

*The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read*  
**Discussion Guide**  
Grades K-3

**Before Reading: to activate schema, build background knowledge, and set a purpose.**

- Teacher’s Note: This book contains the topic of slavery which is a sensitive subject for students. We recommend referring to your school’s guidelines when engaging with this topic.
- Set a purpose for reading. Before you begin read aloud the title and the quote from the last page, “You’re never too old to learn.” What do you think that means? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Frontload vocabulary: plantation, sharecropper, freedom.

**During Reading: to engage students, check for understanding, and make connections.**

- Why does Mary want to learn to read?
- What happens when Mary is 15-years-old?
- What is the first book given to Mary? What does she think when she receives this book?
- Why isn’t Mary able to learn to read when she works as a sharecropper?
- Why do you think Mary clutches her bible at church even though she couldn’t read it?
- How does Mary learn how to read?
- What happens after Mary learns to read?

**After Reading: to summarize, question, and reflect.**

- Return to your question from the beginning. Do you agree or disagree that “you’re never too old to learn”? Has your thinking changed? What is something you hope to learn how to do? (Optional: Pair Share)
- This book contains figurative language. Use [RIF’s Figurative Language Graphic Organizer](#). Find some of the figurative language, check the type and then describe how it relates to the story and what the author’s intentions were for using them.

If your students enjoyed this book...

- Encourage them to continue to discuss it and refer to it in other lessons and conversations.
- Let them explore more books with the theme of perseverance such as [Jayden's Impossible Garden](#) and [Rainbow Weaver/Tejedora del Arcoíris](#).