



Suggested discussion questions for *The Water Will Carry Us Home*

- **What do you notice?** This is always a good starting place when looking at art. Give students time to make open-ended observations. They can be about content, story, materials, colors, anything.
- **What is happening in this film?** Again, allow for multiple answers that are speculative and open. This film combines a historical reality (the violence and suffering of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade), with transcendent mystical characters from the African diaspora. We found that students, even the very young, understood both.
- **Who is the man with the keys? What is he doing?**
- **What symbols do you notice? What do they mean?**
- **Who is the mermaid? What is she doing?**
- **How was this film made?** This will be a good question to talk about the puppets, what they are made of, how they are stylized, stop motion as a process, etc.
- **What materials did the artist use to make the puppets?**
- **Are the puppets realistic? What makes you say that?**
- **How is a stop motion animation film made? Have you ever made one?**

Some background information on Papa Legba and Yemaya:

Papa Legba: In Haitian *vodou* (or *vodun*), derived from belief systems of the Fon ethnic group from Benin (formerly Dahomey) in West Africa, Papa Legba functions as a trickster—a guiding force who challenges humankind to question moral and spiritual decisions, particularly when reaching a crossroads, or critical juncture, in a life’s journey. He is also associated with comedy and sexuality and is the only being that serves as an intermediary between the *loa* (spirits) and the living. Papa Legba is also a guardian of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing. In Haitian vodun representations, he is often seen as an elderly man with a cane and wide-brimmed straw hat, smoking a pipe.

Yemaya: Yemaya is a major water deity from the Yoruba religion. She is an orisha, in this case patron spirit of the oceans and/or rivers - particularly the Ogun River in Nigeria. She is often syncretized with either Our Lady of Regla in the Afro-Cuban diaspora or various other Virgin Mary figures of the Catholic Church, a practice that emerged during the era of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Yemaya is motherly and strongly protective, and cares deeply for all her children, comforting them and cleansing them of sorrow. Yemaya is often depicted as a mermaid, and is associated with the moon (in some Diaspora communities), water, and feminine mysteries. She is the protector of women. She governs everything pertaining to women, particularly the birth and bearing of children - childbirth, conception, parenting, child safety, love, and healing. According to myth, when her waters broke, it caused a great flood creating rivers and streams and the first mortal humans were created from her womb.