



**Classroom Guide for
JOHN LEWIS IN THE LEAD:
A Story of the Civil Rights
Movement**

written by **Jim Haskins** and
Kathleen Benson

illustrated by **Benny Andrews**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3-4

Interest Level: Grades 3-8

Guided Reading Level: S

Lexile™ Measure: 950

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Civil Rights Movement (1960s), Nonviolence, African American and United States History, Justice, Courage

Synopsis

The book celebrates the life of John Lewis, a living legend of American history. Lewis, now a U.S. Representative for Georgia's Fifth Congressional District, began his life as the son of sharecroppers in Alabama. As a boy, he experienced the injustice of segregation and was inspired by the words and activism of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Lewis joined the Civil Rights Movement and was an adherent of nonviolent resistance. He was involved in the major protests of the 1960s, including the March on Washington, the Freedom Rides, the Selma-to-Montgomery March, and voter registration drives. He helped form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to organize sit-ins and other activities. Despite many physical attacks, serious injuries, and numerous arrests, Lewis never stopped fighting for human rights. He was elected to Congress in 1986, where he continues to serve.

Background

John Lewis was born into an era when racial segregation was the norm in many Southern states. The so-called Jim Crow laws kept blacks and whites apart in almost all aspects of life. Separate entrances for public buildings, and separate restrooms, drinking

fountains, hospitals, restaurants, libraries, and places of worship were almost universal. For many people, the Civil Rights Movement began in 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, and give up her seat to a white man. This resulted in her arrest and a boycott of Montgomery city buses led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The boycott lasted more than a year until the Supreme Court declared bus segregation in Montgomery unconstitutional. In the following years, after many more protests and demonstrations, important legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were passed by Congress.

Teaching Tip

This is an excellent book to feature during your observance of Black History Month in February.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. How would you define injustice? What examples of injustice in today's news can you name?
2. What is courage? Give some examples.
3. How do you expect to be treated by others? How do you try to treat other people? How do you feel if people don't treat you well or fairly?
4. What do you know about the Civil Rights Movement in the United States? Who were some of the movement's leaders?
5. What are some laws you know about? How do they affect your life? How can laws be changed in the United States?

Exploring the Book

Display the book and read the title on the front cover. Ask students what they think the title *John Lewis in the Lead* means. Invite students to comment on the illustration.

On the back cover is a quotation from Congressman John Lewis. Discuss the quotation. Ask students how they might make a difference in the world.

Page through the book, noting features such as the dedication, copyright, title page, text, illustrations, and timeline.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out what John Lewis did and why he was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement.

VOCABULARY

Write the following words from the book on the board. Read aloud each word and talk about its meaning. As students come across these words in the text, help them expand their understanding of the meanings. Have students use the words to make Civil Rights glossaries. Encourage students to add words of their own choosing as well. Point out that many of these words can be used to apply to issues around the world.

segregated boycott sharecropper protest	injustice nonviolent sit-ins commitment	discrimination rally demonstrations rights
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AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding of the content. Encourage students to refer back to the text and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

1. What do you think the first sentence of the story means?
2. How did Aunt Seneva and the children survive the storm?
3. How did John Lewis get the nickname Preacher?
4. What made John Lewis angry toward the beginning of the story?
Why do you think his parents warned him to be quiet?
5. What was Lewis's first protest against segregation? Why did he decide to protest?
6. What is SNCC? What were members trying to accomplish with the Freedom Rides?
7. How was Lewis's commitment to nonviolence tested?
8. How did the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom impact civil rights? What role did John Lewis play in the event?
9. Why were white people afraid of giving the vote to blacks?
10. How did the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson inspire the march from Selma to Montgomery?
11. Why do you think Alabama Governor George Wallace wanted to prevent the Selma-to-Montgomery march?
12. How did Bloody Sunday affect the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965?
13. How does John Lewis continue to serve his country today?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might find times when John Lewis stood up for something he believed in.
- The **Illustrator** might illustrate parts of the story that are not illustrated in the book.
- The **Connector** might find books about other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might research civil rights news stories from the 1960s.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion.

1. What lesson might John Lewis have learned after surviving the storm at Aunt Seneva's house? What have you learned from a frightening experience?
2. How was John Lewis influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.?
3. What do the authors mean when they say, "It was time to turn things upside down in order to set them right side up"?
4. What role did the news media play in the nation's reaction to Bloody Sunday? How would information about an event such as Bloody Sunday be spread today?
5. How does learning about the past help you to understand the present?
6. Why is it important to be able to change existing laws as well as to write new ones?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Identify an injustice you think is taking place today. Write an essay explaining what is wrong and how you think it can be changed.
2. Write a poem honoring John Lewis.
3. Find out about some of the issues John Lewis supports and is working on today and write a letter to him with your thoughts about one of the issues.
4. Write a blog posting about an incident in the life of John Lewis.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Have ELL students work with strong English speakers and readers to go over passages from the book.
2. Have ELL students write or dictate questions about the book. Set aside time to help students explore these queries and discuss answers to their questions.
3. Read aloud a sentence and have students repeat it after you, pointing to each word as they read.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

1. Tell students that 25,000 people participated in the Selma-to-Montgomery march when it finally took place on March 21, 1965. Explain that the route of the march is now called the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, and that it is managed by the National Park Service. Work with students to learn more about the trail and the museums and other exhibits for visitors along the route. Then have students plan an imaginary trip to see this historic trail.

Teaching Tip

Curriculum materials are available online for the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail from the [National Park Service website](#).

2. Have students work in groups to research the lives of other civil rights leaders mentioned in the story including Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Hosea Williams, George Wallace, Lyndon Johnson, and Mohandas K. Gandhi. Have each group present its findings to the class.

3. Remind students that today John Lewis is a U.S. Congressman representing Georgia. Have students find out the duties of a Representative and the main functions of the House of Representatives.

Math

Have students find out the distance from Selma to Montgomery Alabama and then calculate how long it would take to walk, run, bike, and drive the distance. Before making their calculations, students will have to decide how many miles per hour can be covered by walking, running, biking, and driving.

Music

Numerous songs are associated with the Civil Rights Movement. Find recordings of songs such as "Turn! Turn! Turn!" by Pete Seeger, "A Change is Gonna Come" by Sam Cooke, or "Blowin' in the Wind" by Bob Dylan to play for the class.

Art

Students might assemble a John Lewis mural for a classroom wall. They could include painted scenes as well as collage elements such as photographs and news clips to represent his life and contributions.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jim Haskins (1941-2006) was an award-winning author with more than one hundred books to his credit. Several of the books, including *The Story of Stevie Wonder*, won the Coretta Scott King Award. Haskins also won the *Washington Post* Children's Book Guild Award for a body of work in nonfiction for young people. Most of his books highlighted the achievements of African Americans and the history and culture of Africa. Haskins was born in Demopolis, Alabama, where he grew up in a household with lots of children. He received his B.A. degree from Georgetown University in 1960 and had graduate degrees from Alabama State University and the University of New Mexico. Among his many titles were the *Count Your Way* series; *Amazing Grace*; *Lena Home*; and *Moaning Bones, African-American Ghost Stories*.

Kathleen Benson co-authored some twenty books with her husband, Jim Haskins. She is the Curator of Community Projects at the Museum of the City of New York. When asked what she hopes readers will take away from *John Lewis in the Lead: A Story of the Civil Rights Movement*, Benson says, "I hope they will take away a sense that one individual really can make a difference."

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Benny Andrews (1930-2006) was a painter and teacher who drew on his African American roots to create vivid works that address human suffering and injustice. His work is in the collections of more than thirty museums including the Smithsonian Institution and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He won numerous awards and prizes including a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1974. Andrews was

one of ten children born to sharecroppers in Plainview, Georgia. He and his siblings worked in the cotton fields to help support the family. He was the first in his family to graduate from high school. He received his art education on the G.I. Bill at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Book Information

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *John Lewis in the Lead* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/71/pb/john_lewis_in_the_lead_a_story_of_the_civil_rights_movement

BookTalk with co-author Kathleen Benson:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/benson.mhtml>

Order Information**On the Web:**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/71/pb/john_lewis_in_the_lead_a_story_of_the_civil_rights_movement (secure on-line ordering)

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