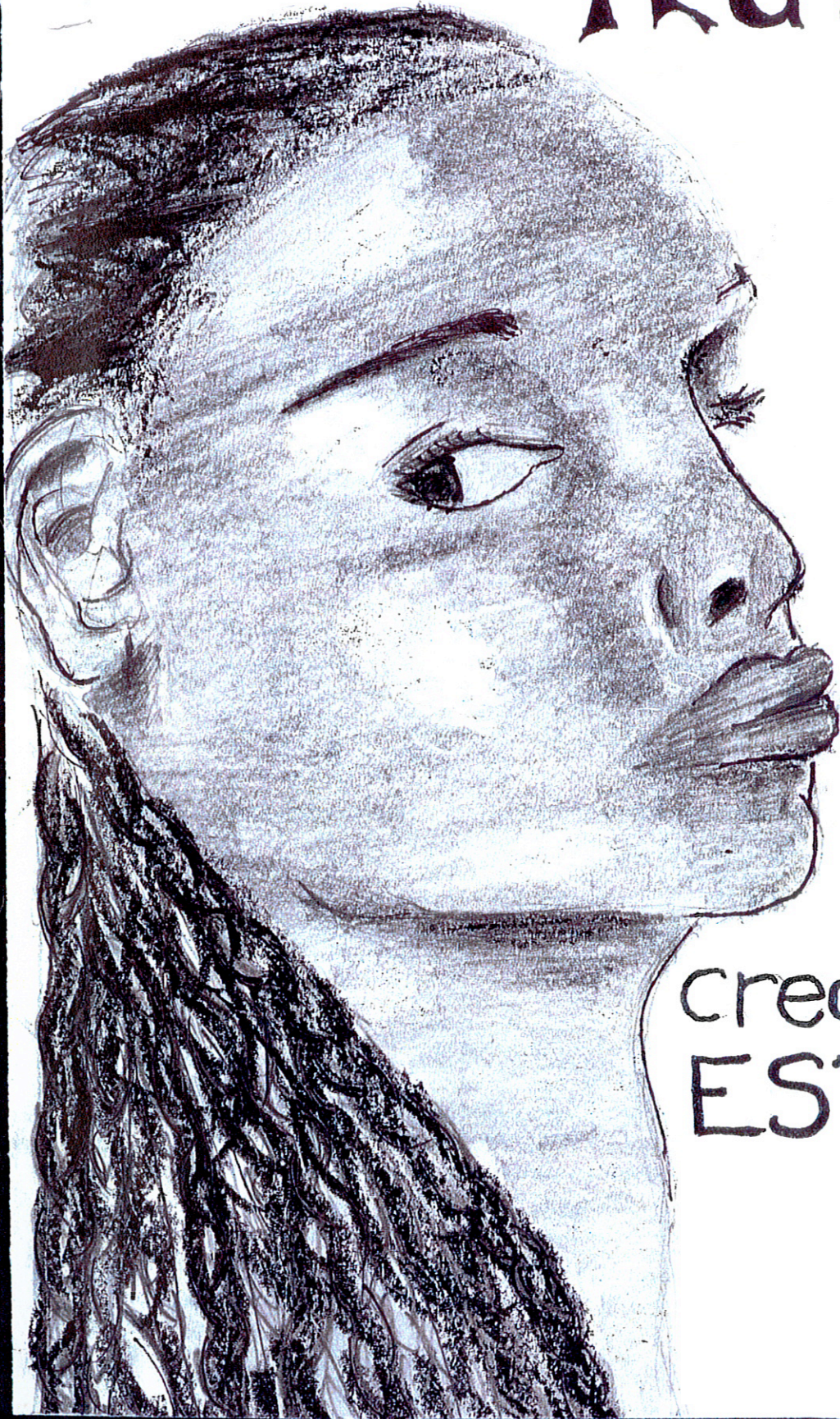


# Karate



created by  
**ESTHER**



# **Historical Character File: A Slave's Freedom**

Dear audience member,

This learning product was created by a PIONEER School for Expeditionary Learning 8<sup>th</sup> grade student in the spring of 2004. And while I have been trying for several years to intertwine historical inquiry, literacy, and craftsmanship in the curriculum I develop, this is my first attempt at facilitating the development of a product of this complexity. I am truly honored by the academic and creative risks these students were willing to take as we learned from this process together. Please take a moment to read their introductory advice below, as it will help you understand the context of our endeavors. And thank you for sharing in our learning!

-Matt Strand, PIONEER 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Humanities

## **PIONEER 8<sup>th</sup> Graders' Introduction**

### **What is a historical character file?**

- A historically/geographically accurate, fictional story about a character we created; it includes a portrait of the character, a narrative/biography, a character map, a bibliography, and the option of including artifacts from the character's life
- Our way of showing what we are learning
- An experiment in learning based on educator Ron Berger's character file project
- A project about slaves in United States history

### **What were we trying to accomplish?**

- To build our schema (background knowledge) about slavery
- To educate others/ourselves about the slavery era
- To bring back the history through every detail instead of bits and pieces
- To challenge the notion that slaves were merely stereotypical "victims"; they were human beings with complex emotions that often used various "forms of freedom" as a way to experience power and dignity
- To feel the personal, human level of history rather than simply memorizing dates and facts in order to gain a different perspective of and respect for the real people that endured this system

### **What else should the audience know?**

- Our intent is not to be racist or offensive; some of us have chosen to portray the physical and verbal abuse slaves experienced; sometimes this involves violence and racial slurs that, according to the primary, secondary, and expert resources we used in our research, were commonplace; these elements were included to convey historical realities
- We worked for 2 months on this project: asking questions, researching, discussing, drafting, drawing, critiquing, revising, and creating artifacts
- We went deep. And we'll remember it because we spent so much time on it. And we actually enjoyed the process; almost all of us would be willing to do a project like this again in the future.

## Slave Narrative

I sit here next to the window with my eyes closed, feeling the warmth of the morning sun caress my cheeks. I see without looking the beautiful scene that awaits me outside --- the very first beams of light reaching across the rolling hills, catching the light in the morning dew on my recently sprouted herb garden. This time of day is my favorite --- it's so silent I can almost hear the sun meeting the earth --- awakening it to another glorious day. I stand up, stretch, and open my eyes to drink in my beautiful garden. I pick an apple off the tree by the back porch of my quaint little cottage and sigh with the pure bliss of its sweet juice filling my mouth as my teeth sink into the perfect shining red skin. Humming, I skip over to the ginseng section of the garden. Just as I start pulling some weeds out of the rich dark soil, I hear little footsteps pattering through the back door. Overjoyed that my wonderful little boy has come out to help me, I welcome him into my open arms and hand him the rest of my apple to finish.

Silently we work side by side, pulling out weeds and picking the ripe herbs. When we are finished, we take our pickings inside and meet my husband, father, and mother for breakfast in the kitchen. After a delicious meal of fresh bread and grits, my son, father, and husband go out for a walk. While they are gone I bury myself in my work, soaking, mashing, and chopping until the correct remedy has been made to cure Mrs. Coatell's cold. This is when I feel most alive, when I'm with my plants --- just working. I am hardly aware of my kind mother watching over me --- seeing me make the remedies that she taught me. When I turn around I am excited to see ---

"GET TO WORK YOU LAZY NIGGERS!" I sigh, open my eyes, and take in my real surroundings. Instead of warm morning sun creeping through the open window,

there's just harsh blistering sun forcing its way through the dirty cracked piece of glass. Instead of glistening, dewy herbs pushing their way through the rich dark soil, there are rows and rows of dusty cotton that seem to stretch for miles. Instead of herbs being collected by a happy family, cotton bolls are being stripped from the dried plants by sunburned, bleeding, hunchbacked slaves. Instead of that quaint little cottage that I caught a glimpse of when running an errand for my master one day, I'm in a hot dirty kitchen. Instead of seeing my son playing in the backyard, I see him sweating and straining under the heavy loads he's dragging into the stables. I can't see my mother, but I know she's somewhere doing work she's far too old and weak to do. Then I turn away from the window, wiping salty tears from my eyes, knowing that I will never see my husband or father again.

Returning to the piles of laundry that Daisy, Minnie, Ruby, and I are attacking, I hum along to a song that they've taken up singing. While I hum I wonder whether or not I should sing along with a song that I love --- and hate --- so much.

"Follow the drinking gourd, follow the drinking gourd," --- my optimistic side wins and I sing along with the others, putting my whole heart into the song --- "for the old man is waiting, for to carry you to freedom, if you follow the drinking gourd."

As I sing I think about what it would be like to really travel on the Underground Railroad. I know where in the sky to find the Big Dipper (the drinking gourd), but I've already lost my father and my husband to that wretched trail. I shake my head, trying to rid it of the images that are forming of my father, lifeless and limp, swinging from the rope. To stop thinking about that, I imagine that my husband is living in New York or



Pennsylvania, missing me. That is the most I can hope for, 'cause I haven't seen him since that cold evening when he stole away on the Railroad last February.

“STOP THAT GOD DAMN CATERWAULING!” For once I am grateful for the overseer's cruel words, because they stop the horrible images swirling around in my head.

After working all day on the laundry, then preparing the master's dinner and washing his dishes, I'm allowed to go home. As I walk back to my house, the pain in my hands confirms how blistered and raw they are from the boiling water and harsh lye that we had used to do the laundry. I sigh, knowing without looking that my apron is spattered with blood from my blisters ripping when I had sharpened the master's knives before dinner. I'll have to clean out the stains tonight so I can wear my apron tomorrow, and I'll also have to do something to heal my hands. Just as I start thinking of the possible herbs that I could use to make a healing salve, a noise interrupts my thoughts.

“No sir! No I didn't leave the shovels out—I promise, sir, please take pity on me!” I cringe as I watch my mother's small frame being dragged by the overseer. This is a weekly happening; someone leaves the tools out and they blame her and whip her because everyone else has left. As much as I want to help her, I know that interfering would just make things worse. So I walk quickly, knowing that I need to get home to my son, and wonder how my poor mother can stand this weekly treatment.

I walk into our small hut on the outskirts of the master's property and my son, Kinte, rushes into my open arms. “Mama! What happened to your hands?! And your apron?” His large round eyes are full of fear that I've been punished for something.

“I was just doin' some hard work, hun,” I reply, tousling his hair.

“Mom, do you know where Grammy is? She didn’t come back after she should’ve been done working.”

I hear whips cracking in the distance. “She’ll be here a little later on,” I say in a tight voice that doesn’t sound like my own. Kinte seems satisfied with this answer, so he moves on to his next question. “Mama? Will you teach me about herbs tonight?” My heart fills with joy to know that he wants to be a healer, but it’s risky enough for me to practice the ancient healing remedies without being caught. So I tell him what I tell him every other night that he’s asked, “Not today, honey, maybe tomorrow.” He sighs, disappointed, then asks, “Can I see your mark then?” I chuckle at this and push the fabric of my skirt down over my hip a little to reveal a small scar --- a cicatrix. Seeing my son looking at it now I feel proud. I think of the day that my mother, who taught me everything I know about the healing arts, had carved the small circular symbol into my hip. Kinte reaches out with his small hand and rubs the scar.

It is late and I can tell that he is tired, so I gently lead him to his bed. He sinks gratefully onto the lumpy corncob and straw mattress, and I lay down next to him, stretching my long legs out next to his short ones. I lie still, humming an ancient lullaby until I hear his breathing become steady and rhythmic, then I quietly stand up and creep out the door and sit down in my small patch of land that I use for my herb garden. My plants are wilted from the day’s intense sun, so I fetch a bucket of water and do my best to revive the poor withered things. Just as I pick some Leonale’ (an ancient healing herb my mother brought over from Africa) to help my burned hands, I hear my mother staggering towards me.



I run to her and guide her inside. To my surprise, this time her back isn't soaked in blood, but her face is streaked with tears.

"Oh mother! What did he do to you?" I ask.

"He just knocked my down, but he had been threatening to whip me the whole time he was dragging me there --- I was so afraid he would whip me again I couldn't help crying," she replies. This makes me so mad. Not only do they force her to work when she is old and feeble, but some days they beat her until her back looks like strawberry jam and other days they threaten her with whipping.

"What do they think that you did?" I ask now, wondering what an old woman could do to deserve this.

"They think that I left the shovels out again -- but I didn't! I didn't." At this she dissolves into tears and I run to the herbs and get the comfrey and smooth it onto her back with a rag soaked in cold water, trying to help her relax.

"What are you using?" My mother knows so much more than I do about herbs and remedies.

"I'm using compress of comfrey," I reply, wondering if she'll approve.

She sighs, "If we were in Africa we could go to the end of the village and gather bilaconde by the swift river." My mother had been the healer in her village in Africa, as had all the rest of our family going back for generations. When she came to America on the slave ship, she planned to keep on practicing the ancient healing practices but her hands became too damaged from years and years of hard labor. When I was old enough to learn she taught me secretly about healing and herbs. It is very risky to heal the slaves here on the plantation using the ancient arts --- the whites are threatened by our

knowledge --- but it gives me great satisfaction every time I cure someone's cold or heal their broken limbs. It makes me feel almost... free.

I decide that maybe I should talk about something else to help her take her mind off her pain. "I was thinking about Kudzi today while doing the laundry. He was such a good husband."

"He was indeed, child. You must remember to always think positive thoughts, hope that he is free, and that someday you and Kinte will be reunited with him." Her eyes fog over and I can tell that she's deep in thought about something.

After a long silence she says, "You work so hard --- only eighteen and you run our house and keep the entire plantation healthy. All the slaves look up to you; the combination of your brain and leadership make you a pillar of strength for them to get hope from." I smile at her and she reaches up and fingers the ends of my long shiny black hair, braided into tight cornrows. I reach out and hold her hand. Her hands, once so long, slim, and able, are now old, weathered, and scarred. It is oddly beautiful seeing her old hands intertwined with my young, slim, dexterous ones, no matter how blistered and bloody they are.

"Kinte asked me again tonight to teach him about healing and herbs," I say, breaking the silence.

"Kurare, you can't avoid teaching him forever, you know. We both know that if you and I die before teaching him that the plantation will be without a healer.

"I know Mama. I'm just so frightened that we'll be separated --- I don't know what I'd do if I lost him." Just thinking about being separated from my dear son brings tears to my eyes. She sees the tears in my eyes, gets up, crosses the room and lies down



on the mattress next to Kinte. Seeing them lying there next to each other makes me feel somehow peaceful, so I get up and walk outside. Looking up at the heavens I find the Big Dipper, then the North Star, and once again consider the Underground Railroad. Looking at the North Star my mind drifts away again to my cottage—to freedom.



\$50 Reward

Missing Slave

5'9" tall

3 diagonal scars on his left cheek  
Answers to the name "Samuel"

If found return to

George Franklin  
overseer at  
Josiah Williams plantation  
Lost River Road  
Shelbyville



\$100 Reward

Missing Slave

6'4" tall  
big, strong worker

If found return to

George Franklin  
Overseer at  
Josiah Williams plantation  
Lost River Road  
Shelbyville





*Angelica improves circulation and by doing so warms the body. If applied externally it can relieve joint pains, stomach cramps and muscle spasms. It can reduce lung congestion and is an all around good tonic.*








*Motherwort stabilizes the heart,  
and eases nervousness.  
It can reduce the heat flashes of menopause  
and promote menstruation.  
Although it is a very safe herb  
it should never be used during pregnancy.*



A photograph of a dried yarrow herb specimen pressed onto a piece of yellow paper. The herb consists of several stems with finely divided, feathery green leaves and clusters of small, pale yellow flowers. The paper is aged and has some red and brown spots. The top and bottom edges of the paper are torn, revealing a dark, textured surface underneath. The left edge of the page shows the spiral binding of a notebook.

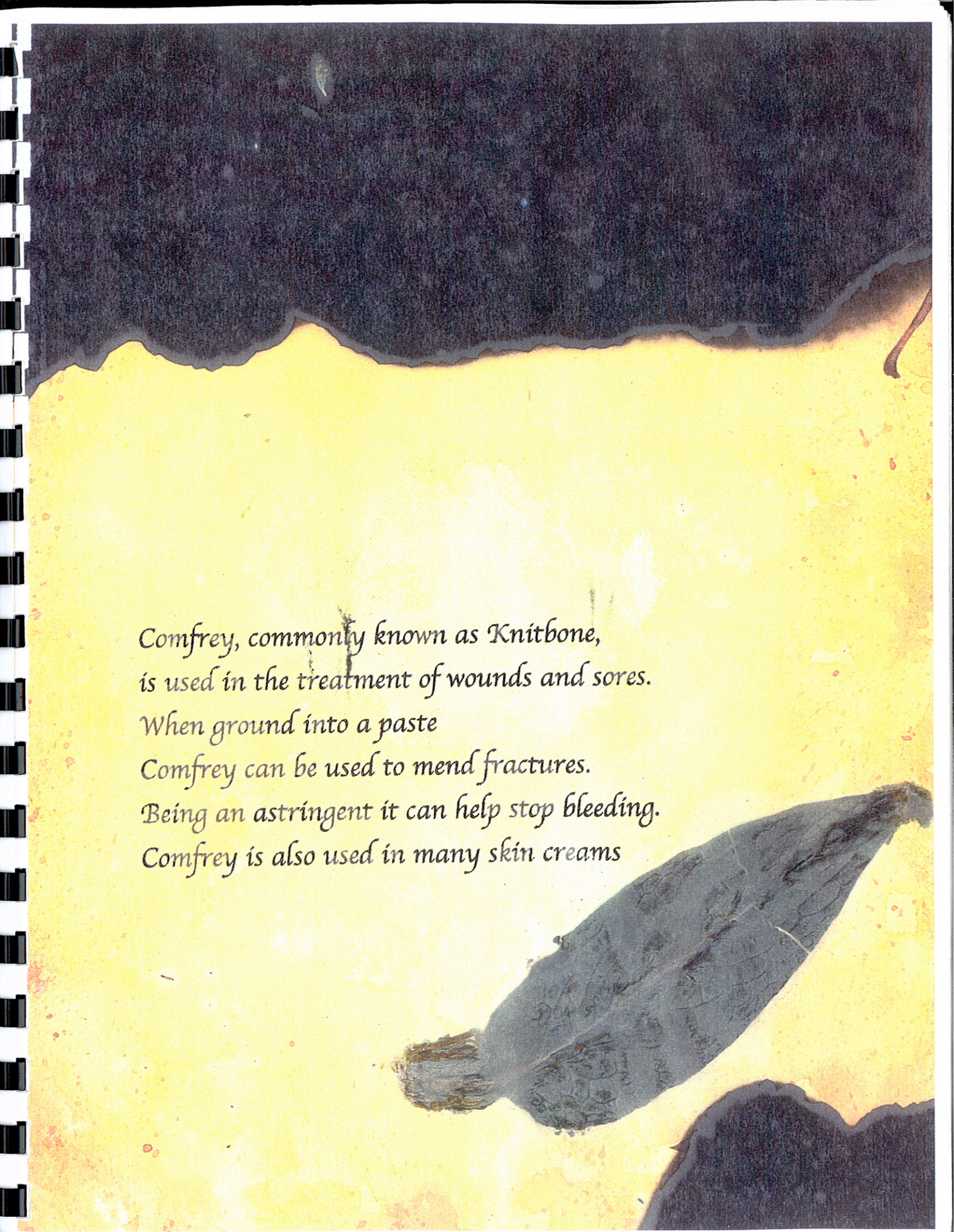
*Yarrow is used to relieve pain and speed the healing of wounds; internally and externally. It can also be used to treat colds and sore throats or break fevers.*



*Violets can be used to brew a calming tea.*







*Comfrey, commonly known as Knitbone,  
is used in the treatment of wounds and sores.  
When ground into a paste  
Comfrey can be used to mend fractures.  
Being an astringent it can help stop bleeding.  
Comfrey is also used in many skin creams*



Kurare and Kinte's footprints in the sand  
at the Josiah Williams Plantation in Shelbyville.



## Character Map: Kurare

### Family History:

- Immediate family-
  - Father was hung when she was little
  - Mother was a healer in her African village and passed all of her knowledge of plants, herbs, and healing on to Kurare. Now her mother lives with Kurare but her hands are too damaged from hard work to heal people.
  - She doesn't know where her siblings are.
  - She has a son, named Kinte. Their master re-named him John. He is 5 years old and works in the stables.
  - Her husband, Kudzi, was sent away after repeated beatings for being "argumentative."
- Ancestry-
  - Doesn't know much about her ancestors except for what her mother tells her of other healers in the family.

### Personal Description:

- Physical description-
  - She is 18
  - Tall with long legs



- Long hair is usually braided neat cornrows
- Long dexterous fingers
- Cicatrix (ritual scar) on her hip that her mother carved after she had learned enough to become a healer.
- Not necessarily pretty or traditionally beautiful but she has strong defined cheekbones and large dark eyes with flecks of gold in them.
- Dreams and hopes-

Her dream is to run away with her son to a free state. She is afraid to fulfill this dream because she knows if she is caught she will be separated from her son.
- Fears-
  - Her healing powers being discovered
  - Her son being taken away from her.
- Job-

Part of the household staff and does things such as working in the kitchen, cleaning, and doing laundry. She is very grateful that she doesn't have to work in the fields doing hard labor but even so sometimes she daydreams about spending all day picking herbs and working on healing remedies.
- What others would say about her-
  - She is a sweet-natured person
  - She can heal any sickness or wound

- Knows a lot about herbs and plants
  - Loves her son
- Type of home/work environment
  - While working in the house, the women will sing songs such as “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” until they are silenced.
  - When she is at home, things are peaceful. She, her mother, and son sing as they plant herbs.
- Meaning of name-

Her name, Kurare, comes from the word Curare which means “to heal”. She was named this because in her family’s history, the women have been healers for their villages.
- Image of Freedom.
  - Kurare’s image of freedom would be that she could gather and plant whatever herbs that she wanted and heal people without having to hide and be restrained.
  - She also thinks that part of freedom would be where she could love her son and do what is best for him without having to worry about them being separated or injured.
- Potential outcomes if she acts on it.
  - Kurare often worries about what would happen if she did run away or somehow escape with her son to a better place. She worries about being caught and separated or seeing him beaten.

She had been beaten occasionally, so it wasn't that that she was most afraid of, it was seeing her son beaten.

- She also worries about her healing powers being discovered and being sent away from her mother and son, or being made to do harsh work so that her hands become so roughened from calluses and cuts that she is unable to perform the delicate work of planting and picking herbs and healing peoples' wounds. She knows that the slave owners and her master would punish her because the combination of her knowledge and leadership that make her a pillar of strength for the other slaves to look up to and get hope from undermine the slave owners authority.
- Although she does worry a lot, she also dreams; she dreams of being able to do her healing work without keeping it a secret, she dreams of her and her son and her husband living together in a house of their own, just being happy and not being forced to do anything.

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