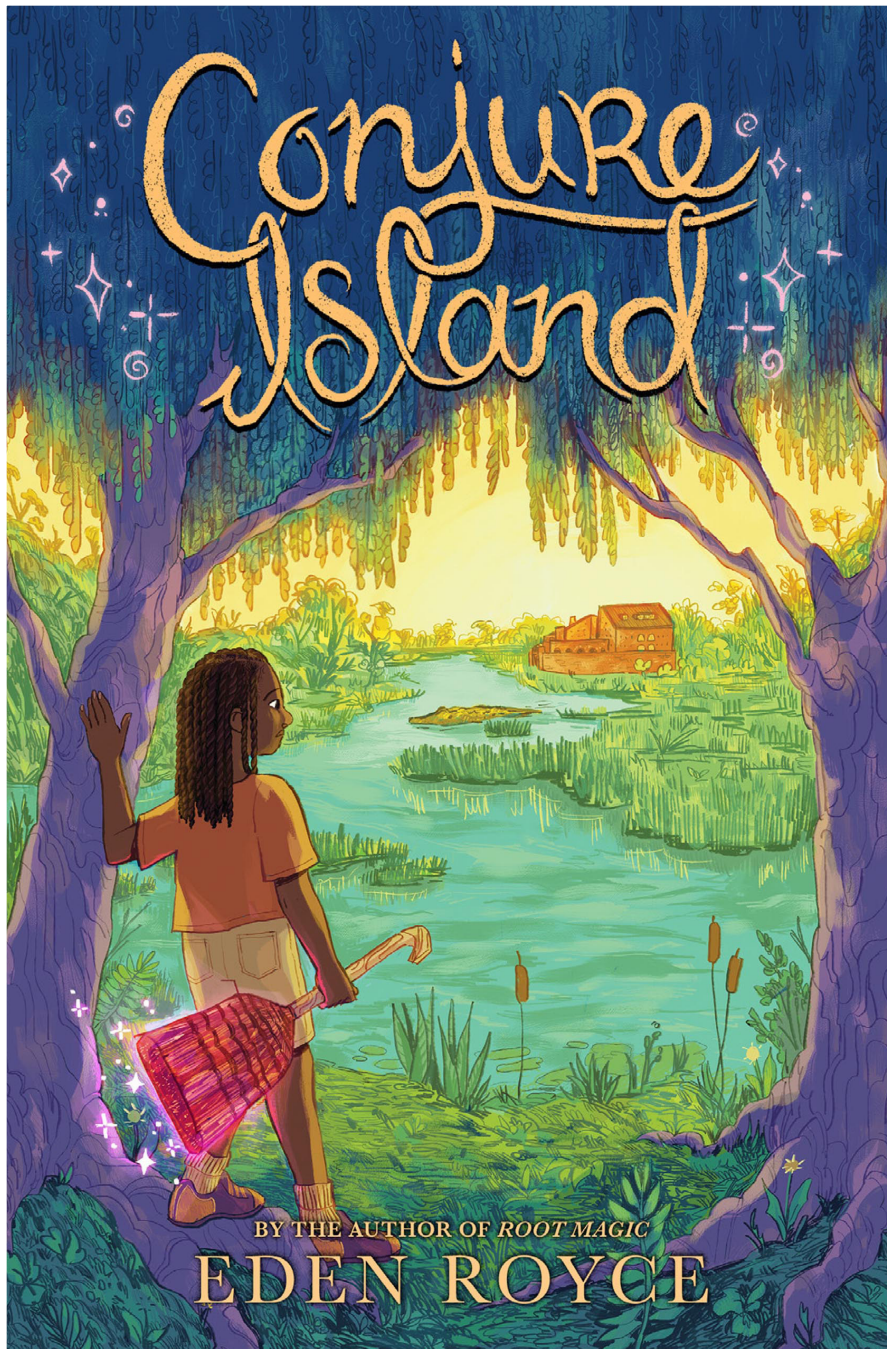


# EDUCATORS' GUIDE



Includes Pre-Reading Activities, Discussion Questions, Classroom Activities, an Exclusive Author Letter and Background Material





## About the Book

If you ask Delphinia Baker, she'd tell you she has all the family she needs. Sure, her mom passed away when she was young, her dad is often away on deployment, and she's had to move so much that she's never had close friends. But even though Del has never had anyone she can call her people, she has always had her grandmother—and for Del and Gramma, best friends since forever, that's enough. Besides, having no roots just makes it that much easier when you have to move again.

All of that changes, though, when Gramma falls ill and Del is sent to stay with her great-grandmother. Del has never even heard of Nana Rose, and she has no interest in spending the summer with a stranger on an unbearably hot island off the South Carolina coast. And when Nana Rose starts talking about the school she runs dedicated to their family's traditions—something called “conjure magic”—Del knows she's in for a weird, awkward summer.

That is, until the magic turns out to be real.

Soon, Del is surrounded by teachers who call themselves witches, kids with strange abilities, creatures and ghosts who can speak to her. She has a hundred questions, but one more than any other: Why didn't Gramma ever tell her about her family, the island, this magic? As Del sets out to find answers and to find her place in a world she never knew existed, she also discovers a shadowy presence on the island—and comes to believe that it all might be connected.

Eden Royce, the acclaimed author of *Root Magic*, returns to the folklore of Gullah Geechee culture to weave an enchanting tale of magic, mystery, and belonging.



### About the Author

Eden Royce is a writer from Charleston, SC, now living in the Garden of England. She is a Shirley Jackson Award finalist for her short fiction for adults. Her debut novel, *Root Magic*, was a Walter Dean Myers Award Honoree, an ALA Notable Children's Book, a Mythopoeic Fantasy Award winner, and a Nebula Award Finalist for outstanding children's literature. Find her online at [edenroyce.com](http://edenroyce.com).

Credit: Tim Hensel



# A Letter from Eden Royce

## Dear Reader,

In my second book, *Conjure Island*, I'm returning to the place where I grew up: the Lowcountry of South Carolina. It's a place full of magic and mystery, and not just from a historical point of view. I wanted to write this book to show that magic lives in the South, even now. And this middle-grade Southern Gothic fantasy novel is just the place to do that.

I wanted to create a character who wasn't familiar with the South and had lots of uninformed ideas about it. Thinking about people in my own family who lived outside of the South helped me create Del. It was a challenge to write her point of view because it was so different from my own. But in embracing that difference, it helped me sympathize with her situation.

One of the tenets of the Southern Gothic genre is family secrets. These secrets have kept Del in the dark about a part of her history and her own access to a magical world she never knew existed. The island holds adventure and dangers, but most of all, it holds the answers to questions Del has never wanted to ask before. Soon, Del learns that the island has so much more in store for her, including a chance to discover what happened between generations in her family.

*Conjure Island* is a book about family history and how it impacts each and every person, even kids. It's also a fantasy woven together with real traditions and practices that are recognizable in South Carolina where I grew up, in the Caribbean islands, and in the Western and West Central African nations where my people originated. History isn't just some boring subject; it can tell a deeper story of who we are and give us lasting connections when we thought we had none.

I'm wishing you a wonderful trip to *Conjure Island*, and I hope it's a place you'll want to visit again and again.

Thank you so much for reading,

**Eden Royce**





## For Educators:

*Conjure Island* by Eden Royce explores community, connection, and the enduring impact of oppression on Gullah Geechee and other Black cultures. This guide provides resources to support students' exploration, responses, and connections to the text. Use the questions and activities suggested here in whatever combination best supports your students and engages their interests. Keep in mind that alongside uplifting themes of family, friendship, and Black heritage, this novel addresses a legacy of enslavement, racial oppression, and Black cultural erasure. Model culturally responsive engagement for students by taking time to reflect and counter your own biases, encouraging open expression while correcting misconceptions or misinformation, sharing your own learning, and including materials that uplift historically excluded experiences without marginalizing them.

## For Students:

Ask students to create a "self-portrait" to answer the question: who are you? Students can literally draw themselves or create something else (a word cloud, a collage, a recipe, a mix tape, etc.) that shows the ways they see themselves in the world. Lead the class in a discussion of how heritage or community connect to their identities and their self-portraits.



Magnolia



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



## Discussion Questions

**1** Del and Gramma have several rituals they do to help them settle into their new space. Name some of them. Why do you think these tasks and routines are so important? What kind of rituals do you have that are important to you or your family?

**2** After all the upheaval of Gramma going into the hospital and Del being sent away for the summer, the final straw is not being able to use her phone on the island. “It was the feeling of one more thing going wrong. One more thing outside her control.” [Page 64] Discuss why this moment is so overwhelming for Del. What does it tell you about Del as a character? Why is control so important to her?

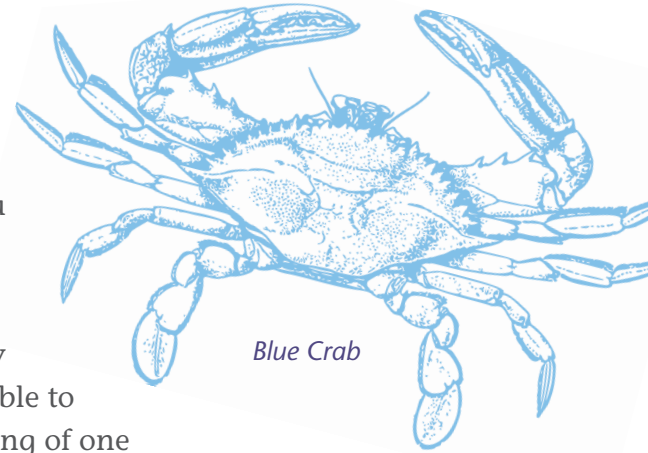
**3** When Del says that the name “chilly bear” is weird, Eva tells her “Might not be what you’re used to, but that doesn’t make it weird. Just different.” [Page 83] What does Eva mean by this—describe the meaning in your own words. What is something you do or like that others might find unusual or different?

**4** Consider some of the comments Del makes about constantly being a new kid and about the skills she’s developed to cope. For example:

- “[S]he knew that feeling of being watched carefully. All new kids did.” [Page 80]
- “It wasn’t all that different from moving to a new town and learning how to act so she didn’t stand out.” [Page 81]

Do you agree or disagree with these comments and why? Why would new kids know the feeling of being watched? Why would they learn to adjust their behavior to not stand out? How do these same coping skills help or hinder Del on the island?

**5** After several setbacks, Del is anxious about being no good at conjure magic. But Eva reminds her that even the simplest things she currently knows how to do had to be learned and practiced. What’s a skill you know so well you don’t even have to think about it (such as multiplication tables, riding a skateboard, making dumplings, etc.)? Think back to when you didn’t know how to do it—how did you learn and practice your skill? How would you teach it to someone else?



Blue Crab





**6** What comes to mind when you think about magic or witches? Where do those ideas and images come from? How did you learn them? Do the descriptions of conjure magic and its cultural aspects differ from your expectations for magic and witches? Use specific examples from the text to answer.

**7** Discuss what Nana Rose and Sorcell Harus say about island outsiders' assumptions or attitudes and about people seeing what they expect to see [Pages 103 and 129]. What were Del's first expectations of Nemmine Island? How and why did those expectations and her attitude change and allow her to see the island and the school for what they really are? What does Sorcell Harus mean when he says "How a person views me is a reflection of themselves and their experiences. It has nothing to do with me." [Page 130]?

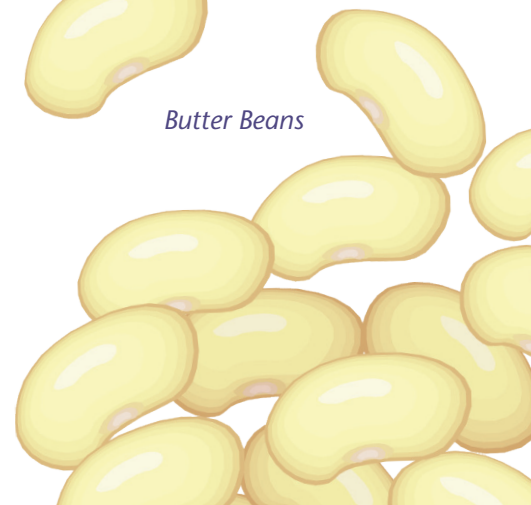
**8** Discuss the Vesey Conservatory for the Wonder Arts motto: *Protect. Educate. Survive.* Describe its meaning in your own words and use the text to support your answer. When discussing the origins of conjure magic, Sorcell Harus says "Remember, this is an old magic born of community, and of the need to protect ourselves, educate our people, and survive in a harsh world." [Page 132] How are each of those three needs related, in the story and in real life? Can any one of these needs be met without also meeting the other two? Explain your thinking.

**9** Del experiences a lot of body signals—physical responses to both her internal and external situations—throughout the novel. Find as many examples of Del's "body intuition" as you can in the text. What is happening in the story or in Del's head when her body sends her these signals? Has your body ever known something before you did? What are some ways your body speaks to you? What are some ways you listen?

**10** Eva tells Del that she doesn't have to practice conjure magic alone—that she has her community to help her. Why is this significant? What is something you learned how to do with others, as a member of a group or community? In what ways does that skill depend on community? What does community bring to its practice?



Butter Beans



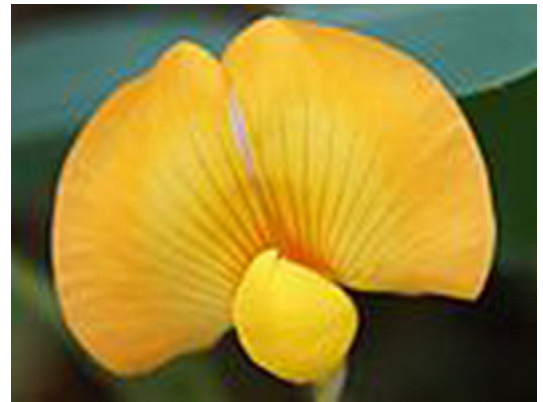


**11** Trust and lack of it is a theme in Del's story. What does trust look like in the text—for Del, for Eva, for Nana Rose? Who or what allows each character to develop trust and why? What do you need to be assured of in order to trust others (your peers or adults in your life)?

**12** Consider Del's nightmares in the text. Choose one and discuss what you think it means or represents, why it happens when it does, and the significance of its different details. What does it tell you about Del? About her thoughts, fears, and feelings? How does that nightmare relate to the rest of the story?

**13** Though she is just eleven years old, Del feels a lot of responsibility, not just to look after herself, but also to look after others in her life—Gramma, her Dad, Eva, even Nana Rose. What are some reasons why she feels this way? Use examples from the text to support your answer. Is Del actually responsible for the many things she takes on? Why or why not?

**14** Describe Del at the beginning of the story and also at the end. How do the events of the story, the other characters she meets, and what she learns about her heritage change her? Use specific examples from the text to support your thinking.



*Ground Nut Flower*

**15** Before reading the novel, you created a self-portrait in answer to the question “who are you?” How do you think Del would answer the same question? Given everything she learns about herself and her people, what might she include in her self-portrait?





## Capture a Broom!

Brooms are such an important part of conjure, and every detail says a lot about the people who wield them. Draw, paint, create a collage, or use digital or fiber art tools to capture the likeness (literal or abstract) of a sorcell broom. You can use the descriptions of the various brooms in the novel or imagine a whole new one to inspire your art. Remember: bristles up!

## Everyday Magic

Sorcell Harus jokingly says that “Lore and Ancient Ways” is just a fancy way of saying “history.” Consider the classes and enrichment activities available at your own school, and choose four (such as Math, Science, Photography, and Marching Band). Imagine that each of these classes were taught at Vesey Conservatory. Create a “fancy” new name and magical description for each class/activity worthy of a Vesey Conservatory syllabus. (You may find that very few of your subjects and interests don’t have a bit of magic to them!)

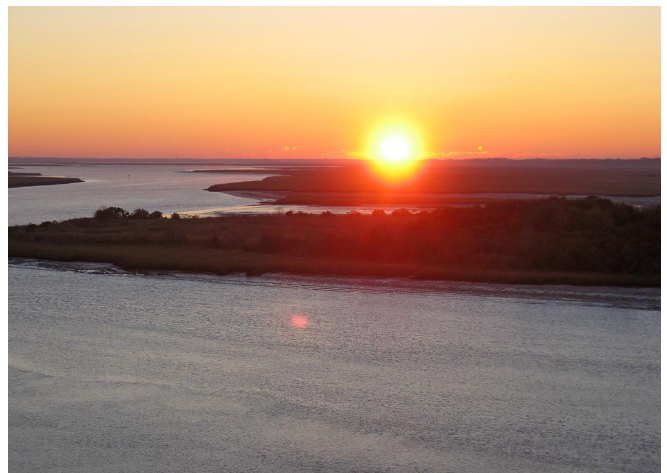
## Book Talk Central

*Conjure Island* references several traditional Black folktales, spirits, magic, and stories throughout its narrative. It is far from the only novel to do so—Eden Royce’s debut novel *Root Magic*, Tracey Baptiste’s “The Jumbies” series, *Nic Blake and the Remarkables* by Angie Thomas, and many others use African and Black diaspora cultural elements to tell their stories. In groups or on your own, pick one of these books to read and give a book talk. Include a summary of the book, the traditional Black story elements you noticed and how they fit into the larger story, and why you think others should read the book.

## Your History, Yourself

During his lesson, Sorcell Harus tells the students that “Learning your history helps you learn about yourself.” [Page 132] And now is a great time to do it! You can interview a family member, do some genealogical research, learn about the history of the place you live, or choose something you included in your self-portrait pre-reading activity.

*Sunrise over Edisto Island, South Carolina, viewed from the McKinley Washington Jr. Bridge. Mr. Washington, a native of the Sea Islands, served as a beloved pastor and politician.*







Do research to learn more about this aspect of your history. Write an essay that reflects on your research process and on what you learned about yourself, and your connection to history and your community. Research isn't quite as simple as Del's search in her school's library, but just as with Del's research, your librarians can make the whole process much more efficient and fun.

## Conjuring Words

For this activity, choose one of the following options:

- Write a missing scene from the novel. You can create a scene involving the main characters or focus on characters that we don't see as much or know as much about (Jube, the Triplets, Sorcell Nyla, etc.). Consider where your scene will fit into the rest of the novel and what information about the characters it will give readers. You can read your scene or perform it for your class.
- Write a letter to Eden Royce, the novel's author. In many ways, *Conjure Island* is a letter of love to Gullah Geechee culture and to readers like you. Write a letter in return that shares what you've learned about Del and her heritage, about Southern conjure, and about Gullah culture. What connections did you make between the book and yourself or your own culture? What will you remember most after reading the novel, and why?

*Live Oak Tree in Charleston, South Carolina | Credit: Agupta96*







CONJURE ISLAND  
AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE  
FOR 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 Conjure Island:*

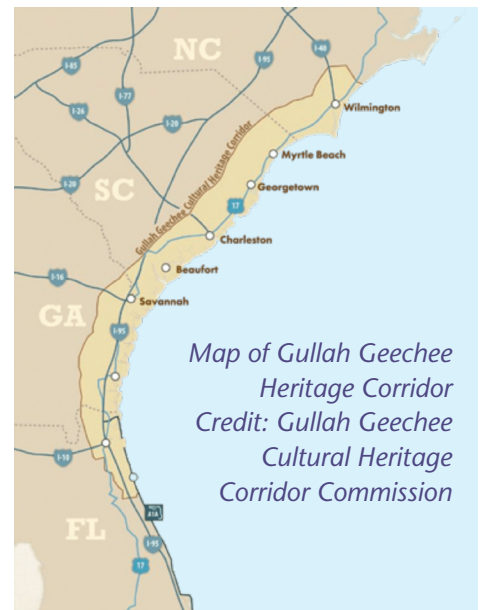
Surrounded by water, stolen to harvest rice, indigo, and Sea Island cotton in labor camps, Gullah Geechee people's enslaved ancestors retained and elaborated upon their broad African heritages. Rich in spiritual beliefs, plant knowledge, foodways, music, artistry, and communal customs, they forged new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





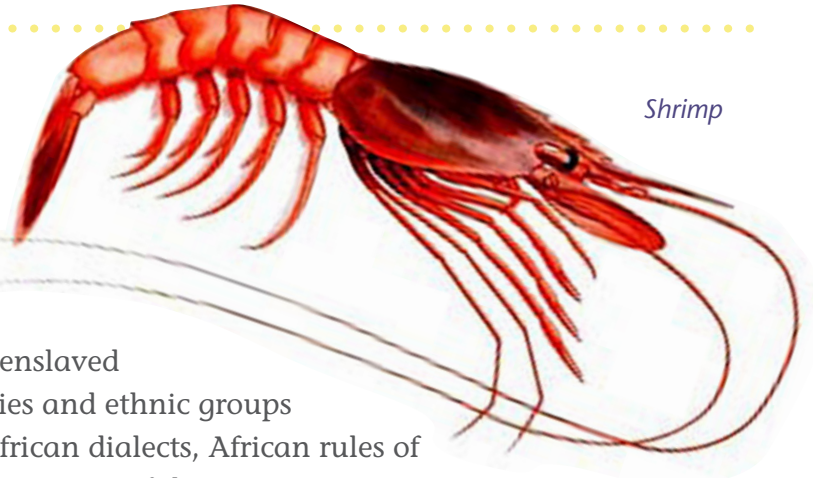
## A Unique Language

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 the characters in *Conjure Island*, 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,



Shrimp

Traditional Gullah sweetgrass baskets  
Credit: Don McCullough







fishers, textile designers, iron workers, storytellers, and musicians, are the healers. Rootworkers, midwives, and conjurers 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 Del, 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](https://saramakeba.com)*



Peanut Plant



Okra





## 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.

## Cultural Resources for Educators

- \* [Gullah/Geechee Nation](#)
- \* [Talkin' Gullah](#) (Gullah Museum, SC)
- \* [Gullah Words](#) (Abridged Gullah Dictionary)
- \* [Understanding Gullah Geechee Culture](#)
- \* [Gullah/Geechee History and Culture](#) (Library of Congress)
- \* [Spiritual Practices in the Lowcountry](#)
- \* [Southern Conjure Women: Manifestors of Southern Black Joy](#)
- \* [Boo Hags and Br'er Rabbit: Your Black Folklore Starter Pack](#)
- \* [African American Folktales](#)

## Book Talk Suggestions for Students

- \* "The Jumbies" trilogy by Tracey Baptiste
- \* *Serwa Boateng's Guide to Vampire Hunting* by Roseanne A. Brown
- \* *The Marvellers* by Dhonielle Clayton
- \* *Wildseed Witch* by Marti Dumas
- \* *Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky* by Kwame Mbalia
- \* *Bayou Magic* by Jewell Parker Rhodes
- \* *Root Magic* by Eden Royce
- \* *Hoodoo* by Ronald L. Smith
- \* *Where the Black Flowers Bloom* by Ronald L. Smith
- \* *Nic Blake and the Remarkables: The Manifestor Prophecy* by Angie Thomas

This guide was prepared by Anastasia Collins, MA, MLIS, librarian, youth literature scholar, anti-oppression educator. Follow them at [@DarkLiterata](#).

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