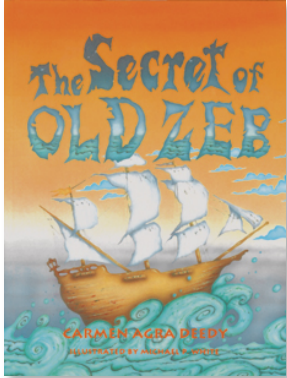


# TEACHER'S GUIDE



## The Secret of Old Zeb

Written by Carmen Agra Deedy | Illustrated by Michael P. White

HC: 978-1-56145-115-9

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Ages 6–10 | Fantasy

AR • RC • Lexile • GRL N; Gr 3

### ABOUT THE BOOK

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

Ten-year-old Walter feels lost when he is shipped off to his Great Aunt Hortensia’s. 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

### 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?
- Look up the following vocabulary words Old Zeb would know:
  - tomfoolery
  - berserk
  - slackjawed
  - stupendous
  - doubloons
  - belittle
  - skullduggery
  - longitude
  - latitude
  - celestial

### 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?

- 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 *The Secret of Old Zeb* came to her. Send the letter in care of Peachtree Publishers, 1700 Chattahoochee Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30318.

## REVIEWS

“The ‘follow your dream’ moral is prevalent throughout the text and reinforced by the dreamlike quality of the illustrations. Behind the talk of adventuring is a reassurance that even though adults have their own dreams and adventures, they still love and return to their children.” —*School Library Journal*

“Cuban storyteller Carmen Agra Deedy has crafted a dashing tale packed with skullduggery, schooners and galleons. Wise guys will especially like young Walter’s witty narration and his sly (but never snide) asides.”  
—*Miami Herald*

## AWARDS

Southern Book Competition Award of Merit □ *Southeastern Library Association*

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- Let children make an origami sailboat and write a few sentences about their dream on the boat.
- Have 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.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Carmen Agra Deedy is a *New York Times* bestselling author and has been writing and traveling around the world telling stories for more than twenty years. Her books, including *14 Cows for America*, *The Library Dragon*, *The Yellow Star*, and *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* have received numerous awards and honors. Carmen has performed in many prestigious venues, but children are her favorite audience. Born in Havana, Cuba, she came to the United States as a refugee, and like most immigrants, sees the world from multiple perspectives.

[www.carmenagradeedy.com](http://www.carmenagradeedy.com)

**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.

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Peachtree Teacher's Guide for  
**THE SECRET OF OLD ZEB**  
prepared by Julie Strickland

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