

# Peachtree Pointers

☞ SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS ☞

PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS

1700 Chattahoochee Avenue

Atlanta, Georgia 30318

## THE SECRET OF OLD ZEB

Written by Carmen Agra Deedy

Illustrated by Michael White

ISBN: 1-56145-115-0 Hardcover / \$16.95

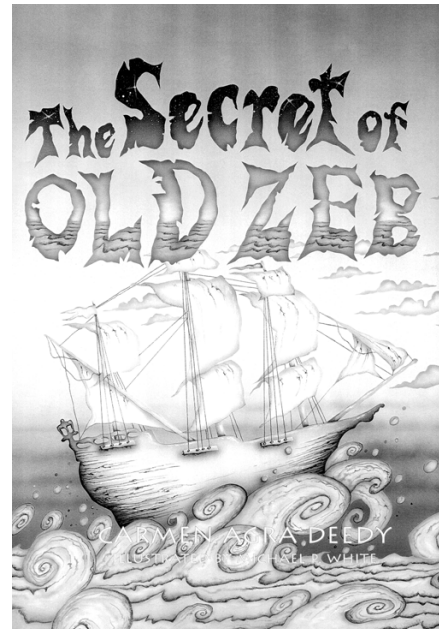
ISBN: 1-56145-280-7 Trade Paper / \$8.95

9 x 12 / 40 pages

34 full-color illustrations,

12 black & white illustrations

Children's, ages 6–10



### ABOUT THE BOOK

“Some dreams are too big to be kept in bottles.”

Ten-year-old Walter feels lost when he is packed off to his Great Aunt Hortensia's, and he fears he is in for the worst summer ever. But then he befriends a mysterious neighbor, Old Zeb, a grizzled sailor who builds ships in bottles. Walter works faithfully on Zeb's Great Secret Project and lifelong dream, and little by little Old Zeb helps Walter realize his own dreams.

### THEMES

- Life dreams
- Following your own compass
- Self-reliance
- Facing fears
- Secret lives

### PRAISE FOR THE SECRET OF OLD ZEB

The “follow your dream” moral is prevalent throughout the text and reinforced by the dream-like quality of the illustrations.

—*School Library Journal*

This book is sure to enchant readers....

—*Library Talk*

The surprises here ... may just prompt children to ask their elders to reveal their own secret dreams.

—*Publishers Weekly*

Non-stop suspense blended with healthy doses of humor, this outstanding book is 100 percent fun on every page.

—*K. A. Rautzhan's national column*  
“Books to Borrow/Books to Buy”

## BEFORE YOU READ

- Show the cover of the book. Ask children what they think Old Zeb's secret is.
- Share a dream of your own or of someone you know well. Ask children to share their dreams.
- Show a miniature ship in a bottle. Ask children how they think it was made.
- Ask children if they have ever been left behind and how it felt.
- Read the dedication page. Carmen Agra Deedy dedicated the book to her three daughters. Ask the children what they think she meant by the statement "May all your ships come in."

## AS YOU READ

- Call attention to the map borders for the illustrations.
- Use plenty of expression, character voices, and variation in volume.
- Discuss what it means to "Face your monster, not his shadow."
- Talk about dreams "too big to be kept in bottles."
- Ask the children which adults in the story have secret lives.
- What is the "compass inside you"?
- Ask why Old Zeb didn't want to share his dream with the sailmaker.
- Old Zeb says, "Dreams don't build themselves." What work did Old Zeb have to do to make his dream come true?

## AFTER YOU READ

Invite a sailor into your classroom to help with a discussion of some of the following interdisciplinary connections (math, geography, astronomy, history, navigation, art). Have a globe and maps of North America and your state handy for reference.

- Where in the world are you—at home, at school, on the ocean?
- Modern sailors have electronic instruments to help them navigate. But years ago (and if the electronic instruments fail in modern times) they used celestial navigation. See what you can find out about celestial navigation. What does it have to do with astronomy?
- One of the electronic instruments that modern sailors use is a GPS (Global Positioning System). These are the same letters as GSP (Great Secret Project), just arranged differently. Find out what a GPS is and how it helps the navigator of a vessel.
- Discuss how maps help locate school, home, and towns, but how longitude and latitude (and a GPS) are necessary for locating position in the ocean. What are latitude and longitude? Why are they so important to sailors?
- Compare Old Zeb and his late-in-life dreams to Grandma Moses, who started painting at the age of seventy-six.
- Discuss what mathematical operations Old Zeb used to calculate the size of his sail.

Without your sailing visitor you can discuss the following issues. Interdisciplinary connections include language arts, interviewing skills, self-confidence and a belief in oneself.

- Discuss whether the children think that being an author and a storyteller was once a fantastic dream for Carmen Agra Deedy. How do they think she achieved her dream? Do they think it took a lot of hard work?
- Have children interview a relative about a dream that the relative made come true.
- How is self-reliance important in the work of making dreams come true?

**Classroom Activities**

- Let children make an origami sailboat and write a few sentences about their dream on the boat.
- Have your children close their eyes and think about one of their dreams or hopes. Let them write a story about the dream or paint a picture illustrating it.
- Create adjective acrostics from the names of the characters: Zeb, Walter, Hortensia, and Lila. Make sure the adjectives accurately describe the character.

Z ealous  
E xhuberant  
B oyish

- Compare the ending of THE WRECK OF THE ZEPHYR by Chris Van Allsburg with the ending of THE SECRET OF OLD ZEB.
- Write a class letter to Carmen Agra Deedy telling her what you like about the book. Ask about her dreams and how she made them come true. What dreams is she still working on? Ask her how the idea for OLD ZEB came to her. Send the letter in care of Peachtree Publishers. (See the address on page 4 of this guide.)

**Vocabulary to Add to  
“Words Old Zeb Would Know”**

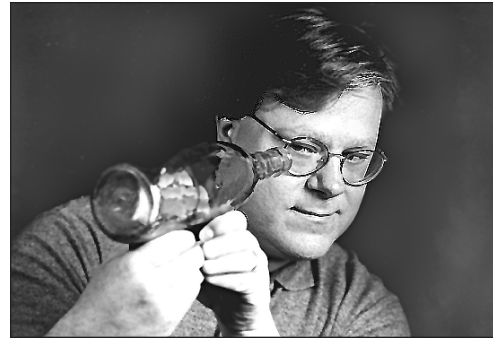
- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. tomfoolery | 6. belittle     |
| 2. berserk    | 7. skullduggery |
| 3. slackjawed | 8. longitude    |
| 4. stupendous | 9. latitude     |
| 5. doubloons  | 10. celestial   |



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A mesmerizing storyteller and acclaimed author, **Carmen Agra Deedy** received a Parents' Choice Gold Award for *GROWING UP CUBAN IN DECATUR, GEORGIA* (an audio collection of stories she wrote and performed), and was named 1993's Georgia Author of the Year for Juvenile Literature for *TREEMAN*. Deedy's other books include *THE LIBRARY DRAGON*, *AGATHA'S FEATHER BED*, and *THE LAST DANCE*.

She is a regular contributor to National Public Radio's "Weekend Edition" of *All Things Considered* and has performed at the Kennedy Center, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Disney Institute, on Broadway at the Victory Theatre, and many other storytelling festivals nationwide.



### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

*THE SECRET OF OLD ZEB* marks a reunion of the team of Carmen Agra Deedy and award-winning artist **Michael White**. They first collaborated on the bestselling *THE LIBRARY DRAGON*.

Educated at the Art Institute of Atlanta, Michael works as a full-time illustrator and participates in the Young Artists and Authors in the Schools programs. He lives with his wife in Atlanta, Georgia.

**Peachtree Pointers for *THE SECRET OF OLD ZEB* was prepared by Julie Strickland, a retired media specialist for pre-K through the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in the Colquitt County School System, Georgia.**



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