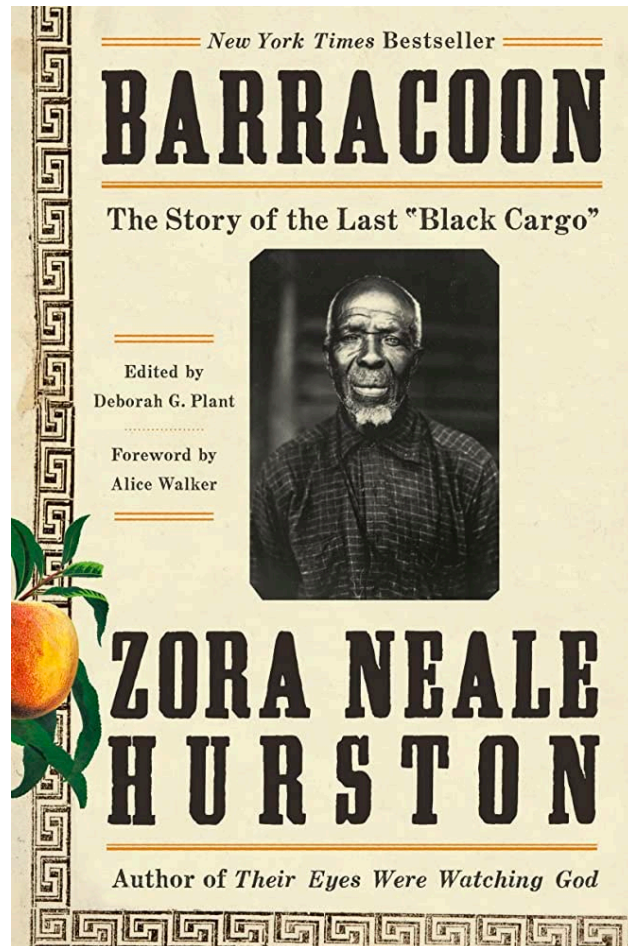


Common Read Activities

“Barracoon: The Story of the Last “Black Cargo”

Zora Neale Hurston



How to use this resource:

This document contains links to resources and class activities. We invite you to explore these activities and discussion questions to identify what might work in your class. We also encourage you to take advantage of [the events](#) offered on campus that align with the Common Read. If you would like to contribute to this document, please email Lisa LaCross (lacross@southalabama.edu) or attend the Common Read discussion on Wednesday, August 16 at 12:45 in Communications Building 160.

Resources:

[Online Access at Marx](#)

[Excerpts from the book](#)

[South Alabama Common Read Website](#)

[Marx Library Libguide on *Barracoön*](#)

[Barracoön Resource Cards \(pdf\)](#)

Class Activities:

[Introducing the book](#)

[Addressing the language used in the book](#)

[Activities for during and post-reading of the book](#)

[Discussion questions](#)

How are you planning to introduce the book in your course?

Start off with a question that can be asked again after finishing the book to track the students' growth. For instance:

- Write down what you know about slavery. After students read the book and visit the Archeology museum:
 - Return the students' responses to them. Now, write down what you know about slavery or add to what you wrote two months ago. How did your view change?
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Introduce the book by asking students to add their hometowns to a map. Add the South Alabama's campus and add places that the students have visited downtown to the map. Ask questions that invite participation from students who are not from Alabama: What is home? How do you define home? Align their responses with Cudjo's view of home and attempt to return. As you read the book, you can add the places named in the book to the map.

Use the "[Meet the Barracoon Flyers](#)" to boost curiosity in the book.

Other ideas?

How are you planning to address Hurston's choice to write in Cudjo's vernacular?

Give the students a paragraph of Old English, a paragraph from "Barracoon," and a paragraph of modern Chemistry. In small groups, students will alternate reading the paragraphs. Students respond to questions about the role of each language in the specific setting.

Read a passage from "Barracoon" outloud or use an audio version. Ask students if they recognize speech patterns from elders in their community.

Show excerpts from "Descendant" in which "Barracoon" is read outloud. Explain how Zora Neale Hurston aimed to preserve Cudjo's culture.

Ask the students about why they believe that Zora wrote the book in Cudjo's vernacular. *Share:* Zora Neale Hurston chose to present Cudjo's voice in the vernacular dialect of the linguistic tradition of African Americans. She even refused a publisher's request to revise the narrative in accordance with established language stylistics for publication. What do you think of the linguistic choices that Hurston made? What can we learn about Cudjo Lewis from his manner of speech? *Then, after reading some of the book:*

In relation to the use of vernacular dialect, what was your experience of reading the Barracoon narrative? What differences in language usage or patterns of speech do you perceive between African Americans and Africatown residents?

Other ideas?

What activities are you planning for during or post-reading?

One FYE instructor is covering the following chapters based on the role they play in telling the story of Africatown:

- the Introduction,
- Barracoona (chapter title),
- Freedom,
- Kossula Learns about the Law,
- and excerpts from "Africatown," which is towards the end of the book.

We will read the chapters in small groups in class and respond to guiding questions on a padlet and trace place names on a map, so that by the end of the chapters, we'll be able to look at the big picture and see the connections between Alabama and West Africa.

After reading sections of the book and visiting the Archeology Museum's exhibit entitled, "Unwritten: The Archaeology & Oral History of Jim Crow Mobile," students will participate in a reflection activity to connect these experiences.

Use the "[Meet the Barracoona Flyers](#)" as discussion topic prompts.

Other ideas?

Discussion Questions

Overall potential questions:

- How would you describe Cudjo/Kossula as a storyteller? Are there storytellers like him in your own community?
- Who gets to decide what stories are important enough to deserve being preserved in print and to warrant classifying as "history"?
- When telling his story, what stylistic and rhetorical strategies does Cudjo/Kossula engage in to emphasize that he is reliable, credible, and trustworthy as a narrator and to ensure that he will be believed?
- What points of difference between life in Africa and life in America does Cudjo/Kossula emphasize, and when/why?
- What points of similarity between life in Africa and life in America does Cudjo/Kossula emphasize, and when/why?
- What role does food play in this narrative, especially between Hurston and Cudjo/Kossula, and why?
- How does Cudjo's/Kossula's depiction of his experiences during enslavement and after compare to what you have been taught in history classes or have seen in popular movies about slavery? Why might his account differ from or contradict others, and how do we choose which to trust?
- What is the difference between art/literature, folklore, anthropology, and ethnography? Where do the lines blur? How would you classify Hurston's text?
- Names (for himself, for his children, and for Africatown itself as a place) are very important in this story. Why do these naming practices matter so much? Can you identify parallel instances in society today where choosing a name is significant?
- How does Hurston build and continually cultivate a relationship of trust with Cudjo/Kossula? Which of her behaviors and her conversational approaches make him willing to engage with her, and why?
- How does the idea of "home" operate for Cudjo/Kossula, in multiple different ways at different points? What places in his physical journey are important in mapping a broad sense of home?
- Cudjo/Kossula is always very specific about naming places: towns, villages, and even road and port names, in Africa and in America. Why do these particular places matter so much to him? What map can we construct of his journeys and travels?
- Cudjo/Kossula frequently talks about distinctions between life "in Afficky soil" and life "in Americky soil." What experiences of feeling like an outsider or feeling like you are living in multiple different worlds at the same time have you gone through?

Specific chapters:

- Comparing "Barracoon" and "Freedom" as sections, how does Cudjo/Kossula talk about the emotional bonds between those kidnapped during Middle Passage and about how they strive to maintain their emotional bonds after emancipation?

- In "Barracoon," how do we interpret Cudjo's/Kossola's apparent warmth and positive feelings toward Hurston's white patron, Charlotte Mason (p. 51-2)? What questions might we ask about that relationship, and about Hurston's relationship to Mason also?
- Why does Cudjo/Kossola suggest that such animosity and tension emerges between those who came over on the *Clotilde* and those who were born into slavery in the United States (except for Free George)? Can we see any parallel intra-group tensions or conflicts in our own community and nation today?
- Why do you think other residents in the area called Cudjo's sons "savages"?
- How does this text reflect on the "American Dream," as Deborah Plant suggests it does on p. 136 of her "Afterword," and does it make you think differently at all about how the "American Dream" works today?
- Why would establishing a church be important to the residents of Africatown?
- How does the church relate to the desire to educate children, which manifested even in building their own schoolhouse?
- What is the metaphorical function of the recurrent use of food and gardening in Cudjo's/Kossola's story? Why do you think he invests such importance in eating and in maintaining his garden and the church in a tidy manner?
- How does Cudjo/Kossola talk about community bonds and the enduring links between those who came over together on the *Clotilde*? How does that manifest and help them to survive and build a new home after emancipation?

Connections to today's world:

- Reading "Marriage" and "Kossola Learns About Law," how can we connect Cudjo's/Kossola's views of the arbitrariness of the American legal system to present-day events in our country?
- Near the end of the text, Cudjo/Kossola discusses how his community helped him to endure losing his whole family and his bodily health and well-being. Are there modern-day analogs in local mutual aid organizations in our area?
- In the narrative of how several of Cudjo's/Kossola's children died and in the story of how he was hurt by the train and never got any of the money from the lawsuit, do we see any analogs to contemporary issues?
- How can we interpret debates and events ongoing in Africatown today, particularly as the new Heritage House has just opened, through the lens of Cudjo's/Kossola's late 1920s stories about its early years (see especially p. 136 of the "Afterword")? Whose voices tend to feature most loudly and powerfully in those debates today? Why? Are those the voices and opinions that ought to receive the most weight in decision-making?