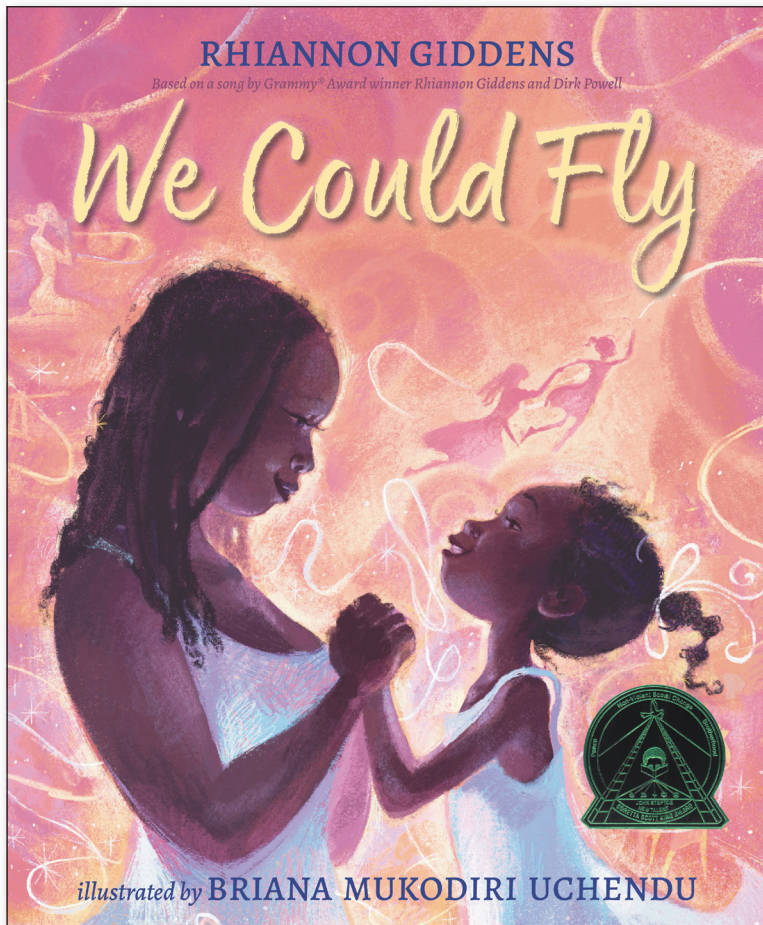


We Could Fly

RHIANNON GIDDENS

illustrated by BRIANA MUKODIRI UCHENDU

A Coretta Scott
King–John Steptoe
New Talent
Illustrator Award
Winner



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Also available as an e-book

ABOUT THE BOOK

As a mother and daughter watch a bird take flight, the young girl feels a mysterious trembling in her arms, a lightness in her feet, a longing to be free. Her mother tells her that Granny Liza experienced the same, as did many of their people before her. Perhaps it's time to slip the bonds of earth and join the journey started long ago. Drawing on lyrics from the song "We Could Fly" by Rhiannon Giddens and Dirk Powell and paired with startlingly beautiful illustrations by Briana Mukodiri Uchendu, this incantatory dialogue between a mother and daughter celebrates love, resilience, and the spiritual power of the "old-time ways"—tradition and shared cultural memory—to sustain and uplift.

This teachers' guide prompts students to think about ways that shared experiences can uplift us. It also encourages them to think about how collective experiences and effort can result in a beautiful journey. It offers discussion questions and classroom activities for teachers working with students in grades 1–4.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

This guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Before reading the book, look closely at the cover illustration. What do you notice about the mother and daughter? What do you notice behind them?
2. At the beginning of the book, the mother and daughter are outside having a picnic. The daughter tries to turn her mother's attention toward something she notices by saying "look in yonder tree." What helps you to know what the word *yonder* means?
3. After reminding the daughter about Granny Liza, Mama says, "Well, every night she flew." What do you think Mama means by this?
4. During and after enslavement, families often left the land they worked on in search of freedom and opportunity. The line "Searching, always searching for the promised land" is repeated in the book. What do you think the promised land is? Does it represent a physical place or is it an idea?
5. When the daughter says, "I've a trembling in my arms now," what do you think this means for her? Have you ever felt that way?
6. On the next spread, there is an illustration of the mother's and daughter's hands. What else do you notice in the illustration? Why do you think the illustrator included so many other people in the background?
7. What do you think this story is mostly about?
8. One illustration shows people flying over a body of water that has a ship in it. What do you think the illustrator is trying to help you understand by including the ship?
9. Rhiannon Giddens wrote a song with the same title as this book to help her think about how much Black American folktales meant to her when she was a child. Dirk Powell worked with her to complete it. Did your thoughts about what the story is about change after listening to the song? Why or why not?
10. What do Granny Liza and the daughter have in common?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

RIDE TO OPPORTUNITY

One illustration shows a train passing through the evening. In the early 1900s, many Black families took trains to the North and other parts of the country to escape racial violence and pursue opportunities not available to them in the South. This was called the Great Migration. In small groups, allow students the opportunity to research routes that trains took and what families encountered once they reached their new cities. Have students write three to four sentences about their findings.

MUSIC FOR FLYING

With your students, listen to Rhiannon Giddens and Dirk Powell perform “We Could Fly.” After listening, allow students to make observations about what they heard and how the music makes them feel. An additional exploration could include research on other songs that share messages of escaping to freedom. Have students also listen to “Now Let Me Fly” by Kim and Reggie Harris to begin their research. You might create a playlist of songs as a class to share your learning with the wider school community.

WHAT’S THE SAME?

We Could Fly was inspired by Virginia Hamilton’s story “The People Could Fly.” After reading both stories, have students discuss some of their similarities and differences. Working with partners, students can complete a Venn diagram to display the connections between the two stories.

FLYING AWAY

The mother tells her daughter how Granny Liza could fly across the river searching for the promised land. Ask students to think about where they might want to fly to. Have students illustrate where they would go and write three to four sentences explaining why they selected that place.

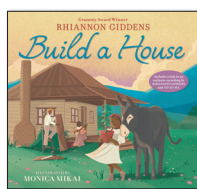
ABOUT RHIANNON GIDDENS



Photo by Ebru Yildiz

Rhiannon Giddens is a musician, singer, songwriter, composer, author, actor, librettist, MacArthur Fellow, Pulitzer Prize winner, founding member of the traditional African American string band the Carolina Chocolate Drops, and the artistic director at Silkroad. She has won two Grammy Awards and has been nominated for an additional six for her work as both a soloist and a collaborator. Her lifelong mission is to uplift people, particularly Black Americans, whose contributions to American musical history previously have been ignored or erased, and to work toward a more accurate understanding of the country's musical origins.

ALSO BY RHIANNON GIDDENS:



Build a House

ISBN: 978-1-5362-2252-4

Also available as an e-book

ABOUT BRIANA MUKODIRI UCHENDU



Briana Mukodiri Uchendu is an illustrator, visual artist, and first-generation Nigerian American. Her recent and forthcoming books include *The Talk* by Newbery Honor recipient Alicia D. Williams, *Soul Step* by New York Times best-selling author Jewell Parker Rhodes and Kelly McWilliams, and *Night Market* by Seina Wedlick. Briana Mukodiri Uchendu lives in Houston, Texas.

This guide was prepared by Antonia Adams, a Texas educator from the Houston area.