

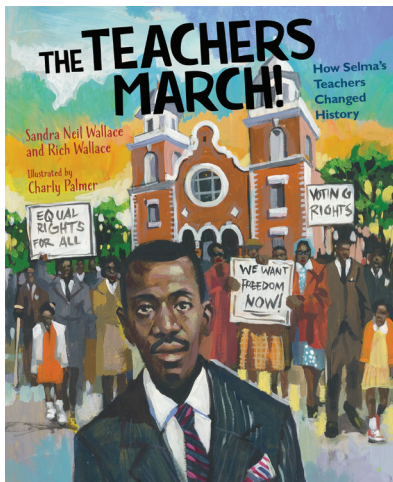
# THE TEACHERS MARCH!

## How Selma's Teachers Changed History

Sandra Neil Wallace  
and Rich Wallace

Illustrated by  
Charly Palmer

An Educator's Guide  
with Common Core  
State Standard (CCSS)  
Correlations



### ABOUT THE BOOK

Reverend F. D. Reese was a leader of the voting rights movement in Selma, Alabama. As a teacher and pastor, he recognized that his colleagues were viewed with great respect in the city. Could he convince them to risk their jobs—and perhaps their lives—by organizing a teachers-only march to the county courthouse to demand their right to vote? On January 22, 1965, the Black teachers left their classrooms and did just that, with Reverend Reese leading the way. Noted nonfiction authors Sandra Neil Wallace and Rich Wallace conducted the last interviews with Reverend Reese before his death in 2018 and interviewed several teachers and their family members in order to tell this important story.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Investigative journalists Sandra Neil Wallace and Rich Wallace are award-winning writers of nonfiction titles including *First Generation: 36 Trailblazing Immigrants and Refugees Who Make America Great* and *Blood Brother: Jonathan Daniels and His Sacrifice for Civil Rights*, which won the International Literacy Association's Social Justice Award. Sandra's picture-book biography *Between the Lines: How Ernie Barnes Went from the Football Field to the Art Gallery* earned the National Council of Teachers of English 2019 Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction. The Wallaces live in Keene, New Hampshire. Visit them at [sandraneilwallace.com](http://sandraneilwallace.com) and [richwallacebooks.com](http://richwallacebooks.com).

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charly Palmer is a graphic designer, illustrator, and a fine artist of note. He has illustrated multiple children's books including *There's a Dragon in My Closet* by Dorothea Taylor and *Mama Africa!* by Kathryn Erskine for which he received the 2018 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award. His artwork has appeared on the cover of *Time*. Charly lives in Atlanta, Georgia. Visit [charlypalmer.com](http://charlypalmer.com).

## PRAISE FOR *THE TEACHERS MARCH!*

★ “This stunningly powerful book by a team of award-winning creators should be a part of every classroom library and teacher-preparation program . . . with well-researched details . . . (and) vibrant acrylic paintings . . . (a) timely testament to the power of collectivism and the continued need for widespread civic engagement.” —*Booklist*, starred review

★ “This little-known march during the civil rights era is considered the catalyst for the other marches that shortly followed. . . . Palmer’s brushy paintings are full of color, detail, and emotion. The narrative is well paced and will work brilliantly as a read-aloud for patient, older preschoolers and early elementary-age children, and it should spark many a conversation about race and protest. An alarmingly relevant book that mirrors current events.”  
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “This well-researched picture book proves riveting in its telling of how everyday heroes led a fight that resulted in the Voting Rights Act.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

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## NOTE ABOUT THIS GUIDE AND *THE TEACHERS MARCH!*

This guide is designed for grades 2 and up. It offers discussion questions to help the teacher immerse students deeper into this important historical event. The guide includes extension activities to help students with comprehension and real-world connections to their own lives. It is assumed that teachers will adapt each activity to fit the needs and abilities of their own students.

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS) CORRELATIONS

The content provided in this guide supports the goals and objectives of the Common Core State Standards across multiple content areas. Since *The Teachers March!* is for ages 7 and up, and because great literature knows no reading level, we provide CCSS that span grades 2–12. For a listing of the standards, visit [www.corestandards.org/read-the-standards/](http://www.corestandards.org/read-the-standards/).

## OVERALL GENERAL USES FOR *THE TEACHERS MARCH!*

**Black History Month:** February always provides a venue for students to learn that Black history is American history. Don’t let Black History Month be the superficial study of “heroes and holidays” and instead show students that history-makers are also ordinary people just like them.

**Elections and Voting:** Voting rights and the struggle to live up to our democratic ideals remains a current event in America. *The Teachers March!* can be read as both a reminder of the struggle toward voting rights and the reality that the march continues today.

**Providing Counternarratives:** Too often books for children have a focus on whiteness and have white-only protagonists. *The Teachers March!* provides a counternarrative to an unbalanced curriculum by demonstrating the important roles that Black Americans have made for everyone.

**Response to Current Events:** Our world remains as political now as it was in the 1960s.

Use this book to remind young student activists that they join a rich history of work for justice and equality. *The Teachers March!* demonstrates that before today's Black Lives Matter marches and women's marches, there were Black teachers in Selma marching for justice.

**Segregation and Integration:** *The Teachers March!* gives students today a view of the Jim Crow South. In regard to segregation and integration, this book can be used in a pre-service teacher credential course at a university as incoming educators will be learning that US schools today are actually *more* segregated than during the civil rights movement.

**Mendez v. Westminster and Brown v. Board of Education:** Students may have heard of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the historic Supreme Court ruling that officially ended segregation in public schools. Students understand that the Brown family was an African American family. Students are less familiar, however, with an important case in 1947 named *Mendez v. Westminster*. In this case a Mexican American family fought to integrate schools in California. Teachers can couple *The Teachers March!* with other important children's books such as Duncan Tonatiuh's *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* and Joyce Carol Thomas's book *Linda Brown, You Are Not Alone: The Brown v. Board of Education Decision*. This will give students of all ages a richer history and wider perspective on segregation and integration.

**Teaching Empathy:** One of the ways to teach young children empathy is to have them read stories like *The Teachers March!* and then have them put themselves in the shoes of one of the characters in the book.

**Modeling Social Justice Work and Activism:** Students benefit from different models of working for freedom and equality. *The Teachers March!* is particularly important because it highlights the activism of everyday people, the teachers of Selma.

## FRONT-LOADING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR STUDENTS

Students will benefit from a front-loading activity/discussion where you give more context to prepare them for the story of *The Teachers March!* Your unit and class discussions may have already covered these important concepts and vocabulary, but if not, then take a few moments to prepare students for the reading of the book. Give as much or as little information as you deem necessary to aid students in their understanding about the historical context in the book.

**What was Jim Crow?** Jim Crow was the name of a rigid set of laws, which made Black people second-class citizens. The laws lasted from 1877 through the mid-1960s, when the story of *The Teachers March!* takes place. These laws severely regulated social interactions between Blacks and Whites. Signs were placed above water fountains, door entrances and exits, and in front of public facilities to mark whether Blacks or Whites were allowed to use and access them. You can see on the timeline at the end of *The Teachers March!*, it is noted that in 1964 the local judge in Selma forbid public discussions, meetings, or marches about voting rights in the city.

**What is voter suppression?** The most basic right of a citizen in a democracy is the right to vote and, yet, Blacks in the Jim Crow South did not have this right afforded to them. There were laws and intimidation tactics put in place to make sure that Blacks would not participate in elections. Sometimes there was a poll tax that had to be paid two years before an election. Often the biggest barrier to voting, though, was a literacy test. White people either did not have to take this test, or they were given different questions that were very easy to get correct. On the other hand, the tests required for a Black person seeking to register to vote too often had impossible-to-answer questions. The questions were so bizarre that no one could get them correct. On top of that, they often were given 10 minutes to do a 3-page, 30-question test, and only one incorrect answer would give them a failing grade.

**What is civil disobedience?** Civil disobedience is when a person or group of people refuse to comply with certain laws and do so as a peaceful form of political protest. The purpose of civil disobedience is usually to bring about a change in laws or government policies. People who engage in civil disobedience are willing to accept the legal consequences of their actions as part of their protest.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As *The Teachers March!* begins, we meet Reverend F. D. Reese. Reverend Reese was a science teacher, but the book also informs us that his favorite subject to teach was freedom and equality. What do you think it means to “teach freedom and equality” and what kinds of things might a teacher speak about that would tell you that they loved to teach freedom?
2. Reverend Reese was already politically active in his hometown of Selma, Alabama. He was working along with others to help get Black people registered to vote. What was the response of law enforcement in Selma to the peaceful Black protestors wanting to register to vote?
3. The story mentions that Blacks could vote if they passed the voting test. What kinds of questions were on that test? Why do you think the test questions were written this way?
4. Why did Reverend Reese think that a march of teachers would impact his city? What was it about the teachers that made them stand out?
5. Unsure of how to exactly proceed with his teachers’ march, who did Reverend Reese finally ask to help him?
6. What are some things that tell you that working for freedom was dangerous work?
7. What was Reverend Reese’s “triumphant idea”? What did he tell the teachers they must do? How did the teachers in church responded to his “triumphant idea”?
8. What were the teachers afraid might happen if they joined the teachers’ march?
9. Who was the very first teacher to sign up for the march, and what was the reason he gave for signing up?
10. On the day of the march, what did Too Sweet put in a brown paper bag to take with her to

the march? What was the reason she placed those items in a bag to take with her?

11. Sheriff Clark had been very busy stopping people from registering to vote. What are some of the things that had happened in the days before the march that might have made the teachers even more afraid?
12. On that day, one hundred and four teachers joined the march. What did they hold in their hands and lift up into the air? What do you think the toothbrush symbolized to them?
13. How did the teachers act when they marched through town? Why do you think they marched this way? What was the purpose?
14. What happened when the teachers got to the courthouse and came face-to-face with Sheriff Clark?
15. Victoriously filling the Brown Chapel, what did the children say to each other about seeing their very own teachers in the march? What do you imagine the children thought about their teachers?
16. What did Dr. King tell the teachers later that night when he came to preach at their church?
17. Because Reverend Reese and the teachers marched, who else began to march?
18. The President of the United States noticed these marches and, in the summer of 1965, what became law?
19. When Reverend Reese, Coach Huggins, and Too Sweet Parrish went to the courthouse to register to vote, who was there to stop them this time? (page 28)
20. What was the very first vote the Black people won in their first election? (page 40)

## **ACTIVITIES: ART AND ACTIVISM**

Here are activities that you can use for students of various ages. The activities are specifically designed to activate various modalities (writing, art, interviewing and interpersonal skills, reflective practice) so that all students can successfully reflect upon the important themes of *The Teachers March!* Use these activities to check for comprehension and extend your students' learning.

### **Objectives**

1. Students understand that marches have played a central role in many movements.
2. Students make personal connections to the text about marches for equity.

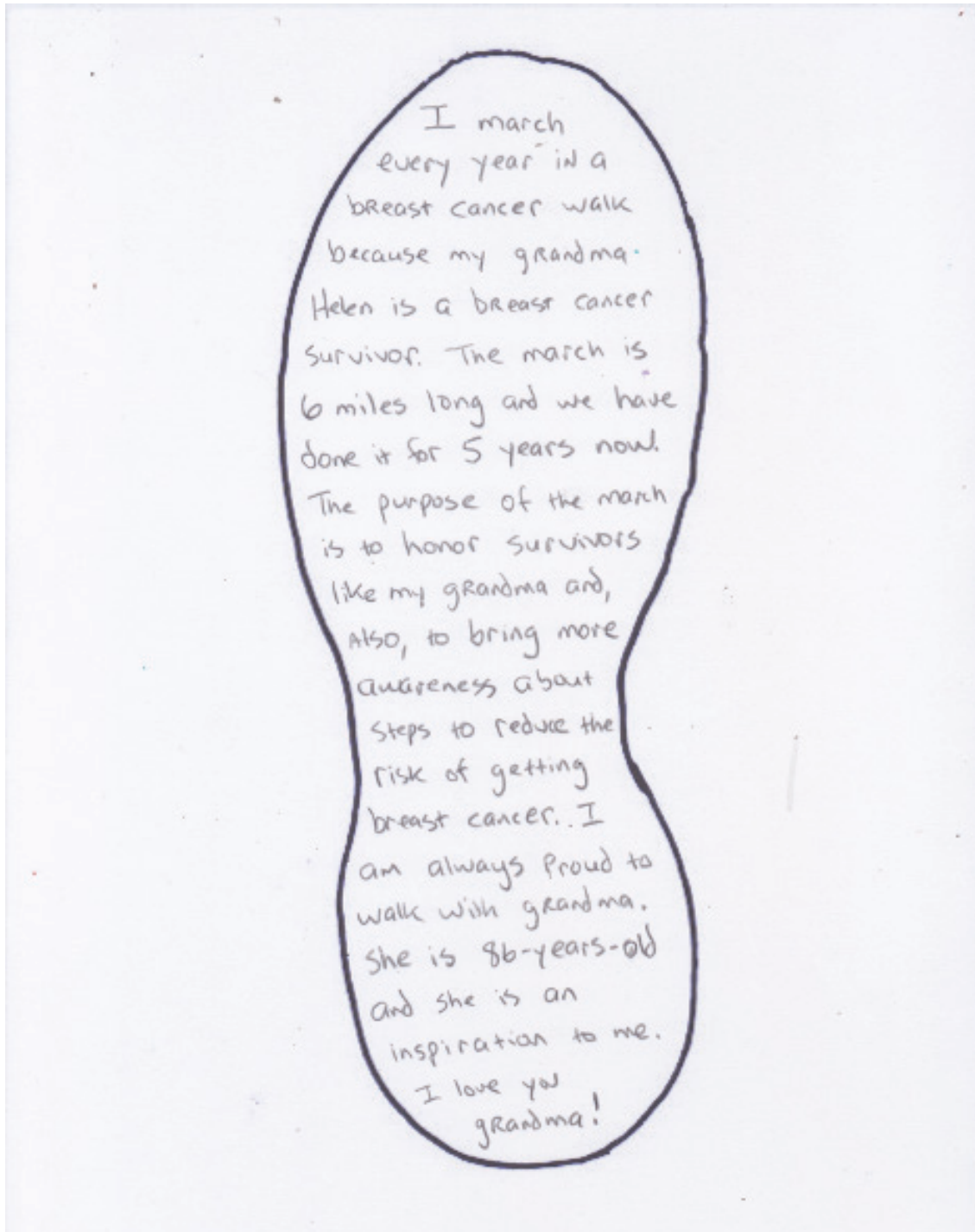
### **Time and materials**

1. One class
2. One copy of the handout for each student.

On page 26 of *The Teachers March!*, artist Charly Palmer illustrates a group of people marching for justice and equity. Marching has a long and important history in the civil rights movement and is still used as a primary part of movements today.

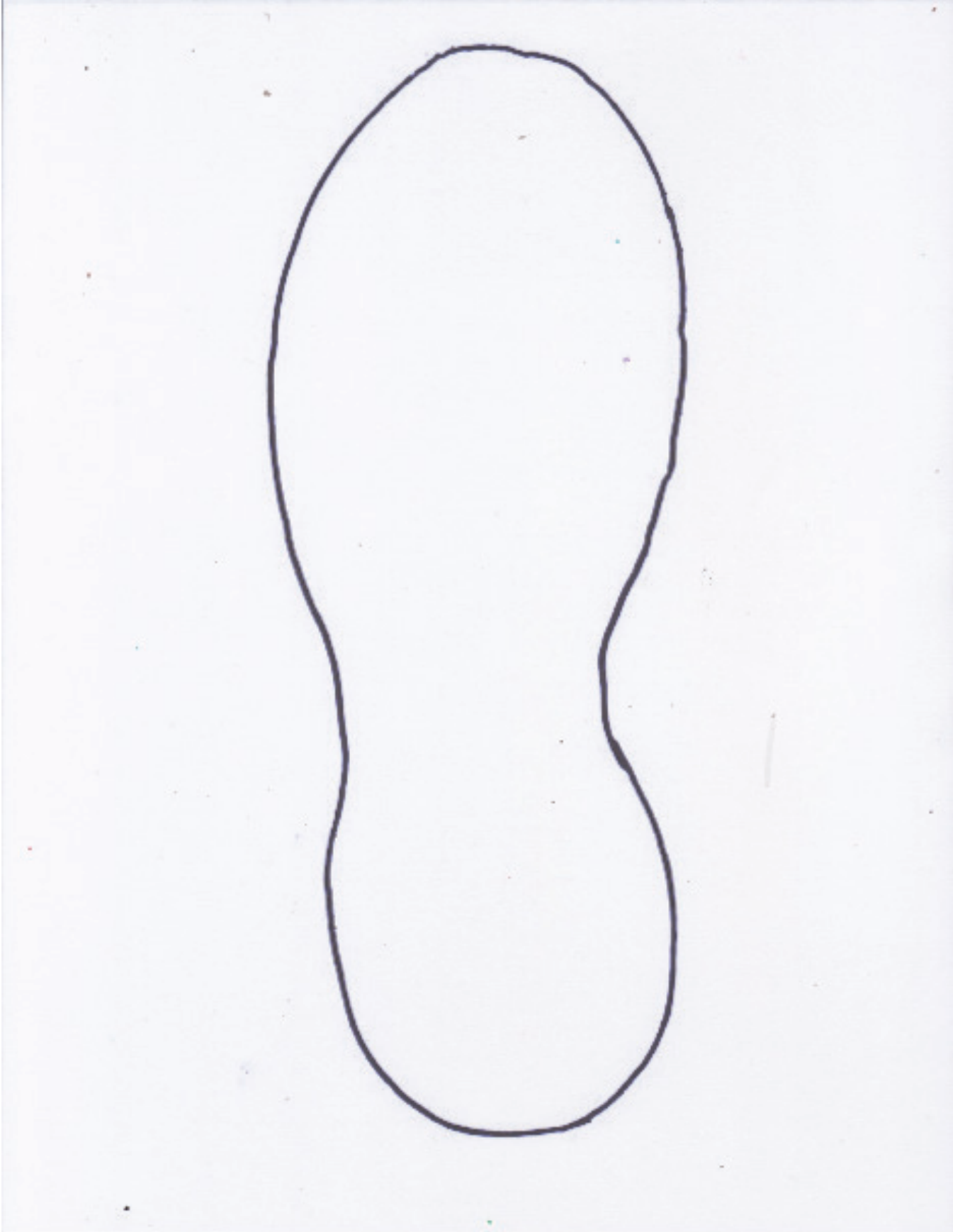
Use the shoe handout to help students make important personal connections to *The Teachers March!* Keeping in the lines of the shoe, write about either an actual march for “freedom and equality” that you have done yourself, or write about an issue you feel strongly enough about that, if you have the opportunity, you would march with others for freedom on this issue. You can cut out the shoes and have these marching all around your classroom to show that the history of marching for justice is alive and well in students’ lives today. The highly visual impact of this art strategy is a great way for teachers to get their room decorated in meaningful ways for evenings when the community comes to school.

### Student example



I march every year in a breast cancer walk because my grandma. Helen is a breast cancer survivor. The march is 6 miles long and we have done it for 5 years now. The purpose of the march is to honor survivors like my grandma and, also, to bring more awareness about steps to reduce the risk of getting breast cancer. I am always proud to walk with grandma. She is 86-years-old and she is an inspiration to me. I love you grandma!

Student handout



## ACTIVITY: INTERVIEWING THOSE THAT TEACH FREEDOM

### Objectives

1. Students will become investigative journalists and interview someone in their family or community who has been on a march for justice.
2. Students will synthesize interview notes and write a summary essay on a person they interview.

### Time and Materials

1. One class to introduce, brainstorm interview questions, and go over tips to remember when interviewing. Students then do the work independently and bring in a final product on the date designated by the teacher.
2. A copy of the questions the class made and a copy of the tips to remember when interviewing.

Authors Sandra Neil Wallace and Rich Wallace interviewed the real-life characters in the book. Interviewing those in our own lives who “teach freedom and equality” is an excellent way to learn more about activism in your own families and communities.

People march for all kinds of issues. Most communities regularly have marches for ending breast cancer, AIDS Walks, Pride parades, Black Lives Matter marches, women and feminist marches, labor marches, and many others. Maybe you have marched in one of these. Maybe you know family members and friends who have taken part in such marches. What can we learn about why people march from those closest to us? How can we be investigative journalists like the authors of this book?

Lead the students in brainstorming a list of questions that they might ask someone who is marching for freedom and equality. Have students copy down the questions so that they have a guide to interview. Possible questions might include the following:

Have you ever gone on a protest march of any kind?

Why was that issue particularly important to you?

Did you make and carry a sign? What did it say?

Was it peaceful?

Who went with you on the march?

What are things that happened that you remember still?

Do you feel like it made a difference?

## ACTIVITY: FOR TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

There are multiple places for university professors of education to use *The Teachers March!* All credential programs have a beginning foundations class that digs into the history of education in America. *The Teachers March!* fits perfectly into the historical contexts of *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Mendez v. Westminster*, the Little Rock Nine, conversations about



segregation and integration in school history, and a myriad of other topics covered in any foundations course in education. Nearly all teaching credential programs in the United States also have at least one course—usually a general multicultural education course—where future educators are introduced to the ideas of teaching for social justice. Let’s not forget that Reverend Reese taught science but also taught freedom and equality. Consequently, *The Teachers March!* is the perfect complement to many university credential courses for teachers coming into the profession.

Here are some ways that *The Teachers March!* could be used in a university credential class for pre-service educators:

It could be read aloud as a historical example of a social justice educator.

Activity One could be used to model the pedagogy of journaling and writing from the perspective of a character in the book.

Activity Two could be used to model the pedagogical strategy of teaching with the arts in mind.

Activity Three could be used as a way to show educators how to connect students to the wealth of information their family and community has about activism and justice.

As teacher reflection is a key component of all credential programs, this book can be the catalyst for a reflective entry on how a credential candidate imagines they will teach their own content area . . . and freedom and equality too.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

The *Brown v. Board of Education* Historical Site in Topeka, Kansas.  
[nps.gov/brvb/index.htm](http://nps.gov/brvb/index.htm).

*Mendez v. Westminster* Re-Enactment  
[uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/background-mendez-v-westminster-re-enactment](http://uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/background-mendez-v-westminster-re-enactment).

Alabama’s Civil Rights Legacy  
[alabama.travel/experience-alabama/civil-rights-legacy](http://alabama.travel/experience-alabama/civil-rights-legacy).

The Brown Chapel AME Church  
[alabama.travel/places-to-go/brown-chapel-ame-church](http://alabama.travel/places-to-go/brown-chapel-ame-church).

## ABOUT THE EDUCATOR GUIDE WRITER

Jeff Sapp is a teacher, writer, and activist. He has written curriculum for Academy Award-winning documentaries on the civil rights movement and the Holocaust. He writes curriculum for major organizations across the nation and is the author of his own award-winning children’s book *Rhinos & Raspberries: Tolerance Tales for the Early Grades*. He is currently a professor of education at California State University Dominguez Hills and lives in Long Beach, California with his husband and daughter. Visit [jeffsapp.com](http://jeffsapp.com).