

## **Using Poetry to Teach Children About the Civil Rights Movement**

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### **Objectives**

After teaching this unit, I hope that my students will be able to identify with their own history and value their own background and identities. I plan to provide my students with opportunities to reflect upon what they are learning and give them the opportunity to express their feelings in positive ways. I want to support them as they interact and think more critically about their own identities, cultural experiences and the world that they live in. Likewise, in this unit my students will learn about the active roles that African American children and others played in reforming their communities during the era. Furthermore, it is my hope that my students will view themselves as agents of change; understand that they too are active participants in history and that they can play key roles in shaping their own lives and communities. I want my students to read interesting texts related to the Civil Rights Era and be able to discuss, question, think, and infer what is happening in them. This can be accomplished as students respond to texts by asking questions, paraphrasing important information, creating visual images, making comparisons, analyzing and summarizing what they have learned. My students will be encouraged to read more literature written by and about African Americans to support their understanding of the events that happened during the era. I will have students interview relatives and have conversations with their relatives about what they have learned about the history of the Civil Rights Movement. I also want to equip my students with strategies, skills and knowledge that they can apply when reading and writing across all content areas.

### **Rationale**

This unit is designed to be taught in either a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Language Arts Class or Social Studies Class. The unit will last for four weeks. Using poetry to teach the history of the Civil Rights Movement will go a long way with assisting students with being creative, outspoken, and will foster their leadership skills. Participation in the unit is designed to foster a heightened sense of awareness, identity and responsibility within students. Why use poetry to teach my students about the Civil Rights Movement? Beginning readers are more able to understand the meaning of poetry because of its rhyme, rhythm, and repetition, and because the accent falls on meaningful words. Furthermore, poetry can serve as a brief introduction to other literature as well as introduce content and concepts across the curriculum. Poetry can encourage students to write longer narratives from its brief introduction of characters, scenes, and stories. Poetry is written in a variety of formats which offer wonderful beginning writing opportunities. Poems can paint powerful, sharp pictures using images and emotive language that stimulate the senses.<sup>1</sup>

Poems can be a powerful genre for teaching younger students about the Movement and can be used to provide background information, to activate prior knowledge and to assist students with generating new ideas and concepts.

This unit is relevant for me to teach because I want my students to learn about many of the events that occurred during the Civil Rights Era that ensured many of the freedoms we enjoy today. Throughout the unit, my students will be provided with experiences, referents, and analogies that will allow them to make connections in their present learning. This bridge building is important to all learning, but of crucial importance in teaching historical information.<sup>ii</sup> My students will need strategies, tools, and various meaningful opportunities to develop concepts related to the Era. With this in mind, students will also need to be equipped with the tools they need to analyze, research and make decisions while learning. They will examine the roles of ordinary children and other adults in reforming their communities, challenging segregation and advancing the ideas of democracy.<sup>iii</sup> This can be a powerful experience for my students, the majority whom are African American.

As a Special Education Teacher, I co-teach in a regular education classroom and provide specialized academic instruction and remediation services to students identified with exceptionalities at Barringer Academic Center (BAC), a medium sized, elementary urban school in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS) in Charlotte, North Carolina. BAC is a partial magnet school that serves approximately eight hundred students, Kindergarten to Grade Five. BAC received recognition from the Magnet Schools of America (MSA), a not-for-profit organization that provides national and regional support, advocacy and leadership for all magnet schools and public schools of choice. The mission of MSA is to provide leadership for innovative instructional programs that promote equity, diversity and academic excellence for all students in public school choice programs. It recognizes magnet schools that show commitment to high academic standards, curriculum innovation, successful desegregation/diversity efforts and the consistent delivery of quality services to all stakeholders.<sup>iv</sup>

In addition, BAC is also considered as a “Finding Opportunities, Creating Unparalleled Success (FOCUS) School” because approximately 75% of our population receives either free or reduced lunch. One-third of the student population has been identified as Gifted and Talented are enrolled in the Horizons or Talent Development Programs. These students from what are considered as affluent middle class families are bused to BAC from all over the city of Charlotte as well as surrounding Mecklenburg County. Their parents are attracted to the idea of smaller class sizes, individualized learning programs, and opportunities for more frequent one on one instruction wherein their peers will readily accept their children. New students are selected through a lottery process and afforded the opportunity to attend BAC and join those already participating in the program. The remaining two-thirds of the student population come from the surrounding neighborhoods of the West Learning Community as part of the Learning

Immersion (LI) Program. Their abilities range from newcomer to developing, but the common thread among them is that they all struggle with reading comprehension and reading fluency.<sup>v</sup> Each individual student brings an extremely different set of experiences with him/her creating a wonderful and sometimes challenging classroom environment. It is not uncommon for many of my student to live in households that include their grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins as well as several other siblings. Thus, finding a consistent time and appropriate space to focus on academic tasks within the home may prove challenging. On a daily basis, I make every attempt to build qualitative, supportive, mutually respectful relationships with parents. I feel that it is extremely important to involve my parents with setting and reinforcing high academic and personal expectations for their children.

Even though there is an extremely diverse community of students from a variety of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, (the student population is roughly 75% African-American, 16% European-American, 7% Asian American and 3% Hispanic-American) many of the classrooms contain African American students only. The majority of the African American students are a part of the lower socioeconomic class who receive government assistance and free or reduced lunches. Students will learn that the free lunch program is very similar to the Free Breakfast for Children Program started by the Black Panther Party (BPP) during the Civil Rights Era.

Many of the students that I teach are reluctant readers who have not acquired the necessary foundational skills and strategies to read successfully. Most of them struggle not only with phonemic awareness, but also with reading comprehension and reading fluency. They tend to perform poorly on standardized tests involving reading comprehension. Yet on the other hand, they enjoy reading and responding to shorter texts. In fact, they are very uncomfortable with being required to read and respond to longer reading passages, books or novels. I felt that using poetry to teach children about the Civil Rights Movement could be a powerful tool to use to assist students with their overall reading comprehension skills. Children's literature can provide a safe space in which children wonder, ask questions and empathize with the character's situations.<sup>vi</sup> It is my hope is that my students will transfer the skills used with shorter passages to longer pieces of literature. In addition, I wanted to use this unit to introduce my students to African American history using creative strategies and to inspire and motivate them to be change agents in their families and communities. Prior to teaching the unit, I will review the concept of sequencing and emphasize the fact that knowing the correct order of events is an essential part of reading comprehension.

Participation in this seminar has enabled me to use literature to develop effective reading and writing strategies. Not only has my knowledge about the seminar topic been enlarged, but my ability to recognize relevant information and to synthesize and evaluate the information has greatly improved. Thus, I soon realized that was virtually impossible to read every published work related to the seminar topic but that I needed to read

selected articles closely and engage with the literature on a deeper level. I hope that readers find my literature choices relevant, appropriate and useful.

In addition, participating in this seminar has enabled me to put my childhood experiences with racial discrimination and desegregation into perspective. Reading African American literature from the Civil Rights Era has strengthened my knowledge and understanding of the plight of African Americans. As a young child during the sixties, I spent a lot of time thinking deeply about the world around me, and how I could make a difference. Much of this time was spent trying to make sense out of the intense turmoil, confusion, racial tension and bloodshed that occurred. Often my family members and classmates told me that my thoughts about things were too serious for such a little girl. However, I soon discovered that the decade of the sixties was a serious, critical and transforming period in the history of the Civil Rights Movement.

At the age of 7, I vividly remember harboring so much anger, emotional pain and fear as a result of the images I saw on television. I was stunned as I watched people being hosed, beaten by police, bitten by dogs and overrun by horses. The racial tensions deeply affected all of society and every aspect of my own young life. Consequently, these images caused me to be heartbroken, filled with hate and yet motivated to action. For approximately 40 years, I have been searching for some way to deal with the emotions that I felt while growing up during the sixties. I grew up in a small rural farming community where I attended a segregated, all Black school until the eighth grade. All of the schools in our county were forced to desegregate in 1970. With desegregation came a new set of problems and racial conflict. The few Black schools that existed were forced to close permanently. All Black students were bused to different White schools throughout the county. Nearly all of the Black teachers lost their jobs. At our new schools, teachers and students were left to figure out how to deal with desegregation on our own. This proved to be a very stressful time for all students and teachers, Black or White.

As a young eyewitness to many of the events that transpired during the Civil Rights Era, I vividly recall wanting to fight someone or some thing, but I did not know who or what. I searched for opportunities to join the activists and protestors in their efforts to combat all forms of racial discrimination, injustice and inequities. Children who lived in the rural communities as I did, encountered barriers such as transportation that prevented them from participating in rallies, assemblies and marches in urban settings. I now realize, however, that we were participants at the grassroots level in our communities, and we did make a difference. The Movement made us aware of the things that we needed to do in order to empower ourselves and others. It also gave us a strong sense of hope, purpose and courage. At our new school, we engaged in conversations about our differences, developed new friendships and made every effort to understand our desegregated environment while demanding equality. Above all, we embraced the changes that confronted us. We were proud and idolized those African Americans who

were resisted, marched, demanded and gave their lives to gain freedom and equality for all people.

### **Teaching Strategies and Classroom Activities**

The combined teaching strategies and classroom activities that follow incorporate differentiated instruction for reluctant learners and enable students to learn through a variety of techniques. The strategies are designed to actively engage students in fun, interactive activities that build their vocabulary knowledge, comprehension skills, and overall reading levels as they read.<sup>vii</sup> Each strategy includes a pre-reading activity for texts that builds and teaches comprehension strategies.

#### *Ruby Bridges: Brave Steps*

The poem, *Ruby Bridges: Brave Steps*, written by modern day poet, author and educator, Latorial Faison, recounts the events, the emotions and obstacles that a brave little Black girl, Ruby Bridges, faced on her first day of school. Ruby was a young pioneer full of hope, courage and fear. She went to her new school with love, hope and peace in her heart. It was because of the color of her skin that she was met with hatred, anger, racism, segregation and all sorts of vices at the door of her new school. It was because of her bravery, faith and unwavering support, William Frantz Elementary would be changed forever. Ruby walked onto the pages of history because she dared to persist and persevere in her efforts to desegregate the elementary school.

As an introduction to the poem, the teacher will provide pre-instruction of vocabulary words prior to reading. The students will next view images and information in the book, *Going to School During the Civil Rights Movement* which provides an overview of the major events that took place during the movement. Next, students will view photos and a two-minute video based on the book, "*Ruby's Shoes*".<sup>viii</sup> They will also read and interact with the background information from Ruby's website paying attention to the vocabulary and the overall content. This process will allow students to understand that Ruby is a real person and that the Civil Rights Movement actually occurred. Students will be given a copy of the poem, *Ruby Bridges: Brave Steps*.<sup>ix</sup> Before reading the poem, students will preview the text, think about the title, make predictions and ask questions. Next students will skim the text for to look for clues about the text. The teacher will guide students in a discussion about their background knowledge for relevant information that may help them understand the text. The teacher will use this strategy with students before students read the text to assist with reading comprehension skills.

Using the choral reading strategy, the students will read the poem a total of five times to allow students the opportunity to become familiar with the text and improve comprehension skills.<sup>x</sup> First, students read the poem together or chorally. The students read the poem again chorally. However, during the second reading, students will be

instructed to pay close attention to rhyming words, repeating words or sounds. Next, the students will read the poem again chorally paying attention to the meaning. Students will be provided with the opportunity to discuss the meaning. Students read the poem again chorally to reflect on the author's feelings. Students will discuss these feelings with their peers. Students read the poem for the last time again chorally, paying attention to their reactions and feelings about the poem. The students will be provided the opportunity to discuss their reactions with their peers. To demonstrate that they have extracted meaning from text, the students will orally summarize the poem with a three-sentence summary.

Finally, the students will be instructed to write a three-sentence summary of the poem based on their oral summaries. This strategy allows for repeated opportunities for the students to interact with the text and their peers while learning and reinforcing their understanding of the text. Choral reading can be engaging, enjoyable and promotes cooperative learning.

To support their understanding and activate prior knowledge, students will add vocabulary to the word wall they learned from the website and the poem. These will be words that they think are important to assist them with understanding the text. A word wall is an organized collection of words prominently displayed in a classroom. This display is used as an interactive tool for teaching reading and spelling to children.<sup>xi</sup> On the word wall, vocabulary will be displayed from the texts that are being read, enabling the teaching of these words in meaningful contexts.

The word wall with vocabulary from the Civil Rights Movement will also be displayed in the class prior to reading any of the text. The following words will be included on the word wall: Rosa Parks, Montgomery Bus Boycott, Brown v. Board of Education, Greensboro Sit-ins, Freedom Rides, Ruby Bridges, Little Rock Nine, March on Washington, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott, segregation, desegregation, integration, inequalities, courage, protestors, activists, Voter Rights Act, Birmingham, Langston Hughes, Malcolm X, discrimination and nonviolence.

The wall will be used to introduce students to text and passages, assist them with making predictions and expand their vocabulary. The word wall will remain visible throughout the entire unit. Students will learn the words through multiple exposures to the vocabulary. They will be able to refer to word wall often, incorporate the vocabulary in their daily conversations as they discuss and interact with texts.

The book, *Through My Eyes*, Ruby Bridges' autobiography, will be read aloud to my students. After reading the book, students will put themselves in Ruby's shoes. Students will be instructed to think about the events that impacted Ruby's life. Using the think-pair-share strategy, the teacher will read the question prompts and the comprehension questions to the class. Think-Pair-Share (TPS) is a collaborative learning strategy in

which students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading. This technique requires students to think individually about a topic or answer to a question; and share ideas with classmates. Discussing an answer with a partner serves to maximize participation, focus attention and engage students in comprehending the reading material.<sup>xii</sup>

Using this technique, the teacher will guide student groups with responding to the following discussion questions: Ruby saw and heard many awful things during the protests outside of her school. Why was the image of a black doll in a coffin particularly terrifying for Ruby? Norman Rockwell painted a picture showing Ruby escorted to school by Federal Marshals. The neatly dressed, pig-tailed little girl is passing a wall with an ugly racial epithet painted on it. Rockwell called this picture "The Problem We All Live With." Why do you think Rockwell chose this title? William Frantz Public School, the once all-white school that Ruby integrated, is now a poorly funded school with mainly African American students. What do you think Ruby Bridges means when she writes, "The kids are being segregated all over again."? Ruby's life changed dramatically because a federal court had ordered two schools in New Orleans to admit black students. Students will view a list of major events in the Civil Rights movement. What other court rulings and laws helped to change people's lives? Can you think of court rulings or laws that have affected your life? Ruby Bridges had to be brave in the face of extraordinary racism. Do you think that the same kind of racism exists today?<sup>xiii</sup>

Students will be instructed to take 3 minutes to think about the main points of the text. Pair - students will take 3 minutes to talk with a partner about their ideas and write their sentences on paper. This strategy allows students to show what they know and build confidence in their individual understanding. Next, students will share- review their sentences with a partner. Finally, students will choose a favorite fact to share with the entire class. Students will not only share their ideas but listen as their classmates share their ideas. This strategy allows the students to make connections in their understanding, reinforce their learning, expand their ideas and thinking about the text and promote cooperative learning experiences.

### *Claudette Colvin Goes to Work*

The teacher will explain to the students that the class will be holding a mock courtroom session over the next three days: There will be a child judge, children jury, and 1, 2 or 3 defendants. There will also be a district attorney and a defense attorney. The case should be about something on their level (i.e., a child is accused of stealing candy on the playground). The witnesses to the act or the defendants may choose to testify. Each side will give their reasons why they think this happened. The verdict should be severe so the children can readily decide if the case fits the penalty. The teacher can interject his/her beliefs on how he/she sees it as an adult to show the difference in what is meant by peers.<sup>xiv</sup>

After the three days, the courtroom session will be concluded and all students will be equal again. As a class, brainstorm comments made by students on their reactions to the previous three days. Positive and negative comments will be accepted during the discussion.

Explain to students how fairness/unfairness can be related to people of different colors or from different cultures. Give each student a Popsicle stick with a laminated happy face labeled “fair” on one side and a laminated unhappy face labeled “unfair” on the other. Ask a series of questions portraying fair and unfair situations and have students use their Popsicle sticks to vote on whether each scenario is fair or unfair. Students will write about what fairness means to them and offer three fair solutions to their courtroom verdict.<sup>xv</sup>

The teacher will give students background information on Claudette Colvin, who at the age of fifteen, helped advance civil rights efforts in her city. In 1955, Colvin refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white person in Montgomery, Alabama. She was handcuffed, arrested and placed in jail for her courageous act. As Colvin was being arrested, she yelled it’s my constitutional right. This incident happened months before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a White person. Colvin was convicted of violating the segregation law and assault. Colvin’s case was tried in juvenile court. The case, *Brown v. Gayle*, went to the U.S. Supreme Court which declared bus segregation unconstitutional in December 1956.

The teacher will show the Youtube video: John McCutcheon sings "Claudette Colvin", after Rita Dove's poem "Claudette Colvin Goes To Work" and follow up with class discussion.<sup>xvi</sup> This technique will be used to reinforce the principle of fairness/unfairness.

### *Rosa*

Studies suggest that most students learn a great deal about history outside of school. This knowledge comes from experiences told in the form of stories told by relatives, from information presented in the media, from museums and artifacts. Students will be further introduced to the Civil Rights Movement and book/poem *Rosa* by using a Civil Rights Contract to be signed by the student, the parent and the teacher prior to reading any of the texts. The contract will contain the following facts: Rosa Parks has been affectionately referred to as the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement; Dr. Martin Luther King was a strong advocate of nonviolent protest and fought for civil rights for all Americans; throughout U.S. history, certain groups of people have been discriminated against because of the color of their skin; stereotypes can lead people to make unfair judgments about individuals and groups; segregation is hurtful and unfair to those discriminated against; the civil rights movement was an effort to establish citizenship rights for Blacks; the 15th Amendment prohibited racial discrimination in voting; ordinary men and women



struggled for their beliefs during the Civil Rights Movement; and Older people have a responsibility to pass on these stories to younger people.

By reviewing and signing the contract, students agree to share and discuss the facts from the contract with their parents. This strategy is designed to present information in an interesting, differentiated format to the students. Use of the contract requires students to make a commitment to learning about the movement. It also encourages conversations between the students, their parents and family members thus activating prior knowledge. Students can learn from their parents, share artifacts, and gain a greater understanding about life during the era. When students return the signed contracts, the teacher will review the facts from the contract with the entire class. This method allows students to make predictions about texts and reinforce their understanding of the facts. It also provides students with the opportunity to clear any misconceptions they have and provides students with an overall summary of what the movement involved.

Prior to teaching the lesson, students will complete an *Evry-Day edit* worksheet about leaders and events during the civil rights movement. Students will find and mark errors on an uncorrected text. They will check and make corrections in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, or grammar. For example, students will edit the following paragraphs: the third monday of January is the annual observance of the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. King was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. A minister and civil rights leader, King lead a bus boycott in Montgomery Alabama, in 1955. Devoted to nonviolence, he all so led a pieceful march in Washington, D.C, during which he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream speech King was kill in Tennessee in April 1968. On December 1, 1955, an african american named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. As a result, she was arrest and fined. The event sparked a year-long boycott of Montgomery Alabama, busses by her many supporter. One of Rosa's biggest supporters was a young minister named Martin Luther King Jr. Many consider Rosa Parks bus ride to be the birth of the civil rights movement?<sup>xvii</sup> This every-day-edit method will reinforce comprehension skills, support learning and writing mechanics.

Next, students will view a brief video recreation of the events of December 1, 1955 prior to reading the poem, *Rosa*, written by Pulitzer Prize winner, American Poet Laureate, Rita Dove, an inspirational figure for African-Americans and for women.<sup>xviii</sup> This poem will provide students with thoughtful insight into what Rosa Parks might have been feeling inside as she deliberately, intentionally and purposefully refused to give up her seat one moment in time. She bravely sat there, quietly, gracefully as she dared to take her seat in history. One can only imagine all the emotions she felt inside.

The Teacher will read aloud to students a children's book about the story of Rosa Parks entitled *Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni, to introduce students to the ideology and conflict that caused the Civil Rights Movement. The book is appropriate for third-grade students

and it contains numerous pictures and illustrations to support the words. Students will be given the opportunity to look at the book prior to the start of this lesson. This strategy will build students' curiosity about the text. Students will be given the opportunity to ask questions, make inferences and predictions.

After reading of the book, students will learn about the rules (for White people and for Black people) on buses in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955: 1) White people boarded the bus through the front door. They dropped their coins into the fare box next to the driver. Then they sat in one of the long seats at the front of the bus or in one of the first three rows of seats. 2) Black people boarded the bus through the front door. They dropped their coins into the fare box. Then they had to get off the bus and get back on through the door in the back of the bus. They took a seat in one of the last five rows or they stood in a "standing only" area at the back of the bus. 3) If a white person got on the bus and there were no more seats in the white section, a black person who was sitting in the front rows of seats set aside for black people had to give up his or her seat.

The teacher will lead a discussion of the rules in relation to Rosa's story. Students will reflect by completing the *Rosa Parks Changed the Rules worksheet activity*<sup>xix</sup> to reinforce their learning and understanding. After completing the worksheet, students will respond to the following questions to reinforce their understanding: Do you agree with what you just read? Why or why not? Discuss any words that you may not have known. How does what you just read relate to your own life? Summarize what you just read. Could the author have written the text more clearly? Why or why not? Based on what you read, what are you curious or interested in knowing more about?<sup>xx</sup> Students should be encouraged to share their ideas and strategies with their parents.

### *Ballad of Birmingham*

This poem, the *Ballad of Birmingham*, written in 1965 by poet Dudley Randall, reminds us that when innocence encounters evil, there is carnage, mayhem and ultimately renewed hope, vision and action. It sheds insight into the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham where four little Black girls died while attending Sunday School. Perhaps this particular church was targeted because it had been used as a meeting-place for many civil rights leaders. The perpetrators strategically aimed to kill the leaders of the movement and ultimately kill the movement. Their efforts were not successful but helped to mobilize and strengthen the resolve of the Civil Rights protestors. "Randall's use of irony, imagery, alliteration, assonance, metaphors, and tone all contribute to the intense effectiveness of the poem. The *Ballad of Birmingham* as a whole is an example of irony"<sup>xxi</sup>.

Using the technique of modeling and practicing, students will be taught to read in phrases and with good expression. The teacher will model reading the poem, *Ballad of*

Birmingham for the students and then provide supervised practice. One important strategy to teach using this technique involves teaching students to slide their index finger or the eraser end of a pencil under each phrase as it is read. This is a multisensory approach designed to increase reading fluency, an important skill that students need to master in order to become a good reader. The teacher will also model asking good questions to foster curiosity in students.

To assist students with improving their overall reading habits, the teacher will provide students with a chart of strategies that good readers practice. The “Things Good Readers Do: Preview –look at the cover and title; look at some of the pictures and read some of the text. Question-ask who, what, when, where, why and how; decide if what you’ve read makes sense. Predict-wonder about what will happen next; make guesses and read ahead to see if your predictions are correct. Infer-imagine the details; use what to understand what the author means. Connect-relate what you’ve read to what you know, and to your thoughts and feelings; compare what you’ve read to other texts and to the world around you. Summarize-organize and connect the details; draw your own conclusion. Evaluate-think about what you’ve read; what did you learn? Was it important to you? Why or why not? Did you like it? Why or why not?”<sup>xxii</sup>

After reading the poem, students will view information and images on *The Ballad of Birmingham* website. Students will also see the Tennessee State University: *The Ballad Of Birmingham* video on YouTube and hear the song. Students will have opportunities to: listen to the sounds of the *Ballad of Birmingham*, listen to how ballads tell stories, Learn to hear, and to write a four-line ballad stanza themselves.<sup>xxiii</sup>

### *Freedom on the Menu*

To introduce the text, students will use the K-W-L pre-reading strategy that will assist students with their comprehension skills. Using this strategy, students will make predictions, preview and build background knowledge by brainstorming and the use of writing prompts. The teacher will use this strategy to review what students know or think that they know about the text, what they want to learn and review what they learned. Students will be given time to make connections and reflect on their predictions with a neighbor. Students will be required to read the passage and answer a set of comprehension questions that assess the student’s understanding of that passage.

Students will be introduced to the book, *Freedom on the Menu*, by using the listen, learn and read strategy. The teacher will pair a struggling student in my class with an older student from another class. The teacher will explain to students that they will take turns reading the text with the older student reading first and the younger student second. This is a strategy that will be use to increase reading fluency as well as reading comprehension skills. Using this approach, students will listen to a text with a partner and review the vocabulary words in the text. They will read the text together following

along as the partner reads. Then students will talk about the story with each other naming the characters, setting, details in the text and the ending. Next they will switch parts and reread the text. Finally, they will write their responses to teacher generated questions about the text. The teacher will observe students as they read with other students. The teacher monitor the process and check for improvements in fluency by listening for how smoothly students read, what words they stumble over or have difficulty with, what words they have mastered in pronouncing, and how confident they sound as they read.<sup>xxiv</sup> The listen, learn and read approach can help build confidence as students support each other while learning, reading and interacting with texts.

### *Pass It On, African-American Poetry for Children*

To interact with poetry from the book, *Pass It On, African-American Poetry for Children*, students will choral read several of the poems. This strategy will not only allow for repeated opportunities for students to interact with the text and their peers, but to learn to enjoy reading poetry.

Students will be told that they are going to learn about the Civil Rights Era in a fun way with the beanbags. They will be shown how to throw a beanbag once they have responded to review questions. Students take turns doing this until every child has had a turn. At the end of the activity, the teacher will ask a few questions designed to reinforce their understanding and learning of concepts.

This strategy can be used as an informal assessment to gauge how much students have learned. The teacher will observe students' participation during class discussions to see how well they grasp the main ideas about the era and how well they understand the vocabulary. It is recommended that the teacher address any consistent misconceptions one-on-one or in small groups as necessary.<sup>xxv</sup> Beanbag toss games are exciting, nonthreatening games that can encourage shy or apprehensive kids to join a group.<sup>xxvi</sup> By passing the beanbag to each other, the students learn the basics of teamwork and start to develop friendships. This game will be used as a strategy to ensure that all of my students actively participate in discussions about the era. The activity not only gets students up and moving, but it makes learning fun and supports peer learning experiences.

### *Role-playing*

Role-playing and simulations can be fun and very effective strategies that engage students in real world scenarios. Role-playing involves active learning and the processes of tuning in, finding out, sorting out and making conclusions and requires students to become more deeply involved in a topic. The teacher can use this strategy to assist students in learning about issues of the past or about current issues in their local community. Participation in a role-play activity can strengthen students' creativity, interpersonal skills and knowledge acquisition skills and connect students with real life

experiences. Students can learn problem-solving skills, negotiation skills and consensus building. As a result of participating, students will have a much better understanding of issues and the importance and complexity of resolving real-world problems. The strategy capitalizes on the interrelatedness of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Role playing develops literacy as a social practice through cooperative learning and simulation of life experiences. The teacher will review historical background information with students. After each role play, students will discuss how they felt when they encountered discrimination and have students brainstorm what changes they will make. The following role-playing activities are based on real world scenarios.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The teacher will make signs the children can pick from that say: Doctor, Lawyer, Teacher, Fireman, Policeman, Store Owner, and Record Producer. Once students pick a profession, the teacher will give students' a certificate indicating that they have successfully studied and passed the classes to earn the title. The teacher then will arbitrarily take away the students' signs and state, sorry but you have blue jeans on, or you are a girl, or boy, so you cannot have this job. Ask the students how they feel.

The teacher will use the same signs for occupations. The teacher will inform the children that we only want 1 Doctor, 3 Teachers, 0 Lawyers, 2 Fireman, etc. Ask them how they feel. Then the teacher will make a Wal-Mart sign and a small sign that says Store. The teacher will give all of the students only \$20.00 to shop. The goods at the "store" will cost twice as much as the goods at Wal-Mart. The students will be given one bag to shop for items at both stores, but require that all of them shop at the "store" first to get the real impact follow by shopping at Wal-Mart. Students will find they purchase more at a larger store than at a neighborhood store. Thus if the people in a particular community want a larger store in their neighborhood, they will have to demand it.

The teacher will show a picture of a room in a house where there are ants, mice, filth etc. Then the teacher will show a picture of the exact same room in a house that is clean. Let the students pick which house they would choose to live in and ask why. The teacher will lead students to understand that all people require safe, clean and healthy living conditions.

The teacher will show pictures of great explorers, inventors, or other contributors to our nation. The pictures shown will represent people of all races. Remind the students that everyone needs to know of these individuals to appreciate what various ethnic groups have accomplished.

### **History of the Civil Rights Movement**

The teacher will have students will listen to songs that recalls the major events of the Civil Rights Movement including Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech and Rosa Parks' bus ride. The songs discuss the Jim Crow laws, and Brown v. Board of

Education and Plessy v. Ferguson law cases. The song explains how the Civil Rights Act in 1964 made segregation illegal. As a result of listening to the songs, students will better understand the important events of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>xxviii</sup> The teacher should involve students in discussions about racism and current protests and how people can still try to change things when they see something that is not fair. The teacher will summarize the history of the Civil Rights Movement with the students creating a timeline to assist students with sequencing events.

Historically, African American people have been severely oppressed and treated crudely for years and denied even their basic human rights. They have been fighting for their rights since the beginning of slavery. As a result of the prolonged years of oppression, they were “moved” to action. Consequently, during the years of 1954-1968, African-Americans and others mobilized in campaigns of civil resistance to combat all forms of racial discrimination, injustice and inequities that permeated every area of their lives. This Movement became known as the Civil Rights Movement, a long, primarily nonviolent struggle to bring full civil rights and equality under the law to all Americans. The movement has had a lasting impact on our nation resulting in increased social and legal acceptance of civil rights for all people.

The Movement involved numerous leaders and thousands of activists in organized efforts, both nonviolent and acts of civil disobedience to combat all forms of racial discrimination and inequities that permeated every area of life especially for Black people. Millions protested and participated in acts of civil disobedience such as boycotts, "sit-ins", and a wide range of other nonviolent activities. Their tactics also included lawsuits, voter registration drives, protest marches, and acts of violence. People from all walks of life, young and old, poor and rich, Black and White joined in the freedom efforts. Their acts were not unnoticed and evoked a crisis situation between the activists, opposition groups and governmental authorities that appeared long overdue. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as a powerful spokesperson and leader, but the movement started long before Dr. King's leadership efforts.

Women and children played critical roles in the overall success of the Movement. One of the most important civil rights case involved Linda Brown, a Black third-grader, who had to walk one mile to get to her all Black elementary school. She wanted to attend an all-White elementary school which was only seven blocks away from her home. Linda's parents with the support of the NAACP, filed suit contending that segregated schools sent the message to black children that they were inferior to whites; therefore, the schools were inherently unequal.<sup>xxix</sup> Prior to the Brown's filing their case, Kenneth Clark, social psychologist, in a lower court, provided testimony that segregation causes black children “to reject themselves and their color and accept whites as desirable”. He based his findings of a test administered to Black children in Clarendon County, South Carolina. Clark and his wife concluded that when Black children were shown two dolls, a white doll and a black doll, and asked for their opinions of each, the children generally

considered the white dolls prettier and smarter than the black dolls and those feelings of inferiority existed at an early age.<sup>xxx</sup>

“The case of *Brown v. Board of Education (1954) of Topeka, Kansas* is believed to mark the beginning of the modern day Civil Rights movement. This case actually included five school desegregation cases: *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*; *Briggs v. Elliot*; *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia*; *Bolling v. Sharpe*; and *Belton v. Gebhart*. The cases were designed to challenge the “separate but equal” doctrine established in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. Thurgood Marshall, chief counsel, of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), managed this all important landmark case.”<sup>xxxii</sup> The Supreme Court agreed and determined that the *Plessy* doctrine of “separate but equal” had no place in education and violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In essence the Court ruled that separate schools, segregated by race, were inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional. This decision meant that racial segregation in schools was unconstitutional. However, it took years to desegregate schools because segregation was so deeply rooted, guarded and embedded in the American culture. Many people and institutions were resistant to change. Consequently, Civil Rights leaders and others recognized that it was necessary to adopt organized, extensive methods of peaceful protests and boycotts. Thus, on December 1, 1955, when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a White man, she was arrested and fined, protesters and supporters held a year-long boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama busses.

Claudette Colvin, who at the age of fifteen, helped advance civil rights efforts in her city. In 1955, Colvin refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white person in Montgomery, Alabama. She was handcuffed, arrested and placed in jail for her courageous act. As Colvin was being arrested, she yelled it’s my constitutional right. This incident happened months before Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a White person. Colvin was convicted of violating the segregation law and assault. Colvin’s case was tried in juvenile court. The case, *Brown v. Gayle*, went to the U.S. Supreme Court which declared bus segregation unconstitutional in December 1956.

During the Civil Rights Movement, several communities across North Carolina acted to destroy segregation and to ensure inclusion and equal opportunities for all citizens. Their tactics included lawsuits, voter registration drives, boycotts, sit-ins, protest marches, and acts of violence. People young and old, poor and rich, black and white joined in the effort.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In February 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina four freshmen North Carolina Agriculture and Technical College students sat down quietly at the lunch counter at a Woolworth store. They were refused service. Soon after, the actions of these brave students were being repeated in several cities throughout the north and south.

Also in April 1960, students at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina formed a student-run organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Many of these young people emerged as leaders of the sit-in protest Movement which transformed the Civil Rights movement, and were very successful. For the first time the students became confident in their leadership abilities and the power and strength of grassroots militancy. Even though the students practiced nonviolent techniques, many were arrested by police, jeered and beaten by segregationists. The students were determined to continue their efforts in the fight for freedoms.

In 1960 the Supreme Court ruling declared that segregation in interstate travel facilities unconstitutional. Consequently, the Freedom Riders, organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), decided to test this ruling by riding throughout the South in attempt to integrate the bus, rail, and airport terminals. In May 1961, organized Freedom Rides began. Segregationists viciously attacked the Freedom Riders as they traveled through Alabama and other areas.

The next major organized effort was the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. A quarter million Americans, Black and White participated in this historic march on the nation's capital. The march proved to be very important, very effective, empowering, and mobilizing for activists. Protestors became more motivated and committed than ever to carry the civil rights revolution into the streets of America demanding equal access to public facilities, quality education, adequate employment, and decent housing for African Americans.<sup>xxxiv</sup> At this event, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his most famous speech, "I Have a Dream" to the huge, united, excited crowd of nearly one million people.

The status of African Americans throughout the South changed significantly in 1965 as a result of the passage of the Voting Rights Act. With the passage of this act, states were prohibited from using literacy tests, interpreting the Constitution, and other methods of excluding African Americans from voting.<sup>xxxv</sup> This was a great victory which led to an increase in the number of African Americans registered to vote. Once registered, several African Americans were elected to federal, state, and local offices.

Another activist group, the Black Panthers was formed in Oakland, California in 1966. They played a short but very important part in the Civil Rights Movement. The Panthers, advocated for a more aggressive, militant approach to obtaining civil rights because they believed that the non-violent campaign of Martin Luther King had failed.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The Panthers believed that the promised changes to their lifestyle via the 'traditional' civil rights movement, would take too long to be implemented or simply not introduced. The Party sought "land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace" for Black and poor people in America. The Panthers also strongly supported the idea of African American history, and taught that every culture should be aware of what contributions they have made to this great nation.



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