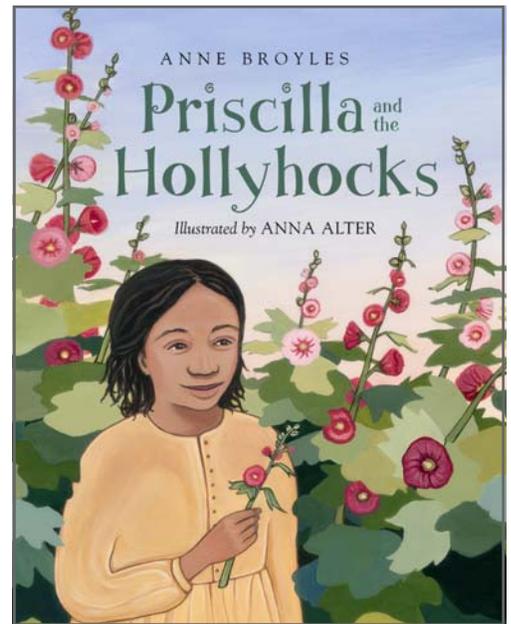




Priscilla and the Hollyhocks

An Activity and Discussion Guide

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ISBN 978-1-57091-675-5 HC \$15.95
Ages 7-10 · 32 pages

Priscilla is only four years old when her mother is sold to another master. All Priscilla has to remember her mother by are the hollyhocks she planted by the cow pond. At age ten, Priscilla is sold to a Cherokee family and continues her life as a slave. She keeps hope for a better life alive by planting hollyhocks wherever she goes. At last, her forced march along the Trail of Tears brings a chance encounter that leads to her freedom.

Before Reading

- Ask students to look at the book's cover. From the picture and title, have them guess what this story is about.
- Ask students what they think life might have been like for a slave child on a southern plantation at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Discuss the Story

After reading *Priscilla and the Hollyhocks*, ask students these questions:

- How is Priscilla's life different from your life? In what ways are you alike, despite living in different situations at different times?
- What words describe Priscilla's personality?
- What is slavery like for a "house slave" like Priscilla?
- Why do you think that Priscilla carries hollyhock seeds with her? What do the seeds represent to Priscilla?
- Where does Priscilla's mother go? What does Master mean when he says, "She'll fetch a pretty penny?"



- What is it about Priscilla that impresses Basil Silkwood?
 - What did Massa Silkwood mean when he said, “I don’t hold with slavery”?
 - How does Priscilla show courage at different points in the book?
 - What do you think of the language in this story? Why does the author have Priscilla speak in dialect?
 - How does the author show Priscilla’s feelings of sadness, fear and joy?
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- Is life with the Cherokee family better for Priscilla? Why or why not?
 - Why is Priscilla so excited by the chance to go to school? What does school mean to Priscilla?
 - Besides hollyhocks, what else gives Priscilla hope?
 - What words might describe Basil Silkwood? Why do you think he had so many children?
 - Compare the different pictures of Priscilla. Describe what emotions the illustrator captures on Priscilla’s face. How did the illustrator help the reader know how Priscilla might be feeling?
 - What visual clues does the illustrator give about the Trail of Tears experience?
 - Which is your favorite picture? Why?
 - Discuss what role hollyhocks play visually in the book.

Priscilla and the Hollyhocks Activities

● Language Arts

What do these vocabulary words mean in the context of this story?

beauteous	plantation
gnarled	spindly
pined	auction block
dollop	bayonets
trudged	weary

- Priscilla carries hollyhock seeds with her so that she feels at home wherever she goes. Ask students to write an essay explaining what they would carry with them to remember home. They may also want to illustrate a picture to go along with their essay.





• The author uses many different language techniques, such as metaphor, simile, imagery, and dialect to tell Priscilla’s story. Review the meanings of these words and have students find examples of them in the story. Next, have students write their own short stories using these techniques.

• Compose a journal entry from the point of view of either Priscilla or someone else on the Trail of Tears. How would they feel? What sort of things would they see or experience?

• Have students write a poem about a time when they felt sad or lonely. If possible, include an object or symbol like Priscilla’s hollyhocks that helped them get through it?

• What might be another way to get across the meaning of these phrases? Would less poetic language fit the story and Priscilla’s character?

“When I was young and still wore slavery’s yoke. . .”

“She’ll fetch a pretty penny.”

“. . .loaded Ma up in a wagon like a steer led to slaughter.”

“I ‘spect my eyes mirrored her sorrow.”

“. . .but my insides was a quiverin. . .”

“I thought my ears’d gone crazy”

Social Studies

• Research the Trail of Tears. Talk about the hardships of the Trail, the reasons behind the removal, and what those on the Trail did to survive.

• What other Eastern tribes were forced to walk on the Trail of Tears? How did the experience of removal differ for the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muskogee Creeks, and Seminoles, who were all officially part of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail?

• Other tribes were also forced to move at later points in American history. Find out more about what happened to the Comanche, Cheyenne, Apache, and Navajo in the west.

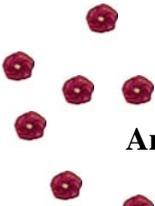
• How did the western expansion of the United States affect Native Americans?

Geography

• Have students map the path that the Priscilla and the Cherokee family walked. Some Cherokees took a water route; others traveled over land. What different landmarks would each group have seen on their journey?

• Add up how many states the Cherokees walked through on their way west. Which path went through the most states, the land or the water route?





Art

- Make a hollyhock doll out of tissue paper (or origami paper) and lollipops:
 - Cut paper into circles or squares about 6” across.
 - Center the paper on top of the lollipop and fold around the candy part.
 - Twist the paper around the stick and secure with a piece of string, ribbon, or pipecleaner.
 - Draw a face on your doll and use the lollipop stick to twirl her around.
- In several paintings the illustrator uses a box to symbolize how Priscilla felt while she was a slave. What other methods or symbols might work to show how slavery felt? Using oil pastels, paints, markers, or crayons, let students discover their own way to tell one part of Priscilla’s story. You could divide up the events of Priscilla’s life and have teams work on each event to create a wall-sized mural.
- Divide into groups to look at a variety of paintings to search out techniques the illustrator uses in terms of brush strokes, color choices, and creating mood. Make a chart listing all the colors in the artist’s palette and how they correspond to feelings of sadness, hope, love, and more. Keep notes about how the artist uses color and technique to create character, establish mood, and convey the story.

Math

- Invite students to use online resources to calculate how many miles a Cherokee who was from New Echota, Georgia (the Cherokee capital at the time of the Trail of Tears), had to travel to Talequah, Oklahoma (current Cherokee capital of the Western Cherokee). Make a chart that compares this distance with what Priscilla traveled (we don’t know exactly where she started out; use New Echota as a starting point) to Jonesboro, Illinois, where she met Basil Silkwood.
- Research the Trail of Tears and calculate how many miles Priscilla walked. Have students figure out what city or town is approximately that far from their hometown. Walking thirty miles a day, how long would it take to get to that town?

Music

- As a slave, Priscilla probably had opportunity to learn and sing spirituals, sometimes called “slave songs.” Research what role spirituals played in slave life and the Underground Railroad. Learn words and music to any of the following spirituals and talk about what the music might have meant to Priscilla:

“Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child”
“Steal Away”
“The Gospel Train”
“Follow the Drinking Gourd”
“I Want To Go Home”



- Encourage students to write the kind of song they think Priscilla might have sung to herself while she was lying on the quilt in the attic at night. Once she went to live with the Silkwoods, how might her song have changed? Hand out rhythm instruments and invite students to share their songs.

Expanding the Story/Connecting with Other Literature

- Priscilla is sustained by her connection to hollyhock seeds. Read *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney (Puffin) and *Johnny Appleseed* by Reeve Lindbergh (Little, Brown Young Readers) and discuss the role nature plays in each book. Who is changed by the planting of seeds in each book?



Notes from Anne Broyles

My Cherokee Heritage

When I was in first grade, my teacher told us about the Pilgrims coming to America. I raised my hand and quoted Cherokee humorist Will Rogers, who said: “My ancestors didn’t come over on the Mayflower, but they were there to meet the boat.” The teacher marched to my desk, grabbed my arm and told me, “That is nothing to be proud of. Don’t mention it again!”

I was confused. My mother had taught me respect and appreciation for my Cherokee heritage. I had a “Certificate of Indian Blood” card and could trace my Cherokee ancestors back to Elizabeth Coody, a full blood Cherokee of the Long Hair Clan born around 1700. Although I wasn’t raised within the Cherokee community, I was fascinated with that side of my history. Today I am a registered member of the Western Cherokee Band, read *The Cherokee Phoenix* newspaper, and vote in tribal elections.

Finding Priscilla’s Story

Many years ago I began research for a young adult historical novel about the Cherokee Trail of Tears (a long story in several ways!) While I was looking through books about a particular young Cherokee woman’s journey walking the Trail, I discovered an old book called *Legends and Lore of Southern Illinois* (Southern Illinois University Press). In a chapter called “Slavery and Servitude,” Priscilla’s story jumped out at me. “That would make a great children’s book,” I thought, then went back to research for the other book. But Priscilla’s story stuck with me.

Many years later, still haunted by Priscilla, I sat down at the computer, and her story seemed to jump from my fingers to the keys to the screen. From where did this first-person slave dialect come? That’s part of the mystery of creativity. (Later I extensively read transcriptions of slave journals and interviews to try to be accurate in language choices.)

Striving to Be True Without All the Facts

No one eavesdropped on Priscilla's conversations to record her exact words. Any documents written about Priscilla were set down to paper decades after she had died. So even though I had the bare bones of this slave girl's story, I had to choose how and what to tell. I have tried to be true to the facts as we know them, but I was inspired to write my version of her story by two compelling questions: Why would a slave child carry hollyhocks seeds in her pocket? Why would a white man in slavery-era southern America buy a slave's freedom?

Those questions guided my imagination as I brought Priscilla and Basil to life. Another writer would have chosen a different back-story (what Priscilla's life was like before she met Silkwood, why hollyhock seeds were important to her) and given these characters different personalities. Writing fiction leaves room for creativity within the boundaries of historical fact. However this story actually happened, at least two lives were changed by the encounter between a white businessman and slave girl on a southern plantation.

Visiting Priscilla's Home

I wasn't able to visit the home where Priscilla lived with the Silkwoods until this book was already in the publication process. How amazing to tour the small two-story home where Basil and Mariah raised sixteen adopted children. I took a photo so Anna Alter could accurately depict the home (see the photo on the next page). Then, with rough directions from the man who lives next door to the old Silkwood Inn, I drove down country roads to the Reid-Kirkpatrick Cemetery and found the family's graves. Basil Silkwood's tall marker says, "Be mindful of the poor." See a photo of Priscilla's grave stone on the next page.

More About Priscilla's Life

- In most of the documents written about her, Priscilla was called "a quadroon slave girl." This means she was one-quarter black, perhaps with one biracial parent and one white parent. In slave times this was not uncommon. It's unlikely anyone, including Priscilla, knew Priscilla's exact ancestry. One of her adopted nephews, Fred Foehr, said, "She was the color of an Indian and had the features of one." Anna Alter has tried to capture this mixed heritage in her paintings.
- That same nephew said, "Priscilla was a very industrious and very agreeable person. She was a member of the Christian Church here and went every Sunday as long as she was able. She was treated just like the other members."
- An 1850 census of "Free Inhabitants in the county of Franklin, State of Illinois" lists Priscilla as age 26. An 1870 Mulkeytown census categorizes Priscilla as a 40 year-old domestic servant. Obviously, there was some guesswork when it came to Priscilla's age.
- Of Priscilla's adopted brothers and sisters, at least one was a person of color. Silkwood also purchased the freedom of a slave boy named John.
- Many people in Mulkeytown remembered Priscilla as a tiny woman who usually wore a sun bonnet and neck scarf pinned with a brooch.
- When Silkwood died in 1876, he included Priscilla in his will: "To Priscilla, a colored woman, a sufficient amount for her ample support as long as she lives."



The Silkwood Inn
Mulkeytown, Illinois
(Photo by Anne Broyles)



The writing on the shapeless low sandstone that is Priscilla’s marker has worn away and is nearly illegible:

PRISCILLA
LIVED HER LIFE
1824 1892
AT HALFWAY PLACE CALLED
SILKWOOD INN STAGECOACH LINE
NEAR MULKEYTOWN

(Photo by Anne Broyles)



Illustrator Anna Alter (left) and author Anne Broyles.

