

MISSISSIPPI MORNING

Written by Ruth Vander Zee
Illustrated by Floyd Cooper

“Pa,” I asked, “Do you know anything about people who wear pointed hoods with white robes and hurt colored people?”

In 1933, James William’s life begins to unravel around him. He can’t believe what his friends tell him about the “hanging tree” or the men with the white pointed hoods until he comes face to face with a member of the Ku Klux Klan.

A thought-provoking story of one boy's loss of naiveté in the face of harsh historical realities, *Mississippi Morning* will challenge young readers to question their own assumptions and confront personal decisions.



★ “Without diatribe or heavy message, *Mississippi Morning* . . . brings urgent politics into personal life.”

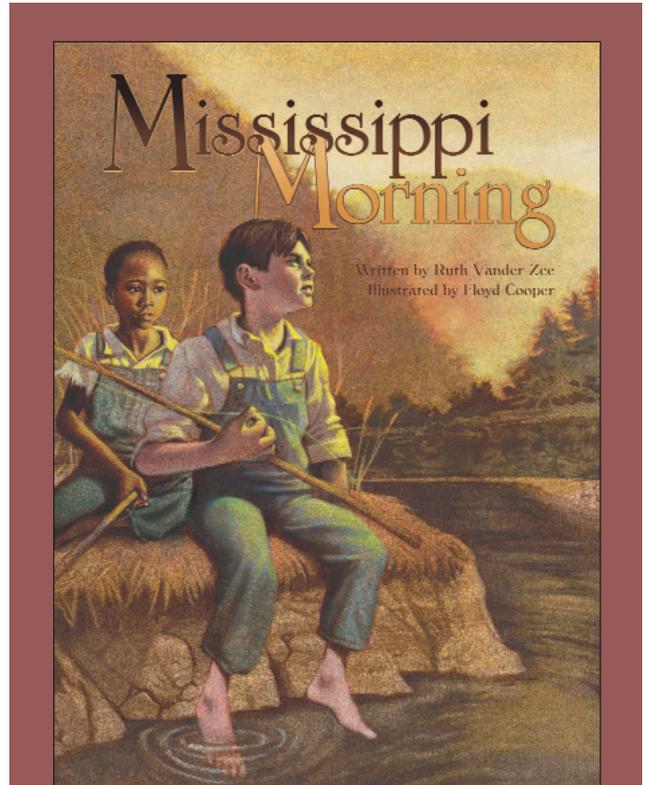
—*Booklist, starred review*

★ “Vander Zee tells the story without judgment; as in real life, the facts fall where they may and the conclusions the reader will draw are inevitable.”

—*Kirkus, starred review*

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

- ◆ Racism
- ◆ Family relationships
- ◆ American history
- ◆ Making choices
- ◆ Friendship



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8" x 11" ◆ 32 pages ◆ Ages 9 and up

Full-color illustrations throughout

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VOCABULARY

Discrimination, Racism, Hero

Look up the definition of *discrimination* in the dictionary. What kinds of discrimination have you seen or experienced in today's society? Do you think that the same kind of discrimination that appears in *Mississippi Morning* still exists today? Why or why not?



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. Do you have a hero? Why do you look up to this person?
2. Have you ever been in a situation where something seemed wrong but no one talked about it? What did you do?
3. What would you do if you knew your friends were doing something wrong and yet everyone around you was encouraging you to participate?
4. How do you decide if something is right or wrong? How old do you have to be to speak up if you know someone is doing things that are wrong?



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. How does James William feel about his life?
2. What are his family responsibilities?
3. What is James William's father's position

in the town? How does James feel about that?

4. When does James William begin to realize that there is some trouble in his town?
5. Does he believe what he hears? Why or why not?
6. Why does James William go fishing with LeRoy?
7. What are James William's perceptions of the relationships between the "colored" people and the white people in his town?
8. Describe how James William's relationships change in the book. What happens between him and his father? Between him and his friends? Between him and the men in town?
9. Why do you think James and his father are looking into each other's eyes throughout the story?
10. Review the art in *Mississippi Morning*. How does Floyd Cooper let readers know that the boy is wiser in some of the last illustrations?



ACTIVITIES

1. Using library books and encyclopedias try to find at least three facts about the Ku Klux Klan and three facts about the Great Depression. Share those facts with others who have read the book.
2. Write a letter of appreciation to a hero.
3. Write about standing up for your beliefs. This can be an autobiographical account or an imagined scenerio.

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ABOUT

the Author & Illustrator

Ruth Vander Zee, teacher and author, says that *Mississippi Morning* was inspired by a sermon she heard. “The story



struck a chord with me because I was raised with certain prejudices that at one time or another were comfortable or unquestioned,” she says.

Ruth has written a curriculum for young adults and another children’s book, *Erika’s Story* (Creative Editions), which tells of a young girl’s rescue from the Holocaust. Ruth Vander Zee is a resident of Miami, Florida.

Floyd Cooper has illustrated many books for young readers, several of which he also wrote. He began drawing at the age of three and has



been illustrating books for children since 1988. Floyd earned Coretta Scott King Honors for several titles: *Brown Honey and Broomwheat Tea*, *Meet Danitra Brown* (both HarperCollins), and *I Have Heard of a Land* (Harper-Trophy).

He received the inaugural New Jersey Center for the Book Award in 2002 and also gained recognition from the Society of Illustrators and the American Library Association. Floyd Cooper lives in Gillette, New Jersey.

If you have any other suggestions for using *Mississippi Morning* with young readers, we would be happy to hear from you.

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