Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Never Forgotten by Diane Dillon, Leo Dillon, Patricia C. McKissack", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/216. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Diane Dillon , Leo Dillon , Patricia C. McKissack

Never Forgotten

United States of America (2011)

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Deities Nature Goddesses Slavery in Africa



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Never Forgotten
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Patricia McKissack, *Never Forgotten*. Ill. by L. and D. Dillon, New York: Schwartz and Wade books, 2011, 48 pp.
ISBN	9780375843846
Genre	Didactic fiction, Illustrated works, Juvenile fiction*, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (8–10 years)
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, The University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Diane Dillon , b. 1933
(Illustrator)

Diane Dillon is American artists born on March 13, 1933 in Los Angeles. He met her husband Leo (of Trinidadian origin) at the Parsons School of Design in New York in 1953, graduated in 1956 with degrees in graphic design and got married in 1957. Since then, they have been working in collaboration, illustrating several children's books. Amongst others, they illustrated *The Ring in the Prairie* (1970), *Whirlwind is a Ghost Dancing* (1974), *Songs and Stories from Uganda* (1974), *Aida* (1990), *Earth Mother* (2005). Their son, Lionel, also became an artist and joined them in illustrating *Pish, Posh, Said Hieronymus Bosch* (1991) and others. Their works can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum. Their works have been noted to cover ethno-racial diversity.

Sources:

illustrationhistory.org (accessed: July 30, 2021).

en.wikipedia.org (accessed: July 30, 2021).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, The University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com

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Leo Dillon , 1933 - 2012
(Illustrator)

Leo (of Trinidadian origin) Dillon was American artists born on March 2, 1933 in New York. He met his wife, Diane, at the Parsons School of Design in New York in 1953, graduated in 1956 with degrees in graphic design and got married in 1957. Since then, they have been working in collaboration, illustrating several children's books. Amongst others, they illustrated *The Ring in the Prairie* (1970), *Whirlwind is a Ghost Dancing* (1974), *Songs and Stories from Uganda* (1974), *Aida* (1990), *Earth Mother* (2005). Their son, Lionel, also became an artist and joined them in illustrating *Pish, Posh, Said Hieronymus Bosch* (1991) and others. Their works can be found in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Brooklyn Museum. Their works have been noted to cover ethno-racial diversity. Leo died in 2012 from lung cancer.

Sources:

illustrationhistory.org (accessed: July 30, 2021).

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Patricia C. McKissack , 1944 - 2017
(Author)

Patricia C. McKissack was an African-American writer born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1944. She got married to Fredrick McKissack with whom she wrote over a hundred books, many of which are based

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on stories told to her by her mother and grandparents about the African-American experience. She also wrote under the names L'Ann Carwell and Pat McKissack. She was a board member of the National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance. As an American author in children's literature, biographical and historical fiction and folktales, she authored many books among which: S*ojourner Truth: A Voice of Freedom*, F*lossie and Fox*, *Mirany and Brother Vlind* and *Never Forgotten*, which won the 2012 PEN/Steven Kroll Award. Apart from this, she has won several awards including Coretta Scott King Award and Jane Addams Children's Book Award both in 1990 for *A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter* (which she co-authored with her husband). She died in 2017.

Sources:

en.wikipedia.org (accessed: July 30, 2021).

scholastic.com (accessed: July 30, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

The story opens with a griot's warning that white folks will invade Africa, capture blacks, and sell them as goods. He recounts the story of Dinga, a well-respected blacksmith who, after losing his beloved wife, decides to raise his newborn baby boy all by himself. Although elderly women in the village advise him to remarry or give out his son as requires their culture and tradition, Dinga rather dedicates his son to the Mother Elements (the goddess of the earth, the goddess of the wind, the goddess of fire and the goddess of water) asking them to help him raise him. He names the baby Musafa which means *only the universe is greater* (p. 12). Musafa grows up and becomes an interesting boy who learns life-sustaining values like courage, family bonds and love from daily discussions with the mother elements. During that period, griots, through their songs and drums, spread rumors of faraway inter-tribal wars and divisions caused by the whites who gradually invade Africa. Soon after, Musafa becomes his father's apprentice as required by the family tradition, but he was not fully skilled like his father. Musafa suddenly disappears (he is captured by the white slave dealers), leaving Dinga devastated. He is bound by chains alongside other villagers for the horrible transatlantic journey.

The Mother Elements try everything possible to save their beloved son Musafa. Mother Earth rages through earthquakes but the slave dealers are able to outsmart her. Mother Fire burns up the Savannah through wild flames but when she is about to snatch Musafa from their chains, they successfully get into the Atlantic Ocean. She is however comforted by Musafa's bravery in facing the unknown. Mother Water rages through storms, floods and thunder to no avail. The journey to the Western world is perilous and dreadful as many fall sick, die and their bodies are thrown into the ocean. Yet Musafa is courageous enough to preach messages of hope and perseverance to the other captives. He tells them: "stop crying. Be stubborn. Refuse to die! Live!" (p. 30). After crossing the middle passage, they are sold out in sugar plantations in Jamaica, Cuba, and Carolina. Dinga mourns his son for three years and becomes miserable. Mother Wind finally gathers powers from the other mother elements and is transported to the Caribbean in the form of a Hurricane in search of Musafa. She sees Africa's children taken from the Ibo, Yoruba, Soninke, Wolof, Akan, Mandingo etc. tribes who now work in the plantations and build the huge houses for the white man. She finds the boy in South Carolina. He is now a young man who has been renamed by his white

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master as Moses. Mother Wind is very happy because Musafa and the other African children have not forgotten their origins and cultural identities. They still tell stories about Anansi and Rabbit. He has become a skilled and renowned blacksmith who proudly tells the white he learnt this art from his father Dinga and that he is the eighth generation of blacksmiths in his clan. Mother Wind cannot communicate with him in this strange land, but she caresses his forehead, and he closes his eyes as if responding to the greeting. Mother Earth brings home news about Musafa and Dinga rejoices. The story ends with the conviction that those who were taken, stolen from Africa, were never forgotten.

Analysis

The transatlantic slave trade marked a significant turn in the history of Africa. Africans were captured and transported to the new world to work on the sugar plantations as slaves. This history was inevitable as seen in the Mother Elements' failure to rescue Musafa from the grip of the slave traders. Nonetheless, they succeed in creating a connection between Musafa and his ancestry through the lessons of courage, family ties and love they taught him while he was still at home in Africa. With these, Musafa can maintain a spiritual connection to his ancestry which elates Mother Wind.

Never Forgotten is therefore a story that helps young generations of Africans both at home and in the diaspora to understand their history and come to terms with it. It underscores the need for the Africans out of Africa to always maintain a spiritual connection to their roots by remembering their culture and priding in it as Musafa and the others do through the folktales and fables they tell, and also through the kind of food they eat.

The illustrations add more evidence to the spirituality that accompanies the African. The cover shows a picture of a father presenting his son to the moon probably calling on the elements of nature to guide and protect him along life. The other illustrations give an insight into the bond between Dinga, Musafa and the Mother Elements. The role of the father in the child's spiritual and cultural attachment to homeland cannot be overemphasized. Dinga decides to raise his son as a single parent, despite pleas of the elders to get him a surrogate mother, to lead him into the ways of the land. Though they end up being separated from each other, none forgets the other because of the filial bond that the father made strong. Therefore, the

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	story is also one of fatherhood, reminiscent too of the fatherland, which never forgets its children.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Deities Nature Goddesses Slavery in Africa
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Child, children Emotions Family Freedom Heritage History Hope* Identity Love Memory Nature Oppression Parents (and children) Past Religious beliefs Tradition
Further Reading	Davis, Olga Idriss, "The Rhetoric of Quilts: Creating Identity in African-American Children's Literature", *African American Review* 32.1 (1998): 67–76 (accessed: July 30, 2021).
Addenda	Origin: Mali.

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