

# The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963

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## How Should I Prepare My Students for a Trip to the Theater?

Being in a live performance is very different than seeing a movie in a movie theater or at home. The setting is much quieter and noises created by viewers can interrupt the show and distract the performers. Remember, that real people are on stage and they deserve your respect while they perform.

Here are some basic guidelines and rules to attending live theater:

- No talking. Even whispers can be quite loud in a quiet room.
- If you have a cell phone, it must be turned off AND put away during the show. The light can distract performers.
- Keep bags, feet and bodies out of the aisles. Sometimes actors walk through them during shows.
- Do not put your feet on the chairs in front of you or sit on your feet in the seats.
- No food or drinks are allowed in the theater.
- Cover your mouth for yawns, coughs or other noises.
- If you think something is funny, feel free to laugh. The actors are energized by interaction from the audience.
- Don't stand up or switch seats during the performance.
- Use the restroom and get comfortable before the show starts.

Main  
Street  
Theater  
Theater for Youth  
Study Guide

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### Who is Christopher Paul Curtis?

The second oldest of five siblings, Christopher was born and raised in Flint, Michigan which has been used as a prominent setting in several stories including *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* and *Bucking the Sarge*. Graduating from Flint Southwestern High School, Christopher immediately did two things: 1) enrolled at Flint's University of Michigan and 2) applied for a job at Fisher Body Plant No. 1, a General Motors assembly facility. This was extremely typical for many young adults. Most blue-collar jobs, particularly in the "Jungle" where Christopher worked, were often heavy-duty, hard-working tasks, requiring minimal educational skills at best. The pay and benefits couldn't be beat, so for high school graduates that wanted a significant income right out of school, General Motors was the ticket.

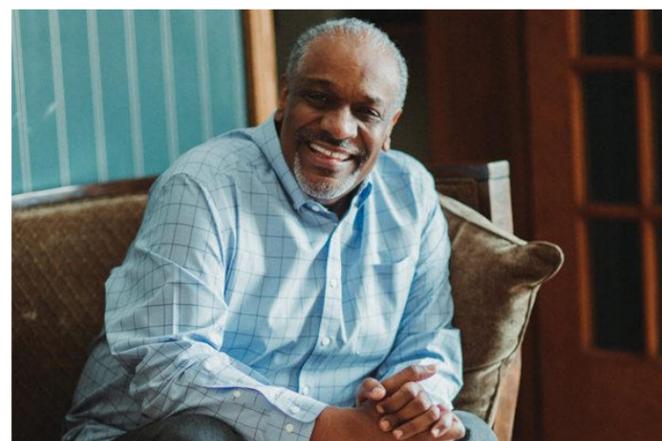
Of all the various departments one could work, the "Jungle" was easily one of the worst. The Jungle was where the manufacturing process began, various sizes and shapes of metal being welded together at sequential work stations that eventually became the body frame of the automobile. With all the large welding equipment hanging from the ceiling like Amazon liana branches, as well as pneumatic, electrical and other connections running to and from all the robotic welding arms gave the area the appearance of a mechanical jungle. In addition, the scent of oil, grease and lingering smoke from the welding guns only added to the metallic ambience.

Once the car's basic skeletal frame was established, one of the first things to get added

were the doors. This was Christopher's work station. During the 70s, Fisher Body produced three models—the Electra 225 (also known as a "deuce and a quarter"), LaSabre and Riviera—all very big and extremely heavy vehicles. Very little plastic was used; the cars were made of mostly metal. Because the doors were so big and quite heavy, the company set the job up for two men to alternate installing the doors on every other car coming down the assembly line. This went on each night for eight or more hours, about 60 cars per hour.

Christopher and his coworker decided that instead of working every other car, they would work every 30 minutes. This allowed Christopher time to do other things – besides reading novels (one of his great passions), he began writing to overcome the boredom. Some of the writings were letters; others were sketches of stories that, like his character Bud Caldwell (*Bud, Not Buddy*), began the colorful sojourn which led him to become one of America's leading authors of children's literature.

Christopher currently lives in Detroit, Michigan and in his free time still enjoys reading, playing basketball and collecting music.



### What is the Book/Play About?

The everyday routines and lifestyle of the Watsons, an African American family living in Flint, Michigan, are irrevocably changed after they decide to visit their grandma in Alabama in the sixties.

The character of Kenny Watson, a smart, thoughtful and impressionable 10-year-old, tells the story. Kenny brings his family—Momma, Dad, little sister Joetta, and Byron, his 13-year-old "official juvenile delinquent" brother—to life as he walks us through some of their hilarious escapades.

The Watsons set out for Birmingham for the main reason of dropping off Byron for the summer at his Grandma's house so that she can put some sense into him. It's 1963 and things in Birmingham are nothing like they are in Flint. The Watsons soon find themselves embroiled in the ugliness, violence and hatred brewing in Alabama. Ultimately, the trip changes the lives of the Watsons, especially Kenny and Byron, forever.

This powerful story is comical, yet tragic at the same time. In the end Kenny finally understands what he needs to do in order to develop the strength to deal with the challenges he and his family face, and where these strengths can be found. They are inside him.

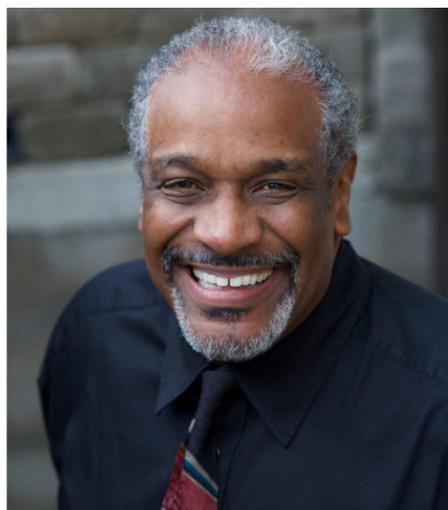
### History of the Play

Main Street Youth Theater's current production of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* is not their first. In 2008, they performed the regional premiere. This script had just been written by Reggie Jackson and performed for the first time at First Stage Children's Theater in January of 2008—just a few days before MST's first production opened.

Mr. Curtis liked Reggie's adaptation of *Bud, Not Buddy* so he asked him to do a stage adaptation of *Watsons* too.

The book and the play are a fictional account of the events around the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing. The events did not happen exactly the way they are presented in the book and play.

The play, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* is really a story about a family and their trials of living in the middle of the civil rights movement.



Shannon Maughan from Kids Reads interviewed Christopher Paul Curtis in the year 2000. He spoke with Mr. Curtis about his family, his work and what inspires him to write. Here's what he had to say:

**Q: When did you first know you wanted to be a writer?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* I've always loved writing, but I never thought I could make a living at it. About six or seven years ago, my wife knew I was unhappy with my job and she told me that I should take time to do what I really wanted -- to write.

**Q: Where do you find the ideas for your books?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* The idea for *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* came from a trip I took with my own family several years ago. We were driving from Michigan to Florida and I wanted to do it in 24 hours. I just said "I'm not stopping!" To keep myself awake, I started thinking about this family [who later became the Weird Watsons of Flint]. Once I got back home from the Florida

trip, I wrote a story about the Watsons driving to Florida. But once I got the characters to Florida, the story just kind of died. I got some fresh inspiration when my son brought home a school assignment to read the poem "The Ballad of Birmingham" by Dudley Randall, about the church bombing in that city during the civil rights movement. After that I knew the Watsons wanted to go to Birmingham instead. Writers have to have really good ears and really good eyes. Ideas come from everywhere—sometimes from everyday conversations. They start really small and they grow, like planting a seed.

**Q: Have you used experiences from your own life in your novels?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* Yes. For me it's an important part of writing. I think it makes your writing more immediate and more believable. There's a truth in it. When you have autobiographical touches in the story it's just more interesting to read.

[Kids Reads note: In *Bud, Not Buddy*, you'll find a really terrific afterword (with photos) from the author about his real-life grandfathers—orchestra leader Herman F. Curtis, Sr., and railroad redcap and Negro League pitcher Earl "Lefty" Lewis—who inspired the characters in the book.]

**Q: Both of your books are set in the past. What kind of research did you do before writing them?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* For *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, I relied on my memories. I was around Kenny's age in 1963 and I had an idea of what was going on then and how

people were feeling. But my first-ever trip south was the drive to Florida.

The setting for *Bud, Not Buddy* was well before I was born. I did research on how kids spoke then, what life was like during the Depression. I read tons of old books, magazines and newspapers in the library.

Each different era has a feel to it and you just have to find it. I try to imagine what other people's lives were like. It's been fun to imagine what my grandparents were like back then. When I was a kid, I didn't want to listen to their stories, which is a shame. I have a riot when I write. I laugh. If I knew it was this much fun, I would have started when I was four. I love it.

**Q: What is a typical day like for you?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* I've been writing full-time since about 1996. On a typical day I wake up at 5 AM (I worked in a factory for 13 years and can't break the habit!). I edit and do rewriting for awhile. I go to the library at 9 AM and do some new writing (I write everything out longhand first). Then I go play basketball and work out for an hour or so. After that I head home to meet my daughter Cydney (who's in third grade) after school, and I help around the house.

My son isn't at home anymore; he's in the Navy now, but he was the first person to read my drafts of *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* and he was very helpful. It's hard to find someone to give your stuff to. He typed a lot while I was working on the book. Cydney has been a big help, too. She even wrote one of the songs I used in *Bud, Not Buddy*.

**Q: What are you working on now?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* I'm working on two books right now, both for Delacorte. One is a contemporary novel for older kids. It's about a 15-year-old boy from Flint whose mother owns a bunch of rental properties. The other book (for 8- to 10-year-olds) is called *Mr. Chicky's Funny Money*, about a kid who gets an unusual gift—a quadrillion dollar bill. A third book might be a sequel to *Bud, Not Buddy*, but I'm not sure yet.

**Q: Do you enjoy going out to meet the kids who read your books?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* I did a book tour in November and December (1999) that included 40 presentations to schools in Houston, so I'm kind of traveled out right now. But it's important to get out and meet the kids. It's helpful on a personal level. It keeps you in touch, lets you see what they are thinking and feeling.

**Q: What kind of advice do you like to give about writing?**

*Christopher Paul Curtis:* Writing is not magical; it's not mystical. Keep it fun. You're in control—you create people and places, you're like a little god when you write. Like anything else in life, if you're serious about it, do it everyday. Stay in practice. At first it seems hard, but your mind is so fantastic, it learns how to make it easier. And remember that when you write about your family, what you know, it just has more truth -- it sounds believable.

## The Watson Family

### **KENNY**

- Narrator of the story
- Middle sibling
- Gets picked on
- Smart – Teachers have him read to older students as an example.
- Outsider – not many friends (must give up dinosaurs to play with LJ Jones)

### **BYRON**

- Oldest sibling
- 13 years old
- Juvenile delinquent
- Likes to bully Kevin
- Proud of his family, but has a difficult time expressing it

### **JOEY**

- Youngest sibling
- Gullible – believes Byron’s tall tales

### **WILONA**

- Mother of three (married to Daniel)
- Caring
- Born in Birmingham, Alabama
- Doesn’t like the cold
- Thinks people are friendlier in Birmingham

### **DANIEL**

- Father of three (married to Wilona)
- Jokester – likes to make his family laugh
- Likes to perform for the family

## Who Said It?

Have your students figure out which character said the following quotations.

1. “It could maybe have started before this, but it for sure started with my brother Byron, who was bad weather all by his self.” **KENNY**
2. “I guess this means no one can call you Hot Lips.” **DANIEL**
3. “Wait a minute! I know what this mean- we on welfare, ain’t we?” **BYRON**
4. “Look at your weird Watsons doing their Mummy imitations.” **BUPHEAD**
5. “You can take one of momma’s throat-choking peanut butter sandwiches. And I guess you can have the last half of my apple.” **KENNY**
6. “Bang! Squirrel stew tonight!” **CODY**
7. “No, Mommy. Go ahead: burn him up, don’t burn him too bad, O.K.? Please!” **JOETTA**
8. “Is this straight mess more attractive than your own hair? Did those chemicals give you better looking hair then me and your daddy and God gave you?” **WILONA**
9. “Aww, man this is too, too hip! Speedy don’t even have one of these in his Cadillac!” **BYRON**
10. “I seen pictures of a bunch of really mad white people with twisted-up faces screaming and giving dirty finger signs to some little Negro kids trying to go to school.” **KENNY**
11. “You like those, huh? Better get used to those, Byron, that’s an outhouse and that’s what Grandma Sands has.” **DANIEL**
12. “Do you think that bird wanted to be kilt?” **GRANDMA SANDS**
13. “There are boys and girls your age, Byron, who will be marchin’ in the streets this week, right into the heart of the mobs what’s been killin’ they folks. And they won’t be armed with knives or guns, but with faith. Why? Because they believe in the people who would do the hurtin’.” **GRANDMA SANDS**
14. “A guy came by and said somebody dropped a bomb on Joey’s church.” **DANIEL**
15. “Shut up and listen. Ain’t no genies in the world, ain’t no magical powers, ain’t no angels. How can you believe in genies behind a couch but not believe it was a part of you that took Joey out of that church?...If you hadn’t been born who would’a gone in to see if Joey was really in there? You was the only one brave enough to go in there.” **BYRON**

(Source: First Stage Children’s Theatre)

### Setting: Flint, Michigan & Birmingham, Alabama

Have your students locate Flint and Birmingham on a map. Have them map out the route on I-75 that the Watson's may have taken on their trip to see Grandma Sands. Ask your students what its like to take a road trip with their family. What do they like to do while riding in the car? Where do they stop? Do they camp? Stay in a hotel or motel? Do they pack their own food or do they stop at restaurants? How is that different or similar to the way that the Watson's traveled in a segregated country?

### Time Period: 1963

Discuss 1963. What music was popular at the time? How were people listening to music at that time since MP3 players and IPOD's didn't exist? How were the popular musicians? What about movies and TV? What were the culture and the fad of the times? History mentions the segregation of lunch counters? What were lunch counters? Do we have something similar to that now?

### Themes: Racism/Prejudice/Discrimination; Friendship/Family; Loss

Racism, prejudice, and discrimination are the central theme in the book. The most obvious effect is the bomb that goes off in the church. More subtle effects include the cruel treatment that Rufus receives from other schoolchildren in Flint, and the fear that the Watson family feels as they drive further south, knowing that they cannot simply stop at a motel and expect to be welcome.

Friendship and family are another central theme. Families support one another especially in difficult times. Kenny and Byron have their share of fights, but when Kenny needs help most, Byron is there to save him from drowning and to help him overcome the trauma of the bombing. Momma and Dad make their children feel loved and cared for, even though their relationship with Byron is difficult at times.

Finally, the book deals with grieving and how different people deal with trauma and loss. While eavesdropping on his parents' conversations after the bombing, Kenny notes that sometimes they talk about the event angrily, and sometimes they just cry. Kenny is unable to talk about what happened for a long time and simply hides from his family. When at last he allows his pain, confusion, and guilt to emerge, his brother helps him move past the trauma and return to a normal life.

*(Source: Planet Book Club.Com)*

### I Remember When...

Kenny tells some entertaining stories about growing up with Byron. Write a short story less than a page long about Byron from Kenny's point of view. (Remember: Kenny is ten years old, and he is good at including dialogue. Try to make your "Kenny" like the "Kenny" in the novel.) After you finish, read your story to a group of classmates. If several students in your class work on this activity, you might gather the stories into a class anthology.

Alternately, have students attempt to write their own stories by sharing anecdotes. See if they can mimic the writing style.

The **16th Street Baptist Church bombing** was a racially motivated terrorist incident in September 1963 by members of the Ku Klux Klan in Birmingham, Alabama, in the United States. Bombing of the black church resulted in the deaths of four girls. It marked a turning-point in the U.S. civil-rights movement of the mid-20th century and contributed to support for passage of civil rights legislation in 1964.



### Aftermath of the Bombing

The attack was intended to instill fear among African Americans who had been demonstrating for an end to segregation and to disrupt court-ordered integration of public schools. Instead, the bombing caused public outrage and helped build support for civil rights legislation by the Kennedy Administration.

The three-story Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was a rallying point for civil-rights

activities through the spring of 1963. The demonstrations led to an agreement in May between the city's white leaders and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to integrate public facilities in the city.

The Ku Klux Klan groups did not agree with the plan to end segregation.

In the early morning of Sunday, September 15, 1963, Bobby Frank Cherry, Thomas Blanton and Robert "Dynamite Bob" Chambliss, members of United Klans of America, a Ku Klux Klan group, planted 19 sticks of dynamite with a delayed-time release outside the basement of the church. At about 10:25 a.m., when 26 children were walking into the basement assembly room for closing prayers after a sermon entitled "The Love That Forgives," the bombs exploded. Four girls—Addie Mae Collins (aged 15), **Denise McNair** (11), **Carole Robertson** (14), and **Cynthia Wesley** (14)—were killed in the blast, and 22 more were injured.

The explosion blew a hole in the church's rear wall, destroyed the back steps, and left intact only the frames of all but one stained-glass window. The lone window that survived the concussion was one in which Jesus Christ was depicted leading young children, although Christ's face was destroyed. In addition, five cars behind the church were damaged, two of them completely destroyed, while windows in the laundry across the street were blown out.



### The Victims

Born November 17, 1951, **Denise McNair** was the first child of photo shop owner Chris and schoolteacher Maxine McNair. Her playmates called her Niece. A pupil at Center Street Elementary School, she had many friends. She held tea parties, was a member of the Brownies, and played baseball. She helped raise money to support muscular dystrophy by creating plays, dance routines, and poetry readings. These events became an annual event. People gathered in the yard to watch the show in Denise's carport, the main stage. Children donated their pennies, dimes, and nickels. Denise was a schoolmate and friend of former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Born April 30, 1949, **Cynthia Wesley** was the first adopted daughter of Claude and

Gertrude Wesley, who were both teachers. Her mother made her clothes because of her petite size. Cynthia went to school at Ullman High School, which no longer exists. She excelled in math, reading, and band. Cynthia held parties in her backyard for all her friends. Upon Cynthia's death she was so mutilated the only way to identify her was by the ring she wore, which was recognized by her father.

**Carole Robertson** was born April 24, 1949. She was the third child of Alpha and Alvin Robertson. Her sister was Dianne and her brother was Alvin. Her father was a band master at the local elementary school. Her mother was a librarian, avid reader, dancer, and clarinet player. Carole, like her mother, enjoyed reading. She excelled at school and was a straight-A student, a member of Parker High School marching band and science club. She was also a Girl Scout and belonged to Jack and Jill of America. When she was at Wilkerson Elementary School she sang in the choir. Her legacy helped create the Carole Robertson Center for Learning in Chicago, a social service agency that serves children and their families.

**Addie Mae Collins** was born April 18, 1948, the daughter of Oscar and Alice. Her father was a janitor and her mother a homemaker. She was one of seven children. Addie was the peacemaker between the bunch. She was also an avid softball player. A youth center dedicated to Addie and her ideals was created in Birmingham.

*(Source: Wikipedia)*

### Create a Timeline

The **civil rights movement** was at the top of the news. Although the Civil Rights Bill of 1957 was meant to create equality through the races by making voting blocks illegal, there was still much inequality. In 1963 many participated in The March of Washington.

**Martin Luther King Jr.** led a peaceful protest called "**The March on Washington.**" More than 200,000 people attended and heard his infamous "I have a dream..." speech.



The **Vietnam war** was in full swing. The war lasted from 1955-1975. Over 58,000 people died.

**President John F. Kennedy** was one of the most popular presidents in United States history. He was dedicated to peace and equality. He established the organization the Peace Corps. He also supported the NASA program and stated the goal of landing a man on the moon before 1970.



On November 22, 1963 President John F. Kennedy Jr. was assassinated while riding in a car in a parade in Dallas, TX. Kennedy was the fourth president to be assassinated during his term in office.

The **Mercury Atlas 9** rocket launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida. It was the first manned space mission.



### Famous Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement

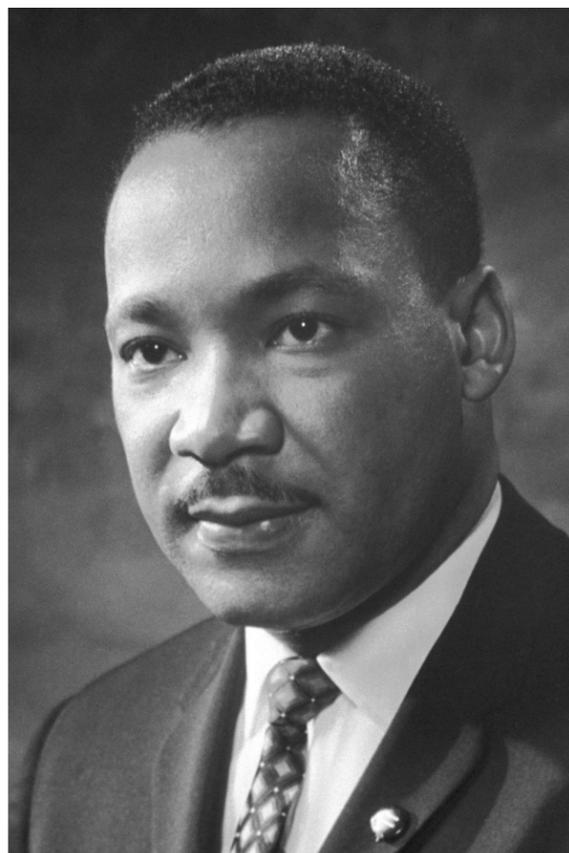
Have your students choose a famous civil rights leader. Some suggestions are below. Have them research their lives and find out who they were, what they are known for and what change they effected in history. Encourage them to use historical books, biographies, photos and newspaper clippings as well as the internet to do their research. Have them interview family and friends who lived during the time period. Get their perspective on the events. Have them put together a presentation based on their research including photos and video if possible.



- Medgar Evers*
- Jesse Jackson*
- Martin Luther King, Jr.*
- Rosa Parks*
- John F. Kennedy*
- Malcolm X*

### Did You Know? In 1963...

- U.S. Postal rates go up to five cents for the first ounce.
- AT&T introduces touch-tone telephones.
- Dr. Michael DeBakey uses an artificial heart to take over the functions of the heart during surgery.
- The Supreme Court rules that reading verses from the Bible in public schools is unconstitutional.
- President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas; two days later, his accused killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, is shot and killed by Jack Ruby.
- The Academy award for Best Picture goes to "Tom Jones."
- Alcatraz Island Prison is closed.
- Coca-Cola introduces Tab.
- Zip codes are introduced in the US.
- The cassette deck is introduced.



The Text of  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s  
“I Have a Dream” Speech  
August 28, 1963

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon of hope to millions of Negro slaves, who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long

night of their captivity. But one hundred years later, the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacle of segregation and the chains of discrimination.

One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have come to our Nation's Capital to cash a check. When the architects of our great republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed to the inalienable rights of life liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check that has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. So we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is not time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy.

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.

Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.

Now is the time to make justice a reality to all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment and to underestimate the determination of its colored citizens. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual.

There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process

of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds.

Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must ever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. They have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom. We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities.

We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one.

We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and

## "I Have a Dream..."

robbed of their dignity by signs stating "for white only."

We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote.

No, no we are not satisfied and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of your trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by storms of persecutions and staggered by the winds of police brutality.

You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our modern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. I say to you today, my friends, that even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow. I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal.



## "I Have a Dream..."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification; that one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted and every hill and every mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains and the crooked places will be made straight and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I will go back to the South with. With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope.

With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to climb up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my father's died, land of the Pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring!"

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. So let freedom ring from the hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that, let freedom, ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi and every mountainside.

And when this happens, when we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every tenement and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old spiritual, "Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."

## Write a Song

The Watsons love music, so write a song about one of the events in the story. You can use the tune of a song that you know, but make the lyrics your own. After you have practiced, perform your song for the class. If you like, invite classmates to join in the performance.

Alternately—Find several of the songs discussed in the book or popular during the 1960's. Discuss what is the same and different about the songs. Try to categorize the music: rock, folk, bebop, etc.



**Folk Music** became popularized in the 1960's. It was known as protest music as many songs were about ending racial inequities and the Vietnam war. Famous artists include Joan Baez and Bob Dylan (as shown in the photo). Other folk artists of the time include Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul & Mary and Trini Lopez.

**The Beatles**, a British rock band who formed in 1960 came to America and caused "Beatlemania." The band consists of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr. They are considered the most influential rock band of all time.



Songs mentioned in book the *Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* include:

- *Under the Boardwalk* by The Drifters
- *Strawberry Fields Forever* by The Beatles
- *Yakety Yak* by The Coasters
- *Ring of Fire* by Johnny Cash
- *Blue Suede Shoes* by Elvis Presley

## Where Are the Watsons?

Print out maps of the United States. Can your students find the locations?

The Watsons travelled from Flint, Michigan to Birmingham, Alabama.

Ask these questions:

- How many states do you think the family travelled through?
- Was there a change in time zone?
- How many miles separate the two locations?
- What location is each state in? (North, South, etc.).
- Can you name the states touching Michigan and Alabama?
- Do you see water near those states? What are those bodies of water?

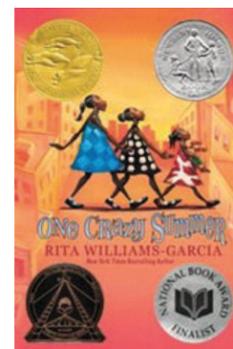
The options are endless! Open up dialog about weather, population numbers, universities in the states and more.



Authors are honored to win awards for their books. It helps to spread their name and increases sales. Publishers often reprint books after winning with images of the awards won, especially the ALA Awards which are arguably the most recognizable and distinguished of literary awards. Having a gold seal on your book cover attracts attention and denotes the “seal of approval” from someone of authority. When choosing books to purchase or check-out from the library, many choose things with award symbols knowing that they will have a high level of quality.

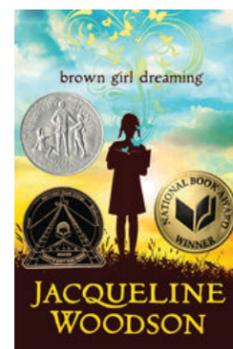
- Newbery Honor Book – The Newbery Medal is awarded annually by the American Library Association for the most distinguished American children's book published the previous year.
- Coretta Scott King Honor Book – **The Coretta Scott King Book Awards** are given annually to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults that demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values. The award commemorates the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and honors his wife, Mrs. Coretta Scott King, for her courage and determination to continue the work for peace and world brotherhood.
- An ALA Top Ten Best Book/Quick Pick
- An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- An ALA Notable Book for Children
- Booklist Top 25 Black History Picks for Youth
- IRA Young Adult Choice
- NCSS–CBC Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies
- Bank Street Child Study Association Children's Book Award
- New York Times Book Review Best Book
- Publishers Weekly Best Book
- Horn Book Fanfare

- Bulletin Blue Ribbon
- Golden Kite Award for Fiction
- Publishers Weekly Flying Start Author
- Notable Book for a Global Society
- California Young Reader Medal Winner
- Hawaii Nene Award
- Illinois Rebecca Caudill Award
- Indiana Department of Education Read-Aloud List
- Indiana Young Hoosier Book Award
- Kansas William Allen White Children's Book Award
- Maine Student Book Award
- Michigan Reading Association Children's Choice Award
- Minnesota Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award
- Missouri Mark Twain Award
- Nebraska Golden Sower Award
- Nevada Young Readers Award
- New Hampshire Great Stoneface Book Award
- New Mexico Land of Enchantment Reading List
- Oklahoma Sequoyah Young Adult Book Award
- Pacific Northwest Young Reader's Choice Award
- Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award
- South Carolina Book Award
- Tennessee Volunteer State Award
- Texas Lone Star Reading List
- Vermont Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award
- Virginia Young Readers Program
- West Virginia Children's Book Award
- Wisconsin Golden Archer Book Award



### **One Crazy Summer** by Rita Williams-Garcia

This book takes place in 1968. Three sisters go on a journey from Brooklyn to California to meet the mother who abandoned them. They dream of going to Disneyland but instead end up at a summer camp for the Black Panthers.



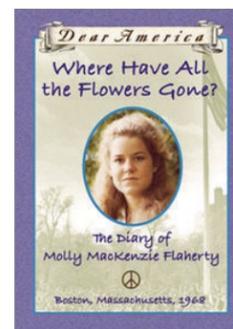
### **Brown Girl Dreaming** by Jacqueline Woodson

This memoir in verse revisits Ms. Woodson's memories of growing up in both South Carolina and New York in the 1960's and 1970's. She discusses the civil rights struggles that she witnesses as a child while she finds her writing voice.



### **Countdown (The 60's Trilogy #1)** by Deborah Wiles

It is 1962 and 12-year-old Franny wants to find peace. She is feuding with her friend, and her family is afraid of a possible nuclear war. President Kennedy goes on TV to talk about Russia sending missiles to Cuba and things get even worse! Interspersed with full page news photos from the era, this book is a great choice for visual learners.



### **Where Have All of the Flowers Gone? The Diary of Mackenzie Flaherty, Boston, Massachusetts, 1968** by Ellen Emerson White

Alternating between a brother, a soldier stationed in Vietnam during the war and a sister fighting for peace in the United States, this poignant book shows both sides of the conflict on the 1960's. This title is one of the Dear America series.