

We've Got A Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March

Written by Cynthia Y. Levinson

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Ages 10-Adult | History | Nonfiction

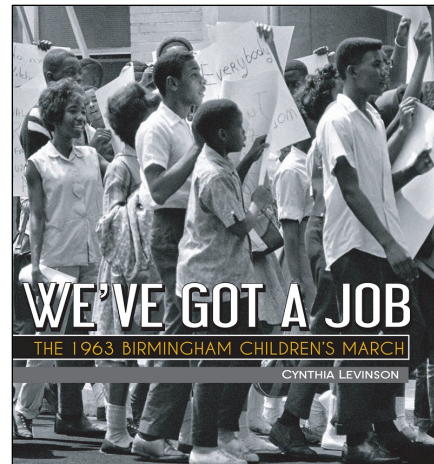
Book Level Scores

Fountas & Pinnell | Level: Z | Grade: 7th and up

ABOUT THE BOOK

We've Got a Job lends a new historical perspective to the American Civil Rights Movement. Focusing on the war for basic human justice's integrity, Levinson highlights the voices of the foot soldiers interspersed with the activities of the generals. Appropriately, the foot soldiers are brave children and teens who take up the gauntlet when most of the adults have dropped it. In a breathless ride that moves the reader through the tumultuous ups and downs of one year, in one state, and one city, Levinson's text lays out a comprehensive history and an exploration of the major and minor players in the Children's March. Four young heroes, James Stewart, Audrey Hendricks, Washington Booker III, and Arnetta Streeter, are the focus of how political and social activism can transform those who have been stereotypically identified by outsiders into self-identified "somebodies". These children take back their souls, and in the process, inspire others to take back their "somebody-ness". Perspectives from We've Got a Job intertwine the voices of the black children involved, with the voices of the black adults who refused to quit and those who have already quit, with the voices of the "liberal" and "conservative" whites who whisper 'wait' or shout 'violence' and even includes the voices of young whites who are barely aware that there is a conflict, to draw the complicated issues of race equality into a specific historical picture – Birmingham, Alabama, 1963.

Levinson's accessible language and thoroughly researched text, place these stories in a context that explores the psyches of four children, out of thousands, who are no longer willing to accept second class citizenship. These young people, along with those adults that teach them the principles of nonviolent resistance, are genuine heroes of the Civil



Rights Movement. The stories in this narrative lend themselves to further historical research, new analysis of the Movement and its detractors, and multicultural, multinational and cross-curricular study. We've Got a Job is more than an historical text, it is also

autobiography and biography; a transition from oral to written testimonies; the power of music in political and social movements and in African American culture and life; the black church and religion's influence on the African American individual and community; the connection to Africa for African-Americans; a deconstruction of a monolithic African-American voice, persona, and ideology; and the economic, psychological and sociological facets that infused the minds of both dominator and dominated.

Finally, We've Got a Job summarizes a war between good and evil; justice and injustice; power and powerlessness; and the bravery, strength of righteous purpose and morality needed to battle a well-equipped, violent, government-sanctioned army, that is determined to maintain an illegal status quo, against a children's army, schooled in non-violent resistance and peopled by those who will no longer accept yokes on their freedom, the freedom of their ancestors and their descendants. It is the ages old tale of a journey that takes one from innocence, and through battles and experiences, to knowledge and truth.

REVIEWS

★starred review

"...this highly readable photo-essay will hold YA readers with its focus on four young people who participated in the Birmingham Children's March...The format will hook readers with spacious type, boxed quotes, and large black-and-white photos on almost every double-page spread, from the horrifying view of the Klan marching with children to the young protestors waiting to be arrested. A fascinating look at a rarely covered event for both curriculum and personal interest..." —**Booklist**

★starred review

“...Yet the most compelling component is Levinson’s dramatic recreation of the courageous children’s crusade and the change it helped bring about in the face of widespread prejudice and brutality. Powerful period photos and topical sidebars heighten the story’s impact.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

★starred review

“...The author takes her inspiring tale of courage in the face of both irrational racial hatred and adult foot-dragging (on both sides) through the ensuing riots and the electrifying September bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church...A moving record of young people rising at a pivotal historical moment, based on original interviews and archival research as well as published sources.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

★starred review

“...This photo-essay stands out for its engrossing content, excellent composition, and riveting use of primary-source material. Covering the history of the Birmingham Children’s March from inception to full impact, Levinson traces the stories of four young people between the ages of 9 and 15 in 1963...With a helpful list of abbreviations, excellent source notes, photo credits, a fine bibliography, and a comprehensive index, this a great research source, but it’s also just plain thought-provoking reading about a time that was both sobering and stirring...” —*School Library Journal*

“...the story belongs to four of the young protesters whom Levinson interviewed over a number of years...”

—*Boston Globe*

“...Clear and lively writing, well-chosen photographs, and thorough documentation make this a fine chronicle of the civil rights era...” —*Horn Book Magazine*

“This extensively researched account of the Birmingham Children’s March is enriched by Levinson’s in-depth interviews with dozens of its student participants and by its intimate focus on four of those children, two boys and two girls...Black and white photos and excerpts from documents of the time round out this riveting, significant work of nonfiction.” —*The New York Times*

NATIONAL EDUCATION STANDARDS

LANGUAGE ARTS (K-12)

[This Teacher’s Guide was prepared with the Common Core Curriculum Standards in mind. The activities within this guide address a wide variety of reading and writing English Language Arts standards.]

MATH (K-12)

[National Mathematics Standards provided by the NCTM.]

NM-PROB.PK-12.3 Apply and adapt a variety of appropriate strategies to solve problems.

TECHNOLOGY (K-12)

[National Technology Standards provided by the International Society for Technology in Education.]

NT.K-12.5 TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH TOOLS

Use technology to locate, evaluate and collect information from a variety of sources.

Use technology tools to process data and report results.

Evaluate and select new information resources and technological innovations based on the appropriateness for specific tasks.

THEMES

- Social Injustice/Social Justice
- African-American History of Resistance
- Paternalism/Patriarchy
- Activism
- Racism
- Civil/Human Rights
- Dreams/Aspirations
- Innocence/Knowledge
- Federal/State Laws on “Separate but Equal” (Plessy vs. Ferguson 1896, Jim Crow Laws, Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas 1954)
- Legal/Illegal
- Segregation/Integration
- US Constitution & Amendments 13, 14, 15, & 19
- Religion/Christianity
- Hypocrisy
- Oppression/Repression
- Reconstruction after Civil War
- Morality/Immorality
- Politics of hate in guise of cultural norms
- Independence/Dependence
- The Mind of the South/Regional differences
- Colonization of Mind and Body
- Self-hatred
- “Passing”
- The Ku Klux Klan

BEFORE YOU READ

Because of the sensitive and mature nature of this text, the instructor should contextualize the story by preparing reading, listening, and, audio-visual centers. Students should also obtain a journal specifically for responses to the “Centers.”

Reading Center – Place books/hand-outs on the following topics in a classroom reading area: African American folk tales/lore; books by and about African-American writers and writing who were published in the 1950’s-the 1970’s (fiction and non-fiction); books/hand-outs on the US South and Reconstruction, The Emancipation Proclamation, The Constitution - especially the 13th, 14th, 15th, and 19th amendments; and political and social activism.

Listening Center – Make available recordings of African-American slave songs, early ballads, work songs, spirituals, gospel, speeches, sermons, protest songs, and readings of some of the folklore. Of special importance is Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech/sermon.

Audio-Video Center – Make available copies of speeches, sermons, and historical videos on post-slavery African-American life. Refer to Levinson’s text for suggestions for each of the centers.

Journal Assignments – Have students write in their journals responses to what they see, read, and hear for use in future discussions, writings, and group work. Based on the background from the texts the teacher and students use, students should be prepared to make inferences and draw conclusions based on intertextualities.

Ask students the following questions:

1. Read or write on the board the song lyrics after the “Table of Contents” in *We’ve Got a Job*. Ask students what they believe is the significance of the title of the book based on the song? What jobs do children have? What responsibilities to themselves, to their families, and to their various communities? Have you heard of a children’s army? If so, where?
2. What is activism? Who are activists and what do they do? [Activists are people who use different methods to change society or promote political change].
3. Who are abolitionists, suffragists, and prohibitionists? [Explain that these groups changed the laws and the Constitution because of their activism].
4. Name people you think of as activists. Tell how they are/were activists. Do you know of any social and/or political activism presently? If so, identify contemporary movements and any people involved.
5. Identify some famous activists. [Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Henry David Thoreau, Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Cesar Chavez, Susan B. Anthony, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Jessie Jackson, etc. You may also want to include some celebrities known for their activism, i.e. Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Carlos Santana, Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jackson, Angelina Jolie, Mos Def, Sean Penn, etc.] Can you identify their causes and the methods used to promote change?
6. Is all activism positive?
7. Now, identify some of your heroes. What characteristics of your heroes do you admire

most and why? Are any of your heroes your age? Does one have to be famous to be a hero? Have students write brief character sketches of their idols, then have a peer present their hero to the class. Is the person identifiable by his/her sketch? Even if the person is not famous or well-known, can your classmates identify the person by a category, like a parent, teacher, religious leader, coach, etc.

AFTER YOU READ

What becomes of Audrey, Arnetta, James, and Wash? How does the spark lit in the Birmingham churches of the 1960’s affect their later lives? Compare and contrast their lives. What occupations do they choose? What paths do they take? Do they ever stop being activists? Write a letter to one of the surviving members thanking them for their bravery and honor. Then, explain to them the state of race relations as you see it today. Is it time for another non-violent Children’s Movement? Or are the laws effectively changing the minds and lives of black and white Americans? How did the irony of Dr. Martin Luther King’s death affect their lives?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE ARTS

Writing a Diary Entry – Have students choose James, Audrey, Arnetta or Wash and write a diary entry from his/her perspective. Allow them to choose any one day in 1963 to describe an event and their emotional response to it. For example, James on the day he acted as a pallbearer for his 14-year-old friend, Carole Robertson. Or Wash on the day he finally could eat ice cream as a human being and not as something forced to eat outside or in the basement. Try to place yourself in the shoes of the teens for whom you are writing the journal entry for.

Interviewing Skills – Translating an Oral History into a Written History
Teachers, work with students to create a list of 1-15 questions to ask during the interview. The interviewee should be someone who was at least 10 years or older in 1963. Questions should include where they were and what they were doing, (example: school, work), during the Civil Rights Movement. While the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963 was the most monumental event of that

year, ask if they have any reflection on Kennedys' role in the Civil Rights Movement? Then following the pattern of Levinsons's book, write a history for that person in relationship to the Civil Rights Movement. Be sure to include at least three direct quotes from the interviewee that tie into quotes from the book. Remind students to remember that even though the Birmingham Marches made international news, many people in the United States were unaware of the intensity of the physical locations where the marches took place and the overall vibe in the south. Ask students to brainstorm several people they know who would be able to give the interview. They can conduct the interview by phone, by Skype (online), or in person. It would be great if they could find people from different states to interview to get multiple points of view (i.e. Alabama vs. South Dakota), to gain a better understanding of how it affected some more than others. Be sure to also have student ask how, the interviewee felt, the Civil Rights Movement has impacted our current history?

English/Language Usage

1. In pairs, define and identify antonyms and synonyms, then make two short lists of examples from the text.
2. What is an acronym? Find examples in We've Got a Job and list the acronyms along with what it stands for.
3. Levinson and the voices that she utilizes connect the movement with the metaphor of war. Identify specific words, phrases, and quotations that keep the imagery alive throughout the text.

Outlining/Making Inferences – In small groups or pairs, write a character sketch on each of the four young students--Wash, Audrey, Arnetta, and James. Compare and contrast the student/soldiers by describing them physically, mentally, psychologically, and emotionally. Begin by finding information in the text and setting it up in the form of an outline:

Example:

- A.
- B.
 1.
 - a.
 - b.
 - 2.

The physical part is easier and is based solely on facts from the text, i.e. class, color, family values, membership in church, clubs, school activities, occupation of parents, etc. However, students are going to have to rely on their skills of interpretation to write the mental aspects of their profiles. What adjectives and phrases would you use to describe each of the four? What do their actions tell you about the development of their personalities, as youngsters and as adults? How and why do they become morally ethical people willing to sacrifice all for social and political change?

MATH

Create a graph showing the wages of African-Americans in the decades beginning with 1950 and ending with 2010? How do you interpret and explain the visuals?

ART

Art and the Use of Symbolism – Much of the text is set in church, in the park and in jail. What do these places represent symbolically? Try interpreting other symbols used in the text. What does the American flag represent? How about a dove? A heart? Blooming or dying flowers?

1. Create a picture that you think embodies one or more of the themes that you discussed in "Before You Read." Let your imagination run wild. Your picture can be as abstract as you want as long as you can explain it. Show your picture to the class. Can they identify your theme?

Photography – Choose one of the pictures from the text and write a diary entry. What does the picture make you feel? What emotions does the photographer seem to want to convey? For example, lonely, lost, helpless or hopeful, victorious or inspired. Explain using details from the photo.

FILM

Show excerpts from Eyes on the Prize or Four Little Girls. What is the impact of seeing hoses opened, protestors beaten, dogs attacking in comparison to reading about it through the eyes of the children and adults who were there? Explain your ideas in an essay, utilizing both the filmic and historical text.

How do the film text and written text complement each other?

MUSIC

Remind students of any language limitations that are school or school district policy before beginning any of the activities in this section.

1. Have students choose a song that they consider a protest song. Tell them to read through the words/lyrics without the music. Allow them to write an explanation or analysis of the significance of the song. Then, have them listen to the song with the music. How does the music enhance or detract from the words. Ask them to identify dominant instruments used. Why do they think that some songs emphasize certain sounds based on the instruments? Is the song more powerful than the written word?

2. The teacher should choose a protest song and distribute the words to the class. Try to find one with which students are not familiar. In pairs, have them write an interpretation of the lyrics. Then, play several versions of the song and have them respond to the inclusion of the music and to the various musical interpretations of the same words. Also, include the instructions on instrumentation included in Activity 1.

3. Have students write their own protest song based on something that they would like to see changed. It should be on something about which they feel strongly, and/or a topical issue, (global warming/climate change, recycling, extinction of certain species, electric cars, depictions of ethnic minorities in television, movies, depictions of women in advertising, etc.). Remind them that they are not expected to write like adults or professional songwriters. Allow them to write their own voices in their own language.

SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

Geography (Map Reading) – Give students a blank map of the US. Have them identify the southern states and their capitals. Then, trace the paths of the Freedom Riders to different parts of Alabama. Locate on your maps, other sit-ins and other marches that took place in different parts of the country. Include the March on Washington.

Research – Assign students to research groups; give each group one of the Southern states defined as the Deep South. First, allow students to brainstorm about what they already know or think they know about the assigned state. Second, ask them to research and outline a general overview of the state: capital, geography (rivers, mountains, etc), population by race and gender, natural resources, education system, and colleges and universities, industries and any state laws enacted during the years 1896-1963). Based on their findings have them write a brief history of the state. Have students include statistics on the state today (2012). Then, have students report their findings to the class. Use their reports as a basis for a discussion on regional identities—culture: language/accents, mores, rituals, food, popular culture, etc. Have them define THE SOUTH.

Role Playing – Utilizing the entire text, divide students into groups and assign them to one of the following groups[remember that even within the groups there were differences] that were involved in major and minor ways with the 1963 Birmingham Children’s March:

1. The black children (like Wash, Arnetta, Audrey, and James), the peace ponies, and others that were willing to go to jail
2. The moderate black community, ministers and others willing to wait for change or who were prospering (economically) under segregation
3. Radical ministers and other black adults who have grown tired of waiting for change
4. White ministers who are supportive of change and those who are not
5. The members of the white governing class—Mayor and council members—and those in positions of economic power, as well as judges and jailors
6. The police and other city workers
7. A cross-section of white Birmingham citizens, (adults, teens, children)
8. Members of the Ku Klux Klan and other violent groups
9. Teachers and mentors from the nonviolent resistance movement

Tell students they are going to write and then act out a role playing play. They must approach their ideas and arguments from the perspectives of the groups to which they belong. All the groups are at a meeting to

discuss the Civil Rights Movement. They may use their journals, the text and any additional resources that they may need. To get them started, call the meeting to order and have them state the problems that need to be addressed from their assigned eyes. Keep track of the groups' ideas of what the problems are and how they need to be addressed. Remember that some people may not see a problem.

APPENDIX

Amendments to the Constitution:

www.usconstitution.net/constkids.html

13th Amendment (1865) Bans slavery and bonded servitude.

14th Amendment (1868) Grants full citizenship rights to African-Americans; effectively overturns The Dred Scott Decision(1857) which stated that African slaves and their descendents were not protected by the Constitution and could never be citizens of America--never officially overturned by the Supreme Court.

15th Amendment (1870) Grants voting rights to Black men; white female suffragist movements were outraged (some were also abolitionists before the War, morally opposed to slavery, but do not see Blacks as human beings).

19th Amendment (1920) Grants voting rights to all citizens regardless of gender.

1865-1877 Southern Reconstruction attempts to rebuild the South after The Civil War and to prepare the newly freed slaves for life in America. Education is paramount. Federal troops installed in Southern states to ensure compliance with laws, especially voting rights. By the time Federal troops withdraw in 1877, most states in the South have enacted state laws (Jim Crow Laws) that override the laws of the Federal government and place Blacks in essentially the same place they were prior to the new amendments. Violence, intimidation, and economic deprivation are used to keep African-Americans from trying to exercise or to continue exercising their rights of American citizenship.

1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson upholds Jim Crow Laws by legalizing separate but equal.

1954 Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas overturns Plessy, finds that segregation and equality are mutually exclusive.

A new era of lynching and violence begins as again African-Americans demand their legal rights.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Cynthia Levinson is a former teacher of pre-K through graduate school, curriculum developer, and an educational researcher, presenter, and consultant. What started as a magazine article on music

during the civil rights period resulted in the award-winning book *We've Got A Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March*. Cynthia offers engaging Workshops and Playshops for kids and adults. One of her workshops incorporates sound and video as students take part in a creative drama about the children who marched to jail. Her other presentations include Where Did You Learn That?!, Separating Fact from Fiction; Picking a Path Through Narrative Nonfiction: How to Reach Reluctant Readers; and Teaching Nonfiction Writing Using a Hero's Journey. Levinson has a B.A. from Wellesley College and an M.A. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Please visit her website at www.cynthialevinson.com or her blog at <http://emusdebut.wordpress.com/>.

(Intended audience: Grades K-Adult) E, M, H

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for *We've Got A Job* was prepared by Dr. Kathy Kilpatrick. Chapter discussion questions were created by Ms. Ferguson.

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Chapter Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: Audrey Faye Hendricks

1. Even after 1954, how did the city of Birmingham resist integration?
2. What tactics did civil rights activists use in Birmingham? Identify as many as you can.
3. Do you support Audrey's parents' decision to allow their 9-year old to go to jail? Does Audrey's age affect whether you view her as a "hero" or not?

Chapter 2: Washington Booker III

1. How would you describe law enforcement in Birmingham in the 1950s and 1960s?
2. How do you respond to Wash's reasoning for why he was not participating in mass meetings and marches?: "It was hard to come to grips with...We knew [the police] to be torturers, murderers..., and the idea of voluntarily submitting yourself to be taken away with them was just to us-we couldn't..."

Chapter 3: James M. Stewart

1. What were the divisions within the African-American community that led to a debate about how to dismantle segregation?
2. James becomes involved in the movement after having firsthand experience with racism. He said "that is the same drive...that made me ultimately stand up to the system and say, 'No. I am not going to be confined. "What motivated James? Where does heroic action come from?"

Chapter 4: Arnetta Streeter

1. According to Dr. King and his followers, why had direct action that was nonviolent become "the only moral way to overcome injustice" in Birmingham? Was it a practical solution?
2. How were the Peace Ponies and other civil rights protestors prepared for the challenges they would face while demonstrating?
3. When Arnetta's father refuses to give up his seat at the front of the bus, he is admonished by an older woman who says, "you don't do anything like that when you have children with you." Do you agree? What should Arnetta's father have done?

Chapter 5: Collision Course

1. What were the city politics in Birmingham? Why does it affect the movement?
2. Where are James and Wash-finding courage? What ideas do they have faith in? Do you have faith in anything powerful enough to motivate you to act?

Chapter 6: Project C

1. What was Project C? What was its purpose?;
2. Why did King, Shuttlesworth, and other Movement leaders insist on acting immediately rather than waiting for the possibility of a peaceful resolution?

Chapter 7: The Foot Soldiers

1. Why did it become necessary to use young people in the movement? Do you, support this decision?
2. How do you react to James Bevel's message to young protestors?: "[You] are responsible for segregation...[N]o one has the power to oppress you if you don't cooperate. So, if you say you are oppressed, then you are...in league with the oppressor."
3. Was Arnetta justified in lying to her parents in order to picket stores and, ultimately, get arrested?

Chapter 8: D-Day

1. On May 2nd, 1963, how did young people in Birmingham make a major contribution to the movement?

Chapter 9: May 3. Double D-Day

1. What attacks did young protestors endure on May 3rd? What conditions did they face in jail? Could you handle it?

2. What do you think of Wash and other young people who sought opportunities to "strike a blow" as others marched peacefully?

Chapter 10: Views From Other Sides

1. What were the different perspectives that white Americans in Birmingham had on African-Americans and the civil rights movement?

2. Do you think that white Americans-store owners, police officers, firemen-who quietly or openly contributed to the movement are heroes in this story?

Chapter 11: May 4-6, 1963: "Deliver Us From Evil"

1. What was Miracle Sunday and why was it significant to the movement in Birmingham?

2. Why do you suppose that the firemen and police men stepped aside and disobeyed Connor's orders?

Do you consider all of the students who participated in the protest "heroes"? Why Or why not?

Chapter 12: May 7-10, 1963:"Nothing Was Said...About the Children."

1 How did Superintendent Wright raise the stakes for young people who chose to participate in the movement? Could you make the decision to continue with stakes that high?

2. Why did the Biracial Subcommittee struggle to reach agreements? What did they finally decide?

Chapter 13: May 11-May 23: It was the Worst of Times. It was the Best of Times

1. How does the violence that broke out on May 11-May 12 affect your thinking about the nonviolent movement?

2. What victory did the young protestors have on May 22nd?

Chapter 14: Freedom and Fury

1. How did the movement in Birmingham inspire young people in other states?

2. What effect did the death of four girls at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church have on the community? Does it make you rethink the use of children in this movement?

3. Do you agree with Morgan's statement that "Every person in this community who has in any way contributed...to the popularity of hatred is at least as guilty, or more so, than the demented fool who threw that bomb..."?

Chapter 15

1. How did their participation in the civil rights movement change Audrey, Wash, James, and Arnetta's lives? How do they view their own contributions?

2. Each of the interviewees believes that young blacks today are "not fulfilling the mission the demonstrators aimed for in 1963." How do you respond to their concerns about young black people today?