

Teacher's Guide:
Obara the Gatekeeper
Adapted by Michelle Bodden
Illustrated by Kwenci Jones

About the book:

Every day, Obara and the Gatekeeper watches the townspeople go by, and every night he dreams of a better life. Finally his dreams come true! but things don't turn out the way he expects...

About the author:

Author Michelle Bodden has been an initiated Orisha worshipper for twenty-one years. She holds a master's degree in elementary education, and has taught in both New York City and Cincinnati Ohio.

About the illustrator:

Painter Quentin "kwenci" Jones has been an artist all his life. His inspiration for the illustrations in this book came from his respect for the awesome beauty of nature.

Author Interview:

1. What were your favorite stories as a young girl?

I loved Mother Goose and anything by Dr. Seuss! I also loved to read different versions of the same story, like Cinderella stories from around the world.

2. What advice do you have for young people who love to write?

Write every day, even if it is only for a few minutes. And read every day, too – you learn a lot about writing stories by reading the stories others have written. Also, be sure to save what you've written, and go back to it every now and then. You may think of a sentence tomorrow that fits into a story you wrote last month.

3. Can you share a bit about your writing process?

I spend about an hour (more if I can) every day reading children's books. My writing process includes a great deal of research, then writing, revising, revising again, getting feedback, revising again, editing and collaborating with kwenci on the illustrations. Because my books are based on traditional Yoruba stories, I also check my work with elders to be sure they are faithful to the original versions.

Pre-reading:

What is a gatekeeper? What do you think Obara will have to do in the story? Will he face a problem? Do all characters face problems?

Questions to consider:

1. What is the setting of the story? Don't forget that setting includes both time and place.
2. What is Obara's job? Why is it an important one for the town?
3. What did Obara dream of? What do you dream of for yourself?
4. Obara felt that people looked down on him. Did they really? Do you ever think that people feel this way about you?
5. Why did Obara feel sorry for himself?
6. How did Obara's luck begin to change by small acts of kindness? What could you do for someone else?
7. Explain why Obara decided to build a home on the highest hill in town.
8. Describe what happened to all of Obara's riches. Would you be so generous?
9. Obara says, "Live and learn." What does he mean by this? When have you had to live and learn?
10. What do you think the ending means? What will happen next? What did Obara's story teach you?

Projects:**Language Arts:**

Write another story about Obara where he learns the lesson to always tell the truth or not to judge a book by its cover. (Most folktales use three in their story—wishes, tests, challenges—be sure to incorporate this element into your own story, just as Obara's story has used it).

Music:

Sing this song to the tune of “Did You Ever See Lassie?”

Obara is the gatekeeper, gatekeeper, gatekeeper,

Obara is the gatekeeper, how unhappy is he!

For his dreams are big dreams

and big dreams are his dreams

Obara is the gatekeeper, how happy he’ll be.

Art:

Notice the beautiful fabrics in each picture of Obara and the Gatekeeper. Either design your own piece of fabric using bright construction paper and markers. Or, draw a picture from the story using real fabric in some part of your portrait.

Reading:

Before reading define the following literary elements. Then, as you read, fill out the chart and discuss.

Character	Setting	Conflict	Resolution

This guide was created by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), a reading specialist and children’s

author. Visit her website to find hundreds of guides to children's literature.