

Book Guide

Milwaukee Public Library Summer Reading Program



Book Title:	Blue: A History of the Color as Deep as the Sea and as Wide as the Sky
Author:	Nana Ekoa Brew-Hammond
Illustrator:	Daniel Minter

Recommended Audience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> K5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 st	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 nd	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3 rd	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4 th	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5 th	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 6 th
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Length of Time to Read:
25-30 minutes

Summary:
Have you ever wondered where blue comes from? Learn all about the fascinating history of the color blue on this journey through time and across continents.

Before Reading (Create Interest):
First, read the book independently so you are prepared to share it with your students. Show them the front cover before reading and ask them to list some things that are blue. Ask: Have you ever wondered where the color blue comes from? How do people make paint that is blue? What about blue eyeshadow or blue jeans? Invite your students to make predictions about how different kinds of blue are made.

During Reading (Discussion/Questions):
If possible, have a world map or globe on hand so you and your students can locate various countries, continents, and geographical features from the book. Pause at any unfamiliar words (like charms, luxury, merchant, dye/dyers, myth, royalty). Define them if needed or demonstrate how to look up a word you don't know using a dictionary. Give students time to look at the illustrations and ask questions as you read. Be sure to allow additional time to answer any questions your students may have about the history of slavery in the U.S. If there are any questions you aren't sure how to answer, make a list of these and save it for later.

After Reading:
Ask your students to share some new things they learned from the book. What questions do they still have after reading? Add these to your list. Ask: Where could we look for factual information to help answer our questions? Where do you think the author found the information for her book? Turn to the last page and show the author's list of Selected Sources. Explain that many nonfiction authors have to do research on the topic they are writing about. Help your students find reliable sources to help answer their questions. Older students can use ABC-CLIO American Mosaic - The African American Experience (free digital resource) to research questions about slavery: <https://www.mpl.org/databases/all/126>

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STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) **Connection:**

Make a Rainbow

Wait for a sunny day and have your students do a fun experiment to learn about the color spectrum. In the 1660s, scientist Isaac Newton noticed that a beam of white sunlight – when it passed through a prism – split into seven visible colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet). Using the instructions provided, challenge your students to make a rainbow.

Adire Design Activity

Page through the book again slowly and ask your students to raise their hand every time they see a blue fabric with intricate, white patterns. The illustrator, Daniel Minter, includes this fabric many times throughout the story. This is adire (pronounced “ah-dee-ray”), which means “tie and dye” in the Yoruba language. Adire is a traditional Nigerian cloth, handmade and dyed with indigo using a special technique that creates striking blue and white patterns. Follow the included instructions to help your students make their own adire-inspired designs.

Sky in a Jar

Go a step further and try a simple experiment to learn why the sky is blue. Fill a clear jar, glass, or plastic tub with tap water. Add a few drops of milk or white soap to make the water cloudy. Shine a flashlight (you can use your phone) through the water and have your students observe which colors they see through the side of the container. The water should have a bluish tint. The water in this experiment is similar to Earth’s atmosphere. When sunlight – which contains all the colors of the rainbow – passes through the air molecules and dust in our atmosphere, the blue light in the color spectrum gets scattered in all directions, making the sky look blue. Have your students change positions and look through the container facing the light. From this angle, the light will look more like a sunset or sunrise (reddish-orange and yellow) because the other colors in the spectrum have been scattered to the sides.

Ideas for younger or older children

Consider reading the book more than once if your students enjoyed it! Younger students may notice and appreciate new details with each read. For older students, read the Author’s Note and “A Few Blue Facts” in the back of the book. Challenge them to use their research skills to find one more fact about blue that was not included in the book.

Additional Notes: Visit <https://www.learningforjustice.org/> and explore the “Teaching Hard History: American Slavery” guide for K-12 educators. Use their resources and student texts, if needed, to help provide accurate, age-appropriate information to your students. Find additional activities, author and illustrator interviews, and more at teachingbooks.net.

