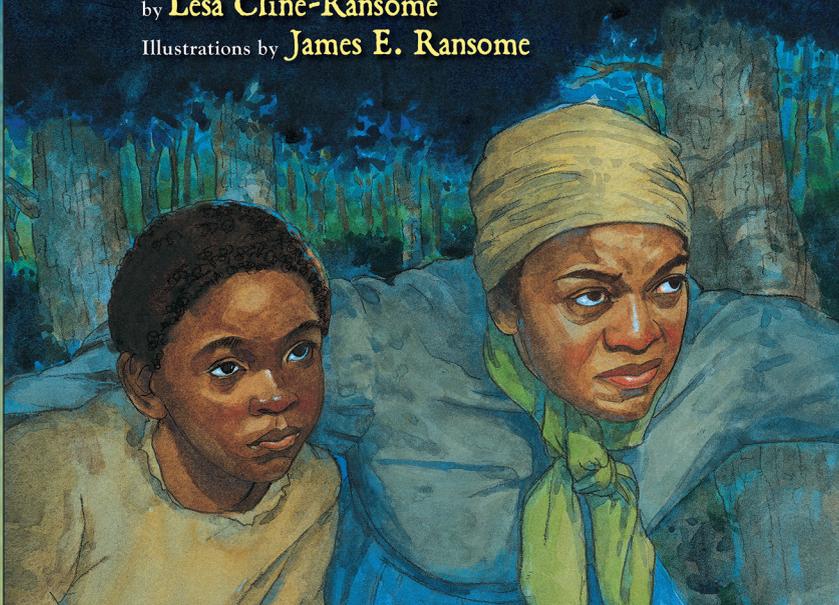


Light in the Darkness

A Story About How Slaves Learned in Secret

by **Lesa Cline-Ransome**

Illustrations by **James E. Ransome**



DISCUSSION GUIDE

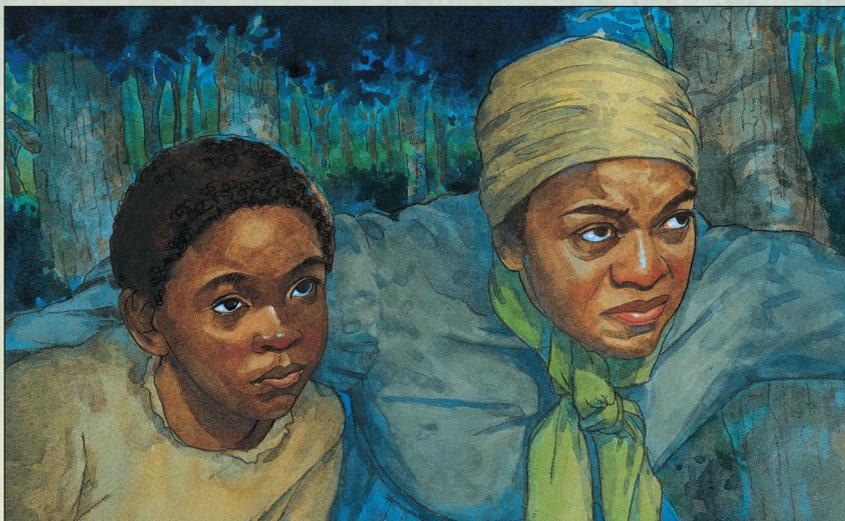
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About the Book

Light in the Darkness: A Story About How Slaves Learned in Secret describes the way that some slaves were taught to read. The narrator (Rosa) shares how she and Mama risk their safety at night to travel to “pit school.” The school is located in a hole that is hidden in the ground. Rosa is eager to learn, but she must wait to understand letters and sounds before she can learn words. Despite the danger of being caught by the patrollers, Rosa and Mama risk the journey to the lessons. Their bravery helps them begin accomplishing a dream that many slaves never had the opportunity to achieve.

Common Core Alignment

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Literature, Writing, Language, Speaking and Listening. The broad CCR standards are the foundation for the grade-level-specific Common Core State Standards. Each question and activity in this guide includes a reference for the CCR strand, domain, and standard that is addressed. You may also reference the grade-level-specific Common Core State Standards to scaffold the questions for your students.



Pre-reading

VOCABULARY

Some words have more than one meaning (i.e., multiple meanings). Use the graphic organizer below to develop sentences for both meanings of the words *quarter* and *pit*. Be sure to think about the meaning that is most likely intended in the book. (*Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: L.CCR.4*)

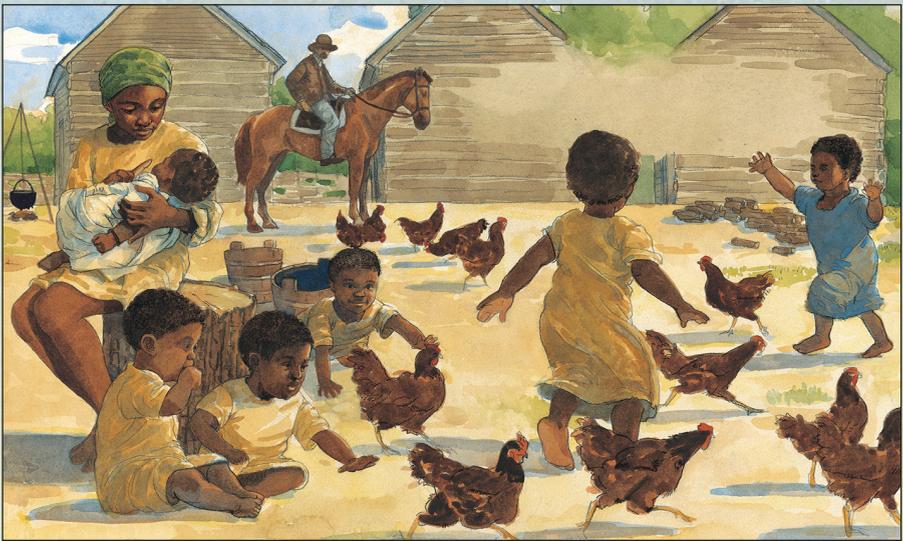
Quarter	
Meaning #1 A coin worth 25 cents that is used to buy items	Meaning #2 A place where people live
Sentence	Sentence

Pit	
Meaning #1 A hole dug in the ground	Meaning #2 A hard object in the middle of a fruit
Sentence	Sentence

Pre-reading

ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

- 1** Complete a picture walk of the story prior to reading the text. What do you think we are going to learn about slavery based on the title of the book and the illustrations? (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: R.CCR.7*)
- 2** Has anyone ever seen a plantation in real life or in a movie? What types of things are on a plantation? What kinds of jobs did slaves have on a plantation? (*Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: L.CCR.4*)
- 3** Many plantations were monitored or watched by *patrollers*. Make a prediction about how the *patrollers* might cause difficulty for Rosa and Mama in this story. To support your answer, refer to the title or other details that you noticed during the picture walk. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.1*)



Discussion Questions

- 1** Rosa says, “Most everyone in the quarter is asleep, but we still crouch low and walk with soft steps ’til we reach the field.” Which meaning of the word *quarter* is used in this sentence? Can someone act out the way Rosa and Mama walk around before they are in the field? Why are they walking in this manner? (*Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: L.CCR.4*)
- 2** Explain why it is important that the patrollers don’t catch Mama and Rosa. What are the consequences if they are discovered outside? Use examples from the text to develop your answer. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.1*)
- 3** Describe how Mama and Rosa enter into the pit. Why is a secret system necessary for anyone coming to the pit? Include details from the text to support your answer. (*Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: L.CCR.1*)
- 4** What does the pit look, feel, and sound like? In your opinion, is the pit a comfortable place? Use examples from the story to develop your answer. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.1*)
- 5** Explain why it is dangerous for Mama and Rosa to go to “pit school.” Why do you think Mama and Rosa take the risk? Make an inference by using your own ideas and details from the text. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.3*)
- 6** How does Morris learn to read? What types of materials does Morris use to teach letters in “pit school”? Why do you think he has everyone say, touch, and write the letters? Refer to examples from the text to support your answers. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.1*)
- 7** Mama says that it is too dangerous to go to school every night. How will she and Rosa remember what they learned if they can’t go to every lesson? Use evidence from the story to support your answer. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.1*)

- 8** When talking about the patrollers, Rosa says, “I hear they are like wolves—they see better at night.” What figurative language can you find in this quote? Based on what you learned in the story, explain things that wolves and patrollers have in common. (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: R.CCR.4*)
- 9** Describe the sequence of events that occurred causing Mama to fear going to “pit school.” How does Rosa change Mama’s mind? Use examples from the text to support your answer. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.3*)
- 10** What type of person is Morris? Does Morris have a positive impact on the lives of other slaves? Include details from the story to describe Morris’s character and his impact. (*Reading: Key Ideas and Details: RI.CCR.3*)



Post-reading

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- 1 Let's take a look at the predictions the class made during the pre-reading activity. Did the book confirm any of your predictions? If your prediction was confirmed, what evidence from the story helped you make an accurate guess? (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.1*)
- 2 Based on what we have read, what are the literal and figurative meanings of the book's title? (*Reading Literature: Craft and Structure: R.CCR.4*)
- 3 How did the illustrations in the story help you understand certain parts of the text, or the characters' feelings? (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: R.CCR.7*)
- 4 Summarize what you learned about Rosa and Mama in this story. What new information did you learn about slavery? What information supported the things you already knew about the lives of slaves? Refer to the text to support your answers. (*Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details: R.CCR.3*)
- 5 Pick a children's book from the "Further Reading" list in the back of the story. Discuss how the person in the book uses education to their advantage. Based on what you learned in both stories, explain why learning how to read is helpful to a slave and also the types of challenges that prevented many slaves from accomplishing this goal. (*Reading Literature: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: R.CCR.9*)



Curriculum Connections

READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING

SOCIAL STUDIES

With a partner, research a slave who used education to change his or her life. Conduct your search through online and/or library resources. Develop a 1–2-page summary that answers the following questions: What caused the individual to want an education? What obstacles did he or she face? How did the education impact the person’s life? How did the individual help or inspire others? How is his or her journey similar to or different from Mama and Rosa’s? (*Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.CCR.6*)

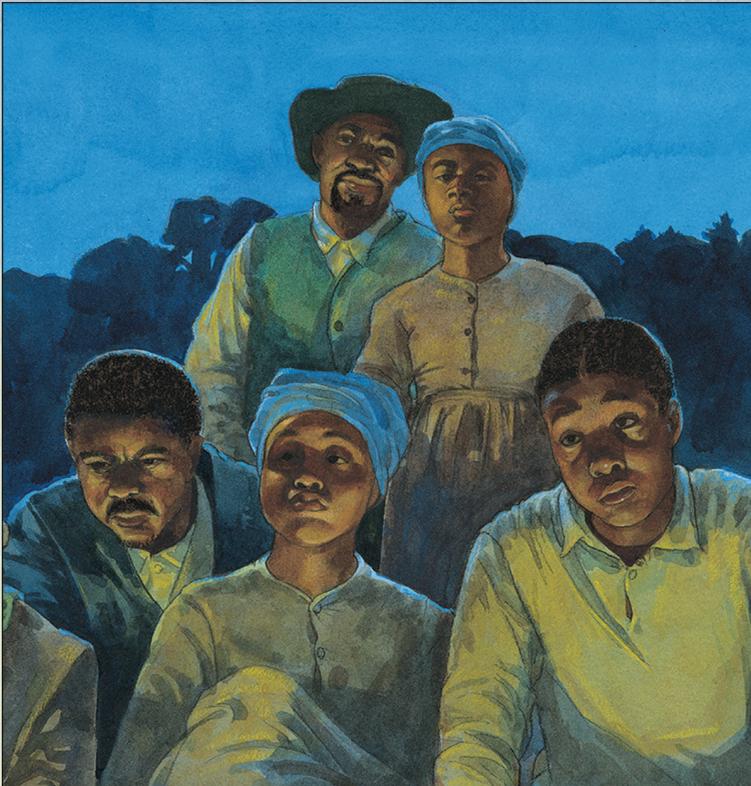
A large part of the slave trade was the production and distribution of products among the colonies and Europe. Research the specific names of the places where trading took place and create a map of the locations. For each colony or country on your map, include the names of products that were traded from that place. (*Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge: W.CCR.7*)



WRITING

In your opinion, do Mama and Rosa have a lot in common? Compare and contrast these characters in a brief essay. Be sure to support your arguments with an introduction, multiple points, and a concluding statement. (*Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.CCR.1*)

After the American Civil War ended, many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were developed. The purpose of the institutions was to educate African Americans and prepare them for careers. Research one HBCU, and identify who founded the institution, how the school helped communities, and the challenges that the school encountered. After you finish your research, write an informative essay that introduces the topic, includes important facts and details, and provides a conclusion. (*Writing: Text Types and Purposes: W.CCR.2*)



ART

Create a diorama of a pit school based on the description given in the story. The diorama should be detailed, showing images such as a secret entrance, the schoolroom setting, learning materials, and the slaves involved in the lesson. In class, present your diorama to a small group and explain how the images match parts of the text. (*Speaking and Listening: Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: SL.CCR.5*)

HOME-SCHOOL CONNECTION

With an adult at home travel to a museum that informs people about slavery through tours or displays. After your visit, write an informational pamphlet or brochure that teaches others something that you learned from the experience. (*Writing: Production and Distribution of Writing: W.CCR.6*)





About the Author

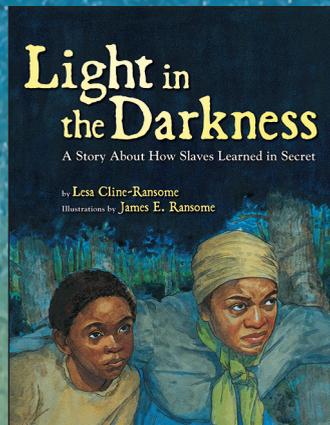
In college, **Lesa Cline-Ransome** thought she would be an investigative journalist. After her first child was born, she fell in love with children's books and began writing them at her husband's urging. Her first collaboration with him was *Satchel Paige*. Since then she and James Ransome have paired up to create five acclaimed picture books.

About the Illustrator

James Ransome's illustrations have appeared in nearly fifty books for children, including: *The Creation*, a Coretta Scott King Award book; *Uncle Jed's Barbershop*, a Coretta Scott King Honor book; *This Is the Dream*; and *A Pride of African Tales*, an NCSS/CBC Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies. His traveling exhibit "Visual Stories" has been touring the United States since 2003. Lesa and James live in Rhinebeck, New York, with their four children.

This guide was created by Dawn Jacobs, who has a doctorate in Special Education: Learning Disabilities and works to improve academic outcomes for all students through teacher development, instructional design, and research in the areas of response to intervention, social support, and parent involvement.

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