

Approved for use in Middle School

Summary of the Work:

The Slave Dancer follows thirteen-year-old Jessie who is kidnapped while running an errand for his mother. To his horror, Jessie discovers that he has been taken aboard a slave ship and has been abducted for his ability to play the fife. Even more repulsive, Jessie is to play the fife for Africans who have been forcibly taken from their homelands and who are chained on board the ship. While Jessie plays, these prisoners are forced to "dance" to retain their muscle tone so that they will bring in more profit in the slave auctions. Although Jessie eventually makes his way home, his life has been forever changed.*

Rationale:

Full of historical details about conditions aboard slave ships, the book is valuable as a narrative of the pre-Emancipation-Proclamation slave trade and its mentality. Literature such as Fox's novel helps young people develop responsible behavior patterns by learning from the characters. Fox's novel deals with an old social issue--the defunct issue of slavery. It also should raise current civil-rights issues in the classroom.**

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- *Booklist*. (1974, Jan. 1), vol. 70, p. 484.
 - *Book World*. (1974, Feb. 10), p. 4
 - *Center for Children's Books Bulletin*. (1974, Jan.), vol. 27, p. 77.
 - *Childhood Education*. (1974, April), vol. 50, p. 335.
 - *Horn Book*. (1973, December), vol. 49, p. 596.
 - *Kirkus Review*. (1973, Dec. 15), vol. 41, p. 1350.
 - *Library Journal*. (1973, Dec. 15), vol. 98, p. 3711.
 - *New Statesman*. (1974, Nov. 8), vol. 88, p. 666.
 - *New York Times Book Review*. (1974, Jan. 20), p. 8.
 - *Publishers Weekly*. (1973, Dec. 10), vol. 204, p. 36.
- * Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.
- * Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- John Newberry Medal 1974

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 970L
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Fox's novel gives young readers a believable and first-hand account of the American slave trade, a regrettable but still unavoidable component of our country's history. The figure of Jessie also provides a model for those wondering how to stand up to systems more powerful--and ethically different--from their own.

The National Council of Teachers of English supports the teaching of history concerning various heritages in this country. "Literature classes should reflect the cultural contributions of many minority groups in the United States, just as they should acquaint people with contributions from the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America" (1982, p. 7)). *The Slave Dancer* gives insights into the culture of the United States at the time of the slave trade as well as depicting the process of enslavement, transportation to the Americas, and eventual sale (1973).

Connection to the Curriculum:

The Slave Dancer is a historical fiction novel set in 1840. The novel shows how the slaves were transported to the United States from Africa. This novel gives historical enrichment to the 7th-grade social studies curriculum, while serving as an example of historical fiction for the Communication Arts/Reading curriculum. Written in the first person, this novel enables the reader to see slavery through a young boy's eyes.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

*Rationale by Kevin S. Frato

**<http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/slavedancer.html>