

Celebrating Freedom on Juneteenth

Inez Sadler



“Juneteenth at Oak Bluffs” by Sonia Sadler. Used with permission from Inez Sadler.

PRE-READING:

1. What important event happened in the United States between 1861 and 1865? Share what you know about it.
2. Share what you know about U.S. slavery.
3. Look at the two images (on this page and the next). What is happening in the pictures?
4. Look at the title. Using the information you get from the pictures and the title, what do you think this article will be about?

NOTE: This is a Level 4 version of an article that appeared in the print version of the magazine as Level 10. A Level 7 version is also available on our website.

On June 19, 1865, a general from the north came to Texas. He told the people of Texas: The president of the United States says that all slaves are free. June 19th became a holiday called “Juneteenth.”

My great-great-grandmother was Mariah Johnson. She was a slave in Texas. One day the master told the slaves to come to his house. Mariah did not want to go. She was afraid. She hid behind a tree. After a while, her mother ran to her. She was happy. She said they were free.

When I was a child in Texas in the 1940s, we celebrated Juneteenth. In our town, we celebrated Juneteenth with barbecue, ice-cream, watermelons, and red soda pop. We got new play clothes, and we were so proud of them.

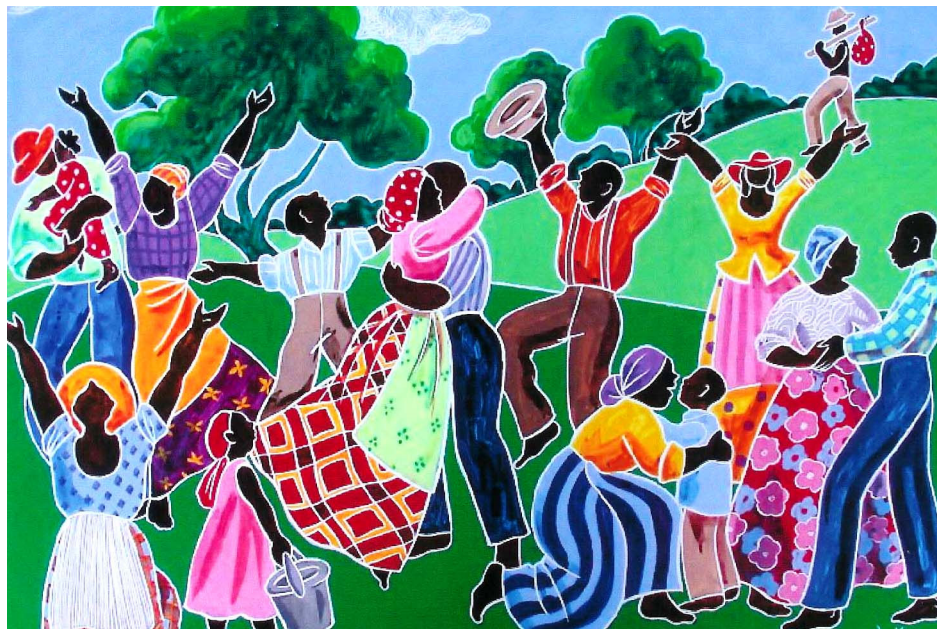
Mariah Johnson was alive when my mother was a little girl. She told my mother stories about her life as a slave. Sonia Sadler, my daughter, wanted people to remember this history. Her pictures showed the end of slavery (see below) and Juneteenth celebrations (page 1). Sonia wanted everyone to understand that slavery caused pain. As a people, we have suffered. But we are strong. We have found ways to survive and celebrate.

Sources: Handbook of Texas <tshaonline.org/handbook>; “The Overstreet Family Reunion Booklet,” 2012.

Inez Sadler lives in Maryland. She is the mother of artist Sonia Sadler (1958-2013). Find more of her art at <sonialynnsadlerarts.com>.

POST-READING:

1. What is Juneteenth?
How do people celebrate it?
2. Imagine you could talk to Mariah Johnson.
What question would you ask her?
3. In a couple of sentences, tell the sequence of events covered in this article. Use words and phrases like “first,” “then,” and “after that.”
4. What do you celebrate about your family and/or your ancestors?



“Jubilee” by Sonia Sadler. Used with permission from Inez Sadler.

5. Practice the past tense.

- a) In English, we usually add “ed” to a verb to make it past tense. But look carefully. We only do this with “regular” past tense verbs and only when they are positive.
- b) What do we do when the verb is negative? Look at the grid and explain the rule in your own words.
- c) There are many irregular past tense verbs. But notice, they are only irregular in the positive voice. What rule do they follow in the negative voice?
- d) What is different about the verb “to be”?

Verb	Regular past (positive)	Regular past (negative)
to paint	painted	did not paint
to celebrate	celebrated	did not celebrate
to want	wanted	did not want
Verb	Irregular past (positive)	Regular past (negative)
to tell	told	did not tell
to get	got	did not get
to hide	hid	did not hide
to run	ran	did not run
to say	said	did not say
to come	came	did not come
Verb	Irregular past (positive)	Irregular past (negative)
to be	I was/you were	I was not/you were not

6. Practice the present perfect.

- a) Notice how the tense changes in the last few sentences of the story. Instead of simple past or simple present, the author uses the present perfect (to have + the past participle of the verb). Write a few sentences that use the present perfect.
- b) Using the context, describe what time period the present perfect tense refers to.