



THE PEOPLE REMEMBER

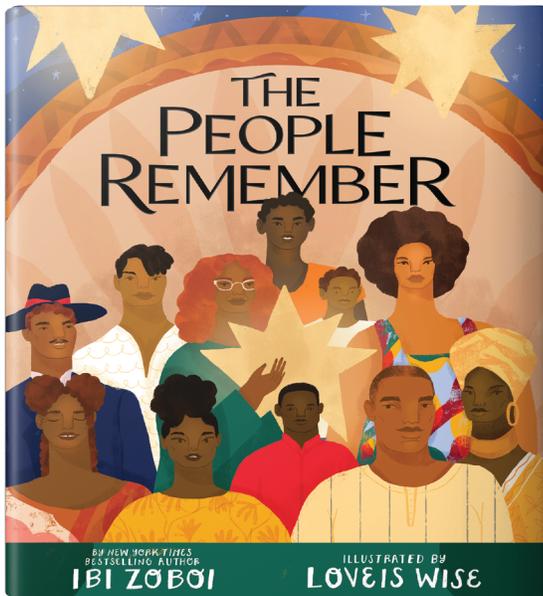
BY NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

IBI ZOBOI

ILLUSTRATED BY

LOVEIS WISE

EDUCATORS' GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Bestselling author Ibi Zoboi and artist Loveis Wise offer a stunning masterpiece of African American history in lyrical free verse and colorful art. This illustrated ode to an inspiring journey is organized around the seven principles of Kwanzaa. Beginning with African kingdoms and ethnic groups, traversing the challenges and triumphs of a resilient people, and ending with a look toward a hopeful future, this rich and layered work can be studied and cherished by readers of all ages.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

IBI ZOBOI is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *American Street*, a National Book Award finalist; *Pride*; *My Life as an Ice Cream Sandwich*; and the *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor and Walter Award–winning novel in verse *Punching the Air*, cowritten with Exonerated Five member Yusef Salaam. She is also the editor of the anthology *Black Enough*. Born in Haiti and raised in New York City, she now lives in New Jersey with her husband and their three children. You can find her online at www.ibizoboi.net.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

LOVEIS WISE is an illustrator and designer from Washington, DC. They are currently based in Los Angeles and their work often speaks to themes of joy and liberation. Their work can be found through the *New Yorker*, Google, Adobe, and the *New York Times*. You can find them online at www.loveiswise.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book begins with “The people remember when it first happened.” What is “it”? “It” is mentioned several times throughout the book. Is “it” the same thing every time? Why do you think the author doesn’t name “it”? What and whom does the author name? Why do you think the book is written this way, with some parts named and others not?
2. “It” happens “again and again,” “on a day and on a night, / during winter, spring, summer, and fall...”? What do these descriptions mean? How must the people feel about what is happening? How does this description make you feel and think about the people’s experiences?
3. A number of ethnic groups and kingdoms of Africa are named in the first half of the book. Have you heard of some of these peoples? If so, where have you learned about them? If not, why do you think that is? Why are people like the French, the English, and the Dutch more well-known in the United States than the Ashanti, the Fulani, and the Hausa, if all of these groups have descendants here?
4. What kinds of emotions do the words and pictures in this book make you feel? Point out some of the pages that stay in your memory. Share what you feel when you see those pictures and hear or read those words. Do you feel one emotion throughout the book, or many different emotions?
5. The author calls this “the land of the free, / home of the brave.” Two pages later, the author writes, “The people remember / when they did not have / their own bodies, / their own thoughts, / their own time.” Does that sound like freedom? What does this contrast show about American history? What are people doing when they choose their words to describe the nation?
6. Reread the description of community life on pages 19 and 21, beginning with “In the loud, bustling cities” and ending with “Ujima. Collective work and responsibility.” How do these moments, places, and activities help the people keep surviving and thriving?
7. How and why are music, dance, art, poetry, and literature important to the survival of a community and a people? Why do you think African Americans invented so many new ways of expression? Think about the verse, “out of the heart comes the finest art.”
8. The creativity developed in this new culture spread, influenced, and “inspired the world.” Why do you think that is?
9. When some newly free African Americans were building towns and others were finding a way back to Africa, which do you think you would have chosen? What were some reasons to stay and build a life here? What were some reasons to go to Africa? Remember

that many people were several generations removed from their ancestors' arrival in the Americas.

10. At each period of transition or change, leaders emerged with different ideas on how to achieve equality. For example, enslaved people could stay, run away, or rebel. Those fighting for the right to vote could use nonviolence or they could defend themselves when attacked. What makes these decisions challenging? How do individuals decide

what strategies and groups to work with toward a goal?

11. What does this story show about the United States of America as a country? About the journey of African descendants in the Americas? At the end of the book, what hopes are you left thinking about?

12. Discuss each of the principles of Kwanzaa. How does each idea help foster a stronger and more independent community?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The People Before. Working in pairs, small groups, or as individuals, have children choose an African kingdom or ethnic group to learn more about. Older students can look for connections between the African culture they researched and African American culture of the past and present. Have students create a work of art that represents some aspect of what they learned. Students who do independent research can debrief afterward and discuss whether it was harder to find this information than it is to research ancient Greece or Rome, and why that might be.

Music Is Black History. Find a video on the evolution and history of Black music and the influence of Black culture on music in general, such as “Music Is Black History,” and show it to your class. Have the class choose a genre, era, or style they would like to learn more about. With the help of an instructional video or, if possible, a guest teacher, have a dance day to learn a dance step or routine together. Have the class discuss how it felt. Students can also create drawings or poems describing how it felt.

What's Wealth Got to Do with It? Show the class a video clip about one of the Black towns where Black businesses successfully built wealth, and/or read Carole Boston Weatherford and Floyd Cooper's picture book *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* with the class. Discuss the relationship between wealth and control. Discuss why white racists wanted to destroy Black businesses and keep Black communities dependent on whites. Have students discover Black-owned businesses or directories of Black-owned businesses that exist today.

The People’s Words. Spend at least a week immersing the class in the sounds and inventions of the personalities named throughout the book—speeches, poems, songs. Offer biographies for the students to read during silent reading time. Have each student choose a historical figure to teach the class about in a short, age-appropriate presentation. They can memorize a poem or a part of a speech and deliver it to the class, or simply tell the class why this person was important in American history. If they share a poem or speech, they can share what they find interesting or inspiring about the piece.

Faith Quilt. Create a classroom quilt that represents the stories of everyone in the class. Have each child bring in a piece of fabric from something that has meaning to them but that they no longer use, such as a T-shirt that used to be a favorite, a first sports jersey, or an old gift. Make sure each child has permission from their parent or guardian to use the fabric they’ve chosen. Provide a bedsheet and have children take turns sewing their patch of fabric onto the sheet. At the end of the year, they can choose a younger class to gift the quilt to. The class can write a group letter expressing their hopes for the other class’s future.

TIPS FOR READING THIS BOOK WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

History Is Complicated. This book can be read with children (and adults!) of all ages. At different levels, they will absorb different aspects. As they learn more, they will recognize more references. Take your time exposing them to the cultures, leaders, artists, and eras named in the book and in the timeline. Make discovery a way of life. You can have regular poetry tea times and music discovery days, and decorate your spaces with art by Black creators to increase familiarity with the culture.

Language. Discuss the concept of diverse African peoples learning to communicate with one another. Learn about how creole languages were created and how drumming, religion, dance, and art made ways for diverse people to communicate, seek independence, and build something new.

“Forty acres and a mule”/Reparations. Do a little research of your own and explain to children where the term “forty acres and a mule” comes from. Tell them that some lawmakers and activists are still making a case for reparations today, and why. Discuss what it means for a government to officially hold itself accountable for historical wrongs, and what kinds of words and actions can make a difference now. Discuss other examples, such as Holocaust memorials and reparations for Japanese Americans interned during World War II.

Music and dance. African American traditions and culture are central to American music and dance. Whenever possible, make connections and give credit to the original sources of styles that have been co-opted by mainstream personalities. Help children become critical consumers of media.

Literature. Watch videos or listen to recordings of Black poets reading their work. You can begin with the poets named in this book and branch out from there. Discuss how the “classic” works of a culture are subjectively assigned, and how the canon needs to be inclusive in order to value and learn from the contributions of people whose survival and triumph over struggles inspire the world.

Back to Africa movement and the settlement of Liberia. Learn more and discuss the impact of the Back to Africa movement on the African continent. When African Americans settled in Liberia, they brought with them attitudes about indigenous Africans that had been drilled into them by their European kidnappers and enslavers. Discuss how the mindset of cultural superiority can lead to friction and violence between people who are alike as well as between people who are different.

Kwanzaa. If your family is Black, discuss with your loved ones how they would feel about celebrating Kwanzaa. Decide as a family whether it is for you. If you are not Black, discuss with your loved ones how your cultural celebrations honor your heritage and give you hope for the future. Also discuss what role your group plays in making the United States safe and fair for all who live here, and how you can individually contribute to the vision of a country that lives up to its ideals.

Timeline. The rich backmatter in this book is a lot for children to digest at once. Allow children to lead the way. If they want to read all of it in one sitting and look up more information right away, create time and space for that. If they are not as interested, try reading one section of the timeline each time you read the book. Make a game out of seeing if they can remember facts from the last section you read together.

