Never Forgotten by Patricia McKissack is a pleasure to read. This poetic story is a middle passage tale told from the point of view of the father, a master blacksmith, whose son was snatched from his village by slave traders. This book begs to be read aloud to audiences in grade three and later. The illustrations by Leo and Diane Dillon fully capture McKissack’s earthy poetry. The beauty, melancholy, and delight of both the words and pictures require that this story be shared and discussed. The topics of love and loss are universal and give educators opportunities for teachable moments. The elements of nature, earth, wind, fire and water, add a rudiment of other-worldly folklore.

I feel no discomfort with the subject matter of the middle passage and slavery; these are themes that students in the listed age groups must be made aware of. McKissack does
a superior job of presenting these topics in a very non-offensive way, and the repetitive cadence of the African phrases is soothing and compelling. I was thrilled with the author's personification of the elements of earth, wind, fire, and water.

There are twenty-two students in my undergraduate children's literature class—two African Americans and twenty Caucasians. Of the group, two students are males, and the rest are females. My students appreciated the story's very hopeful message and the use of the African father's point of view. They felt that the subject matter and vocabulary met state standards for elementary students in language arts and social studies. They said they would enjoy sharing this beautiful book with children as young as first grade as a read aloud and could easily use with older elementary students to introduce a lesson on lyrical poetry, or as a discussion on folklore, mythology and slavery. The themes of family loss and slavery were prevalent in the minds of my African-American students while the idea of hope for the future was the prevailing theme for my Caucasian students.

*These Hands* by Margaret H. Mason is a heartwarming grandfather's reminiscence of what his hands used to be able to do well. However, we soon learn the grandfather's true agenda is to share with his grandson how injustice buoyed him to use his hands to help bring about change for bread workers like him. The topics of injustice, discrimination and wrong-doing are elementary and universal themes that kindergarteners to adults will understand. Readers will enjoy the closeness of a grandfather and his grandson. I would definitely use this book with elementary students of all ages because it is a wonderful introduction or bridge to a lesson about discrimination, fairness and doing what is right.

Everyone in the group enjoyed Mason's story and Cooper's illustrations. Most said they would use this book in a 2nd to 5th grade class. They enjoyed the themes of generational bonding and love shared in the story and appreciated that it was not just the usual African-American story of the movement from slavery to freedom. The job segregation depicted was appalling to some of my Caucasian students. Fourteen of them seemed to feel that segregation, hatred, the middle passage and slavery were “window and mirror” issues for them. They felt they would have wanted to be involved in positive solutions to these problems. This made me ponder the question posed by Latour (1981): is it necessary to be an insider to understand another's lived experience? My African-American students felt outrage, anger and some discomfort when discussing these subjects, wishing that discussions of these topics would remain within their race. Eight of my students preferred to not discuss them at all, feeling that these are things in the past and are no longer relevant.

The overarching themes in *Never Forgotten* and *These Hands* of hope and promise are evidenced when Mother Earth gave Musafa the wisdom of the world and when grandfather taught his grandson how to make bread. However, they differ because Dinga suffers the loss of his son, but grandfather fought to gain the right to use his hands to make bread. Dinga desires to keep his outsider status while the grandfather petitioned to gain insider
status. In my reference to insider/outsider status I am defining a superior/inferior social construct earlier described by Lindbeck and Snower (1988): “In sharp contrast to an insider’s knowledge of worldview, an outsider lives in a stratified life-world” (205). I was proud to know that the majority of my students found the themes in these two books important enough for them to take an inclusive view of the literature. There can never be a solution to racism and white supremacy until relevant dialogue is shared early and often in the lives of young children.

**Works Cited**


**About the Author**

Barbara Montgomery is a retired, National Board Certified educator, living in Columbia, South Carolina. At present she is a Ph.D. candidate and teaching fellow at the University of South Carolina. She teaches children’s literature to undergraduates and diversity in libraries to MLIS students.