

The background of the cover is a textured, painterly illustration. On the left, a woman with long brown hair, rosy cheeks, and a pink nose looks towards the viewer. She wears a tall, white, cone-shaped party hat with a green band. She holds a large bouquet of white and yellow flowers. In the background, a winding path leads through a hilly landscape under a teal sky. Along the path, several figures in white robes and pointed hoods (Klansmen) are visible. The title 'White Flour' is written in large, bold, white sans-serif font, and 'A Reading Guide' is written in a smaller, bold, white sans-serif font below it.

White Flour

A Reading Guide



Unpack the Story

Use these questions to guide students through a close rereading of the book. By examining the text carefully, students develop a broader vocabulary, gain a deeper understanding of the story, and discover more about the craft of writing.

WOW Words

Appalachia brayed taunted mirth
erroneous hoisted retreated sullen

**The day was bright and sunny as most May days tend to be
In the hills of **Appalachia** down in Knoxville, Tennessee**

What do we know about the setting from just the first page of the story? It was May. It was a sunny day. The story takes place in Knoxville, Tennessee.

WOW Words *Help students locate Knoxville on a map. What physical feature on the map relates to the word **Appalachia**? the Appalachian Mountains.*

*What is meant by “the hills of **Appalachia**” in the second line?* Appalachia is the name of the area in and around the Appalachian Mountains. Knoxville is in this region. The smaller mountains at the edges of a mountain range are called foothills.



**A dozen men put on their suits and quickly took their places
In white robes and those tall and pointed hoods that hid their faces.
Their feet fell down in rhythm as they started their parade
They raised their fists into the air, they bellowed and they **brayed****

What do you notice right away about the way the men were dressed? They were wearing hoods covering their faces. They were dressed in white.

The author says that the men “put on their suits.” How were these “suits” different from the types of suits you normally think of men as wearing? These weren’t business suits. They were more like costumes. They were wearing gowns and hoods that covered their faces.

What do you know about these white hoods and robes the men were wearing? They are the types of outfits often worn by members of the Ku Klux Klan.

Why would someone wear a hood that hides his or her face? They don’t want to be recognized or they want to seem more frightening.

What words or phrases in this stanza tell us what the men were doing on that street? They were taking part in a parade. We know they were marching because their feet fell down in rhythm. They were also making lots of noise because they bellowed and they brayed.

WOW Words

*A donkey brays. Why might the author have chosen to use the word **brayed**?* A donkey is often seen as a silly animal. The author might have wanted to give a clue that he thinks the men were acting in a silly manner.

They loved to stir the people up, they loved when they were **taunted
They didn’t mind the anger, it’s exactly what they wanted**

The author used the phrase stir the people up. What other words or phrases mean the same thing? get people excited, make people notice, make people angry.

WOW Words

*What clues in the text help to explain the meaning of **taunted**?* The author says that people could be stirred up and angry. The people in the crowd might yell at the marchers.

Why might the marchers have wanted to make the people in the crowd angry? An angry reaction might mean that people were paying attention to them.



**As they came around the corner, sure enough the people roared
But they couldn't quite believe their ears, it seemed to be support!
Had Knoxville finally seen the light? Were people coming 'round?
The men thought for a moment that they'd found their kind of town.**

What noise did the men expect to hear? They expected angry noises and taunts.

What evidence in the text supports the idea that the men heard what they expected to hear? The author says sure enough the people roared. The men expected to hear the crowd get loud.

What evidence in the text supports the idea that the men did not get the reaction they expected? The men thought the crowd would be angry, but the crowd seemed to be supportive.

How would you describe a town that was "their kind of town?" A town that supported the views of the Ku Klux Klan would be racially intolerant.



**But then they turned their eyes to where the cheering had its source
As one their shoulders crumpled when they saw the mighty force**

What phrase does the author use to describe the reaction of the men in the white robes when they saw the source of the cheering? "their shoulders crumpled"

What one word could you use to describe their reaction? Disappointed; saddened; deflated



**The crowd had painted faces and some had tacky clothes
Their hair and hats outrageous, each had a bright red nose
The clowns had come in numbers to enjoy the grand parade
They laughed and danced that other clowns had come to town that day**

How did the people in the crowd look different from a regular crowd who might be watching a parade?
They were dressed like clowns with funny hats and clothes, painted faces, unusual hair, and red noses.

Clowns are common at a parade. What makes these clowns unusual? They were in the crowd rather than taking part in the parade.

In the last line, what is does the author mean by “other clowns” in town? The author is saying that the people in the robes and hoods are foolish or silly, like clowns.

Do you think the clowns were really happy when they “laughed and danced” at the sight of the men in robes? No, the clowns were prepared to meet the marchers by using humor in response to the marchers’ message of intolerance.

What Really Happened

On May 26, 2007 members of a white supremacist groups went to Knoxville, Tennessee to hold a rally in a public park there. They held signs that insulted not only African-Americans, but Jews as well. One sign had a picture of a noose, with the words “insert neck here” written beside it. As is usually the case at such racist rallies, the counter-protesters outnumbered the racists by far. In this case, though, they didn’t try to shout them down. They didn’t meet anger with more anger. Rather, the local activists met hatred with humor. The Coup Clutz Clowns had prepared carefully for the day, rehearsed, and brought plenty of props and costumes. All of the ‘misunderstandings’ that the clowns in the poem chant were actually part of that day’s shenanigans, and there were others, too.

I took some artistic license in the poem in at least a couple of ways—notably, the supremacists were not wearing robes and were not only Klansmen, but Neo-Nazis as well. Klan robes are visual shorthand to represent those beliefs and values, though, and it seemed like the best vehicle to tell the story.

Beyond mere Facts, though, there is Truth in this story, and I’m happy to share it with you. That Truth, it seems to me, is that there are more than two ways to respond to aggression. ‘Fight or flight’ responses are natural. It is understandable to think they are the only two options. The best option, though, is often a ‘third way.’ A third way must be creative enough to find ways to disarm hatred without either retreating or yielding to aggression and hatred ourselves. If we can do this, we often find that unpredictable positive outcomes suddenly become possible.

In this case, the racist group did not get what they wanted. No one got worked up about their threats and machismo. The counter-protesters simply refused to take such foolishness seriously. The hate group had reserved the square for several hours that day, but they gave up and left an hour and a half early, apparently not knowing how to respond. It is true that the only arrest that day was of one of the leaders of the white supremacists, who rushed at the clowns. It is also true that the police offered the clowns an escort after the Klan and Neo-Nazis left.

I wouldn’t suggest that clown actions are always the way to respond to such events, though it worked that day. What is needed is creativity, solidarity and a refusal to become that which we abhor. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Of all the exciting things that have happened to this book and because of it, there is one that stands out. A few months after *White Flour* was released, another white supremacist march very similar to the one in Knoxville took place in Charlotte, North Carolina. A different group of clowns showed up this time, and they, too, were successful in shifting the mood of the event, countering hatred with humor. Their real-life strategies were inspired by *White Flour*. Here’s to those who march on,

David LaMotte

About the Author

David LaMotte is a dad, husband, peace activist, poet, shutterbug and very bad racquetball player. He makes his living as a singer/songwriter and a public speaker, sometimes at the same time. He has led workshops, keynoted and performed well over 2000 concerts on four continents, and put out ten CDs over the last twenty years. He is also a Rotary World Peace Fellow with a masters in International Studies, Peace and Conflict Resolution from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia and a B.A. in Psychology from James Madison University. For hobbies, he is the co-founder and unpaid director of PEG Partners, a small non-profit that supports schools and libraries in Guatemala, and the Clerk (chair) of the AFSC Nobel Peace Prize Nominating Committee, which chooses a nominee to put forward each year on behalf of Quakers, who were awarded the Prize in 1947.

White Flour is his second children's book. *S.S. Bathtub*, based on his award-winning song by the same name and illustrated by Carrie Patterson, is a rhyming book for younger children. He is currently working on a non-fiction book for adults, tentatively titled *Worldchanging 101: Challenging the Myth of Powerlessness*, which is also a frequent topic for his talks. He has lived in Florida, Virginia, North Carolina, France, Australia and India, but he likes everywhere else, too. Currently, he lives in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with his wife and their four-year-old son.

David is available for classroom visits and school assemblies, or, as a cheaper alternative, can Skype into classrooms for a talk on either Creative Writing, Practical Dream Following, or Worldchanging 101, along with question and answer sessions. For more information or to get in touch, visit davidlamotte.com or whiteflourbook.com.

About the Illustrator

As a child Jenn Hales spent her time reading books and examining bumble-bees in the front yard. Her family didn't have a tv, so she drew the creatures she saw in nature and in her imagination. Later, Jenn moved to Ohio where she graduated from the University of Cincinnati with a degree in Industrial Design. She's worked as a toy designer, a footwear designer, a design researcher, and a welder at SAS institute. Nowadays, Jenn lives in Raleigh, NC and works as a full time illustrator and artist. When she's not painting she spends her time with her partner Graymon and her dog Totoro. You can find more about Jenn Hales and her work at www.jennhales.com

There is a free video version of White Flour available at www.whiteflourbook.com, as well as bulk order book purchase deals for teachers and information regarding how you could have David LaMotte as a guest in your classroom, either in person or via video link.

For more information,
please visit whiteflourbook.com
or call Lower Dryad Music at (919) 923-8494.