

Grade 7 Informational

Adventurous Storyteller

Jack London, one of America's major writers of adventure tales, was born in California in 1876. During his life, London worked at many jobs. His broad life experiences would become the background for his writing.

London loved to read. As a teenager, he spent many hours educating himself at the Oakland, California, public library. He attended college at the University of California at Berkeley, but he stayed for only six months. He thought Berkeley was "not lively enough" and wanted to do something more exciting.

London wrote stories about working people and the hard times they had making a living. He knew their problems first hand. He worked as a sailor, rancher, factory employee, railroad hobo, and gold prospector, to name just a few of his many jobs.

London grew up near the waterfront in Oakland. He loved the water. When he was fifteen years old, he bought a small sailboat called a sloop. Later he sailed to Japan on a schooner, which is a much larger sailing boat.

Like many people of the time, London caught the Klondike Gold Rush Fever. In 1897 he headed for Alaska. He didn't find gold, but he discovered something even more valuable. He discovered that people enjoyed listening to the stories he made up with his vivid imagination. London entertained the miners with story after story. Later, using his experiences during the Gold Rush, he created many more colorful stories.

London resolved to live a full, exciting life. He once said, "I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet."

Each day, he pushed himself. Once London determined that he was going to be a writer, nothing could stop him. His goal was to write at least one thousand words every day. He refused to stop even when he was sick. In eighteen years, the writer published fifty-one books and hundreds of articles. He was the best-selling and highest-paid author of his day. Many people also considered him to be the best writer.

White Fang and *The Call of the Wild* are his most famous stories and are about surviving in the Alaskan wilderness. Readers can enjoy Jack London's energy and his talent for telling wonderful stories each time they open one of his novels.

Grade 7 Narrative

Hamilton, Virginia. "The People Could Fly." *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales*. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers, 1985. (1985)

They say the people could fly. Say that long ago in Africa, some of the people knew magic. And they would walk up on the air like climbin up on a gate. And they flew like blackbirds over the fields. Black, shiny wings flappin against the blue up there.

Then, many of the people were captured for Slavery. The ones that could fly shed their wings. They couldn't take their wings across the water on slave ships. Too crowded, don't you know.

The folks were full of misery, then. Got sick with the up and down of the sea. So they forgot about flyin when they could no longer breathe the sweet scent of Africa.

Say the people who could fly kept their power, although they shed their wings. They looked the same as the other people from Africa who had been coming over, who had dark skin. Say you couldn't tell anymore one who could fly from one who couldn't.

One such who could was an old man, call him Toby. And standin tall, yet afraid, was a young woman who once had wings. Call her Sarah. Now Sarah carried a babe tied to her back. She trembled to be so hard worked and scorned.

The slaves labored in the fields from sunup to sundown. The owner of the slaves callin himself their Master. Say he was a hard lump of clay. A hard, glinty coal. A hard rock pile, wouldn't be moved. His Overseer on horseback pointed out the slaves who were slowin down. So the one called Driver cracked his whip over the slow ones to make them move faster. That whip was a slice-open cut of pain. So they did move faster. Had to.

Sarah hoed and chopped the row as the babe on her back slept.

Say the child grew hungry. That babe started up bawling too loud. Sarah couldn't stop to feed it. Couldn't stop to soothe and quiet it down. She let it cry. She didn't want to. She had no heart to croon to it.

"Keep that thing quiet," called the Overseer. He pointed his finger at the babe. The woman scrunched low. The Driver cracked his whip across the babe anyhow. The babe hollered like any hurt child, and the woman fell to the earth.

The old man that was there, Toby, came and helped her to her feet.

"I must go soon," she told him.

"Soon," he said.

Sarah couldn't stand up straight any longer. She was too weak. The sun burned her face.

The babe cried and cried, "Pity me, oh, pity me," say it sounded like. Sarah was so sad and starvin', she sat down in the row.

"Get up, you black cow," called the Overseer. He pointed his hand, and the Driver's whip snarled around Sarah's legs. Her sack dress tore into rags. Her legs bled onto the earth. She couldn't get up.

Toby was there where there was no one to help her and the babe.

"Now before it's too late," panted Sarah. "Now, Father!"

"Yes, Daughter, the time is come," Toby answered. Go, as you know how to go!"

He raised his arms, holding them out to her.

"*Kum...yali, kum buba tambe,*" and more magic words, said so quickly, they sounded like whispers and sighs.

The young woman lifted one foot on the air. Then the other. She flew clumsily at first, with the child now held tightly in her arms. The she felt the magic, the African mystery. Say she rose just as free as a bird. As light as a feather.

The Overseer rode after her, hollerin'. Sarah flew over the fences. She flew over the woods. Tall trees could not snag her. Nor could the Overseer. She flew like an eagle now, until she was gone from sight. No one dared speak about it. Couldn't believe it. But it was, because they that was there saw that it was.

Another and another fell from the heat. Toby was there. He cried out to the fallen and reached his arms out to them. "*Kum kunka yali, kum...tambe!*" Whispers and sighs. And they too rose on the air. They rode the hot breezes. The ones flyin' were black and shinin' sticks, wheelin' above the head of the Overseer. They crossed the rows, the fields, the fences, the streams, and were away.

"Seize the old man!" cried the Overseer. "I heard him say the magic words. Seize him!"

The one callin' himself Master come runnin'. The Driver got his whip ready to curl around old Toby and tie him up. The slave owner took his hip gun from its place. He meant to kill old black Toby.

But Toby just laughed Say he threw back his head and said, "Hee, hee! Don't you know who I am? Don't you know some of us in this field?" He said it to their faces. "We are ones who fly!"

And he sighed the ancient words that were a dark promise. He said them all around to the other in the field under the whip,...*buba yali...buba tambe...*"

There was a great outcryin'. The bent backs straighted up. Old and young who were called slaves and could fly joined hands. Say like they would ring-sing. But they didn't shuffle in a circle. They didn't sing. They rose on the air. They flew in a flock that was black against the heavenly blue. Black crows or black shadows. It didn't matter, they went so high. Way above the plantation, way over the slavery land. Say they flew away to *Free-dom*.

And the old man, old Toby, flew behind them, takin; care of them. He wasn't cryin'. He wasn't laughin'. He was the seer. His faze fell on the plantation where the slave who could not fly waited.

"*Take us with you!*" Their looks spoke it, but they were afraid to shout it. Toby couldn't take them with him. Hadn't the time to teach them to fly. They must wait for a chance to run.

"Goodie-bye!" the old man called Toby spoke to them, poor souls! And he was flyin' gone.

So they say. The Overseer told it. The one called Master said it was a lie, a trick of the light. The Driver kept his mouth shut.

The slaves who could not fly told about the people who could fly to their children. When they were free. When they sat close before the fire in the free land, they told it. They did so love firelight and *Free-dom*, and tellin'.

They say that the children of the ones who could not fly told their children. And now, me, I have told it to you.