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Gaspard Njock

Gaia and Fatima

A JOURNEY TO THE PAST



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Texts and illustrations:
Gaspard Njock

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Volare, volare, volare, it's Gaia's favourite word. It means to fly in Italian. Every afternoon, on the wide empty square of her little mountain village Bassiano, in Italy, Gaia runs with her arms wide open, shouting: "Volare! Volare!"

Her grandfather often tells her stories about Africa: tales of kings and queens, but also of wars.

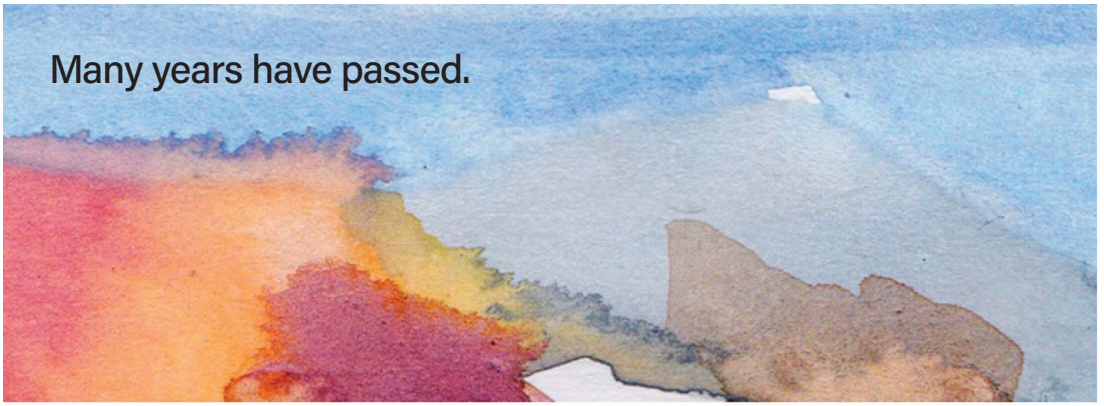


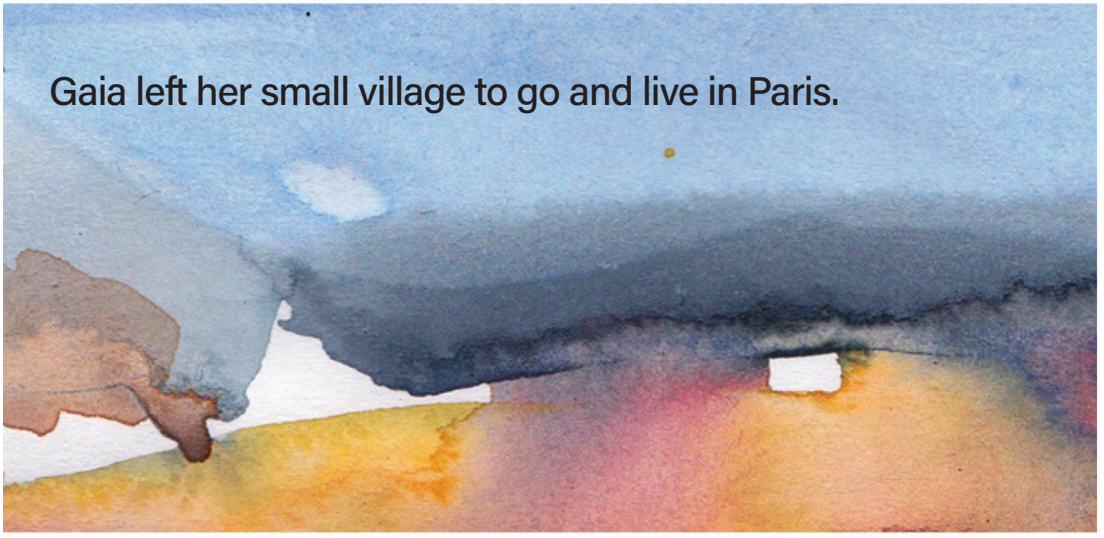
Gaia dreams of flying over Africa, like a bird.


DID YOU KNOW THAT SHADOWS HAVE STORIES TOO? MY TEACHER TOLD ME THAT.



Fatima is a seven-year-old girl who lives in Douala, Cameroon, in a neighbourhood called New Bell. She wants to become a writer so she can tell the stories of her community.


Many years have passed.


Gaia left her small village to go and live in Paris.


She misses the sunrises she used to watch over the hills,
and the fresh mountain air.

Fatima has grown up too.

She finished school and went to Paris as well, with her parents' approval.

She often thinks of the warm colours of her country.

In Paris, Gaia and Fatima, now grown up, reunite at the UNESCO headquarters.

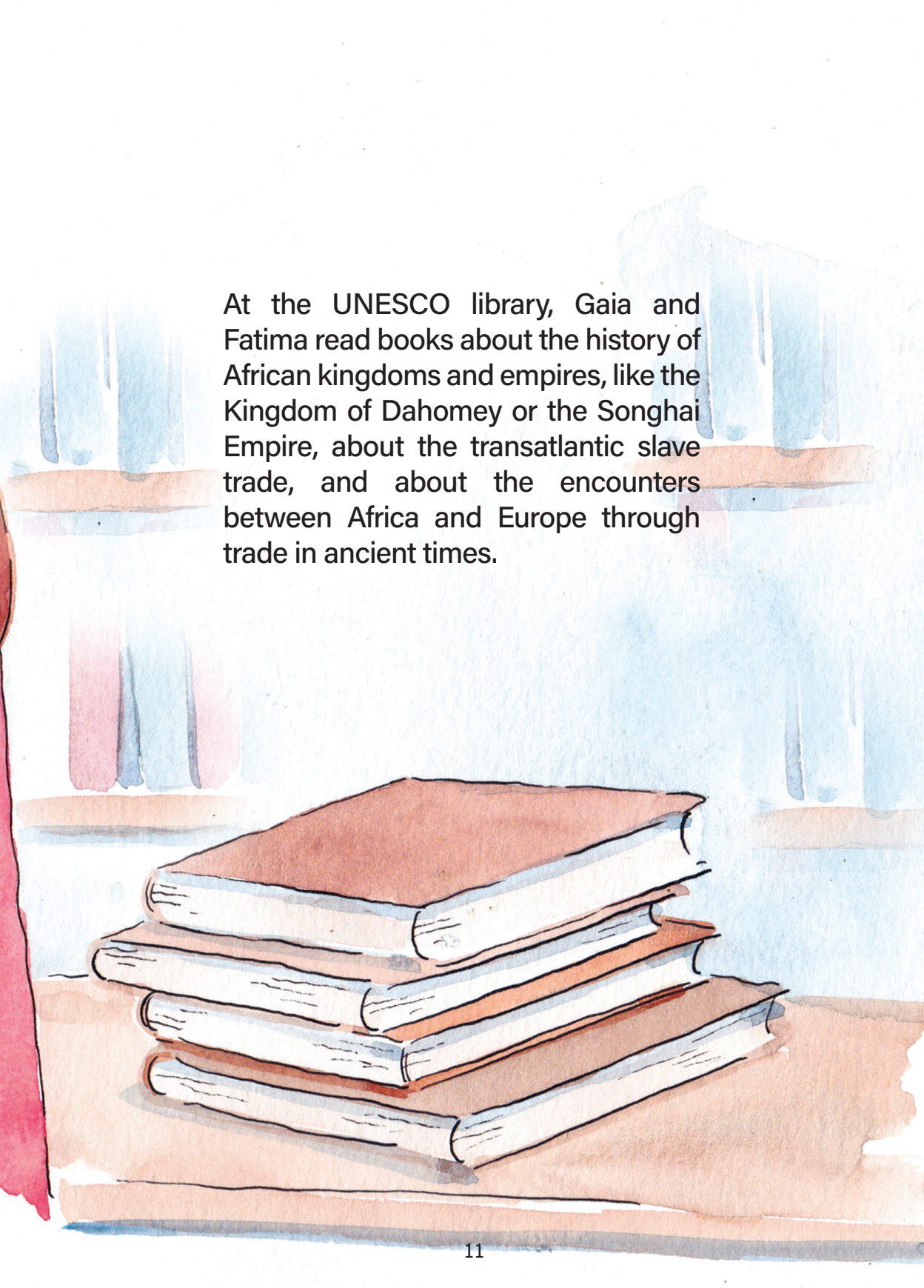




And here they are, working together on a project called “The Routes of Enslaved Peoples”.


THIS IS JUST SO INTERESTING!!

At the UNESCO library, Gaia and Fatima read books about the history of African kingdoms and empires, like the Kingdom of Dahomey or the Songhai Empire, about the transatlantic slave trade, and about the encounters between Africa and Europe through trade in ancient times.

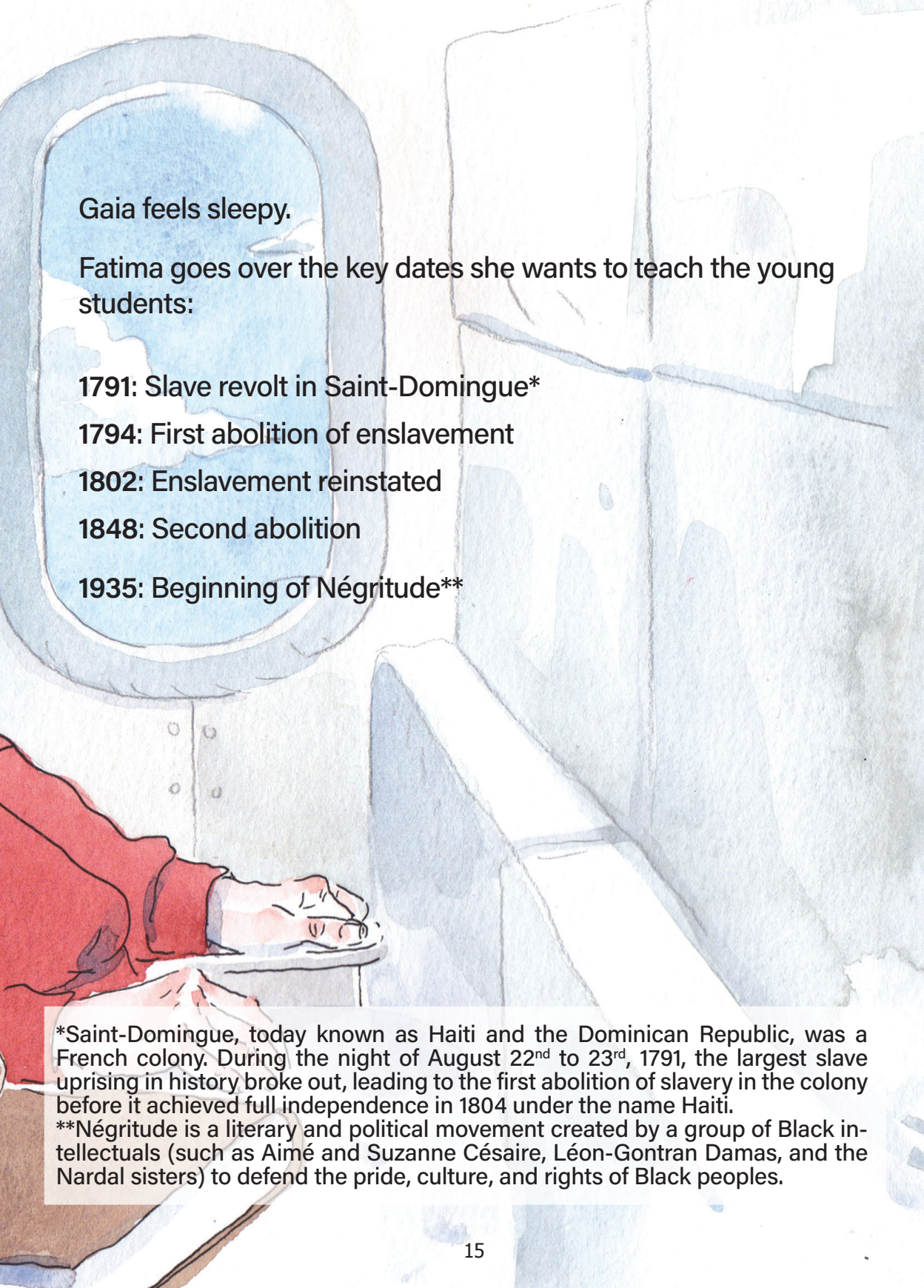



THIS IS AMAZING! THE WORKSHOP WILL HAPPEN IN BASSIANO, MY VILLAGE!
I'M EXCITED TO SEE IT.
YOU'LL SEE, IT'S A VERY WELCOMING PLACE.

Gaia and Fatima are very happy. UNESCO is sending them to Italy to run a drawing workshop on enslavement and its repercussions today, especially on how prejudice gets shaped.







Gaia feels sleepy.

Fatima goes over the key dates she wants to teach the young students:

1791: Slave revolt in Saint-Domingue*

1794: First abolition of enslavement

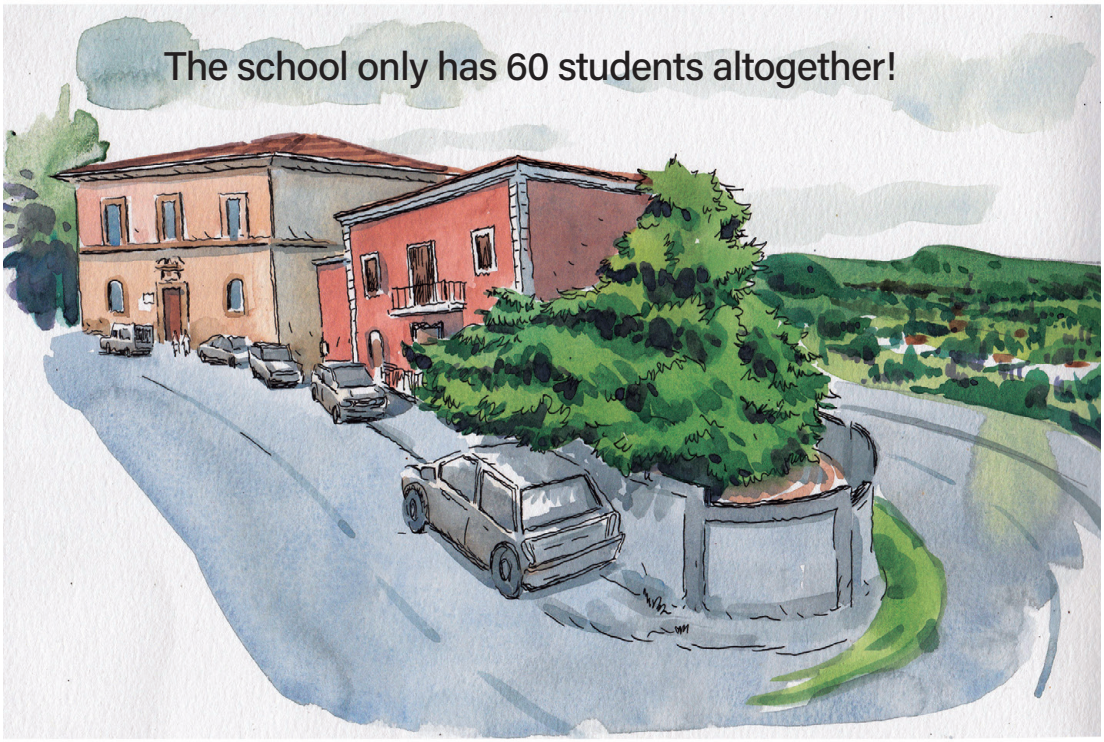
1802: Enslavement reinstated

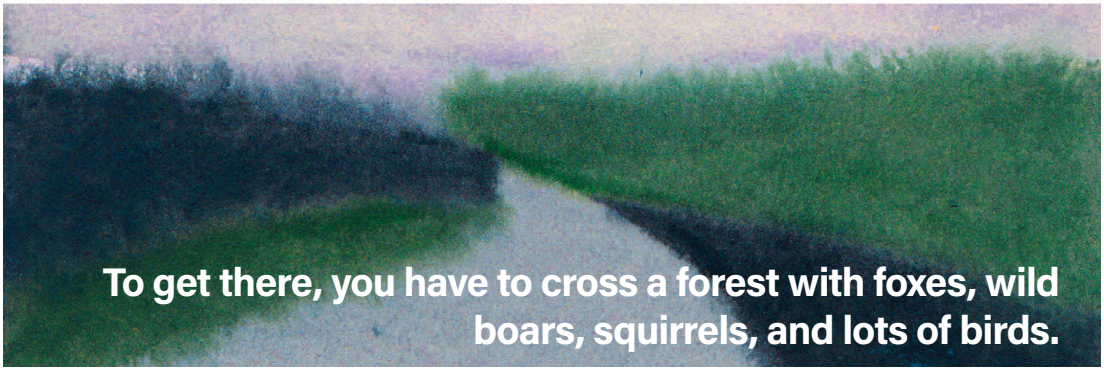
1848: Second abolition

1935: Beginning of Négritude**

*Saint-Domingue, today known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was a French colony. During the night of August 22nd to 23rd, 1791, the largest slave uprising in history broke out, leading to the first abolition of slavery in the colony before it achieved full independence in 1804 under the name Haiti.
**Négritude is a literary and political movement created by a group of Black intellectuals (such as Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, Léon-Gontran Damas, and the Nardal sisters) to defend the pride, culture, and rights of Black peoples.


Bassiano is a small village in Italy, right at the top of a mountain.


The school only has 60 students altogether!


To get there, you have to cross a forest with foxes, wild boars, squirrels, and lots of birds.

When the sun sets in Bassiano, the shadows sway softly in the breeze.

From the mountain, you can see the sea in the distance.

And the village turns different shades.



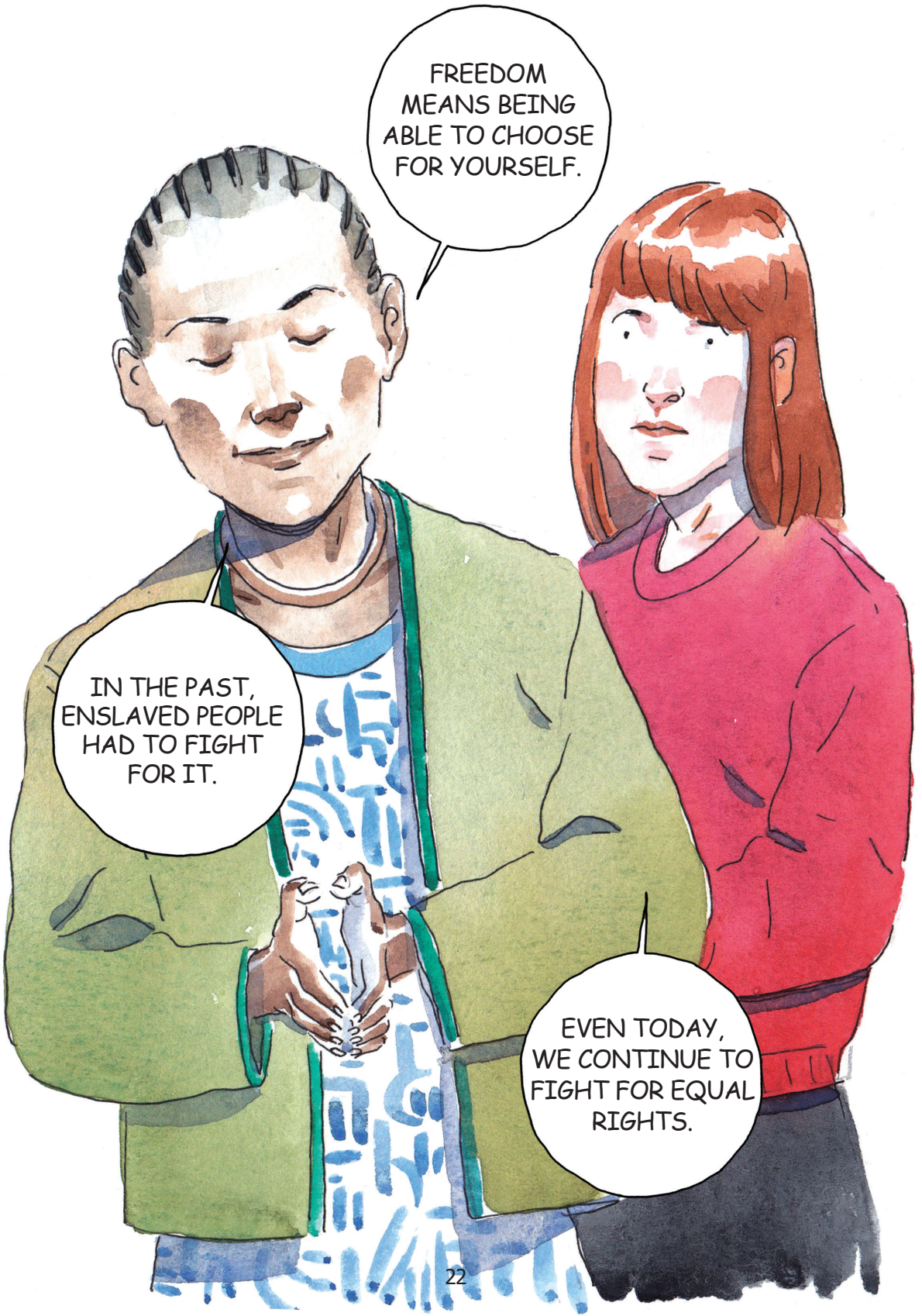
The students are very curious. One of them, Marco, asks many questions.



Antonio does not talk much, but he has plenty of ideas. Rebecca watches everything carefully.


QUEEN NZINGA IS A SYMBOL OF FREEDOM FOR MANY PEOPLE.


FREEDOM, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?


FREEDOM MEANS BEING ABLE TO CHOOSE FOR YOURSELF.
IN THE PAST, ENSLAVED PEOPLE HAD TO FIGHT FOR IT.
EVEN TODAY, WE CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR EQUAL RIGHTS.


I WANT EVERYONE TO BE FREE!
EVERYONE SHOULD BE TREATED EQUALLY!
WHAT ABOUT THE QUEEN, DID SHE MAKE PEOPLE SEE THINGS DIFFE-RENTLY?

During the workshop, the children draw.
Rebecca really enjoys drawing!

She creates portraits of courageous people: Paulette Nardal, Louise Michel, Aimé Césaire, Louis Delgrès, Jenny Alpha, Giorgio Marincola, Aminata Aidara, Valérie Osouf, and others.



Marco is very impressed.



The children try to remember what they have learned.



Antonio:
Being free means making your own choices. And not judging others without knowing them.

Rebecca:
Racial bias keeps us from being free.



Gaia and Fatima are very proud.
They have shared beautiful stories with the children of Bassiano.




PAULETTE NARBAL!
HUGO
LOOK, I MADE THIS!


THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE DONE.
NONNO! LOOK AT MY DRAWING!





"They don't speak properly."
"They are not like us."

Such sentences are harmful.

These prejudices can prevent people from living as they wish, with dignity.



Yet, those we judge before even knowing them study with us, work with us, and go to school with us. Some of them become our friends.

As we learn to understand each other, the shadows disappear.



Quiz

What is a racial prejudice?

For each question, answer by true or false.

1. Saying that someone is less intelligent because of their skin colour is a prejudice.

2. People from the same background look alike and think alike.

3. You can tell if someone is good or bad just by looking at them.

4. A child, no matter their origin or skin colour, has the right to dream about any studies and any job they want to do.

5. Sometimes, repeating what we hear at home without thinking spreads prejudice.

6. You can be friends with someone even if they don't come from the same country as you.

7. Racial prejudice can hurt people and prevent them from being themselves.

8. It is normal to ask questions if you don't understand something about another culture.

Answers with explanations

1. True-It's an unfair racial prejudice. Intelligence does not depend on skin colour.

2. False-Every person is unique. The country where we are born does not define our personality or values.

3. False-You cannot judge someone by their appearance. You have to know them.

4. True-All children have the right to dream big, no matter their background.

5. True-We should think about what we repeat. Sometimes, without meaning to, we pass on false and hurtful ideas. That's why it's important to think for yourself and not just copy others.

6. True-Friendship does not depend on origin or language, but on the heart and respect.

7. True-Prejudice can stop people from feeling good about themselves or reaching their potential.

8. True-Asking questions with curiosity and respect is a good way to learn.

What I learned from this story: …

Gaia and Fatima

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Gaia and Fatima go on an adventure together. Through their journey, they learn that being curious, kind, and using your imagination can change the world. As they meet new people, they discover that learning and friendship can help break down walls between us. Along the way, Gaia and Fatima change too. They grow because of the children they meet and become better friends themselves.

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