

Born on the Water written by Nikole Hannah-Jones & Renee Watson and illustrated by Nikkolos Smith, is a lesson study/curriculum that is funded by a grant from the Pulitzer Center entitled *Democracy How? The 1619 Project* in collaboration with LaUnique Bookstore and Cultural Arts Center, Camden, New Jersey.

Prepared for:

Prepared by: Veronica Boone Jones, Curriculum Specialist, Career Educator; grant awardee

Date: September 21, 2025; Meeting date: October 16, 2025

Executive Summary

This proposal recommends the implementation of *Born on the Water* (2021), authored by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones and Renée Watson with illustrations by Nikkolos Smith, into classroom/school curricula. The book provides an accessible and emotionally powerful introduction to African American history, identity, and resilience.

Through poetic storytelling and evocative imagery, the text offers educators an opportunity to engage students in critical conversations around heritage, culture, justice, and the shaping of American history. The proposed integration of *Born on the Water* aligns with state and national learning standards, supports culturally responsive teaching, and nurtures empathy and critical thinking in students.

Rationale

Cultural and Historical Relevance

Born on the Water centers African and African American history in a way that affirms identity while illuminating the resilience of enslaved Africans and their descendants. It provides a counterbalance to curricula that often minimize or oversimplify the Black experience.

Developmentally Appropriate

The book's lyrical style and visual storytelling make it suitable for a wide range of learners. Complex historical themes are presented in a way that is accessible for elementary students, middle school students, while still offering depth for older readers.

Anticipated Outcomes

By adopting *Born on the Water*, educators will:

- Enrich their curriculum with culturally relevant and historically significant content.
- Equip students with tools to understand identity and resilience.
- Foster inclusive, respectful learning environments.
- Strengthen connections between classroom learning and real-world history.

Grant parameters

The lesson study is designed for implementation for a one to two-weeks period for classroom settings or after school programs. The grant will provide the following resources:

1. One *Born on the Water* picture book for every 4 students to be used cooperatively during the lessons.
2. Up to 5 *Born on the Water* books to keep in the classroom and/or school library at the end of the project.
3. Materials for the teachers and students for lesson development.
4. Access to additional resources.
5. Professional Development and Support for teachers:
 - ☐ *Overview & Introduction to Born on the Water - 30 minutes mandatory virtual meeting*
 - ☐ *Workshop on Critically Reading difficult topics - 1 hour mandatory virtual meeting*
 - ☐ *Scheduled Check in - 15 minutes virtual meeting*
 - ☐ *Project Reflections and Survey - 30 minutes mandatory virtual meeting*
 - ☐ *In-class Support Visit - up to 45 minutes per request - as needed*
 - ☐ *Collaborative Lesson Planning Session - per request - virtual meeting*
 - ☐ *Recognition & Participation Certificates for teachers and students*

Conclusion

Born on the Water offers more than just a literary experience; it is a vital tool for teaching history, culture, and humanity through story. Its inclusion in the classroom helps ensure that students see themselves reflected in history, while also encouraging all learners to engage with the complexity of America's past.

We respectfully ask your approval and support of the two week project based on *Born on the Water* as a curriculum addition between the months of October and December, 2025.

 Contact Information
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