

Muriel Johnson

When The Children Stood Up

Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



About the Performance

In this program, true stories will be shared of Black child heroes from American History. The story of The Children's Crusade of 1963 in Birmingham Alabama where 4,000 children ages 5-19 peacefully marched for freedom. The tale of Ruby Bridges, a six year old who was the first to integrate schools in the South. Additionally shared is the story of 10 year old Ron McNair, a boy who dreamed big, loved books, science, and astronomy, but didn't have access to the best libraries due to segregation. In spite of limitations put upon him, he became a physicist and the second African American astronaut in the world.



About the Artist

Professional storyteller **Muriel Johnson** has performed at preschools and elementary schools, museums, colleges, churches, theaters, festivals and countless other venues across the U.S. and toured Colombia, Brazil, Peru and as well as Cape Town, South Africa and Ghana, West Africa. She has an animated and interactive storytelling style in which she incorporates songs, rhythmic chants, humor and rich character voices. Her masterful telling has captivated audiences around the world. With over 30 years of experience as an early childhood educator, Muriel enjoys teaching about the role storytelling plays in early literacy and language development.

Program Learning Goals

1. To shine a light on the importance of inclusivity.
2. To foster critical thinking, civic engagement, and the ability to analyze historical events and their lasting consequence.
3. To empower students with an understanding of the struggle for equality and justice while fostering empathy.

Essential Questions

1. Why is it important to tell stories about the past and historical events?
2. What are ways that people can stand up for human rights and fair treatment?
3. How are your experiences in school similar or different to students in the 1950s and 1960s?

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Vocabulary

- **Prejudice:** a preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience; hating ideas or people before you even really know them
- **Racism:** prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized
- **Segregation:** the action of separating people, historically on the basis of race and/or gender
- **Integration:** the process of bringing different racial and ethnic groups together in a way that promotes equality and reduces barriers to social interactions and opportunities
- **Jim Crow Laws:** state and local laws in the American South that legalized racial segregation and discrimination against African Americans from the late 1880s to mid-1960s
- **Protest or march:** an occasion when people show that they disagree with something by walking somewhere, often singing, chanting and carrying signs
- **Nonviolent protest:** the expression of disapproval or a call for change through peaceful means without any physical violence; nonviolent resistance or nonviolent action

Key Facts and Context for Students

A World of Storytellers

Storytellers have existed in every country, culture and group of people for centuries. Before there was written language people told stories. In many parts of West Africa, a storyteller is referred to as a **griot** (*gree-ot*). Griots are revered figures who are also historians, poets, musicians, and diplomats. The position of griot is hereditary and passed down through generations. In Ireland, storytellers are called **seanchaí** (*shan-a-kee*), in Ancient Greek storytellers were called **bards**, in France storytellers were called **troubadours**. In every Country throughout history, storytellers carried an important role in society.



The Civil Rights Movement was a time primarily during the 1950s and 1960s when African Americans fought for equal rights and an end to segregation in the United States, particularly in the South. It is a story of people standing up for what is fair and not accepting unfair rules. People peacefully marched, protested, and organized sit-ins, where they would sit in places they weren't allowed to sit, to show that they wanted to be treated equally.

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Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- Who tells stories in your family? What are those stories about?
- Why do you think older people tell stories about their childhood?
- Can a story change how you feel about something?

Pre-Performance Activity: Connecting with the Civil Rights Movement

Learning Goals:

- To introduce the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement.
- To reflect on personal experiences with fairness and equality.

Materials:

YouTube video: [“The Civil Rights Movement”](#) (3 min),
Vetted books and websites about the Civil Rights Movement (see
resources on page 5)



Directions:

1. Discuss the Civil Rights Movement. What do students already know? Who were significant leaders during this period? Explain this was a time when people fought for their rights to be treated equally, regardless of their race. Emphasize the struggle for fundamental human rights such as the right to attend school, vote, and be treated with dignity, and that many children were actively involved in this movement.
2. Ask students to share examples of times they felt unfairly treated, or instances where they witnessed discrimination. This could include being excluded from a game because of their gender, being treated differently at school because of their race, or witnessing someone being bullied.
3. Encourage students to reflect on how they felt in these situations, and how they think those in the Civil Rights Movement might have felt when they were subjected to discrimination and segregation.
4. Watch “The Civil Rights Movement” video. Discuss key concepts such as the fight for desegregation, the struggle for voting rights, and the role of nonviolent resistance.
5. Divide students into small groups and assign each group a leader of the Civil Rights Movement such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, John Lewis, etc.
6. Have each group research their leader’s life and contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Encourage students to present their research in creative ways such as a poem, song, artistic timeline, etc.
7. Share each group’s presentation and reflect on each individual’s legacy. What has changed since the Civil Rights Movement? What rights do we still need to fight for?

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- Who participated in the Civil Rights Movement? How did they participate?
- Why were children willing to risk their safety to participate in the Civil Rights Movement?
- How did the Civil Rights Movement change the United States?

Post-Performance Activity: Reflecting on the Civil Rights Movement

Learning Goals:

- To reflect on the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement.
- To create an original artistic work inspired by the objectives and struggles of the Civil Rights Movement.

Materials:

Vetted books and websites about the Civil Rights Movement
(see resources on page 5), art supplies



Directions:

1. Discuss Muriel Johnson's performance. What did students learn from the program? What stood out in the history of the Civil Rights Movement? How does this connect to their own lives and experiences today?
2. Ask students to write a short response reflecting on the role of children in the Civil Rights Movement, the importance of listening to children's voices, and the impact of events like the Children's Crusade. How were students empowered by learning about this history?
3. Share responses with the class and note the similarities and differences between everyone's thoughts. Identify themes, issues, or people that students brought up in their responses that they may choose to engage with in the next steps.
4. Have students pick a topic (or multiple topics) from the list made in step 3. In small groups or alone, create an original work relating to the topic(s). This could include a poem, story, song, research project, timeline, skit, painting, collage, etc. Emphasize that there is no wrong medium to choose; this is about engaging creatively with the topic(s).
5. Have each student/group present their work. Emphasize being a respectful audience, including listening during presentations and applauding afterward.
6. Reflect on the students' projects. What was the creative process like? What was inspiring from watching the student presentations?
7. Discuss ways that students can take action in their own communities to advocate for social justice and equality, connecting the lessons of the Civil Rights Movement to the present day.

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Further Resources

- [Muriel Johnson Artist Website](#)
- **By Muriel Johnson:**
 - [We Sing Like This](#) (book of Cuban folktales)
 - [I Can See With My Ears](#) (storytelling CD)
 - **Storytelling videos:**
 - [“Storyteller Muriel Johnson”](#)
 - [“Little Daughter and the Wolf”](#)
 - [“How Goat Got Out of Trouble”](#)
- **Civil Rights Movement Teaching Resources:**
 - [Civil Rights Teaching: A Resource Guide for Classrooms and Communities](#)
 - [“Learning from the Civil Rights Movement” by Learning for Justice](#)
 - Jeffries, Hasan Kwame (editor): *Understanding and Teaching the Civil Rights Movement*, University of Wisconsin Press (2019)
 - Menkart, Deborah, Alana D. Murray, and Jenice L. View, editors: *Putting the Movement Back Into Civil Rights Teaching*, Teaching for Change (2024)
- **Books about the Civil Rights Movement:**
 - Bridges, Ruby: *Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story*, Scholastic (2009)
 - Butler-Ngugi, Anitra: *Nina Under Arrest: A Birmingham Children's Crusade Survival Story*, Capstone Press (2024)
 - Greenfield, Eloise: *Rosa Parks*, HarperCollins (1995)
 - Johnson, Angela: *A Sweet Smell of Roses*, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers (2007)
 - Levine, Ellen: *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*, Puffin Books (2000)
 - Pinkney, Andrea Davis: *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers (2010)
 - Ramsey, Calvin Alexander and Bettye Stroud: *Belle, The Last Mule at Gee's Bend: A Civil Rights Story*, Candlewick (2016)
 - Rochelle, Belinda: *Witnesses to Freedom: Young People Who Fought for Civil Rights*, Puffin Books (1997)
 - Shelton, Paula Young: *Child of the Civil Rights Movement*, Dragonfly Books (2013)
 - Tuck, Pamela M.: *As Fast as Words Could Fly*, Lee & Low Books (2013)
 - Tonatiuh, Duncan: *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation*, Harry N. Abrams (2014)
 - Weatherford, Carole Boston: *Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins*, Puffin Books (2007)

Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.02)

Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (T.P.06)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

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Curricular Connections, continued

History and Social Science

Grade 3

- Topic 5: The Puritans, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Native Peoples, and Africans (HSS.3.T5)

Grade 4

- Topic 4: The expansion of the United States over time and its regions today (HSS.4.T4)

Grade 5

- Topic 5: Slavery, the legacy of the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights for all (HSS.5.T5)

Grade 6

- Topic 1: Studying complex societies, past and present (HSS.6.T1)

Grade 8

- Topic 4: Rights and responsibilities of citizens (HSS.8.T4)
- Topic 5: The Constitution, Amendments, and Supreme Court decisions (HSS.8.T5)

Grades 9-12

- US History I Topic 4: Social, political, and religious change (HSS.USI.T4)
- US History I Topic 5: The Civil War and Reconstruction: causes and consequences (HSS.USI.T5)
- US History II Topic 2: Modernity in the United States: ideologies and economies (HSS.USII.T2)
- US History II Topic 4: Defending Democracy: the Cold War and Civil Rights at Home (HSS.USII.T4)
- US History II Topic 5: United States and globalization (HSS.USII.T5)

