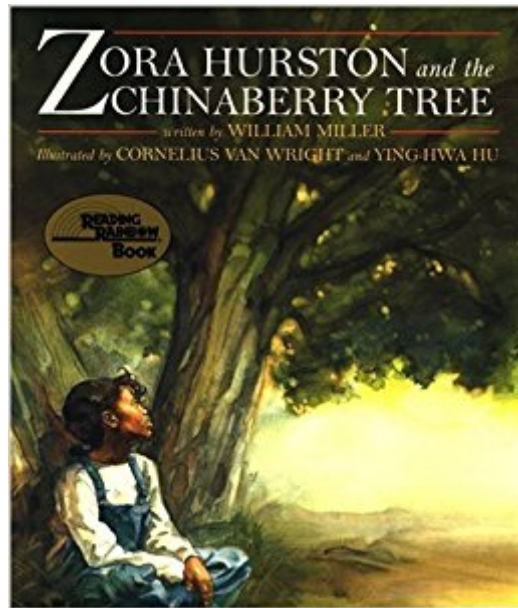




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Zora Hurston (Reading Rainbow Books)



Synopsis

Zora is full of dreams. From the top of the chinaberry tree, she dreams of living in the cities beyond the horizon. Her father thinks she should wear dresses and leave dreaming and tree-climbing to boys. But her mother teaches Zora that like each new branch of the chinaberry tree, dreams are always within reach. Independent and full of spirit, Zora explores her hometown and listens to the stories of its people -- stories her mother makes her promise to remember. But it isn't until Zora is faced with her mother's death that she realizes the importance of her promise. Based on autobiographical writings of the renowned African American writer Zora Neale Hurston, this is a story that will appeal to all readers who, like Zora, believe in their dreams.

Book Information

Lexile Measure: 540 (What's this?)

Series: Reading Rainbow Books

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: Lee & Low Books; 1st ed edition (September 1, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1880000148

ISBN-13: 978-1880000335

Product Dimensions: 8.8 x 0.4 x 10.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #890,336 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #152 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States > Civil War Era #261 in Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Literary #1122 in Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Multicultural

Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 4

Customer Reviews

At times effectively mottled, at other times hauntingly distinct, Van Wright and Hu's (Make a Joyful Sound) commanding watercolor paintings are the high point of this book, which recounts an episode in the childhood of the African American author of the acclaimed *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Conveying the changing expressions on the face of the young Hurston as easily as they show the grandeur of the sky at nightfall, the versatile artists neatly capture the emotions in this lucidly told story. A stern father tells Zora that she should wear a dress (she wears overalls), read the Bible

daily and obey him, but Zora listens only to her mother, who teaches her "that everything had a voice: the trees and rushing wind, the stars in the midnight sky." So the girl accompanies the boys when they gather around the campfires at night and listen to their fathers' tales of Africa. On her deathbed, Zora's mother instructs her young daughter to remember the stories, which "kept their people alive. As long as they were told, Africa would live in their hearts." First-time author Miller's affecting account ends where it began: with Zora climbing a chinaberry tree as her mother had shown her how to do; from the top of the tree, "Zora saw again the world her mother had given her," and she "promised her mother she would never stop climbing." Ages 4-up. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Kindergarten-Grade 3-Hurston's difficult childhood is a challenging subject for a picture book, and Miller is not entirely successful in his treatment. The story is framed by scenes of the child in a chinaberry tree, imagining what lies beyond the horizon. The blurry edges of the watercolor images work well to suggest the worldview of a young girl prone to dreaming. The problem lies with what is left unsaid in the brief narrative. With only three sentences to characterize her father, children may be confused to learn that "Zora only listened to her mother." However, it is the treatment of her mother's death that is most problematic. As the child spies on the men and boys telling stories around the campfire, she hears about "...Death, the great square-toed one...who sat on a platform made of palm leaves and ruled with a sword in his hands." Two pages later, her mother dies. No explanation of the reference to death or of the family's funereal customs is given in the text or in the author's note. More importantly, the impact of the girl's beloved relative's death is not satisfactorily resolved by showing Zora climbing her chinaberry tree. More narrative is needed to help readers understand the unique setting and dynamics surrounding this character and to cushion the effect of this traumatic event. Stick with Patricia and Fredrick McKissack's *Zora Neale Hurston* (Enslow, 1992) and A.P. Porter's *Jump at de Sun* (Carolrhoda, 1992) for a more developed sense of the subject and her milieu. Wendy Lukehart, Dauphin County Library, Harrisburg, PA Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is a story about a little girl how overcame obstacles by following her dreams and the advice of her mother.

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