

**“We got to use what we got.”**  
**How Birmingham’s Children Became Foot Soldiers on the Front Lines in the**  
**Fight for Civil Rights**  
**Birmingham, Alabama 1963**

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**Overview:**

This unit is designed to be implemented in a 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom over the course of approximately three weeks during the literacy block and the social studies period. Through the stories and actions of its youngest participants, students will come to understand the history and significance of the civil rights movement. The work they do will focus on Birmingham, Alabama in 1963- the events of that year and the experiences of the children who lived through it and those who didn't.

**Rationale:**

The civil rights movement is considered by many to be one of the defining moments in America's history. When we study the movement, we learn not only about segregation – what Diane McWhorter calls “that surreal conspiracy of law, politics, economics, and tradition that trapped black Americans in a lowly corner of society”(13). We also learn how ordinary people, with extraordinary courage banded together to challenge and combat this injustice and force America to “make good” on the promises of equality.

Unfortunately, in the crowded curriculum of a fifth grade classroom, the civil rights movement is often a footnote to Black History Month activities. Students are familiar with a few notable personages and a handful of landmark events, but they know little about what came before. They have no ideas about attack dogs and water pounding from fire hoses, back o' the bus and colored only waiting rooms or “doghouse education.” But they should. As Frederick Douglass noted, “It is not well to forget the past.” Students should have a sure understanding of the events and times that so drastically shaped and changed our country and its culture.

In my beginning reading for the course, I came across a comment about the part that children played in bringing the struggle for black equality to national attention. It was noted that children were thrown into the role of foot soldiers on the front lines of the American racial divide. They were the ones who dealt with the taunts, assaults, and in-your-face bigotry as they tried to do something as simple as go to school.

Throughout the years of the civil rights movement, there were many black children and teenagers who were actively involved. Their names may be largely lost to history, but the effects of their brave acts are not. With all the talk of ‘role models’ the most powerful models for young people today are, or should be their heroic counterparts of yesterday – not heroes on pedestals, adult and remote, but kids like themselves who believed that their world could change for the better and undertook the challenge to make the changes (Levine 3).

This unit tells the story of the civil rights movement through the eyes of the children who played such an important role. At some point, all children in the South had first-hand experience of the cruelty of segregation. For the white child it might have been the harsh way his mother spoke to the black housekeeper who cared for him as though he were her child. For a black child it could have been the daily reminder of her less than second-class status evinced by the “colored” water fountain she had to drink from. The most tragic thing about all this was that Southerners of both races had to live with a split, segregated consciousness. They began to accept a form of social insanity as reasonable (McWhorter 15).

Deciding to teach students about race relations and the civil rights movement in particular is a daunting task. Where to begin? How much can be covered so that students develop a strong understanding of the issues and conflicts? Since the heart of this unit is Christopher Paul Curtis’ novel, *The Watsons go to Birmingham – 1963*, I felt that it would be wise to focus most, if not all, our work on that city in that year. Birmingham in 1963 was a microcosm of Southern segregation at its worst. Martin Luther King considered it the most segregated city in the country. Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth said Birmingham had “a heart as hard as the steel it manufactures and as black as the coal it mines” (qtd. in McWhorter). The black citizens referred to it as “Bombingham”. (There had been more than 30 bombings of African American homes and businesses in the past 16 years – only one of which was ever solved.) The events in Birmingham in that year proved to be a tipping point for the civil rights movement. Many people across the country were unaware of the cruelty to which Birmingham’s black citizens were subject. The events of early May, 1963 changed that. As TV cameras recorded the events of those tumultuous days, those images captured the attention of the entire country and forced it to look closely and see segregation for what it really was morally indefensible.

Teachers know that literature informs history and history informs literature. Using children’s literature is a powerful way to teach history. There’s just something very compelling about a good story. Children listen, read, and are drawn in and learn. Good stories, Christopher Crowe notes, whether fiction or nonfiction, help personalize the experiences of others and can make history seem real and immediate...they can change people’s attitudes. In these books, young people who have had little or no experience with African American people or culture can discover wonderful windows into a part of American history they may know nothing about (133).

The shared experience of reading a book as a class, not only affords students insights into this important period in the country's history; it also gives students a way to talk about race. Dr. Beverly Tatum has written extensively about racism and what educators can do to be part of the racial solution, rather than contributing to the problem. She notes: "it is important to acknowledge that race matters, that colorblind is not the goal.... Everybody is affected by the fact that we live in a society built on systems of privilege and disadvantage. That influences how we view the world, who we come into contact with and how we think about ourselves and other people. It's not necessarily divisive to acknowledge difference." (30)

### **Background:**

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, said "no" to segregation in schools. Birmingham didn't listen. In 1955, Rosa Parks said "no" to the bus driver and refused to give up her seat. In 1956 segregation on Alabama buses ended by order of the Supreme Court. Birmingham didn't hear. Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas was integrated in 1957. Ruby Bridges began school in New Orleans, thereby integrating its elementary school system, yet Birmingham schools remained proudly segregated. In February of 1960, four black college students sat down at a lunch counter in a Woolworth's store in Greensboro, North Carolina. They and the hundreds of other students who would join them sat on for six months until Woolworth's finally desegregated its Greensboro lunch counter and, later in the year, implemented the policy in all its stores across the country. Loveman's and J.J Newberry's in Birmingham continued to bar blacks from their counters. Despite landmark federal rulings outlawing segregation, in 1963, Birmingham, Alabama's remained defiantly segregated in all aspects of its public life.

In 1944, Birmingham had passed a series of segregation ordinances that they zealously enforced. These ordinances covered the minutest aspects of daily life and just about eliminated any interaction between whites and blacks. Each race co-existed in a parallel universe, coming into contact with one another only when they were passing on the street, shopping downtown, and when blacks worked in white's houses or got arrested. Blacks and whites couldn't play games together, eat in the same room (unless separated by a high wall) or co-mingle on the bus. Birmingham was so virulently segregationist that it was one of only two Southern cities that would not consider having a professional football team because it violated the ordinance that prohibited blacks and whites from playing together.

Clearly, Birmingham eclipsed every other big American city in the ugliness of its racism (Rice 46). For black people these ordinances were a constant source of anger and frustration. "Colored only" signs confronted them at every turn and served as a daily reminder of the demeaning system under which they were forced to live. Yet, as Dr. Rice notes, "We found a way to live normally in highly abnormal circumstances. People went to work, children to school. Parents tried to make their children's opportunity as equal as possible and their world as pleasant as they could" (46).

All through the South, however, and in Birmingham as well, black people were working in various ways to secure their rights. It was difficult. When victory was achieved in one town, it

did not mean that the repeal of that Jim Crow law would spread to the next town over. There was no domino effect. Each town, each law required a separate battle. No black person liked segregation, but people disagreed about how or even if to confront and dismantle it. These splits inevitably cracked along lines of social class (Levinson 23). Middle and upper class blacks who had worked to gain some measure of acceptance from their white counterparts and who were considered the “good Negroes” or the “responsible Negroes” were in favor of a cautious approach in pursuing desegregation. They felt the most appropriate methods were through the courts and test cases, lobbying legislatures and running for office. These methods, however, had proved themselves slow, expensive, and not always effective. Poorer, working class blacks had much less to lose and were, consequently, in favor of a more aggressive approach that would yield more immediate results. They found their champion in Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, a leader in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), who had earned the nickname “the wild man from Birmingham”. After the Ku Klux Klan bombed his house on Christmas night in 1956, he took this as a sign from God that it was he who was anointed to lead his people to freedom. To this end, he pushed the envelope at every opportunity. He rode in the front of Birmingham buses; he tried to enroll his children in the white high school; he demanded that Birmingham hire black police officers. He was a pioneer of aggressive direct action and not only went to jail more than any other civil rights leader, but also suffered grievous bodily injury as a result of positioning himself at the forefront of many demonstrations.

By 1962, the momentum of the civil rights movement seemed to have stalled. It had been more than four years since the integration of Little Rock High School and the failure of the campaign to desegregate Albany, Georgia in December of 1961 still rankled. Reverend Shuttlesworth, however, was ready to infuse the movement with new energy, ready to demonstrate and clash with police if necessary in order to secure the rights for his people he felt had been granted through the Supreme Court’s historic 1954 ruling. His plan was to antagonize Birmingham’s segregationists into committing an act against its black citizens that was so outrageous that the entire country, as well as the federal government, would be forced to take notice. In Birmingham, in 1963, he found the perfect setting from which to launch the movement’s climactic next act. In Eugene “Bull” Connor, the city’s loudmouthed, white supremacist commissioner in charge of police, he found a matchless villain. The stage, it seemed, was set.

Reverend Shuttlesworth asked his colleagues from the SCLC, specifically Martin Luther King, Jr., to come to Birmingham to help organize a protest. Dr. King had not wanted to bring the movement to Birmingham. He considered it much too dangerous. But Shuttlesworth convinced him that Birmingham was strategic to the movement. Since the rule of law seemed to have no effect on those in charge of the city, his plan was to effect change through pressuring the businessmen – specifically those who owned department stores. Blacks could shop in these stores, but they couldn’t use the dressing rooms, eat at the lunch counters, or use the toilets. (Mothers shopping with young children would bring glass jars with secure lids to provide relief for their toddlers.)

Their plan, which became known as “Project C” (“C” for confrontation-so coded as to misdirect police listening in on tapped phones) was two pronged. One component involved sit-ins at the lunch counters, continuation of the selected boycotts begun the previous year, picketing, and kneeling in prayer at segregated parks and on the steps of city hall. Its other major element, its

“centerpiece”, involved mass demonstrations. The goal was to have so many people arrested that the system would be overwhelmed and Connor, driven to extreme, would do something provocative. The media would be there to capture it all for the nightly news, which would, in turn, engender national sympathy and call attention to the everyday circumstances of a black person living in the segregated Deep South. Rather than attempt to desegregate the entire city, as protesters tried, and failed to do in Albany, Georgia, organizers of the Birmingham campaign had a few, very specific goals. They wanted: desegregation of all store facilities, immediate upgrading in employment opportunities for blacks, all charges dropped against protestors, and the establishment of a Bi-Racial Committee to develop specific plans to desegregate the schools, movies and hotels, reopen municipal facilities (parks etc.), and no constraints placed on blacks who were trying to register to vote. They published these “Points for Progress” in a press release through which they intended to make clear to both whites and blacks what they wanted. The release began: “The Negro community has made it perfectly clear that they will submit to jailing to demonstrate that that they will no longer endure the laws and custom of segregation, brutal treatment by the police and injustice in the courts...” (Levinson 32).

Martin Luther King, Jr. famously stated, “We are willing and prepared to fill up the jails of the South” (quoted in Levinson 49). This quickly became a rallying cry for the movement at this time. King was adamant, though that the protests must be non-violent. An important point to bear in mind is that all the actions proposed, though inherently non-violent, were, under Birmingham’s segregation ordinances, also illegal. Protesters would be breaking the law and would be subject to arrest. The key to success, he felt, was that the protesters could neither resist arrest nor retaliate. No matter what anyone did to them, they could not fight back. Many people found this admonition difficult to accept. Dr. Rice, in her memoir relates a conversation she overheard between her father and mother as they discussed how to react to the call to take to the streets and behave non-violently. “Ann, I’m not going out there because if some redneck comes after me with a billy club or a dog, I’m going to kill him. Then they’ll kill me and my daughter will be an orphan.” He told me definitively that he did not believe in being non-violent in the face of violence (Rice 94).

Dr. King and the other organizers figured, based on a survey of Birmingham’s jail cells that they’d need approximately 1,000 protesters to be arrested. Unfortunately, they had a great deal of trouble attracting a sufficient number of volunteers willing to go to jail. At mass meetings in the city’s black churches as few as 15 people might walk down the aisle to the altar to volunteer. Fear of losing one’s job, being a black person in a Birmingham jail, and sure retribution by white supremacists kept the numbers of volunteers small. Bull Connor was not helping to fill the jails as had been expected. He and his police force (having been coached by Albany’s police Chief Pritchett) were exceedingly polite, and very few protesters were being arrested. Meanwhile, other forces were conspiring to diminish the effects of Project C. Many in Birmingham’s black community felt this type of action would prove harmful to their cause. Additionally, there was turmoil in the city government. A referendum in November had resulted in a larger, more responsive city administration. The voters replaced the three commissioners who ran Birmingham (Bull Connor among them) with a nine-member city council and a new mayor, the relatively progressive, Albert Boutwell. Many hoped, and possibly expected, that this new configuration of city government would be more moderate and would ease the city’s segregation ordinances. In light of this, many believed that civil rights activists would call off the protests.

The Kennedy administration urged Dr. King to do so in order to give the new administration a chance to change conditions in Birmingham. Once again, though, Bull Connor prevailed. He refused to leave office. So for a time, Birmingham had two sets of government. No one knew who was in charge or what would happen if the protests continued. In an effort to prop up the failing Project C, King decided to get arrested. On Good Friday, April 12, 1963 he was arrested and taken to jail along with 50 other Birmingham residents ranging in age from 15 to 81 years. His arrest accomplished its intended effect by attracting interest nationwide.

Despite this attention, the Movement appeared to be at a tipping point. They had, as Wyatt Tee Walker noted, “run out of troops. We had scraped the bottom of the barrel of adults who could go to jail”(quoted in Mayer). Without the hordes of volunteers to flood the jails and attract press coverage, the campaign would fail, and if Birmingham failed, who knew when and if blacks would get their rights. As all around him seemed to be mired in despair and inaction, Reverend James Bevel, one of Dr. King’s lieutenants, put out a radical idea – fill the jails with school children!

Bevel, as McWhorter describes him, was a “civil rights figure such as Dr. Seuss might have created.” He wore a Jewish yarmulke on his shaved head even though he was a Baptist minister. He talked to the kids as no minister had before. His words were intended to provoke- especially the kids. “You are responsible for segregation. You and your parents because you have not stood up...No one has the power to oppress you if you don’t cooperate. So, if you say you are oppressed, then you are in league with the oppressor: now it’s your responsibility to break the league with him” (Levinson 61). The kids were beyond inspired and dying to march. The reaction of the elders, however, was quite a different matter. His suggestion was condemned as “unnecessary, stupid, and immoral.” Malcolm X criticized the notion saying: “Real men don’t put their children on the firing line” (quoted in McWhorter 124). Dr. King felt it was too dangerous. But Bevel took him to task, asking him how old a child has to be to become a Christian. When he replied that age didn’t matter as long as the child made a conscious decision, Bevel countered, asking King how could he allow a child to commit to being a Christian, but not allow that child to protest segregation? King agreed with the principle, but would still not agree to allow black children to be funneled into Birmingham’s jails. There seemed to be no choice. Rev. Shuttlesworth, facing the inevitability of the situation declared, “We got to use what we got.” And so children were enlisted as foot soldiers in the battle for civil rights (Levinson 68).

Bevel planned to launch the action on May 2, 1963, referring to it as “D-Day”. In the days and weeks leading up to the May 2, young activists who had already been attending mass meetings in the churches, whether on their own or with their parents, received training to help them deal with the dogs and the jails and to help them stand fast on their commitment to non-violence. Students circulated pamphlets urging classmates to leave school and to march. High school student Carol Maull remarked, “It was too late for the conversation the grown-ups were having. The ball had already started rolling” (quoted in Levinson).

When black DJ Shelley Stewart of Birmingham’s radio station WENN announced on Thursday morning May 2<sup>nd</sup> that “there’s gonna be a party at the park. Bring your toothbrushes because lunch will be served”, the young people knew it was time to march. More than 1,000 students converged on the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which had become an epicenter for the events

of those days. The students were instructed to leave the church and walk to the city hall four blocks away. They were to leave in groups of 50 in timed intervals. As students walked, they were confronted by police a block and a half away and asked for their parade permit. When they replied that they did not have a permit they were arrested and taken to jail in police wagons. And so it went, until nearly 800 children had been arrested and jailed.

At the end of the day, civil rights leaders were exultant. Martin Luther King, Jr. was moved to comment, "I have been inspired and moved today. I have never seen anything like it...If they think today is the end of this they will be badly mistaken" (quoted in Levinson 77). As thousands filled the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church that first night to celebrate the day's events, the children found themselves confined to cells meant to hold 900, but which now held 1200. They had achieved their goal.

Buoyed by the previous days' successes, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, "Double D-Day" as James Bevel called it, saw more than 1500 students play hooky from school and head for the Sixteenth Street Baptist church in hopes of being arrested in the name of freedom. That day, however, was different. In addition to the police, firemen were also in place across the street from the church. The young protesters knew from their non-violence training that this meant high powered fire hoses, hoses so fierce that the water spewing from them would tear away the bark from a tree, would be trained on them.

Nevertheless, they left the church in their assigned groups, some as decoys, others headed for their destination of city hall. Bull Connor had no intention of arresting and jailing thousands more demonstrators. Where could he put them?! Instead, he decided to keep them in the church. As a group of marchers neared him, he had the firemen point the hoses at the students. He ordered them to "disperse or you're gonna get wet." The marchers held fast and Connor ordered, "Let 'em have it." The stream of water was so powerful it ripped the shirts from the backs of the boys, tore the hair from the side of a young girl's head and knocked many children down, sending them tumbling sown the streets. Shortly thereafter, Connor ordered the police to release the attack dogs, further terrorizing the young protesters. "You wondered how people could be so cruel," R. Powell, a high school student remembered.

At three in the afternoon, the protest had finally run its course and a truce of sorts had been established. The protesters went home, the barricades were removed and traffic flowed once more. Dr. King reassured the parents of the children who had been arrested: "Don't worry about your children who are in jail. The eyes of the world are on Birmingham"(quoted in Turck 76). And they were. The reporters, photographers and television cameras had finally gotten what they'd come to Birmingham for- a compelling story and its electrifying images. Even though the white newspapers in Birmingham gave little print space to the events, and the majority of black newspapers condemned them, the three national networks covered the demonstration on the nightly news and the word got out to the larger world and had a profound effect in many quarters. Many in Birmingham's black community who had been against the Movement's tactics were suddenly united and supportive of Dr. King's efforts. President Kennedy, reportedly "sickened" by what he saw on the news, not only sent Attorney General Burke Marshall to Birmingham to help negotiate a peaceful resolution to the events, but began to actively seek ways his administration could work to end segregation in the country.

Movement leaders tried their best to maintain a studied non-violence, but they could not quell the violence and rioting that erupted in the days following what the media dubbed, the Children's March. But by May 10<sup>th</sup>, business leaders and civil rights activists had negotiated a peace and store owners, acutely feeling the results of the boycotts, sit-ins and bad press, finally agreed to a version of the protester's demands. At a press conference Rev. Shuttlesworth, along with Dr. King stated, "Birmingham has reached an accord with its conscience" (McWhorter 84).

Desegregation did come to Birmingham, albeit slowly and in fits and starts. Sporadic bombings continued, and the agreement negotiated by Rev. Shuttlesworth and Dr. King, which many criticized as not far reaching enough, was not completely implemented. The Alabama State Supreme Court did rule that Albert Boutwell was the rightful mayor, thus putting Bull Connor out of a job. Students who participated in the marches were expelled from school. They sued in court and their case was affirmed on appeal and all were reinstated, but schools were not desegregated. On June 23<sup>rd</sup>, downtown department stores removed their "White" and "Colored" signs from bathrooms and water fountains. Perhaps of greatest significance during this period, Birmingham's City Council voted on July 23, 1963 to repeal its Segregation Ordinances.

Despite the dramatic events of the spring, Birmingham was once again to become the focus of national attention in the struggle for civil rights when on Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was bombed and four little girls were killed. That same day, a 13-year-old boy, riding on his brother's bike was shot by a 16 year old Eagle Scout on his way home from an anti-integration rally. A sixteen year old was shot to death by a policeman for throwing rocks at the cars of white people. James Stewart, one of the high school students who had participated in the Children's March said, "To know that somebody hated us as a people, hated us so much that they decided the way to win is to now kill their children... That was very sobering. It made me angrier, but it made me more determined" (quoted in Levinson 148).

### **Objectives:**

The primary objective is for students to come away from their work in this unit with a clear understanding of the history and significance of the civil rights movement. They will also understand that young people, some as young as themselves, played an important part in achieving the goal of equality for their race. Students will also realize that individuals can and do make a difference. An additional objective is to create an environment that allows students to explore and discuss their ideas about race.

### **Strategies:**

Students will:

Read and understand historical fiction, informational text, and poetry and analyze the literary elements of each genre.

Research topics

Read and analyze primary sources

Integrate and synthesize information from multiple genres to add depth and breadth to their understanding of the topic.



Write in a variety of genres.

Prepare and take part in dramatic role plays

Create surveys, collect and analyze data

Create and demonstrate mastery of the topic using multi-media presentations

### **Classroom Activities:**

#### Introductory Lesson- Part One

This is an open discussion intended to not only introduce the unit of study , but to determine what students know about civil rights, what they understand, or think they understand about racism and discrimination, and if they believe that a young person can effect change.

Procedure:

Students and teacher sit in a circle facing each other. Ground rules of civility are established and the topic is introduced.

Ask students:

What they know about the civil rights movement

What were some of the issues?

Who were some of the important people involved?

What were some of the important/groundbreaking events?

The civil rights movement is over, but people feel that a great deal of racism still exists. What do you think?

What is racism?

What does it look like?

What is discrimination? What does that look like? Does anyone feel he/she has been discriminated against?

Has anyone discriminated against anyone else because of race?

Have you ever been able to change someone's mind? Have you ever convinced your parent or an adult that you, not they were right? Do you think a young person can really have an effect on a big issue? What might that be? How could they do it?

How would you feel if someone were protesting against you?

As students talk, briefly note their responses. These can be displayed on chart paper during the unit or put away and revisited when the unit has been completed.

#### Part Two

Ask students if they think that others in their grade feel as they do on the issues discussed.

Present the idea of creating a survey, collecting data and analyzing the results.

As a class, discuss the following points:

What do you want to know – make it clear?

Whom will you survey – what's the population?

How will you collect the sample?

What kinds of questions will there be – yes/no, short answer/sliding scale?

Students will create the survey, distribute it, collect, and analyze the results.

Consider how the collected results compare to the ideas of the students in our room.

Do they think it would be different if another school in a different neighborhood took the survey?

If possible, connect with another school and conduct the survey and compare/contrast the results.

## **Lesson 1**

Part 1 - Historical Overview

Materials required:

Power point presentation of overview topic(s)

Students should have an overview of the history behind the issues. Needed background will briefly cover and connect slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow laws, and events in the modern civil rights era 1951-1965, including, but not limited to: Rosa Parks, the Montgomery Bus boycott, Martin Luther King, Jr., separate but equal, Brown v Board of Education, freedom riders, The Little Rock 9, Ruby Bridges, sit-ins, doctrine of non-violence, direct action etc.

This overview can be done through a power point presentation, or using selected portions from the Eyes on the Prize series.

Part 2- Research/Writing/Presentation

Once acquainted with the people and events of the era, students will then choose a topic to research in depth and present to/teach the class.

Presentations can be in any format they choose- comic book, poster, collage, power point, impersonation, tableau, short skit, etc. but will require a supporting informational text and bibliography.

Students' topics should be presented in sequence and a photo or other representation should be placed on a prepared time line around the classroom.

## **Lesson 2**

The Novel

Materials needed:

Copies of the novel for each student or a copy to be read aloud by the teacher

Notebooks

Introduce the novel – *The Watsons go to Birmingham- 1963*, by Christopher Paul Curtis

Begin with a brief biographical overview of the author.

Have students turn to the page with *In memory of* at the top.

Ask them to read the page and write down in their reading notebooks what they notice and what they think this might mean.

Students will read and interact with the text through discussions, questions, and written responses. Students will work in small book club groups and as a whole class. Narrative elements will be analyzed as well as author's purpose, style and tone. Students will also identify major themes throughout the book and consider its historical accuracy.

In addition to the novel, students will also be reading nonfiction selections

### **Lesson 3**

#### Primary Sources

By chapter eleven, the Watsons have arrived in Birmingham, but they have no idea what they will be facing.

Materials needed:

A copy of Birmingham's Segregation Ordinances for each student (those most pertinent to their lives)

In small groups, students will read through a portion of the ordinances

Ask them to think about their day/week and to discuss among themselves the things they wouldn't be able to do if they lived in Birmingham.

Have them record on chart paper and report out as a group.

Encourage discussion and questions. What do they think about these restrictions? What was it like for white people? Did these ordinances bother or affect them?

### **Lesson 4**

#### Scavenger Hunt

Students will research "Project C" on the website of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute [www.bcri.org](http://www.bcri.org) and write down what they have discovered.

Explain that many black people in Birmingham felt this campaign was not a good idea, while others thought it was the only way to secure their rights.

As a class, discuss the merits of the plan and the hazards

### **Lesson 5**

"I want to go to jail."

Materials needed: Copy of the prologue of Cynthia Levinson's *We've Got a Job* for each student

Read aloud the prologue from page 2

On these pages, nine-year-old Audrey Faye Hendricks tells her mother that she wants to go to jail. Her parents think it's a good idea and drive her to the church to be arrested.

Hendricks was one of the children who participated in Birmingham's Children's March and it is through her eyes as well as others that we are able to catch a glimpse into the events of those tumultuous days.

Ask students what this could possibly be about. Why does she want to go to jail and why is it okay with her parents?

Have students consider what they might be willing to go to jail for and to write down in their reading journals what that would be and why. Perhaps they think there is nothing worth going to jail over. What are their reasons?

## **Lesson 6**

### **The Voices of the Children- The Children's March**

#### **Culminating Project**

Through this project, students will retell this significant episode of the Civil Rights Movement through a series of short skits they have written, acted out, and filmed (I-movie). Their work will comprise a "documentary" of the events.

Materials Needed:

Copies of the first person accounts of students who participated in the march

Sources: *Freedom's Children*, by Ellen Levine

*We've got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March*, by Cynthia Levinson

*Eyes on the Prize: No easy Walk (1961-1963)*. DVD

*Mighty Times: The Children's March*. DVD

Google Images

Video camera

Begin by giving students an overview of the events of April – June 1963 in Birmingham. This can be accomplished by:

- Provide students with copies of selected readings
- Prepare a power point presentation using images and video clips
- Show selected portions from *Eyes on the Prize* DVD
- Show the DVD, *Mighty Times: The Children's March*
  - Teacher's discretion: Show after the unit to avoid student work that is overly derivative

Explain that, as a class, they will be creating a documentary to tell, through the eyes of some of the participants, the story of what was going on and what the experience was like.

As a class, discuss the background and the events so that students have a clear understanding of what transpired.

Assign several students to each of the following segments. Students should research further, prepare the dialogue, and rehearse their parts.

Students will be filmed in black and white to provide a sense of period authenticity. Running on the screen behind them will be representative video or still images of the events they are describing.

Additionally, students are encouraged to use hymns and protest songs prominent in the Civil Rights Movement to accompany their scenes.

**Parts to include would be:**

**Narrator** – Deliver the prologue and provide the sense of continuity and fill in background information throughout the film

**The DJ** – Playing the records and providing the inspiration along with the music as well as the coded call to action

**Students** – Listening to the DJ and discussing why they want to participate, what the codes tell them

**Adults** – Groups discussing the pros and cons of letting their children participate; adults who feel that the protests shouldn't be happening at all vs. those who believe protests were needed to provide immediate and effective change

**Dr. King and Reverend Bevel** – The conversation between them about letting the children go to jail and the argument Rev. Bevel used to try to convince Dr. King to relent

**Student protesters** – Students recounting what the experience was like- including the fears, excitement, experience of the water hoses, and being in the jail

**Police and firemen** – Their point of view. What was it like to train dogs and fire hoses on children? Did they feel their actions were justified? Were they doubtful? Ashamed? Confused?

**Reporter** – Discussing the aftermath—the world was looking on. President Kennedy's administration's commitment to ending segregation

**Narrator** – Provides the epilogue—Further violence and finally passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965

Final video will be shared with other fifth grade classes as well as the 8<sup>th</sup> graders who are studying American History.

Note: This project can also be completed using power point with still photos and voice-overs.

## **Annotated Bibliography/Works Cited**

Note: Most sources can be used by students

Apol, Laura, Aki Sakuma, Tracy Reynolds, and Sherri Rop. "'When Can We Make Paper Cranes": Examining Preservice Teacher's Resistance to Critical Readings of Historical Fiction ." *Journal of Literacy Research*. 34.4 (2003): 429-464. Print.

Researchers explore how best to use historical fiction in a classroom. They urge educators to engage students in critical conversations about the literature and the events depicted rather than simply lead students through a series of arts and crafts style activities.

Casement, Rose. *Black History in the Pages of Children's Literature*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008. Print.

History comes alive through literature. This is a great resource for teachers who want to make the black experience in America meaningful for their students. Covering the period from colonial times to the present, each chapter contains a brief introduction to the historical period and a leveled, annotated bibliography of great children's literature that can be used to give breadth and depth to the study of each period.

Crowe, Christopher. "Reading African American History and the Civil Rights Movement." *English Journal*. 92.3 (2003): 131-134. Print.

In this article, Crowe discusses how a good story, whether nonfiction or fiction, can personalize the experiences of others and in so doing, make history more alive and meaningful.

Curtis, Christopher. *The Watsons Go To Birmingham-1963*. New York: Scholastic, 1995. Print.

This Newberry Honor book is the story of the "Weird Watsons", a loving, if somewhat rambunctious African American family from Flint Michigan. In an effort to straighten out thirteen-year-old Byron, who is on the verge of becoming a juvenile delinquent, the family decides to travel to Birmingham, Alabama, to leave him for the summer under the care of Grandma Sands. Their trip coincides with one of the most wrenching moments in the struggle for civil rights and leaves no family member unaffected. This is a funny, poignant, well-written book that never fails to captivate students.

Guggenheim, Charles, dir. *A Time for Justice*. Southern Poverty Law Center, 2011. Film. <Tolerance.org>.

This is an award-winning documentary (Best Documentary-Short Subject) that depicts the battle for civil rights as told by the people on the front lines. It recalls the events in Montgomery, Little Rock and Birmingham, just to name a few. Through the voices of the participants, it reveals the heroism of ordinary people doing extraordinary things in the name of justice and equality. It is available free to educators through the Southern Poverty Law Center/ Teaching Tolerance. This DVD also comes with a teacher's guide.

Hakim, Joy. *All the People*. 10. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 62-125.

This final volume in Hakim's series on American history focuses on the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is as well written as all the other books in the series. It contains a wealth of additional information in addition to the basic facts. There are maps, photos, primary source materials, anecdotes and personal reminiscences. America's history is told as a grand story. It is engaging reading for students as well as for teachers.

Hampton, Henry, dir. *Eyes on the Prize: Volume 1, and Volume 2*. PBS Video, 1986. Film.

This powerful series from PBS takes viewers through the most significant events of the Civil Rights Movement. (These two volumes proceed from Emmett Till to the March on Washington.) Participants from all sides recount their experiences against the backdrop of archival films and music. Dr. King figures in much of these two volumes and students watch and listen, fascinated, as he emerges as a real person, not simply the famous African American man they've done book reports about.

Hudson, Robert, dir. *Mighty Times: The Children's March*. Dir. Bobby Houston. Teaching Tolerance in Association with HBO, 2011. Film. <Tolerance.org>.

This award winning video ( Best Documentary – Short Subject) tells the story of the week in May 1963, when more than 4,000 children boycotted school and marched through Birmingham with the intention of being arrested. More than 2,500, some as young as nine years old were, indeed arrested. Their efforts though, breathed new life into the civil rights movement. Their story is told by the participants and makes excellent use of archival movie footage of the events as well as of the music of the time. This is an excellent resource. The DVD and a standards based teacher's guide are available free to educators through Teaching Tolerance of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Levine, Ellen. *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*. New York: Puffin, 1993. Print.

This book contains the true stories of 30 African Americans who were children or teens during the civil rights era. Their vivid reminiscences recount what it was like for them to face the ugly face of segregation, whether at the whites-only section of a lunch counter, or facing down an angry mob on their way into a segregated school. This is a fascinating document of the times.

Levinson, Cynthia. *We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March*. Atlanta: Peachtree Publishers, 2012. Print.

The 1963 Children's March in Birmingham, Alabama, proved to be a tipping point in the civil rights struggle. The author tells this incredible story in a very personal way through the reminiscences of four of its young participants. This is an excellent book- well researched and told like the great story it is.

Mayer, Robert. *When the Children Marched: The Birmingham Civil Rights Movement*. Berkeley Heights: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2008. Print.

This is a very good resource for the topic. It is written for upper elementary school readers and clearly explains the issues involved and the actions taken.

McWhorter, Diane. *A Dream of Freedom: The Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968*. New York: Scholastic, 2004. Print.

This book begins with an excellent prologue that clearly explains the emergence of Jim Crow laws and how segregation took hold of the country for almost a century following the Civil War. The following chapters chronicle the struggle for civil rights from Brown v Board of Education in 1954 to the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. Each chapter details not only the history and the circumstances surrounding the major event but provides interesting behind the scenes insights. This is history told as story. Upper elementary readers will find it easily understandable and teachers will consider it a valuable source of information.

Morrison, Toni. *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Print.

Many full page photos of segregated schools and the children who were forced to attend them, first-hand accounts of the emotional experience, factual text to explain the scenes, as well as Morrison's fictionalized comments through the eyes of young participants make this an excellent resource for students and the classroom.

Osborne, Linda. *Miles to go for Freedom: Segregation & Civil Rights in the Jim Crow Years*. New York: Abrams, 2012. Print.

This eminently readable book provides an overview of the Civil Rights Movement in its earliest phases – the 1890s to 1954. It is told through multiple lenses which include first person accounts, photos, and primary sources. Children and teachers will find it an excellent resource.

Rice, Condoleezza. *Extraordinary, Ordinary People*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010. Print.

In this memoir of her earlier years, Dr. Rice allows readers to see another side of black life in the deep South during the turbulent civil rights era.

Tatum, Beverly. "It's Not So Black and White." *Instructor-Intermediate*. 108.5 (1999): 29-31. Print.

In this article, Dr. Tatum explores how dialog in the classroom about racism can be a powerful catalyst for change.

Turck, Mary. *The Civil Rights Movement for Kids: A History with 21 Activities*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2000. Print.

This is an excellent resource book that provides solid background information on aspects of the civil rights movement from the early fifties to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It is a very readable text, liberally illustrated with archival photographs. The activities, however, are not on par with the text.

Wyman, Richard. *America's History Through Young Voices: Using Primary Sources in the K-12 Social Studies Classroom*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005. 1-11, 170-180. Print.



This book contains primary source material including letters, diaries, and essays written by young people from twelve periods of American history. In addition to the content, the book provides instructional material for teachers.

**Websites:**

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute  
[www.bcri.org](http://www.bcri.org)

National Civil Rights Institute  
[www.civilrightsmuseum.org](http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org)

## Pennsylvania State Standards Addressed in This Unit

**Mathematics**

- 2.4 Mathematical Reasoning and Connections
- 2.4F Use statistics to quantify issues (e.g. social studies)
- 2.6 Statistics and Data Analysis
- 2.6A Organize and display data using pictures, tallies tables, charts  
bar graphs and circle graphs
- 2.6E Construct and defend conclusions based on data

**Social Studies**

- 8.3 United States History
- Standard Statement: Why Study History?
- Focus Question: How Do We Learn About History?
- A.1 Primary Documents, Materials, and Historical Places

**Literacy**

- 1.1 Learning to Read Independently
- 1.1A Establish the purpose for reading a type of text before reading
- 1.1B Select texts for a particular purpose
- 1.1G Demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of text
- 1.2 Reading Critically in All Areas
- 1.2C Produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions  
of the genre
- 1.3 Reading, Analyzing & Interpreting Literature
- 1.3A Read and understand works of literature
- 1.3C Describe how the author uses literary devices to convey meaning
- 1.4 Types of Writing
- 1.4A Write poems, plays, and multi paragraph stories including narrative and  
memoir
- 1.5 Quality of Writing
- 1.5A Write with sharp, distinct focus, identifying topic, task and audience

- 1.5B Use well developed content appropriate for the topic
- 1.5C Write with controlled and/or subtle organization
- 1.5E Revise writing to improve organization, word choice, order and precision of vocabulary
- 1.5F Edit writing using the conventions of language

**Visual Arts**

- 1.1 Understand and Apply Art Media, Techniques and Processes
  - 1.1A Select and use materials, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories
  - 1.1C Use materials in a safe and responsible manner