



## ***Using Biographies to Understand Choices***

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:  
Elementary or Middle School Literacy or Social Studies Classrooms  
I have a first grade classroom.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Choices, and Biographies

**Teaching Standards:** [Appendix 1](#)

**Synopsis:** I hope to incorporate my study of working with students of poverty to assist me with developing this curriculum unit. I work at a Title 1 school and Project L.I.F.T school. The students at my school tend to react quickly when making decisions. I hope to design lessons that develop character and teach students how to be respectful, honest, responsible and caring through the use of biographies. I want students to examine “Why they are reacting a certain way?” I want to know what motivates their choices. I want to explore their social habits. In my literacy or social studies lessons, I love to read to students, biographies of people who have been faced with diversity and have made wise choices (Helen Keller, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr.) that exhibit respect, honesty, responsibility and caring.

*I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 30 students in literacy and/or social studies.*

*I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.*

## Using Biographies to Understand Choices

*Cassandra Black*

### Introduction

It is my hope to incorporate my study of working with students of poverty to assist me with developing this curriculum unit. I work at a Title 1 school and Project L.I.F.T school. The students at my school tend to react quickly when making decisions. Many students tend to be disorganized, struggle with reasoning skills and simply make inappropriate choices. I hope to design lessons that develop character and teach students how to be respectful, honest, responsible and caring when making choices. I want students to examine “Why they are reacting a certain way?” I want to know what motivates their choices. I want to explore their social habits. In my literacy lessons, I love to read to students, biographies of people who have been faced with diversity and have made wise choices (Helen Keller, Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr.) that exhibit respect, honesty, responsibility and caring.

I hope to also examine how my students’ economically challenging circumstances impact the decisions and choices they make. By studying people of our time and in history (social studies connection) students can see how their choices can make a difference in their world and life. The word choice is defined as the words and actions of an individual or group. Aristotle suggests that a choice is the desire that results from deliberations about the options that are in our control<sup>1</sup>. Choices are the means we use to a desired result.

Cultural customs, family traditions, and one’s definition of friendship or family can all impact the choices we make. I hope to incorporate role-plays, graphic organizers, and project based learning activities in designing this unit. These types of learning activities and teaching strategies tend to appeal to the students I teach. Students are able to have more success through movement, tactile and visual activities.

Movement activities can stimulate brain activity and grow the brain. Movement within a lesson can increase buy-in from the student, which could also increase a student’s participation in the class activities and lessons. Movement activities give the teacher and the student an alternative to worksheets. Many primary learners are kinesthetic learners who learn best through hands-on movement activities. By increasing the use of movement in the classroom, educators can increase learning opportunities for students, especially students of poverty like those represented in my school.<sup>2</sup>

Tactile learners need to get up, move and participate in activities. Role-playing lessons “work extremely well for social studies units and book discussions.”<sup>3</sup> Tactile learners, like the students I teach, need to manipulate objects and love playing games that teach them specific skills. Role-playing activities are particularly helpful because tactile learners (also known as kinesthetic learners) are more successful when learning by doing something.

Visual learners need to see the pictures, charts and videos. As I share many of the biographies presented in the lessons and throughout the unit, I will incorporate visual aids such as charts, mind maps, graphic organizers and videos to benefit these types of learners.

As a first grade teacher, I have students at an age where they can bring a positive attitude to the classroom and school environment. I hope to find ways to teach my students to respect authority, take turns, share, and “play by the rules.” I want my students to know they have a choice to do the right thing. As I share biographies and autobiographies with them I want them to witness and understand that making the right choices can be difficult but it builds character and strengthens their ability to be successful in many situations.

I intend for this unit to contain character education and motivational activities/discussions that improve the academic performance for my first graders. With recent demands for students to be fluent readers by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, it is extremely important for students to have a solid reading foundation. Students in first grade generally love to listen to stories. They especially love listening to stories about people and their experiences. Character education and character development lessons on respect, honesty, responsibility and caring are important tools for learning to becoming successful and productive citizens. In order to increase student understanding and confidence when making choices, this unit will explore current researched-based findings on the topics of poverty, discipline, character and relationships that increase active classroom engagement and learning.

This unit has two goals. The first goal is to engage students in character development through literature, specifically non-fiction literature such as biographies and autobiographies. Exposing students to a wide variety of biographies allows students to see how an individual’s words and actions or choices can influence his or her life. The second goal is to teach and reinforce first grade common core objectives and standards in literacy and social studies. Character education and engaging learning activities in the classroom can spark and maintain a student’s love for learning. It is my hope to create life-long learners who can make informed choices that will impact their overall educational experience and life.

I have worked with students of poverty for a number of years. I hope to develop lessons that develop character and teach positive character traits. I want my students to examine the “Why they are acting or reacting a certain way?” I want to know what motivates their choices. I want to explore their social habits and teach them to think before taking action and/or reacting in a negative way. Ruby Payne believes “the two anchors of any effective discipline program that moves students to self governance are structure and choice.” She indicates that, “the individual always has choice—to follow or not to follow the expected behaviors.”<sup>4</sup>

What is Character Education? According to Victor Battistich, “The goals of character education are thus essentially the goals of raising good children: youth who understand, care about, and act upon the core ethical values” exhibit good character. Diligence, compassion, integrity, and fairness create a productive, just, and democratic society. Battistich also indicates, “As they (students) grow in character, young people grow in their capacity and commitment to do their best work, do the right thing, and lead lives of purpose. Effective character education involves creating the kinds of classroom and school environments that enable all students, without exception, to realize their potential to achieve these vital goals.”<sup>5</sup> Motivation and engagement that incorporate choice is key to learning positive character traits.

Ruth Charney believes that if you want “children to learn to think for themselves and for schools to become places where children learn to take charge of themselves and their learning,” character education is a must. In addition, Charney indicates that children “learn to derive meaning from their schooling, which helps them to direct their lives and make good choices.” The key teaching practices that help foster a responsive classroom where students are allowed to make choices include: morning meanings, guided discovery activities, academic choice, and family-involvement. Charney recommends taking “a practical approach to giving students choice in their learning to help them become independent, self-motivated learners. Students have the opportunity to make choices about the learning within the content areas and it encourages students to take control of their own learning in a meaningful way, both individually and cooperatively.”<sup>6</sup>

Character education can offer success and enhance learning beyond the classroom setting by expanding learning opportunities outside the walls of the classroom, the school building and in a student’s community. The common core reading goal for first grade RL.1.9 calls for students to compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories. I hope to develop a unit that takes age appropriate biographies and autobiographies and allows students to talk with one another, role play and engage in movement activities about the choices and actions being made. The North Carolina Standard Course of Study of Social Studies, 1.H.1, indicates that first grade students should be able to understand that history tells a story of how people and events changed society over time.<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean to teach character education and the idea of making appropriate choices to students of poverty? This is a question I hope to explore as I review and examine the research. Paul Tough indicates that character is a “set of abilities or strengths that are very much changeable—entirely malleable. In fact, they are skills you can learn; they are skills you can practice; and they are skills you can teach.”<sup>8</sup> When teaching students of poverty, it is important to build strong relationships and keep your expectations of students high. Lessons on respect, honesty, responsibility and caring can help students build self-esteem, character, and make choices that enhance their lives. Discussing character traits through biographies and autobiographies will allow students to explore the choices they make concerning respect, honesty, responsibility and caring.

Honesty is telling the truth. Students need to value honesty, so it is important to model honesty in the classroom. Respect is what you say and how you act toward others, which encompasses the idea of choice. Respect is a character trait that must be taught. Showing good manners by saying “please” and “thank you” and modeling acceptable behaviors are choices that define a person’s character. Doing what you are supposed to do is being responsible and accountable. Responsible people are dependable and trustworthy and generally do not blame others for their own mistakes. Teachers must recognize often when students are responsible and they don’t let others down. Caring is showing kindness and generosity, helping and not being mean and hurtful. Caring allows a person to be empathetic towards others. Caring people generally take into account how their choices, words, and actions, affect other people.

## **Overview and Objectives**

This curriculum unit will take autobiographies and/or biographies and develop lessons about choice based on the life experiences of motivational people in our society. Some lessons of study will include people alive today and some lessons of study will include people of the past. This unit will include activities and lessons that are cooperative in nature and allow students to interact with one another through role-plays, movement and visual activities. Thurgood Marshall, Helen Keller, George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, Harriett Tubman, Wilma Rudolph, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Amelia Earhart, and Jackie Robinson will be some of the choices of people from the past for students to study and discuss. Dr. Mae Jamison, Barack Obama, Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Tiger Woods, Bill Clinton, Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, Ruby Bridges and Tyler Perry will serve as some choices for present study choices.

The people highlighted are mostly African Americans, which is compatible with the population of students I teach. They also represent a wide range of career choices such as government leaders, actors, inventors, writers and athletes. This curriculum unit

will be grounded in lessons that develop character through discussion and will help students examine the relationships they have in their lives. The unit will incorporate strategies that help students see themselves as or becoming respectful, honest, responsible and caring individuals. Curwin, Mendler and Mendler indicate in their book, Discipline with Dignity that “teachers and administrators need to constantly be looking for places during the school day to allow children to make decisions.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Demographic Background**

Ashley Park’s vision is to provide all of our students the best education available by using the Family Model to address their needs. My school utilizes the Family Model where our children are assigned to a grade level family that they work with everyday instead of just one classroom teacher. The students will work together in small groups that change throughout the day based upon the needs of each child. A group of teachers and staff members are assigned to work with each family grade level structure to maximize the learning that occurs daily. We believe our Family Model creates a successful learning environment where teachers must work collaboratively to maximize instructional excellence. We believe that in order for students to achieve at high levels they must feel safe and supported in their learning environment. The learning process must be exciting, engaging and promote higher-level thinking as a way to ensure the academic needs of all students are met. Ashley Park has a belief that strong supportive communication with parents provides a positive impact on learning and that it is important to celebrate our accomplishments throughout the school year.

Ashley Park is a PreK-8 School that serves approximately 600 children on the west side of Charlotte. We are a part of the Project L.I.F.T. initiative. L.I.F.T. or Project Leadership & Investment for Transformation is a public and private partnership organized as a non-profit organization, operating as one of eight learning community offices in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System. The school has a focus on the West Corridor student feeder pattern into West Charlotte High School. The learning community consists of 9 schools. There are four key areas of intervention in which investments will be targeted: Time, Talent, Technology, and invested Parent/ Community support. \$55 million dollars was collectively raised for a five-year pilot in efforts to reform policy that will advance educational outcomes for students served in this area.

My first grade students come from economically disadvantaged homes. 100% of the students in my school participate in the free lunch program funded by the federal government, which also makes us a Title 1 school. According to the U. S. Department of Education, “the purpose of the Title 1 funding is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at

minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.”<sup>10</sup>

Key factors in working with economically disadvantaged students are to build relationships, boost engagement and develop a growth mindset. Integrating tactile movement, and visual aids can provide students in this situation with engaging classroom experiences. “Children of poverty are often at a disadvantage in school, and educators can find it challenging to help such students engage positively in their own learning.”<sup>11</sup> Professionals in the field of teaching students of poverty, such as Eric Jenson and Ruby Payne suggest the use of physical activity, music, drawing, role-playing and positive affirmations to engage students. Experts suggest that “children of poverty are being identified and labeled with grossly overgeneralized, deficit-laden characteristics that put them at risk of being viewed as less capable, less cultured, and less worthy as learners.”<sup>12</sup> Cooperative learning groups, role-playing, discussions, the use of teams and partner work can also build confidence in students, which will help to increase their academic success. “Students from poverty often need more help engaging in the classroom. To help students become truly engaged, he [Eric Jenson] suggests the use of physical activity, music, drama, social work and positive affirmations.” Social work is defined in this context as cooperative groups, partner works, small groups or teams. Jensen suggests that students should be given opportunities “to make their own choices throughout the school day” in order to develop a “growth mindset which places more importance on attitude, effort and strategy than on luck, genetics, and socioeconomics.”<sup>11</sup> This is why this unit allows students to make choices of the biographies and autobiographies to read for the unit. If this unit is to help students become responsible, caring people who make good choices, it is the job of the teacher to do more than intellectual development.

### **Strategies and Activities**

The biographies and autobiographies used in this unit should be the choice of the students participating in lessons. A selection of names should be provided to students based on available resources at the school. The biography/ autobiography should be an age appropriate read aloud book for students. Longer chapter books are appropriate to use as well. For the purpose of writing this unit I will select the people to discuss and provide activities for. Each biography or autobiography will contain discussion questions, role-play or movement activities and visual aids, and graphic organizers to address the various learning styles of the students I serve.

The common core curriculum and North Carolina standards addressed in this unit include 1.H.1 Understanding that history tells a story of how people and events changed society over time and RL1.3 Describe characters, setting and major events in a story. Teaching with biographies allows students to see how individuals act and make choices.

Biographies and autobiographies introduce students to a whole new world of historical figures and different areas. Biographies and autobiographies also give students the opportunity to hear about people who have faced obstacles and made choices that influenced their lives in positive ways. According to Wartenberg, our present common core standards “were written with philosophy for children specifically in mind.” The standards include goals for speaking and listening skills that enhance a child’s “natural inquisitiveness.”<sup>13</sup>

To help with visual learners I will also incorporate the use of graphic organizers. Using graphic organizers can also help students construct meaning from the text being read aloud to them. Graphic organizers can empower students’ understanding of the person in the biography or autobiography. Graphic organizers help students organize their thinking and ideas.

Each biography will incorporate activities and discussions of personal values, social values, and civic virtues. Personal values involve one’s own actions. For example, Jackie Robinson could be viewed as weak for choosing to not fight back when he was called names and had items thrown at him. Social values include a person’s actions and attitudes towards others. Jackie Robinson’s attitude of being the first Black major league baseball player was not one of arrogance but one of humility. Finally, civic virtues involve a person’s actions and attitudes in terms of how to act and react within the community. Even though many in the African American community may have viewed Jackie Robinson as a hero and talented baseball player, this is not the view of all Americans at the time. Incorporating lessons, activities and discussions around respect, honesty, responsibility and caring, it is important to examine the perspectives and beliefs of the students being taught. This gives students time to reflect on their own experiences and choices that they make.

Wartenberg believes that children are natural-born philosophers and should be given the “opportunity to discuss philosophical questions.” As teachers, it is our job to “create a classroom that takes account of the innate curiosity of children and the social situation of the classroom in which they find themselves.”<sup>13</sup> Reading biographies and autobiographies can engage students in a discussion of big ideas and allow students to express their opinions and beliefs.

### **Classroom Activities**

What is a biography? Prior to reading and conducting the biography/ autobiography lessons, it is important to instruct students on the characteristics of biographies. A biography is defined as a detailed description of a person’s life. It includes basic facts and experiences of a person’s life. Biographies highlight a person’s personality and choices



throughout their life. Biographies can bring history and people to life and when we find what motivates great people we can understand their actions and their choices.

Why teach with biographies? According to the Indiana Historical Society, biographies illustrate how individuals shape history and history shapes individuals; biographies take personality and character into account; biographies are fascinating and help to counter a Eurocentric view of the past.<sup>14</sup> In addition, biographies encourage students to explore and they incite their natural curiosity. When children can relate to a character they become more interested and motivated.

Educational World “suggests that teaching with biographies brings real life stories into your curriculum.” Most biographies include facts such as date and place of birth (and death, if applicable); major achievements; education; work facts; and an overview of what makes the person significant.<sup>15</sup>

This unit is designed to bring in discussions beyond the basic facts. This unit is designed to look at character traits of respect, honesty, responsibility, and caring when examining the person in the biography. Graphic organizers help to consolidate information and questioning but can also be used to stimulate philosophical discussions about character and choice. According to Wartenberg, there are six rules to engaging in a philosophical discussion. They are: Present a real example of the abstract issue being discussed; State your position on an issue – that is answer a question that has been asked in a clear manner after taking time to think; Support your position with reasons; Figure out if you agree or disagree with what has been said; Present a counterexample to a claim that has been proposed; Put forward a revised version of a claim in light of criticism.<sup>13</sup>

### Biography #1: Wilma Rudolph

Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World’s Fastest Woman by Kathleen Krull and Wilma Rudolph by Eric Braun are biographies about Wilma Rudolph. Wilma Rudolph was unable to walk and was paralyzed with polio then was able to win Olympic Medals for track and field. Wilma Glodean Rudolph was an American athlete and an Olympic champion. Rudolph was considered the fastest woman in the world in the 1960s and competed in two Olympics in 1956 and in 1960.

#### *Discussion questions:*

What was so special about Wilma Rudolph? What are some of the things that Wilma had to overcome? Would you consider Wilma Rudolph a hero? Why? or Why not? Why do you think Wilma was so determined? Why did she try so hard? How did Wilma’s having so many brothers and sisters help her or hurt her? Why did Wilma mail her brace back to the hospital? What words best describe Wilma? Why did you choose those words?

*Role-play and/ or movement activity:*

Wilma Rudolph played basketball and ran track. Students can participate in those sport activities. Another role-play activity may be to tie up one leg for a period of time so students can experience how it feels to walk with a brace.

*Graphic Organizer:*

This graphic organizer will help students focus on the major accomplishments of Wilma Rudolph. Students can tell about her life with polio, her life after she could walk and being an Olympic champion.

The graphic organizer is a rectangular box divided into two rows and three columns. The top row contains three large, empty square boxes. The bottom row contains three smaller, empty rectangular boxes, each with several horizontal lines underneath for writing.

<http://www.netrover.com/~kingskid/graphic/graphic.htm>

*Character traits:*

*Respect:* Respect for her mother who took Wilma to a hospital twice a week over 50 miles away. They rode on a bus. It was the closest hospital that would treat Blacks.

*Honesty:* Wilma had strong faith. She loved going to church and believed in honesty.

*Responsibility:* Wilma was the last runner on her 400-meter relay race team. She was responsible for crossing the finish line first. Her team depended on her. *Caring:* Wilma had 19 older brothers and sisters who watched over her and cared for her.

*Choices:*

Wilma would consistently exercise her paralyzed leg to make it stronger. Wilma worked even harder to walk because they would not let her go to school because she could not work. Wilma's choices changed her life and the life of many people battling polio and similar disabilities.

## Biography #2: Harriet Tubman

[A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman](#) by David A. Adler, [An Apple for Harriet Tubman](#) by Glennette Tilley Turner, [Harriet Tubman: Hero of the Underground Railroad](#) by Lori Mortensen, [I am Harriet Tubman](#) by Grace Norwich are biographies that trace the life of Harriet Tubman, born Araminta Ross, who escaped from slavery to become famous as a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad.

### *Discussion questions:*

Describe Harriet’s life as a slave. What events lead her to choose to escape? What risk and dangers did Harriet face as a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad? Why do you think Harriet took the slave to Canada? How does Harriet know whom to trust along the way? How did the Underground Railroad work? Why do you think Harriet Tubman is called “Moses”? What are some other causes Harriet Tubman fought for during her life?

### *Role-play and movement activity:*

Students can participate in an obstacle or maze course to simulate the risk used by Harriet Tubman to escape from slavery showing the Underground Railroad. Students could also design a quilt pattern used by many during the Underground Railroad journey as a secret code to let slaves know what path to take along the obstacle or maze course.

### *Graphic Organizer:*

This graphic organizer will help students focus on the major accomplishments of Harriet Tubman, her life as a slave, her life as a “conductor” and how they are related to the character traits.

The graphic organizer is titled "Biography Research" and contains the following sections:

- Name: [ ]
- Person's Name: [ ]
- Photo: [ ]
- Early Life: [ ]
- Family Life: [ ]
- Major Accomplishments: [ ]
- Interesting Facts: [ ]

<http://oakdome.com/k5/lesson-plans/internet/common-core-biography-research-graphic-organizer.php>

### *Character traits:*

*Respect:* Harriet Tubman was respected because she was a hard worker. She was often hired out to other plantations. *Honesty:* Harriet Tubman and the slave she brought to freedom had to trust strangers along the Underground Railroad. *Responsibility:* Harriet

felt responsible and obligated to bring her family and many others out of slavery. *Caring*: Harriet Tubman cared so much about her family and other slaves that she kept going back to the south despite the dangers. She was able to save over 300 slaves.

### *Choices*

Harriet Tubman chose to risk her life over and over again for the people she cared about. Harriet Tubman's choice to bring her family and others out of slavery shows the importance of family commitment and caring for others. Harriet Tubman chose to be a spy for the army and she also chose to fight for the right to vote and women's rights.

### Biography # 3: Rosa Parks

I am Rosa Parks by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins, A Picture Book of Rosa Parks by David A. Adler, Rosa Parks: A Life of Courage by Ann-Marie Kishel, *What's So Great about Rosa Parks*, by Jim Whiting, Rosa Parks by Lola Schaefer, Rosa Parks: Civil Rights Pioneer by Eriks Shores, and Rosa Parks by Wil Mara are the stories of Rosa Parks and her participation in the Montgomery Bus Boycott Movement.

### *Discussion questions:*

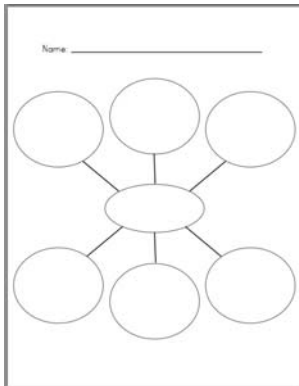
What was a "Jim Crow law"? Why did Rosa refuse to give up her seat on the bus? How did the actions of Rosa Parks help to give Martin Luther King, Jr. his start as a leader in the Civil Rights Movement? How did the bus boycott affect the black community, the white community, and the economy of Montgomery? Do you believe Rosa Parks changed the world? Explain. Why do you think Rosa Parks is called "The Mother of the Civil Rights Movement"?

### *Role-play and movement activity:*

Line up chairs to simulate a bus and role-play the part of the book in which Rosa Parks was asked to move further back on the bus and ended up arrested for refusing to move. Students can also take walks several times a day for a period of time to show how many Blacks walked to and from work for 381 days during the Montgomery Bus Boycott Movement.

### *Graphic Organizer:*

This graphic organizer is a web. Students will put Rosa Parks' name in the center circle and put facts about Rosa Parks in the circles that extend out from her name.



[http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/graphic-organizers/writing-web-4\\_WRWEB.pdf](http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/graphic-organizers/writing-web-4_WRWEB.pdf)

*Character traits:*

*Respect:* People in the community respected Rosa. She was a valued member and she worked for the NAACP. *Honesty:* Rosa was an honest person and respected by her community. She had never been arrested. She served as a great example. This allowed Martin Luther King, Jr. and the NAACP to use her case as an example to justify the Montgomery bus boycott. *Responsibility:* Rosa was responsible for the Montgomery bus boycott. *Caring:* Rosa Parks kept fighting against unfair treatment of African Americans throughout her life.

*Choices*

Rosa chose to stay in her seat and get arrested for a cause.

Biography # 4: Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Clayborne Carson, I Have a Dream by Martin Luther King Jr. with Kadir Nelson, Happy Birthday Martin Luther King by Jean Marzollo and I Am Martin Luther King, Jr. by Grace Norwich are biographies and autobiographies that describe the life accomplishments of the civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr.

*Discussion questions:*

What historic campaign did King lead in Montgomery, Alabama? What were the many jobs of Martin Luther King Jr.? Who is Coretta Scott? What was the civil rights movement's main focus? Dr. King wanted equality for all people, no matter what their

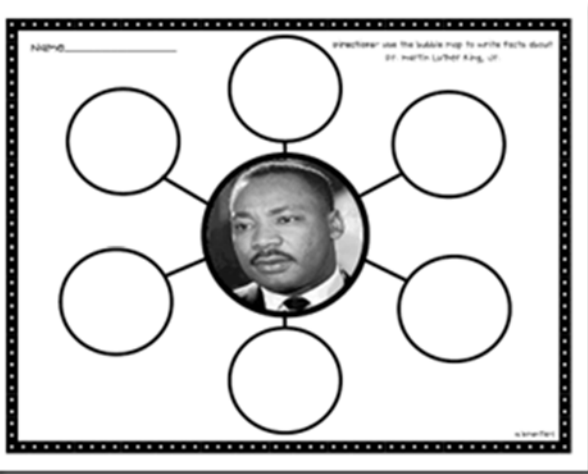
race. What does that mean? What do you think life would be like with no discrimination? Why did Martin Luther King win the Nobel Peace Prize? Discuss the meaning of the I Have a Dream speech.

*Role-play and movement activity:*

Organize and act out a march for a cause that you believe in. Make posters to carry during your march.

*Graphic Organizer:*

This is a web graphic organizer. Students are to tell about the accomplishments of Martin Luther King Jr. in the circles extending out from his photograph.



[www.firstgradefrosting.com](http://www.firstgradefrosting.com)

*Character traits*

*Respect:* Martin Luther King, Jr. was respected by many leaders even the President of the United States. Millions mourned his death. *Honesty:* Martin Luther King, Jr. won the Nobel Peace Prize for his amazing work on peace. He was an honest man. He emphasized the importance of truth in his speeches. *Responsibility:* Martin Luther King, Jr.'s home was bombed, he was sent to jail and but he still preached non-violence and responsibility. *Caring:* Martin Luther King, Jr. fought for the civil rights of all people. He cared.

*Choices:*

Martin Luther King, Jr. elected to give speeches, shared his non-violent beliefs, and conducted marches to inspire a country. We now have a national holiday to honor him.

### Biography # 5: Jackie Robinson

A Picture Book of Jackie Robinson by David A. Adler, Teammates by Peter Golenbock and Paul Bacon and Jackie Robinson: Equal Rights Leaders by Don McLeese are biographies describing the life of baseball player Jackie Robinson.

#### *Discussion questions:*

What is a barrier? How do the additional players of the Brooklyn Dodgers and other members of the league react to Jackie joining the team? How did Jackie Robinson contribute to the game of baseball? What role did he play in helping African Americans to play professional sports? What kind of person do you think Jackie Robinson was? Why do you think so? Have you ever experienced a time when you were afraid to do something but you did it anyway? How did that feel? Why do you think Jackie Robinson did the things he did even though he was scared? Explain this statement, “I want a man with the courage not to fight back.” What did it mean when Pee Wee Reese put his arm around Jackie Robinson in front of a crowd? What did Pee Wee Reese risk?

#### *Role-play and movement activity:*

Jackie Robinson played four sports. Organize a football, baseball or basketball game within the class or have students participate in track and field events.

#### *Graphic Organizer*

This graphic organizer is a KWL Chart. Under the “K” students describe what they already know about Jackie Robinson prior to reading the book. Under the “W” students describe what they want to learn about Jackie Robinson and finally, the “L” has facts learned about Jackie Robinson after reading the books or movie (42) excerpts.

K	W	L

#### *Character traits:*

*Respect:* Jackie Robinson earned respect by playing hard in baseball and not fighting back against people who were cruel to him. Jackie Robinson was a respected athlete. He played baseball, football, basketball, and ran track. *Honesty:* Jackie Robinson was in the

US Army. He was also elected into the baseball Hall of Fame for his honesty and bravery as the first African American to play on a Major League Team. *Responsibility:* Jackie Robinson became the first African American in the major leagues. He had to be brave and not fight back or it would ruin the chances of other African Americans being a part of major league baseball. *Caring:* Jackie Robinson cared about the rights of African Americans. He worked hard to be admitted to officer candidate school in the army. He refused to sit in the back of the bus.

*Choices:*

Jackie Robinson chose to play with the Dodgers. He played four sports and was the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)'s first student to star in four sports. He helped African Americans get admitted to officer candidate school in the US Army. He chose not to fight back when others were cruel to him.

Biography # 6: Barack Obama

Barack Obama United States President by Roberta Edwards, Meet President Barack Obama by Laine Falk, and African American Heroes: Barack Obama by Stephen Feinstein discuss the life of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States of America.

*Discussion questions:*

What obstacles did President Obama face in his childhood, as a man, and as a president? What important decisions has President Obama made? What does "Barack" mean? Who is Michelle Robinson?

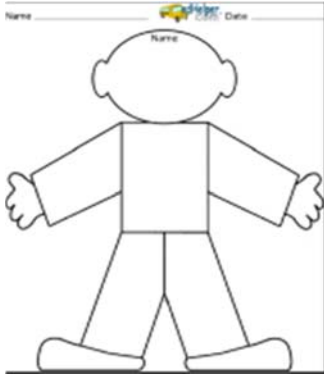
*Role-play and movement activity:*

President Obama fought hard to have the Affordable Health Care Act passed. Start a running club at school; make sure students actively participate in recess everyday.

*Graphic Organizer:*

On this graphic organizer, students are to write words that describe President Obama on his body.





[www.sharemybookswithyou.blogspot.com](http://www.sharemybookswithyou.blogspot.com)

*Character traits:*

*Respect:* Many people respected Barack Obama. He was a senator, a teacher and is the President of the United States. *Honesty:* Barack Obama talks openly and honestly about his life. He lived in Honolulu, Indonesia, Hawaii and Chicago. *Responsibility:* Barack Obama is the first African American President of the United States of America. This is a big responsibility. He helps make laws and to keep our country safe. *Caring:* Barack Obama spoke out against unfair practices. He cared about poor people. He helped people in Chicago gain better housing and health care. He has a loving wife and family. He won the Nobel Peace Prize.

*Choices:*

Barack Obama chose to work hard in school at Harvard Law School. He made very important speeches sharing his beliefs. He chose to run for President of the United States and won two terms.

Biography # 7: Michelle Obama

Who is Michelle Obama by Megan Stine and I am Michelle Obama: The First Lady by Margina Graham Parker tell of Michelle Robinson's life as a young girl and her accomplishments during her time as First Lady of the United States.

*Discussion questions:*

Who is Michelle Obama? What was her childhood like? What things did Michelle like to do? What jobs or careers has Michelle Obama held? What are the duties of the First Lady of the United States of America? What are some of Michelle Obama's beliefs?

*Role-play and movement activity:*

Michelle Obama is an advocate for health, living and exercise for everyone. Visit *Michelle Obama's Lets Move* website and do some of the physical activities. <http://www.letsmove.gov/>.

*Graphic Organizer:* On the graphic organizer students would conduct research on Michelle Obama.

The graphic organizer is a rectangular box with a double-line border. At the top, it has a small box for 'Name'. Below that is a larger box for 'Biography Research'. Underneath are two boxes: 'Person's Name' and 'Picture'. Below these are three boxes: 'Early Life' (a rounded rectangle), 'Family Life' (an oval), and 'Major Accomplishments' (a rectangle). At the bottom is a wide box for 'Interesting Facts'.

<http://oakdome.com/k5/lesson-plans/internet/common-core-biography-research-graphic-organizer.php>

*Character traits:*

*Respect:* Michelle Obama is respected as our First Lady. *Honesty:* Michelle Obama is a well-educated and honest person. *Responsibility:* It is a big responsibility being the First Lady of the United States. *Caring:* Michelle Obama works with programs that support our veterans and with program that keep kids healthy.

*Choices:*

Michelle Obama chose to work hard at school. She became a successful professional. As First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama makes lots of choices. She gives speeches that give hope to others.

Biography # 8: Ruby Bridges

*The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles and George Ford, *Ruby Bridges* by Ruby Bridges and Grace Maccarone and *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges tell the story of a young black girl integrating an all white public school in Louisiana. Ruby Bridges showed a lot of courage.

*Discussion questions:*

What is segregation? Why did Ruby have to desegregate the school by herself? How do you think Ruby felt in school? Was what happened to Ruby fair? Why or Why not? What was kindergarten like for Ruby? How was first grade different for Ruby? Why does Ruby

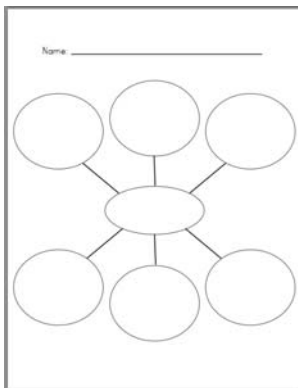
describe her first day of school at William Frantz? How did the actions of Ruby Bridges and her family shape our history?

*Role-play and movement activity:*

Role-play the scene where Ruby has to enter school through an angry crowd. Ask students to discuss how they felt as Ruby, as the angry crowd, as the United States Marshalls.

*Graphic Organizer:*

On this graphic organizer, students will list the impact of Ruby Bridges' decisions, choices, and actions.



[http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/graphic-organizers/writing-web-4\\_WRWEB.pdf](http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/graphic-organizers/writing-web-4_WRWEB.pdf)

*Character traits:*

*Respect:* Ruby Bridges remained respectful to others even when others treated her badly. *Honesty:* Ruby shared her honest feelings in her autobiographies. *Responsibility:* Ruby went to school everyday even when others were mean to her. She did her work and made good grades. She was responsible. *Caring:* Ruby's family, the NAACP, and others cared about Ruby. They wanted her to be safe.

*Choices:*

Ruby and her family made the choice to desegregate an all white school in Louisiana. That choice affected a society.

## **Conclusion**

Incorporating my study of working with students of poverty to assist them with character traits of honesty, respect, responsibility and caring is my goal for this curriculum unit. I work at a Title 1 school and Project L.I.F.T school. The students at my school tend to react quickly when making decisions without fully thinking about the impact of their choices. Many of my students tend to be disorganized, struggle with reasoning skills and simply make inappropriate choices. The lessons are designed to have students examine choices by others to help them in their character development. The lessons are designed to teach students how to be respectful, honest, responsible and caring when making choices.

## **Appendix 1**

The common core curriculum and North Carolina standards addressed in this unit includes:

1.H.1 Understanding that history tells a story of how people and events changed society over time.

RL1.3 Describe characters, setting and major events in a story.

## **Materials for Classroom Use**

Graphic Organizer Websites

<http://www.netrover.com/~kingskid/graphic/graphic.htm>

<http://oakdome.com/k5/lesson-plans/internet/common-core-biography-research-graphic-organizer.php>

[http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/graphic-organizers/writing-web-4\\_WRWEB.pdf](http://www.superteacherworksheets.com/graphic-organizers/writing-web-4_WRWEB.pdf)

[www.firstgradefrosting.com](http://www.firstgradefrosting.com)

[www.sharemybookswithyou.blogspot.com](http://www.sharemybookswithyou.blogspot.com)

## **Reading List for Students**

Helen Keller: Courageous Advocate by Scott R. Welvaert

Oprah: The Little Speaker by Carole Boston Weatherford

African American Heroes: Colin Powell by Stephen Feinstein

Colin Powell by Wil Mara

Marian Anderson by Eric Braun

George Washington Carver: Teacher, Scientist, and Inventor by Lori Mortensen

Carter G. Woodson: The Father of Black History by Patricia and Fredrick McKissack

Langston Hughes: Great American Writer by B. A. Hoena  
Langston Hughes: Great American Poet by Patricia and Fredrick McKissack  
Booker T. Washington by Lola M. Schaefer  
Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer by Judy Monroe  
Thurgood Marshall: Civil Rights Champion by Judy Monroe  
Amelia Earhart by Marilyn Rosenthal and Daniel Freeman  
George Washington Carver: Scientist and Inventor by Judy Monroe  
Madam C.J. Walker by Katie Marsico  
Mary McLeod Bethune: Empowering Educators by Lissa Johnston  
Dream Big: American Idol Superstars: Jennifer Hudson by Gail Snyder

### **Annotated Bibliography for Teachers**

Adler, David A., and Samuel Byrd. *A Picture Book of Harriet Tubman*. New York, NY: Holiday House, 1992. This biography tells about the life of Harriet Tubman.

Adler, David A., and Robert Casilla. *A Picture Book of Rosa Parks*. New York: Holiday House, 1993. This is a picture book about the life of Rosa Parks.

Adler, David A., and Robert Casilla. *A Picture Book of Jackie Robinson*. New York: Holiday House, 1994. This is a picture book about the life of Jackie Robinson.

Aristotle. "The Internet Classics Archive | Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle." The Internet Classics Archive | Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle. Accessed November 19, 2014. This document was our first class reading and discusses what a choice is and what it means for it to be voluntary and worthy of praise or blame.

Battistich, Victor. "Character Education, Prevention, and Positive Youth Development." Character Education, Prevention, and Positive Youth Development. Accessed November 19, 2014. The author describes the goals of character education in this article.

Braun, Eric. *Wilma Rudolph*. Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2006. This is a biography about the life of Wilma Rudolph. It is a part of the First Biographies Pebble series.

Bridges, Ruby. *Through My Eyes*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999. This is an autobiography about the life of Ruby Bridges. It has actual photograph of how life was as she integrated an all white school in Louisiana.

Bridges, Ruby, and Grace MacCarone. *Let's Read About-- Ruby Bridges*. New York: Scholastic, 2003. This biography of Ruby Bridges is part of the Scholastic First Biographies.

"Building on Biographies -- Bringing Real-Life Stories Into Your Curriculum!" Education World: November 18, 2014. Accessed November 19, 2014. This article gives tips for teaching with biographies.

Charney, Ruth. *Teaching Children to Care: Management in the Responsive Classroom*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children, 1992. This is a book for teachers. It shares a classroom management approach.

Coles, Robert, and George Ford. *The Story of Ruby Bridges*. New York: Scholastic, 1995. This is a biography about the life of Ruby Bridges.

Curwin, Richard L., and Allen N. Mendler. *Discipline with Dignity New Challenges, New Solutions*. 3rd ed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2008. This is a book for teachers describing a classroom management approach.

Dill, Margo. "Make Learning Active for Tactile Learners." Bright Hub Education. February 8, 2012. Accessed November 19, 2014. This article reviews reading and learning strategies for tactile learners.

Edwards, Roberta. *Who Is Barack Obama?* New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 2010. This is a chapter book about the life of our President, Barack Obama.

Gajowski, Carrie. "Teaching with Poverty in Mind: How to Help At-Risk Students Succeed." Scientific Learning. April 24, 2012. Accessed November 19, 2014. <http://www.scilearn.com/blog/how-to-help-at-risk-students-succeed>. This article examines the work of Eric Jensen.

Golenbock, Peter, and Paul Bacon. *Teammates*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990. This is a biography about Jackie Robinson. This book also tells about the relationship between Jackie Robinson and his teammate, Pee Wee Reese.

Hedeen, Jane. "Teaching with Biographies." Indiana Historical Society. Accessed November 19, 2014. [http://www.indianahistory.org/teachers-students/teacher-resources/classroom-tools/Why\\_Teach\\_with\\_Biographies.pdf](http://www.indianahistory.org/teachers-students/teacher-resources/classroom-tools/Why_Teach_with_Biographies.pdf). This article is a teacher resource for teaching with biographies

Jensen, Eric. *Teaching with Poverty in Mind What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do about It*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009. This book discusses how schools can improve the academic success of students who live in poverty.

King, Martin Luther, and Clayborne Carson. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Intellectual Properties Management in Association with Warner Books, 1998. This is the story of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.

King, Martin Luther, and Kadir Nelson. *I Have a Dream*. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books, 2012. This is an autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Kishel, Ann. *Rosa Parks: A Life of Courage*. Minneapolis: Lerner, 2006. This is a biography of Rosa Parks describing with actual photographs the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Krull, Kathleen, and David Diaz. *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the World's Fastest Woman*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1996. This book is about the struggles of Wilma Rudolph. It tells about her childhood, having polio and then becoming an Olympic champion.

Marzollo, Jean, and J. Brian Pinkney. *Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King*. New York: Scholastic, 1993. This biography talks about the life of Martin Luther King.

McLeese, Don. *Jackie Robinson [pbk]*. Vero Beach, Fla.: Rourke Pub., 2003. This biography tells about Jackie Robinson's life as a boy, in the army, as a college student and as the first African American Major League baseball player.

Mortensen, Lori, and Frances Moore. *Harriet Tubman: Hero of the Underground Railroad*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Picture Window Books, 2007. This biography tells of Harriet Tubman's life as a slave, as the conductor, as a spy for the army and as a helper for homeless African American people.

Norwich, Grace, and Ute Simon. *I Am Harriet Tubman*. This is a chapter book about the life of Harriet Tubman. This is a great read aloud for young children.

Norwich, Grace, and Mark Fredrickson. *I Am Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Scholastic, 2012. This is a chapter book about the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a great read aloud for young children.

Parker, Margina Graham, and Marco Birge. *I Am Michelle Obama: The First Lady*. Tucker, GA: Tumaini Pub. 2009. This is a biography about the life of First Lady, Michelle Obama.

Parks, Rosa, and James Haskins. *I Am Rosa Parks*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1997. This is an autobiography of the life of Rosa Parks. This is a chapter book.

Payne, Ruby K. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. 4th Rev. ed. Highlands, Tex.: Aha! Process, 2005. This book includes a collection of resources and articles by Ruby Payne.

Sato, Mistilina. "Poverty and Payne Supporting Teachers to Work with Children of Poverty." *Poverty and Payne Supporting Teachers to Work with Children of Poverty*. January 1, 2009. Accessed November 19, 2014. This article explores the work of Ruby Payne. It prepares teachers to support students who live in poverty.

Schaefer, Lola M. *Rosa Parks*. Mankato, MN: Pebble Books, 2002. This biography of Rosa Parks has photographs taken during her time in history.

Shores, Erika L. *Rosa Parks: Civil Rights Pioneer*. Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2005. This biography of Rosa Parks contains several quotes throughout the book.

"Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged." Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged. Accessed November 19, 2014. This is the Title 1 law.

Tough, Paul. *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012. This book discusses the importance of teaching character in schools.

Turner, Glennette Tilley, and Susan Keeter. *An Apple for Harriet Tubman*. Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman, 2006. This biography tells about the life of Harriet Tubman as the great "conductor" of the Underground Railroad.

Udall, Anne J., and Joan Daniels. *Creating Active Thinkers: 9 Strategies for a Thoughtful Classroom*. Tucson, Ariz.: Zephyr Press, 1991. This is a book for teachers with ideas on how to get students to think.



Wartenberg, Thomas E. *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009. This book provides an approach to teaching philosophy to young children.

Whiting, Jim. *What's So Great About...? Rosa Parks*. Hockessin: Michell Lane Publishers, 2008.

This biography of Rosa Parks includes chapters about her life after the arrest up to sharing the spotlight with President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore.

Wil, Mara. *Rosa Parks*. Cambridge: Children's Press, 2007. This biography is about the life of Rosa Parks and her life in Montgomery, Alabama.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle. "The Internet Classics Archive | Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle." The Internet Classics Archive Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle. Accessed November 19, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Jensen, Eric. *Teaching with Poverty in Mind What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do about It*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Dill, Margo. "Make Learning Active for Tactile Learners." Bright Hub Education. February 8, 2012. Accessed November 19, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Payne, Ruby K. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. 4th Rev. ed. Highlands, Tex.: Aha! Process, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Battistich, Victor. "Character Education, Prevention, and Positive Youth Development." Character Education, Prevention, and Positive Youth Development. Accessed November 19, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Charney, Ruth. *Teaching Children to Care: Management in the Responsive Classroom*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> North Carolina Standard Course of Study: Social Studies and Common Core Curriculum: Literacy.

<sup>8</sup> Tough, Paul. *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Curwin, Richard L., and Allen N. Mendler. *Discipline with Dignity New Challenges, New Solutions*. 3rd ed. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> "Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged." Title I - Improving The Academic Achievement Of The Disadvantaged. Accessed November 19, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Gajowski, Carrie. "Teaching with Poverty in Mind: How to Help At-Risk Students Succeed." *Scientific Learning*. April 24, 2012. Accessed November 19, 2014. <http://www.scilearn.com/blog/how-to-help-at-risk-students-succeed>.

<sup>12</sup> Sato, Mistilina. "Poverty and Payne Supporting Teachers to Work with Children of Poverty." *Poverty and Payne Supporting Teachers to Work with Children of Poverty*. January 1, 2009. Accessed November 19, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Wartenberg, Thomas E. *Big Ideas for Little Kids: Teaching Philosophy through Children's Literature*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Hedeem, Jane. "Teaching with Biographies." *Indiana Historical Society*. Accessed November 19, 2014. <http://www.indianahistory.org/teachers-students/teacher-resources/classroom-tools/Why Teach with Biographies.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> "Building on Biographies -- Bringing Real-Life Stories Into Your Curriculum!" *Education World*:. November 18, 2014. Accessed November 19, 2014.