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What are slaves?

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Page 1

Illustration: no prompt

Text:

It's a sunny day in Georgia. Danny is eight years old, and today his mother asks him if he wants to visit a museum. Danny can't wait! He loves to visit museums. Danny and his mom get in the car, and she drives him to visit a historical Antebellum South plantation, now a museum, in Georgia where they live. Danny has been to museums, but never one like this. His mother tells him that this museum used to be a plantation where agriculture, or farming for food and other crops, was produced in the late 18th century.

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Illustration: no prompt

Text:

When Danny and his mother enter the museum, they first thing they see is a large photograph of children working in cotton fields. "What are those kids doing?" Danny asks his mother. "They are working in the fields picking cotton," his mother replies. Danny has never had to work in a field before. Somewhat confused, he asks "why do they look sad?" "Well, because they are slaves," replies Danny's mother. "What are slaves?" asks Danny curiously.

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Illustration: no prompt

Text

Danny's mother thinks for a moment. "Being a slave is like being taken by a stranger away from your home and family into a new strange place. When Europeans came to America, they needed workers but

didn't want to pay them, so they kidnapped people from Africa and brought them here as slaves. They were forced to live in dirty, small living quarters, sometimes ten people to one small room. Slaves were forced to work from sunrise to sunset, and got paid nothing at all. If the slaves did not do as they were told, their owners might hurt them." This didn't sound right to Danny. After all, his father was white like the slave owners from Europe and his mother was black, like the slaves from Africa.

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Illustration: no prompt

Text:

Danny then sees another picture, this time of children who looked skinny and clothed in what looked like ragged dresses. Curious again, Danny asks "Why are they so skinny? Didn't they eat dinner?" "Those children were allowed to eat very little food and what they did eat was not very nutritious, so the kids were small and skinny as a result," his mother explains. Danny begins to get confused as to why slaves were not treated the same.

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Illustration: no prompt

Text:

"Well, why do all of those girls have holes in their dresses?" Danny persists. "Those aren't just girls, both boy and girl slaves wore dresses," says his mother. "Boys wore DRESSES?!" Danny exclaims. "Yes. Most slave children wore the same kind of clothes until they grew up. Slaves usually had one or two pairs of clothing, and those clothes were old and torn up. Planters, or slave owners, did not care about what the slaves wore," his mother replies. Danny looks at his own clothes, then back up at the picture of

the slave children. He is even more confused and upset now because he has so many clothes of his own, and plenty of shoes.

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Illustration: no prompt

Text:

“Come on, there’s more,” Danny’s mother says, and urges him along to a photo of a child teaching her mother to read. Danny reads the title at the bottom of the picture labeled “Daughter Teaches Mother to Read.” To this, Danny points out “Why is the daughter teaching the mother to read? Shouldn’t it be the other way around? You taught me to read!” Danny’s mother smiles. “Yes, I did, Danny. But during that time, teaching slaves to read was illegal. The daughter was probably teaching her mother late at night so the planters would not see. Many slave children learned to read secretly from white children behind the backs of their parents. Only basic reading and math was learned, if that.”

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Illustration: no prompt

Text:

“Why was learning to read and do math illegal?” Danny says. “Unfortunately, learning to read during this time was only for the white people,” his mother explains. “White people thought that if slaves learned to read, the slaves might start to believe that they have the same authority and power as whites. So the planters made it illegal.” Danny thought about how he read the title of the picture with such ease, and how it wasn’t fair that slaves were not allowed to read.

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Illustration: no prompt

Text:

Danny grows quiet because he realizes how his life is so different from the lives of slaves. After some quiet thought, Danny says, "This was all because of skin color? None of that seems fair." "Keeping people as slaves and making them work without paying them because they look different is unfair," Danny's mother replies. "Slaves fought back, many of them escaped and other people helped them. America had a big war about it, called the Civil War. The slave owners lost the war, so slavery ended. But, some of the slave owners were mad because they didn't want to do their own work. So, even though slavery was against the law, the slave owners kept being mean to the African-Americans and treated them unfairly.

Page 9

Illustration: no prompt

Text:

The slave owners passed their hatefulness onto their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren for years and years, which is why we still see some African-Americans being treated unfairly today. So even though slavery is over, it is important to speak out if you see someone being treated unfairly, and always treat everyone with respect even if they look different from you."

Page 10

Illustration: no prompt

Text:

Danny thinks about this, and thinks about how he would never, ever want slavery to happen again. He thinks about how his skin color is mixed between his father's and his mother's. He realizes that if slavery was still around, that wouldn't be possible. But Danny loves his skin. He wouldn't want it any other way, and he especially wouldn't want any other person to feel bad because of their skin color.