



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **The Slave Dancer**

Paula Fox

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

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Paula Fox

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Phone: 888.650.4224

3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

[novelunits.com](http://novelunits.com)

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying  
and categorizing, evaluating,  
analyzing details

### Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,  
comparison/contrast,  
inference, cause/effect

### Writing

Description, travel diary

### Vocabulary

Antonyms/synonyms, root  
words, prefixes/suffixes,  
context

### Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion

### Literary Elements

Character, setting, plot,  
figurative language, conflict

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## Summary

*The Slave Dancer*, a Newbery Medal award-winning novel, is a piece of historical fiction set in the 1840s. At that time the slave trade was a very profitable, albeit a very risky, business. The main character, thirteen-year-old Jessie Bollier, is kidnapped from his home in New Orleans and forced to endure a voyage on a slave ship to Africa. Jessie can play the fife, a musical pipe, and it is because of this talent that he is pressganged into service on the horrible ship, *The Moonlight*. The hateful captain of the ship, Captain Cawthorne, believes that his slaves will bring a higher price if he can keep them physically fit during the wretched trip from Africa. To this end, he forces Jessie to play his fife while the slaves “dance” to his music.

## About the Author

Paula Fox is the author of *How Many Miles to Babylon?*, *The Stone-Faced Boy*, and *Portrait of Ivan*, all of which are ALA Notable Children’s Books. In addition, her book *One-Eyed Cat* is a Newbery Honor book.

## Initiating Activities

### **Instructions Prior to Reading:**

You may wish to choose one or more of the following Prereading Discussion Questions and Activities. Each is designed to help students draw from their store of background knowledge about the events and themes they will meet in the story they are about to read.

### **Prereading Discussion Questions and Activities:**

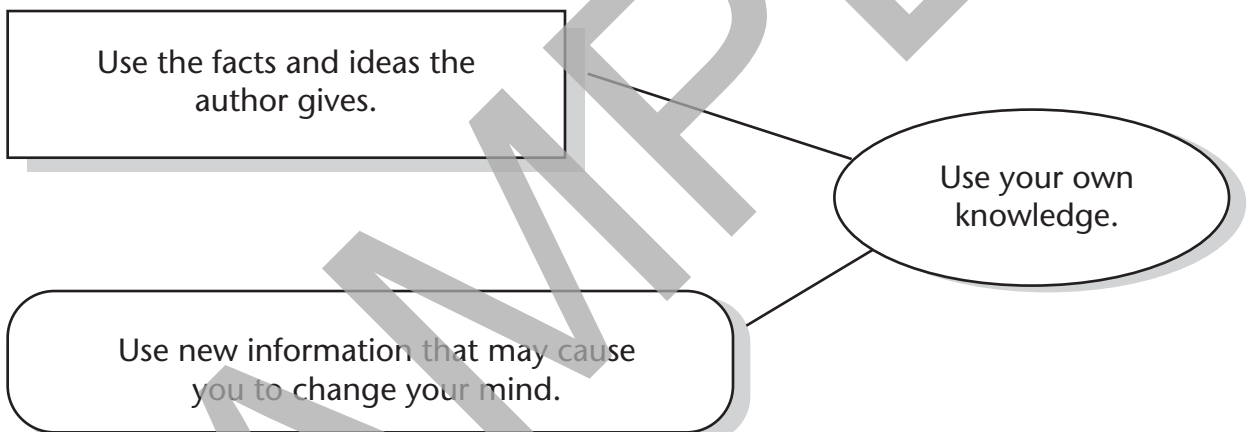
1. **Previewing:** Have the students examine the title and cover illustration. Also suggest that they flip through the book and look at chapter titles. What do the expressions on the characters’ faces on the book cover suggest? What do you think the story will be about?
2. **Concept Map:** Write “Slavery” at the center of a large piece of paper, to be kept for later comparison with events in the book (or as a bulletin board display to be expanded as the story is read). Have students generate any ideas that come to mind when they hear the term, helping students organize them into categories such as synonyms, antonyms, reasons for, reasons against, famous slaves, places where slavery existed, etc. Draw “wagon spokes” around the central concept (“Slavery”) to connect with the supporting ideas (categories). Encourage students to add to the chart during and after their reading of the novel.

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## Using Predictions

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how the conflict will be resolved, which details given by the author will be important to the plot, which details will help to fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses. As students work on predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader’s thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give us to help us in making our predictions? Why are some predictions more likely than others?

A predicting chart is for students to record their predictions. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, you can review and correct previous predictions. This procedure serves to focus on predictions and to review the stories.



Predictions:

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## Chapter 1: “The Errand” — Pages 7-15

### Vocabulary:

sustain 7	blizzards 7	clamor 7	preoccupied 8
swathe 9	lavish 9	surly 9	uncharitable 9
perilous 10	aroma 11	profusion 11	straddled 11
throngs 12	intoxicated 13	trussed 13	parched 13
fetid 14			

### Vocabulary Activity:

List the vocabulary words on the board or on a sheet of paper in the form of a table. Pronounce the words. Ask the students to rate their knowledge of each of the words as a group or individually.

Word	I Can Define	I Have Heard	I Don't Know
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### Discussion Questions and Activities:

1. Describe where Jessie lives. Include the city, his house, his family and his mother's work. (*Pages 7-8, Jessie lives with his mother and sister in New Orleans in a damp brick and timber house. His mother sews beautiful dresses for the rich.*)
2. Why does Jessie's mother call her big sewing job a "nightmare"? (*Page 9, She has so much work and so little time to complete it that she is forced to work nights with only the poor light of candles.*)
3. Why is Jessie forbidden from going to the "slave market"? (*Page 8, The answer is not specifically given but the place where slaves are sold is an evil place where boys should not wander around.*)
4. On what kind of errand does Jessie's mother send him? (*page 9, to borrow candles from Aunt Agatha*)
5. How does Aunt Agatha act toward Jessie and his mother? (*pages 9-10, cold and unloving*) Why does she act this way? (*Page 10, Jessie's mother says that the death of Jessie's father has entirely changed her nature.*)
6. Do any of your relatives remind you of Jessie's Aunt Agatha? If so, in what ways are they like her?

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7. Identify the following quotations and their significance:

“Not enough,” she said. “Go and borrow some from Aunt Agatha.” (page 9, Jessie’s mother)

“What an undignified way to earn your keep! Playing that silly pipe!” (page 11, Aunt Agatha)

“He’s worth nothing without his pipe!” (page 13, Claudius’ companion)

**Prediction:**

Why has Jessie been kidnapped? Who has kidnapped him? Where will he be taken?

**Supplementary Activities:**

1. Writing: Have you ever been sent on an errand at night alone? Describe it.
2. Research: Look up “slavery” in an encyclopedia or social studies text and attempt to gain a historical perspective on the subject.

How long has slavery been around? Why did people want slaves? Does slavery exist in the world today?

3. A story map is an outline that helps you to understand and remember the story better. What do you know about the story after reading only the first chapter?

- What is the setting?
- Who is the main character?
- What is the problem?

As the story is read, more characters may be added and the setting and the problem may change, so additions may be made. Fill in the story map that follows on page 12 of this guide.

Plot is the action in the story. Usually a plot progresses through four stages—exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution or the falling action. Place these stages on a large sheet of paper. Review as each chapter is read. Add incidents for each stage as the chapters are completed.

4. Begin an attribute web for Jessie. (See pages 13-14 of this guide.)

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## The Nature of Conflict

As is true in real life, the characters in novels face many conflicts. When two people or forces struggle over the same thing, conflicts occur. The excitement in novels develops from the use of the three main types of conflict: (1) person against person, (2) person against nature or society, and (3) person against himself.

Below list some of the conflicts from the novel. In the space provided, briefly describe the conflict and indicate which type of conflict is involved, printing "PP" for person vs. person, "PN" for person vs. nature or society, and "PS" for person vs. self. Then choose three of the conflicts and describe how each was resolved.

Conflict	Description	Type

Conflict #1 resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

Conflict #2 resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

Conflict #3 resolution: \_\_\_\_\_