



The Great Migration: Journey to the North

Eloise Greenfield , Jan Spivey Gilchrist (illustrator)

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We were one family among the many thousands. Mama and Daddy leaving home, coming to the city, with their hopes and their courage, their dreams and their children, to make a better life.

When Eloise Greenfield was four months old, her family moved from their home in Parmele, North Carolina, to Washington, D.C. Before Jan Spivey Gilchrist was born, her mother moved from Arkansas and her father moved from Mississippi. Both settled in Chicago, Illinois. Though none of them knew it at the time, they had all become part of the Great Migration.

In this collection of poems and collage artwork, award winners Eloise Greenfield and Jan Spivey Gilchrist gracefully depict the experiences of families like their own, who found the courage to leave their homes behind during The Great Migration and make new lives for themselves elsewhere. *The Great Migration* concludes with a bibliography.

Supports the Common Core State Standards

The Great Migration: Journey to the North Details

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Author : Eloise Greenfield , Jan Spivey Gilchrist (illustrator)

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From Reader Review **The Great Migration: Journey to the North** for online ebook

Cristina says

Text Summary

“They see the train coming closer and closer, and then it stops. They gather on the platform, hold out their tickets, climb aboard... It’s time. They’re moving slowly, then faster; some think too fast, some think not fast enough, toward a world they don’t yet know.” Thus begins the journey of the courageous men, women, and children of the Great Migration. In the South in the early 1900s, the Jim Crow Laws and the KKK were destroying the lives of African Americans. So, families left their homes; some mourning the loss of their land, some, the loss of their friends; however, for many, the anticipation of freedom willed them to leave. On the trip, they thought about the places they left, and daydreamed about places they were about to see: Chicago, New York, Washington... Although they were apprehensive and questioned whether things would actually be better in the North, they kept with them their hopes and dreams of a better tomorrow: “Got to try it. Going to do it. Going to make it. No matter what.”

Literary Merits

During the Great Migration, Eloise Greenfield and her family were one among the millions who left their homes in the South and traveled to the North in search of a better life. The short poems presented in this book are written from a range of perspectives of people who migrated to the North: a man leaving his farm, a young girl and boy mourning the friends that they are leaving behind, an older woman anxiously awaiting the arrival of the train, carrying no nostalgic memories of the town she’s leaving, and a young girl leaving her mother with only a small teddy bear to accompany her on her long journey. Using this technique, Greenfield allows for readers to experience this journey through the eyes of many different people. Through these characters, Greenfield shows the reasons why these families are leaving, what some of them leave behind, and what all of them look forward to in the future. Gilchrist’s vibrant collage artwork (photographs, drawings, maps, etc.) helps to depict their journeys along the way.

Classroom Recommendations

Ages 5 and up. Reflected in this text are themes of courage, resiliency, family relationships, justice, freedom, and dreams. Greenfield prefaces her selection of poetry with an introduction that gives some background information of the living conditions for African Americans in the South during the early 1900s. Although, further study of the KKK and Jim Crow laws would benefit young readers who may have had little exposure to these topics. It might be interesting to pair this text with something like Deborah Ellis’ *Children of War* to show the impact of injustice on a child’s life and their stories of having to flee their homes in search of better lives. I just read Ellis’s *Children of War* last week for our informational text study, so it is still fresh in my mind. See my review for *Children of War* to get some more information.

David says

The Great Migration by Eloise Greenfield, illustrated by Jan Gilchrist chronicles the journey to the North by over a million African Americans from the American South between 1915 and 1930.

When Eloise Greenfield was four months old, her family moved from their home in Parmele, North Carolina,

to Washington, D.C. Before Jan Spivey Gilchrist was born, her mother moved from Arkansas and her father moved from Mississippi. Both settled in Chicago, Illinois. Though none of them knew it at the time, they had all become part of the Great Migration.

With poems and beautiful collage artwork, the experiences of families who were courageous enough to leave their homes behind and make new lives for themselves in the North are depicted.

The free verse poems follow a number of unnamed characters as they set out to move North with the poetry speaking from each person's heart. Students will more easily be able to imagine what it would be like to stand in such a person's shoes. The poems are arranged chronologically following a family's move North. They explain how the combination of segregation, KKK threats, and Jim Crow laws encouraged African Americans to move North.

This is a strong addition to juvenile literature for younger readers regarding the Great Migration. Highly recommended.

For ages 9 to 11, Great Migration, segregation, African American history, poetry themes & fans of Eloise Greenfield and Jan Gilchrist.

Rebecca says

This is a wonderfully creative book about the migration of over a million African Americans from the southern region of the US to the northern regions of the US. Each page shows us a picture of how each child, woman, man is feeling throughout their journey to a new home. Sometimes scared, excited and even angry. It is so important to teach our children the history of our country and this book enables very young readers to read and view the story and the people in beautiful lyrical poems. This book appeals to boys and girls, but especially boys who love to read non-fiction and are interested in history. I think children from 2nd grade up to 5th could identify with the characters in this book and would love to jump into part of our American history.

Coretta Scott King Author Award Honor 2012

Greenfield, E. (2011). The Great Migration Journey to the North. NY: Harper Collins Children's Books.

L13_brian_mihovilovich says

The Great Migration is a story about a young black woman's journey from the south to the north during the period called the great migration. It starts off with the main character reading about how the north is free from the KKK and the fear that surrounds them. The main character is unnamed which adds to the fact that this could represent any young black woman's experiences during that time. After hearing about the north, her and her family pack up and begin the journey. The book covers all aspects of the journey from saying goodbye to the trip. The pictures really add to the mood of the book, done in watercolors. The shadows make the pictures abstract again to add to the feeling that this could be any individual during the great migration.

I would definitely recommend this book for a Great Migration unit. Before the story starts it gives some good history of the time period and sets the reader up for what they will experience. Each new page also offers great room for discussion with students about how they could handle the different situations that are brought up.

Micki says

This is a wonderful book, probably most appealing for grades 2-4. It tells of the Great Migration (1915-1930), when black families moved north in order to escape discrimination and find jobs. The story is told in segments, with each mini-story coming from a different age and viewpoint. The individuals say their goodbyes, make the trip north, question what they're doing, and finally arrive with a determination to stay and make their lives better. I think the illustrations are dark and almost haunting, but they certainly add to the tone of the story.

(Coretta Scott King Author honor book 2012)

Marianne says

In free verse poems, Eloise Greenfield tells the tale of African Americans who, hoping for a better life in the Northern states, leave all they know in search of a new home and new life.

Greenfield's lines are simple but thoughtful, carrying music in her words, like the sound of train wheels on the track in:

In Question: Men and Women:

Will I make a good life
for my family, for myself?
The whhels are singing
"Yes, you will,
you will, you will!"
I hope they're right.
I think they're right.
I know they're right

To me the real show stopper in this work is the illustrations, done in mixed media with photos, prints and other forms of monochromatic collage.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Based upon Eloise Greenfield's own life experience of migrating north in 1929, this series of poems describes the move from north to south for a group of black people at that time. In these spare poems she captures their hopes for a better life, their dreams for a future, and their fears that life may be no better. This is something that was never taught to me when I was in school, or, if it was, it was related to me as a dry fact.

Books like this one give facts a human face, and reveal what it must have been like to leave the land and way of life you know and move north to the unknown. According to Greenfield's introduction, many people found that life wasn't perfect in the north, but somewhat better. I wish this book could have gone on a bit longer and revealed some of those imperfections. This book is a 2012 Coretta Scott King Award honor book for its text, and deserves to be so.

The illustrations intrigued me. I didn't particularly like them, but I'd really like to know how Gilchrist created them. Some look to be watercolored kodalith prints; some look like faded newspaper clippings or rubber stampings or drawings illustrated with sponges dipped in ink. Too bad a note on the illustration technique wasn't included.

I hope teachers use this in classrooms so that children today can get a full and clear picture of why so many black people moved north, and what they found when they got there. Recommended.

Cindy says

During the early 1900's more than a million African America migrated from the south to the north in order to escape the Ku Klux Klan. This is a wonderful story that is written poetry format that will help young students to understand the journey that many of these Americans had to take in order to feel truly free. The illustrations are beautiful and simple, adding to the story. This book does a wonderful job of helping the reader to connect to those the story is about, and will pull at your heartstrings. This would be a great text to use even with older classes of students as they student this era.

Mary Ann says

The Great Migration is a beautiful blend of poetry, history and illustration. Eloise Greenfield shares a very personal perspective on the mass movement of African Americans from the southern part of the U.S. to the North between 1915 and 1930, intertwining both historical perspective and a personal experience. Greenfield begins with a short explanation of the meaning of "the Great Migration", what it was, and how it affected her family. In August 1929, she was three months old when her father took the train from their home in North Carolina to find work in Washington, D.C. A month later, he sent for his family: "I was too little to know it then, but I had become a part of the Great Migration."

The poems in this book follow a number of characters as they set out to move North, hoping to find a better life for themselves and their families. Each character is unnamed, but the poetry speaks from that person's heart. Through this free verse poetry, the reader is pulled right into what it would be like to contemplate leaving your home.

This is a wonderful way into history for students, helping them imagine what it would be like to stand in a person's shoes. The poems in this book are arranged in a chronological way, following a family's move North. As the Horn Book review says, "Many of the poems give voice to unnamed travelers' thoughts; Greenfield explores the heart of each person, from the young woman going North alone, who sees her mother secretly packing her teddy bear in her bag, to the angry woman who says, 'I can't wait to get away. . . I hear that train whistling / my name. Don't worry, train, / I'm ready. When you pull / into the station, my bags and I / will be there.'" I found this approach very moving, perfect for making me want to learn more.

Gilchrist's illustrations blend watercolor and collage to create landscapes and personal portraits that are as powerful as the poems. I was particularly struck by the way she incorporates faces from actual photographs into her artwork, reinforcing the feeling that these poems speak for actual people's experiences.

Rachel Freeman says

What a collection of powerful poetry that truly transports you to the journey African-Americans took from their homes in the South to their new homes in the North. This was such an enjoyable collection of poems about such a emotional time in many people's lives that one can never fully understand unless they took this journey. Yet this book can help one themselves in these people's places to get a glimpse of their feelings and journeys taken. Eloise took this journey herself when she was only four months old with her mother and siblings after being separated from her father we he went to secure their new lives up North. I believe this would be an excellent collection of poems to help younger elementary students understand the Great Migration. This collection of poems should not serve as the sole explanation though, but would be a valuable piece when talking about the journey and the various people that took this journey. The way these poems were pieced together and placed in the collection took you on the Great Migration from the beginning when people were hearing from relatives about how life was better up North to the point when they arrived North. This would serve as a great mentor poetry collection and one could have students then write their own collection about some journey that they have gone on or another "journey" or migration from history. Thus, this piece could act as a bridge between two different migrations in America's history and act as a jumping point for comparing and contrasting them. Also the illustrations are amazing in this book. They are in collage form and many feature pieces of real pictures of those that went on the Great Migration.

Stacy Ford says

Greenfield weaves in the different points of view that men, women and children had as they fled their homes in the South for the promise of a better life in northern cities. The reader is able to gain insight into how families were separated as fathers went looking for work, the fears of African Americans as they left all they had ever known and the ever present hope that the future held.

Good for use during African American history month. Offers a look at a topic not widely discussed in elementary circles. Pair with "The Watsons Go To Birmingham - 1964" to offer a look at why the family moved to Flint, Michigan.

Brynaleh says

Splendid multimedia illustraitons that bring alive the time and the emotions of the Great Migration journeys of Black kids, adults and families. I liked the poetic language, but the book has NO coherent narrative, which made it utterly confusing for my (learning disabled) 10 year old. We read the whole thing and he asked me "What was this about?" He enjoyed the pictures but it wasn't possible for him to really absorb the storyline, because there really wasn't much of one. It reads more like a montage of emotions as people make the great journey north, which is great for a child who already understands the basics of this part of history. In our case it ended up being a lovely jumping-off point for teaching him more about various eras of post-slavery Black life in both the North and South, and conversations about how my son's southern Black family

members might have ended up in the Northeast. Not a bad outcome, but not really what I was looking for in a book for kids his age as it was not relatable for him.

Wendy says

Taken by surprise with this book. I feel like I've read so, so many picture and large-format middle-grade books about Black History in the last few years that I didn't think any of them could really intrigue me any more. This book is exceedingly simple and short, and that's its strength. No wasted words. For the most part each character speaks once and only once; they say what they need to say and the book moves on. This book captures a snapshot and knows what it's doing. It doesn't insist on creating drama. And make no mistake, for some reason the poorest illustration was chosen for the cover--I can't imagine why. This book has five-star illustrations within.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

In a series of free-verse poems, Greenfield chronicles the great migration through the eyes of those who have decided to leave their homes in the south and to head north for a better life. The poems are written chronically, beginning with news about life up north, away from the fear and violence of the Ku Klux Klan. It is followed by a number of poems exploring the mixed feelings of those who have decided to make the move. Each person is left unnamed, identified only as, for example, man, woman, boy and girl, giving them a somewhat Everyman persona, even as they are personalized by expressing their feelings about leaving. At the center is a lone poem called "The Trip." It details the train ride and what the riders experienced as they leave everything familiar behind them. This is followed by a poem that speaks to the fears of the travelers about having made the right decision, as they arrive at their destination. The last poem, "My Family" is the most personal poem, a tribute to the author's family and their move north when she was only 3 months old. Gilchrist's mixed-media collage illustrations perfectly compliment the Greenfield's poems. You will notice, as you explore these details illustrations, that she has incorporated faces taken from photographs into them. And do explore each page, as there is so much to notice and talk about.

Paul says

I knew very little about this, so THE GREAT MIGRATION was a nice overview. Jan Spivey Gilchrist's collage-illustrations were assembled from what look like over-photocopied images of trains, cityscapes, vehicles and individual people and crowds, adding in color with crayons or pastels or watercolors. And they are imagination-capturing. The story is also told through Greenfield's poems that tell her own family's story. The combination of the poems and visuals succeed in conveying the dislocation ("...saying goodbye to the land puts a pain on my heart."), anticipation, fear, disorientation, separation and longing that had to accompany those, maybe especially children, who made the northward journey.
