**Zora Neale Hurston - The Music behind Her Writing**

1. Read Zora Neale Hurston’s biographical information in our textbook and make note of key details below.

During the Great Depression, Zora Neale Hurston worked for the WPA collecting African American stories, songs, and folklore. Some of those songs were recorded and are easily accessed online. Since music is such a big part of Delia’s life in “Sweat,” and since so much of Hurston’s writing depends on the reader’s ability to “hear” the language, listening to Hurston’s literal voice before reading the story is both helpful and enjoyable. Additionally, the themes of African American spirituals—suffering, deliverance from evil, the desire for a long-lost home—are prevalent in “Sweat,” examining these songs will provide a better understanding of the story’s historical context, allusions, language, and themes.

* Listen to Hurston’s recording of the song “Halimufack” [here](https://www.loc.gov/item/flwpa000014/).

1. In her introduction to the song “Halimufak,” from whom does Hurston say she learned the song?
2. What was Hurston’s process for collecting songs?

* Listen to more of Hurston's recordings which you can find here: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/florida-folklife-from-the-works-progress-administration/>. (Note the recordings that have Hurston’s name listed.)

1. Of the songs that Hurston performs for the recordings, which did you like the best? Why?
2. What similarities did you find among the songs you heard? What similarities are there between these songs and songs that are popular today?

* Read and reflect on the traditional spiritual lyrics, watch/listen to the YouTube videos by clicking on the link in the title, and then answer the questions that follow.

**“**[**Swing Low, Sweet Chariot**](https://youtu.be/GUvBGZnL9rE)**” (video features a 1909 recording of the Fisk Jubilee Singers)**

I looked over Jordan, and what did I see,

Coming for to carry me home;

A band of angels coming after me,

Coming for to carry me home.

If you get there before I do,

Coming for to carry me home;

Tell all my friends I'm coming too,

Coming for to carry me home.

Chorus

Swing Low, sweet chariot,

Coming for to carry me home,

Swing low, sweet chariot,

Coming for to carry me home.

**“**[**Wade in the Water**](https://youtu.be/vg_8L96E3eU)**”**

Well, who are these children all dressed in red?

God's a-gonna trouble the water

Must be the children that Moses led

God's a-gonna trouble the water.

Who's that young girl dressed in white

Wade in the Water

Must be the Children of Israelites

God's gonna trouble the Water.

Jordan's water is chilly and cold.

God's gonna trouble the water.

It chills the body, but not the soul.

God's gonna trouble the water.

If you get there before I do.

God's gonna trouble the water.

Tell all of my friends I'm coming too.

God's gonna trouble the water.

Chorus:

Wade in the water.

Wade in the water, children.

Wade in the water.

God's gonna trouble the water.

**“**[**Roll, Jordan, Roll**](https://youtu.be/mAZhQQN758g)**”**

Went down to the river Jordan,  
Where John baptized three  
Well I walked to the devil in hell  
Sayin John ain't baptize me  
I say;  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
My soul arise in heaven, Lord  
For the year when Jordan roll  
Well some say John was a Baptist  
Some say John was a Jew  
But I say John was a preacher of God  
And my bible says so too  
I say;  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
My soul arise in heaven, Lord  
For the year when Jordan roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
My soul arise in heaven, Lord  
For the year when Jordan roll  
Alleluja!  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
My soul arise in heaven, Lord  
For the year when Jordan roll  
(Everybody says)  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
My soul arise in heaven, Lord  
For the year when Jordan roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
My soul arise in heaven, Lord  
For the year when Jordan roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
Roll, Jordan, roll  
My soul arise in heaven, Lord  
For the year when Jordan roll

1. How do the spirituals differ from the work songs or dance songs?
2. How are they similar?
3. What desire or need is expressed in the spirituals?
4. What does the river Jordan symbolize?