

From debut picture book author Tricia Elam Walker and illustrator April Harrison,
winner of the Coretta Scott King–John Steptoe Award for New Talent

NANA AKUA GOES TO SCHOOL



**TRICIA
ELAM WALKER
& APRIL
HARRISON**

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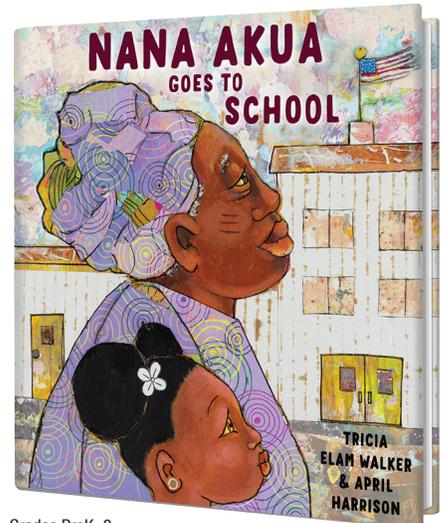
Classroom Activity Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this moving story that celebrates cultural diversity, a shy girl brings her West African grandmother, whose face bears traditional tribal markings, to meet her classmates.

It is Grandparents Day at Zura's elementary school, and the students are excited to introduce their grandparents to the class, and share what makes them special! Aleja's grandfather is a fisherman. Bisou's grandmother is a dentist. But Zura's nana, who is her favorite person in the world, looks a little different from other grandmas. Nana Akua was raised in Ghana and, following an old West African tradition, has tribal markings on her face. Worried that her classmates will be scared of Nana—or worse, make fun of her—Zura is hesitant to bring her to school.

Nana Akua knows what to do, though. With a quilt of traditional African symbols and a bit of face paint, Nana Akua is able to explain what makes her special and to make all of Zura's classmates feel special, too.



Grades PreK–3
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tricia Elam Walker is the award-winning author of the novel for adults, *Breathing Room*, as well as a culture and fashion commentator, and blogger. She is an award-winning fiction and nonfiction writer, a culture and fashion commentator, and a blogger. She has written for National Public Radio, the *Washington Post*, *Essence* magazine, *HuffPost*, and more. She practiced law for sixteen years prior to teaching writing in Washington, D.C., and Boston. Tricia is an assistant professor of creative writing at Howard University and is working on several projects, including children's books, plays, and a second novel.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

April Harrison, a renowned folk artist, is the Coretta Scott King–John Steptoe New Talent Award–winning illustrator of Patricia C. McKissack's final picture book, *What Is Given from the Heart*, which received four starred reviews and which the *New York Times Book Review* called an “exquisite story of generosity.” Her work appears in the public collections of Vanderbilt University, Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center, the Atlanta Housing Authority, and the Erskine University Museum, as well as in many private collections.

Learn more at [aprilsongallery.com](http://aprilsonggallery.com).



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

THE UPSIDE OF DIFFERENCES

Zura worries that Nana Akua's face markings might cause a stir at school. She's concerned that someone might laugh at her grandmother or be mean to her. Nana Akua creates a positive experience in the classroom by sharing her story and the quilt, then painting symbols on everyone's faces. Hold a discussion about physical differences and people's reactions to them. Then have students work in pairs to write and illustrate a short story in which a difference has a positive effect in some unexpected way. Each pair should share their story with classmates.

FAMILY TREASURES

Nana Akua suggests that they bring in Zura's special quilt that has symbols from a "long-ago tradition." As a class, discuss why the quilt is important to Zura and her family and how it ties in with their family history. Then invite children to bring in an object (or a photograph of an object) from their home that has a special meaning to their family. Each student should share why the object or photograph matters to their family.

NANA, MIMI, AND MORE

Zura calls her grandmother "Nana," Bisou calls her grandmother "Mimi," and Alejo calls his grandfather "Abuelo." Create a chart for students to list what they call their family members, including the story behind the names or nicknames, if any. Then have class members survey other students in the school on the same topic. Mark the chart to indicate how widely used a name or nickname, like Nana, is. Hold a discussion on the names and their origins, such as family tradition or language. Talk about why we call certain relatives by special names.

GLEAN FACTS ON GHANA

Nana Akua is originally from Ghana, a country in West Africa. The symbols on the quilt are used by the Akan people of Ghana. Share a map that shows Ghana's location and share images of the country. To learn more about it, have students use print and digital resources to each find five facts about Ghana that they consider interesting. Have them make short notes about each fact, including their source for it. What is the official language of Ghana? When was it founded as a country? What does its flag look like? Then gather as a class to share information and talk about the research process.

This guide was written and prepared by Kathleen Odean, a former school librarian who gives workshops on new children's and young adult books. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on the 1996 Caldecott Award Committee.



WHAT MATTERS?

In the story and on the endpapers, you learn about Adinkra symbols and their meanings. Choose three symbols. Write their names, pronunciations, and meanings below. Then, explain why each one represents an important quality.

Symbol name: _____ Pronunciation: _____

Meaning: _____

Why it's an important quality: _____

Symbol name: _____ Pronunciation: _____

Meaning: _____

Why it's an important quality: _____

Symbol name: _____ Pronunciation: _____

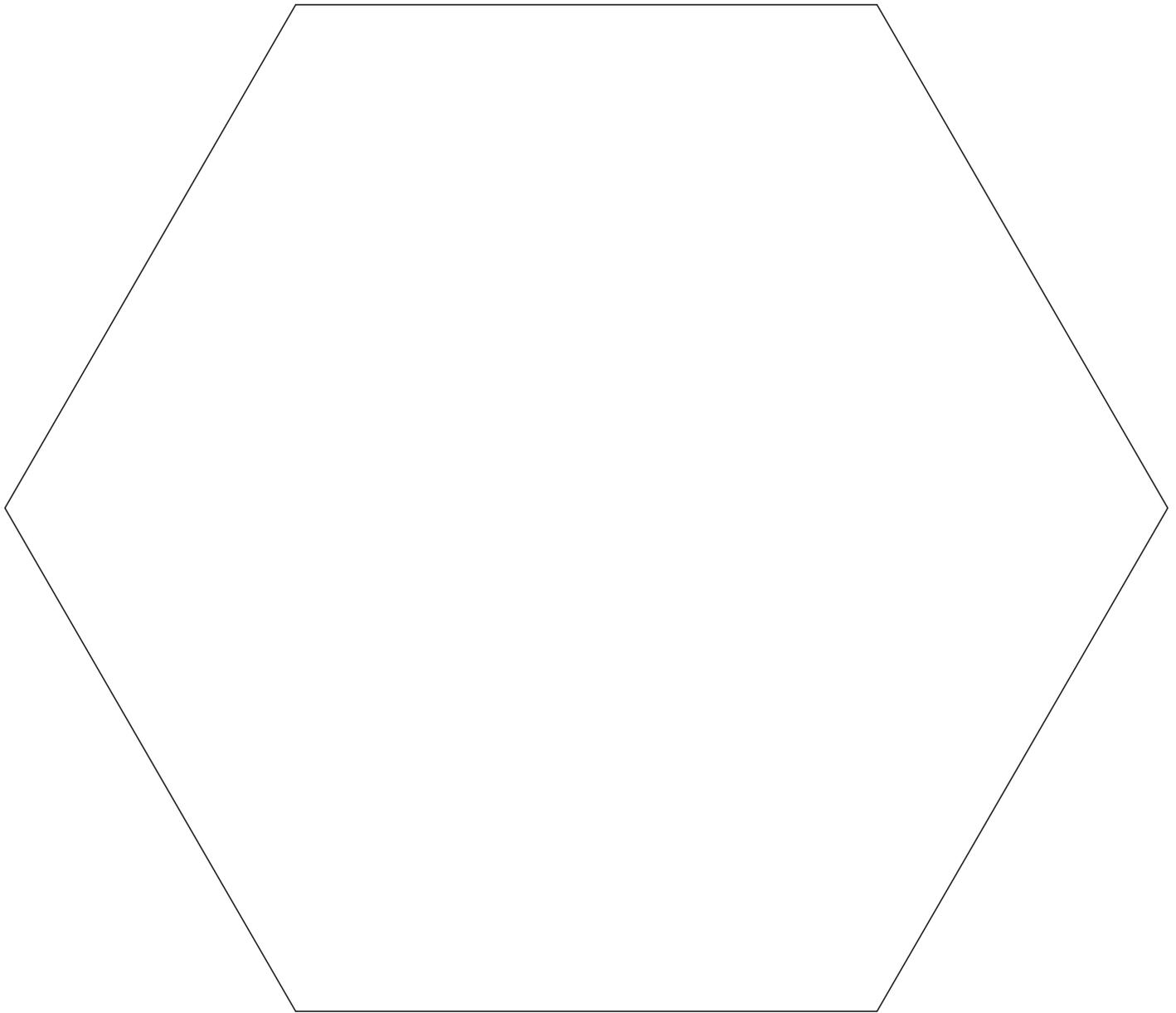
Meaning: _____

Why it's an important quality: _____



A QUILT OF WISDOM

Choose your favorite Adinkra symbol to add to a class quilt made of paper. Draw and color the symbol on the template below. Write the symbol's name and meaning on it, too. Fill in the background with color. Attach the edges of your piece to the edges of other students' pieces to create a paper quilt to hang in your classroom.



REPRODUCIBLE!

