or social context of the conversation. Code-switching has been considered a necessary tool for survival in environments where people are denied access and opportunities based on their ability to speak American Standard English. Gullah Geechee language continues to influence both African American Vernacular English, Southern speech, and vocabulary patterns.

HONORING THE PAST IN THE PRESENT

Just like Jezebel & Jay, Gullah Geechee people continue responding to ongoing geographical, political, educational and economic injustices as they craft their futures—caring for themselves and each other, while using tools and beliefs carried to America in the hearts and minds of enslaved African people. Many young Gullah Geechee people are returning to the Rootwork, Conjure, Hoodoo and other spiritual traditions of their African and American-born ancestors. Alongside more commonly recognizable creative roles such as sweetgrass basket weavers, makers of delicious cuisines, farmers, educators, fishers, textile designers, iron workers, storytellers and musicians, are the healers. Rootworkers, midwives, and conjurers who speak the languages of the spirits, plants and animals, and know which natural elements help with protection, solace, health and success.

Much like the Africans brought to North America, and like Jez & Jay, young Gullah Geechee people can learn from their ancestors, listen to their elders, spend time in nature, practice their magic, and learn how to be comfortable with and true to themselves.

This essay was written by **Sara Makeba Daise** (she/her/hers), a fifth-generation Gullah Geechee woman and Cultural History Interpreter from Beaufort, South Carolina. She holds a B.A. in Communication with a minor in African American Studies from the College of Charleston, and an M.A. in Public History from Union Institute & University. An Afrofuturist and multi-dimensional creative, her work invites you to your Being-ness across time and space. You can follow her online: [@saramakeba](https://twitter.com/saramakeba) / saramakeba.com



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CLASSROOM
USE

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GULLAH GEECHEE NATION AND PEOPLE

ORGANIZATIONS

Geechee Experience

The mission of Geechee Experience is to educate, entertain and celebrate Gullah Geechee language and culture utilizing technology.

Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor

The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor is a National Heritage Area established by the U.S. Congress to recognize the unique culture of the Gullah Geechee people.

Gullah Geechee Initiative Foundation

The Gullah Geechee Initiative Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit organization established to provide services and programs for young people who live primarily on St. Helena Island, SC.

BOOKS

G is for Gullah

by Ebony Toussaint. *G is for Gullah* is a book that teaches children the alphabet while educating them about Gullah culture.

God, Dr. Buzzard, and the Bolito Man: A Saltwater Geechee Talks About Life on Sapelo Island, Georgia

by Cornelia Walker Bailey and Christena Bledsoe. Anchor, 2001. Equal parts cultural history and memoir, this book recounts a traditional way of life—that of the Geechee Indians of Sapelo Island—that is threatened by change, with stories that speak to our deepest notions of family, community, and a connection to one's homeland.

Gullah Geechee Heritage in the Golden Isles

by Amy Lotson Roberts and Patrick J. Holladay, PhD. Arcadia Publishing, 2019. The Golden Isles are home to a long and proud African American and Gullah Geechee heritage. The authors explore the rich history of the region's islands and their people.



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GUIDE FOR
CLASSROOM
USE

***Gullah Home Cooking the Daufuskie Way:
Smokin' Joe Butter Beans, Ol' 'Fuskie Fried Crab
Rice, Sticky-Bush Blackberry Dumpling, and
other Sea Island Favorites***

by Sallie Ann Robinson and Gregory Wrenn Smith. University
of North Carolina Press, 2003.

***The Little Gullah Geechee Book: A Guide for
the Come Ya***

by Dr. Jessica Berry. J. Berry Collective, LLC, 2020. There is
a hidden treasure on the tongues of Low-country natives.
The melodic rhythm of the Gullah Geechee language still rings
strong from the South Carolina inland regions to the Sea Island
coasts. This pocket-guide to the Gullah Geechee history, culture
and language offers a brief introduction to a United States gem.



Butter Beans

FILMS AND VIDEOS

Daughters of the Dust (1991)

An independent film written, directed and produced by Julie Dash that is the first
feature film directed by an African-American woman distributed theatrically in the
United States. Set in 1902, it tells the story of three generations of Gullah women
as they prepare to leave their ancestral home.

**“From Whence We Came”: Gullah Geechee Watch Night +
Emancipation Celebration**

A video created by the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Commission of a
celebration that is over 150 years old: the Watch Night service commemorating
the date of January 1, 1863 when enslaved people in the Low Country, the Sea
Islands and throughout the United States emerged from bondage as a result of
the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Gullah Geechee—the me I tried to flee: Ron Daise at TEDxCharleston

Gift yourself with the impact of your own culture, says educator and historian,
Ron Daise, and enrich the lives of others around you.

Gullah Homecoming — Sierra Leone & Gullah People Reunite (1989)

A documentary about the discovery of connections between Gullah Geechee people
and the people of Sierra Leone.



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GUIDE FOR
CLASSROOM
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Gullah Roots

Follow leaders of the South Carolina and Georgia Gullah Geechee community as they experience a homecoming in Sierra Leone.

The International Gullah Film Festival

The mission of the International Gullah Film Festival is to encourage filmmakers to explore and tell visual stories based on the rich history of Gullah culture.

Taste the Nation with Padma Lakshmi: “The Gullah Way”

The Gullah Geechee people of South Carolina are fighting to preserve the traditions passed down from their ancestors, West Africans forced into slavery. Top Chef star Padma Lakshmi catches and cracks crab with new friends and old, all working towards reclaiming their heritage.

BACKGROUND

African American Charleston

A series of articles related by theme that describe the history of African American presence in Charleston, South Carolina. According to the website: “The stories shared here are a varied blend of personal observations, recollections and perspectives shared by our local contributors, a beautifully complex collection of voices.”

Gullah Sweet Grass Woven Basket
| Credit: Gullah Geechee Cultural
Heritage Corridor Commission

Interactive Map of Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor

This interactive StoryMap was developed by the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission in partnership with the Queens University of Charlotte History Department.

