

LESSON

BRING IT ON!: STORIES AND STRATEGIES FOR FIRST GRADE

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

Included in this section are lessons and stories written by first-grade teacher Maggie Donovan, along with reflections on their implementation. A number of the lessons can be adapted for any grade level. Her description of how to dramatize key events can be found along with the lesson on the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the Citizenship section.

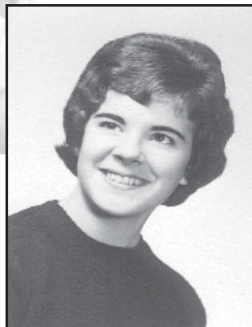
The titles that follow are included in this section:

- Letters from the Underground Railroad
- Sheyann Webb
- “Psssst! Hey Mister!” A Classic Freedom Story (story and lesson)
- Sit Down, Marie! Eugenia Fortes at the Hyannisport Beach
- Language
- Sit-Ups
- Bigger Than a Hamburger
- Dollar Days

Bring It On!: One year I was teaching about Rosa Parks with Cheryl Sutter, who teaches fourth grade. One of her boys told one of my boys about hooded and robed nightriders who persecuted Rosa Parks’ family when she was young. The fourth-grader said they had a funny name with a lot of k’s in it. My student brought this up during a class discussion and asked if it was the truth. I said yes and confessed that I left that part out because I thought it was too violent and distressing. Well, of course the first-graders were disdainful of my overprotectiveness and insisted on hearing the whole story. Peter said, “Bring it on!” This was a lesson to me.



(above) Maggie Donovan with first grade students Lauren, Aquille and Nick, 2003. (right) Maggie Donovan in 1963.



Acknowledgement: Like all movement work my curriculum represents the contributions of many people. I want to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for their understanding and support, those freedom fighters whose stories I have told for their inspiration, and my students and their families for helping me understand the meaning of my stories. I especially thank Bob Zellner and Cheryl Sutter, my collaborators.

Maggie Nolan Donovan

worked for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee from 1963 to 1967 during the Civil Rights Movement. She has taught young children on Cape Cod for 30 years. She also teaches teachers at the Wheelock College Graduate School in Boston, Massachusetts, and is a teacher-researcher with Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She considers teaching social justice as the central mission of her professional life.

Letters From The Underground Railroad

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

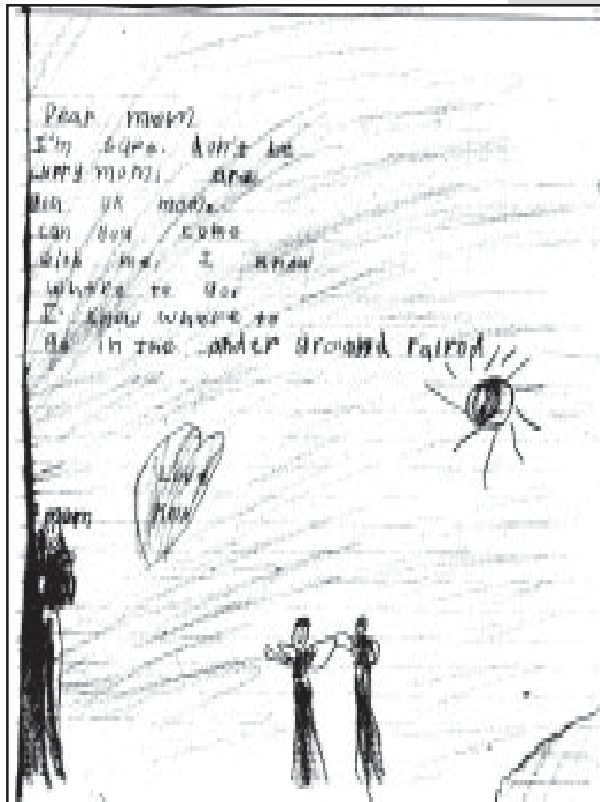
Students who have talked and read about Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman move beyond the drama and danger of a journey on the Underground Railroad to a deeper understanding of the costs of freedom. Chief among these costs in the eyes of the children I teach is the loss of family and loved ones. The idea of never seeing your family again goes straight to their hearts.

Children's books about the Underground Railroad like *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* by Deborah Hopkinson make clear not only the anguish of enslaved people who decided to escape, over the loss of family, but also the resolve of those who stayed behind that their younger family member would be free. Older slaves prepared the way for younger people, encouraging them and planning parts of their escapes. Often the older people stayed behind so that they could continue to help others escape.

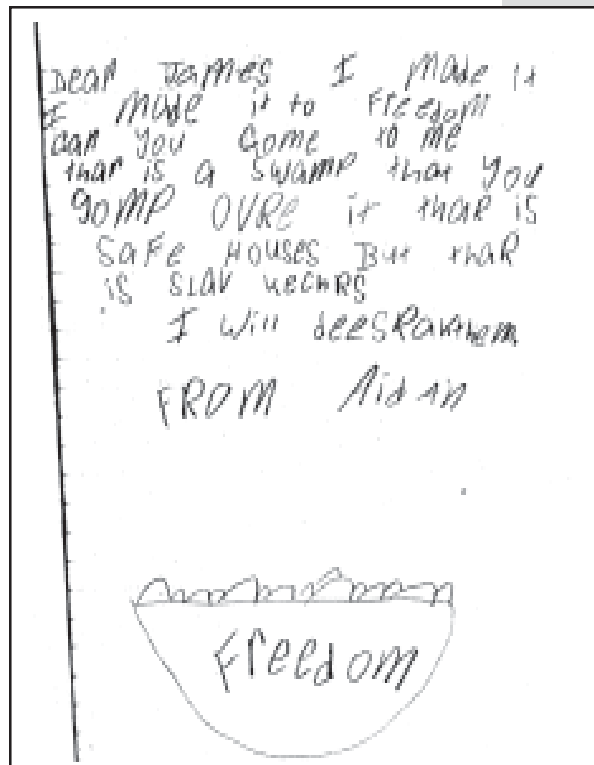
After children have considered this for a while I introduce the idea of letter-writing. We read several accounts of how slaves managed to send letters and messages back to their families, using codes and other strategies to prevent overseers and masters from interpreting the contents of the letters. People who couldn't write found others to write for them.

Now we are ready to write letters of our own. We have several discussions about what a runaway who has reached safety would want to say in such a letter. Children always suggest first the message: "I am safe." They also suggest words of enduring love and remembrance. Many think the letters should urge people to try to escape and describe some of the pleasures of freedom. Others consider messages of strength and hope for those who will not be traveling to freedom.

Once the children begin writing, the silence in the room is weighty. Children are completely absorbed and seem to have taken on the identities of runaway slaves. The letters are almost always to their parents. They are poignant and authentic in terms of human emotion.

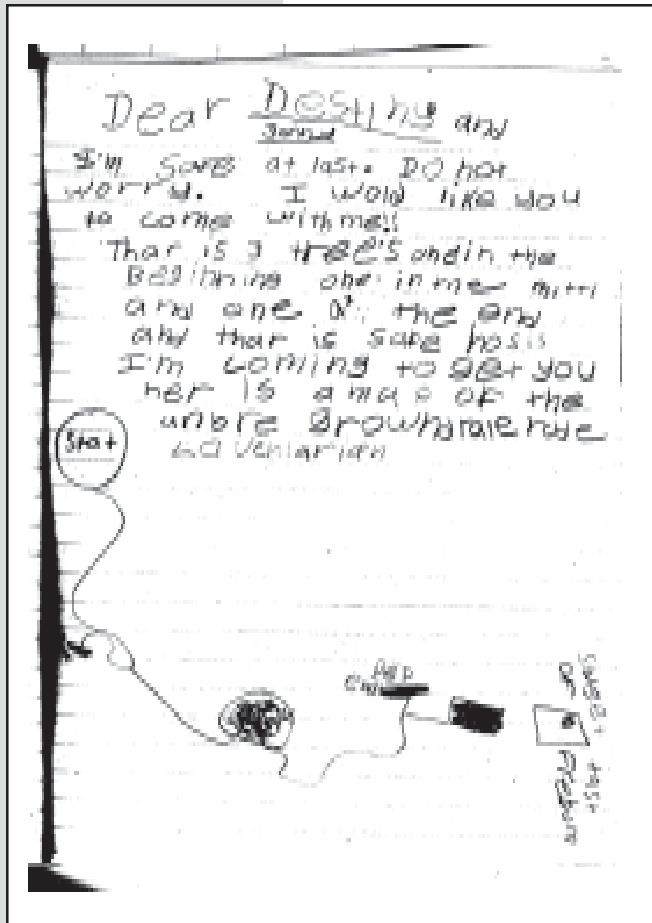


"Dear Mom, I'm safe. Don't be worried, Mom. Are you okay Mom? Can you come with me? I know where to go. I know where to go in the Underground Railroad. Love, Kelli."



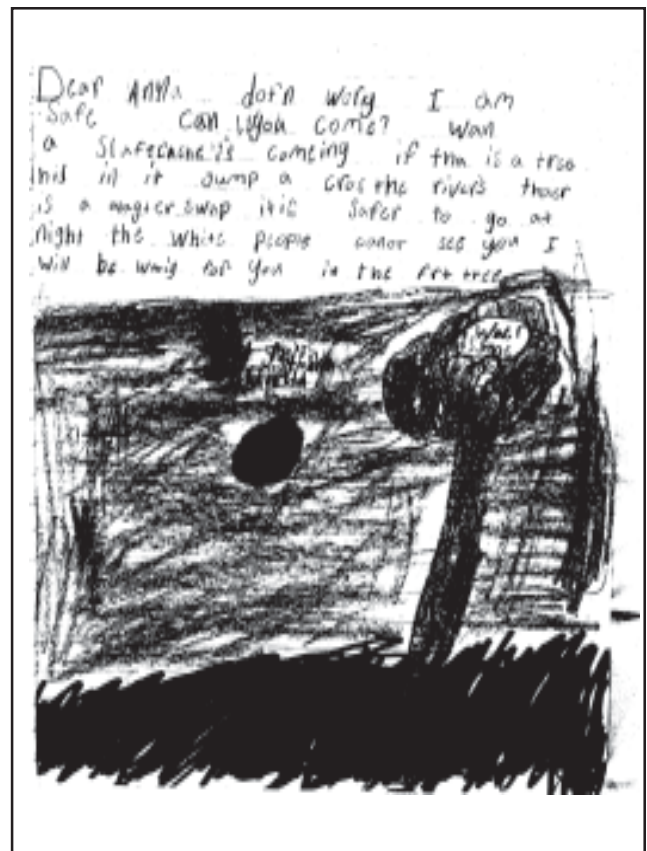
"Dear James, I made it! I made it to freedom! Can you come to me? There is a swamp that you jump over it. There is safe houses but there is slavecatchers. I will distract them. From, Aidan."

We publish the letters together in a classroom book we call *Letters from the Underground Railroad*. I send a second copy of each letter home. Families have pointed out that separation from family is part of the refugee, immigrant, and migrant worker experience. They often use these letters as starting points to talk about their own family histories.



“Dear Destiny and Jenny, And I’m safe at last. Do not worry. I would like you to come with me!! There is three trees in the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end. And there is safe houses. I’m coming to get you. Here is a map of the Underground Railroad. Love, Marian.”

“Dear Anna, Don’t worry, I am safe. Can you come? When a slavecatcher is coming, if there is a tree hide in it. Jump across the rivers. There is an alligator swamp. It is safer to go at night; the white people won’t see you. I will be waiting for you in the first tree.”



Sheyann Webb

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

Sheyann Webb was eight years old and a third-grader when she put on her “marching shoes.” As she walked to school one morning in January 1965 she happened on a meeting at the Brown Chapel AME Church that changed the direction of her days for the next few months. She stopped and stared across the street at the unusual bustle in front of the church on a weekday morning. People were gathered, talking in small groups, cars were parked in front and more cars were pulling up. Most surprising of all, some of the people clustered on the church steps were white. Something strange was going on. Sheyann was already late but she felt herself drawn across the street, up the steps and into the back of the church. Once inside Sheyann sat in a back pew and listened to Hosea Williams, an aide to Martin Luther King, speaking to the crowd. The words that stayed with Sheyann were, “If you can’t vote, then you’re not free; and if you ain’t free, children, then you’re a slave.” Sheyann couldn’t stop thinking about that. She knew her great, great grandmommas had been slaves and she knew her parents didn’t vote. Sheyann was hours late for school. When she arrived, her teacher reprimanded her in front of her classmates both for her tardiness and for getting involved with the dangerous goings-on at Brown Chapel.

Sheyann stopped going to school that day. She became the only child to regularly attend daytime meetings at Brown Chapel. She went to rallies and marches. She talked her best friend, Rachel West, into going with her, though only after school. She argued with her parents. She questioned her mother, “Why are we second-class citizens? Why can’t we vote? Why, why, why?” Sheyann badgered her parents day after day. Sometimes her father got up and walked out of the room. Her mother listened, tried to answer her questions and considered long and hard what Sheyann was saying. Sheyann’s mother also explained some reality to her. Trying to register could cost Sheyann’s parents their jobs or get them kicked out of public housing. And Sheyann was facing a worse possibility. Going to demonstrations could get you hurt or even killed. Her mother told her that four little girls in Birmingham, about her age, had died in a church bombing. From the beginning Sheyann understood the danger in her actions and she was often afraid.

Hosea Williams asked Sheyann if she could sing. Soon she was up front leading hundreds of people singing Freedom Songs, like “Woke Up This Morning with My Mind Stayed on Freedom” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round.” Rachel started singing with her. Sheyann’s parents came to Brown Chapel in the evenings to hear her sing, but they would not march or register.

Sheyann and Rachel became special friends of Dr. King’s. He often played a game with them, asking, “What do you want?” They would reply, “Freedom.” Dr. King would say, “I can’t hear you,” and they would say “Freedom,” louder and louder until they were all shouting and all three were laughing. One day Dr. King asked them, “Do you young ladies have your marching shoes on?” They



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Sheyann Webb, 1965.

looked down at their feet uncertainly. Rachel lifted one shoe to show him. Each girl had only one pair of shoes. “They’ll do,” Dr. King said, “They’re just fine.”

Sheyann took part in many marches. She saw people all around her beaten, hit with clubs, shocked with cattle prods. She held tight to the hand of an adult marcher, Margaret Moore. She sang to gain courage; she prayed, but the fear haunted her dreams by night and her talks with Rachel by day. She was especially afraid of the horses the mounted police would ride into the crowd. Stronger than her fear were her conviction and determination. And she saw change in those around her. She witnessed the teachers march and saw her own teacher, Mrs. Bright, among the marchers. She saw her mother’s mix of fear and admiration when they talked. She overheard her mother defending her to her father when she was skipping school.

One night Sheyann stayed up late to polish her father’s shoes. She rubbed until her arm was sore and the worn leather showed her blurred reflection. A few days later her mother asked what she would like for her birthday on February 17. Her answer was swift and sure: “Register.” The next morning when Sheyann came downstairs for breakfast, both her parents were sitting in the kitchen. This was strange; her father had usually left for work before she was up. “Shey, you’re getting your birthday present a day early,” her Momma said. Sheyann walked between them and held their hands as they joined the long line to register. They stayed in line all day. White passersby sprayed Raid and disinfectant at them and held their noses. The courthouse closed before they reached the doors. They went home disappointed but not defeated. Their decision was made and Sheyann’s parents did finally register to vote.

Sheyann Webb marched twice across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in the marches from Selma to Montgomery. The first time she was gassed and driven back with others, but the second time she crossed the bridge, triumphant. Dr. King sent the girls back to Selma from the Montgomery road, telling them they had marched enough. Sheyann told him, “My feet and legs may be tired, but my soul still feels like marchin’,” as she boarded a bus to return home.

Two people Sheyann knew and loved died in the struggle: Jonathan Daniels, a young white seminarian from New Hampshire who lived with Rachel’s family; and of course, her beloved Dr. King. Others who marched with her were killed, and most, Sheyann included, were insulted, threatened, gassed, beaten, or jailed. Sheyann registered to vote on her 18th birthday.

Resources

Levine, Ellen. *Freedom’s Children*. G. P. Putnam’s Sons: New York, 1993.

Webb, Sheyann and Rachel West Nelson as told to Frank Sikora. *Selma, Lord, Selma*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980.

“PSSSSST! Hey Mister!”: A Class Freedom Story

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

This lesson is based on the reaction of students and the follow-up activities to the story, “PSSSSST! Hey Mister!” The story, written for first-graders by Maggie Donovan based on an interview with Bob Zellner, follows this lesson.

“Hey! Let's make a book of it!” Alex cried as soon as I finished telling the story, “PSSSSST! Hey Mister!” to a hushed audience of first-graders. They knew Bob Zellner, my friend who had visited our class several times and was a favorite of theirs, but they had never heard this adventure story of his rescue by a nameless little hero. Their eyes shone as they imagined a soft-spoken, sure-footed, cool, calm, and collected freedom fighter in the tradition of their beloved Harriet Tubman, leading the way out of danger to the Promised Land. And, like Ruby Bridges, he was about their age. Not knowing his name gave the illusion that one of them could almost be him. “Yeah, it's a book!” voices called out in agreement. They wanted to capture this story, to pin it down and hold it fast on paper

“But how will we do it?” I asked. Ideas spilled out in a river of possibilities: mostly pictures, just a few words per page, each page drawn by a pair of children, like scenes from a play. We made a list of scenes on chart paper and children partnered up and chose a page. My job was to type up a pithy text which would capture the content of their pictures. This story would be told mostly through artwork with just enough words to outline the plot. Some conflicts arose over page assignments. Several pairs of boys chose the scene where Bob jumps off the porch, falls a long way, and rolls down a hill. Our solution was eminently satisfying. Anyone who wanted to draw that scene did, and they were all included in the final product. The effect was something like a flipbook where, if you flip the pages quickly, you see the illusion of action. Bob falls through several pages and rolls through several more. Some children wanted to illustrate two or three different scenes, so they did. When the illustrations were complete we put them all in order and bound the book on our spiral binding machine. My text, typed and printed, was cut into strips and glued on each page. Everyone collaborated on the cover. It acknowledges Bob Zellner as the original storyteller. Each child also signed the front as illustrator. In a burst of enthusiasm we decided it was the first of a series and added the series name, *Freedom Stories*, over the title.

The finished book delighted us all. Some scenes, like the party and the jump, have three or four pages devoted to them. The text is often only one or two words like “Surrounded” or “Follow me.” The characters change in appearance and even gender from page to page. For instance, the page showing the end of the trip through the trees has one word of text, “Safe,” and the illustration is of two girls. The book is roomy enough to invite readers to enter and walk around in the world of the story. It encourages multiple interpretations. The energy and momentum of the drawings carry the reader through the story, and the lack of text provides children with opportunities to make up dialogue and add descriptive language of their own as they read. We made several copies on the copy machine, and children added color to the black and white of the copied pages. We sent Bob a book with a letter thanking him for the story.

“PSSSSST! Hey Mister!” is the most popular of our class books, and we have written many. Children are proudest of it and identify with it most strongly. They read it over and over and add occasional artistic touches to their pages. I understand that in some way they are not only authors and illustrators but characters in this story. The series name, *Freedom Stories*, marked the first time the word freedom became identified with our work, a word with special significance to our class and a word we consid-

ered our own. Later, terms like Freedom People and Freedom Work were coined by students and added to our class vocabulary. And the little boy, called Freedom Fighter, represented all of us Freedom Fighters connected over time and space, by our thirst for freedom.

“PSSSSST! Hey Mister!”

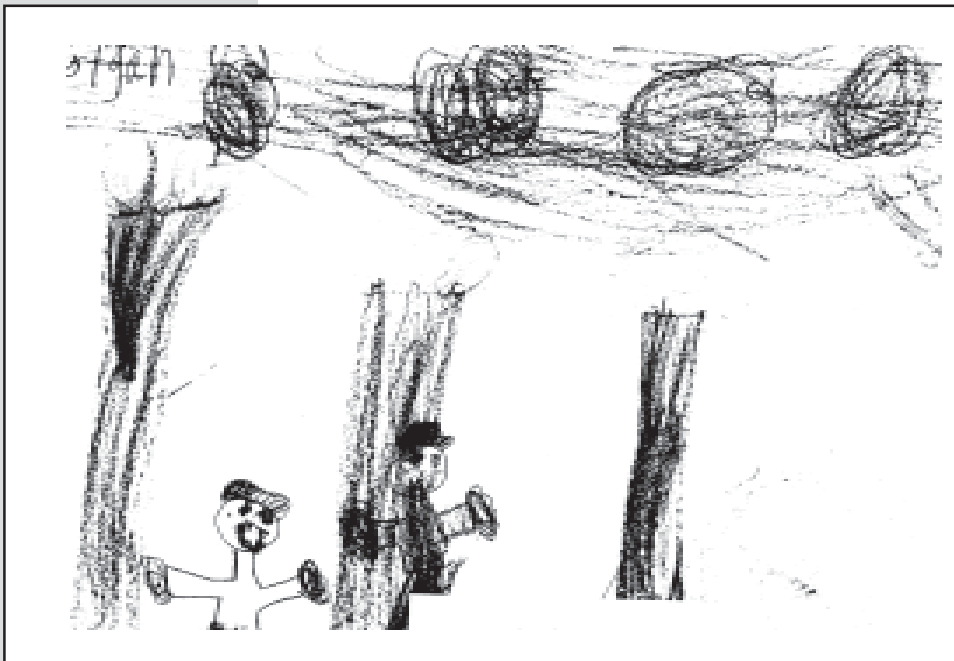
A True Story Told by Bob Zellner

By Maggie Nolan Donovan, based on interviews with Bob Zellner

Bob was having fun at the party. It was a balmy night with a full moon and the little backyard was crowded with neighbors from all up and down the street. Children had strung up colored paper lanterns, and candles flickered on the back steps. Card tables were set up and covered with all sorts of delicacies. Platters of fried chicken and bowls of macaroni and cheese crowded against each other. Whole tables were filled with homemade cakes and pies. There were even cupcakes the children had decorated with freedom symbols. It seemed like all the cooks in that part of town had outdone themselves. School was out, and little children could stay up late. They chased each other through the grownups’ legs. Old folks sat in kitchen chairs chatting and watching the young people. The record player was spinning and some teenagers had started to dance. The little yard was so full that the party had spilled into the yard next door. It looked as if the whole African-American community had turned out for the festivities.

Bob had just been in Danville a few days and he didn’t know many people yet. He had come there to help organize meetings and marches to protest the living conditions for

African-American families; poor schools, poor housing, poor jobs, and especially to register people to vote. Many white people, especially those in power, didn’t want to see these changes, and there had been trouble. Black people who marched or tried to register had been beaten and jailed. Some nights the city looked like a battlefield with barricades, tear gas bombs, and mobs armed with clubs and even guns attacking the peaceful protestors. The protestors did not fight back, but they did keep meeting, marching, and trying to register. They sang and held hands as they faced the angry crowds and gave each other courage. Tonight people were relaxing and



“In the woods”
by Morgan

trying to forget their struggles for a few hours. The party was a way to welcome the young organizers like Bob who wanted to help the local people in their fight for freedom.

Bob, a young white man from Alabama, was glad of a chance to get acquainted, and begin to make some new friends. He was heading back toward the picnic tables for one more piece of strawberry pie when suddenly everyone froze. A loud voice told people to stand still. The police had come to break up the party and arrest everyone there. A moment passed and then people started running in all directions trying to escape. Bob ran too, though he didn't know where he was going. He followed a young couple with children and when they dashed in a back door he followed.

Once inside, everyone paused while they caught their breaths. The young couple looked at each other and then at Bob. The mother wrapped her arms around her children and spoke, "I'm sorry, you'll have to leave. The police are looking for white people from out of town who are helping register voters. They are especially angry with them and will blame anyone who tries to help them. You are putting our family in danger by being here."

The woman looked really sorry and her voice was sad but firm. Bob understood. He knew what the woman said was true. He was scared, but he opened the front door and stepped onto the little porch. The police were waiting. They shone their flashlights on Bob and someone fired a gun, which splintered the wood just beside him. Bob ran the length of the porch and jumped over the rail. He didn't know that the house was built on a steep hillside and he fell a long way to the ground. He landed on his back and rolled into a thicket of pricker bushes at the bottom of the hill.

Bob lay very still in the middle of the pricker bush. The thorns scratched his face and hands and caught in his clothes. He could hear the police searching for him and even see their flashlights shining through the thick branches, but the light didn't reach to where he lay scarcely daring to breathe. He stayed there, cramped and wet from the muddy ground, for what seemed like hours. Something brushed his leg. Something touched his arm. Bob tried not to think about spiders and snakes. Finally he heard one police officer say, "He's not here. He must have gotten away. Let's search the yard next door." Still Bob lay quiet. What if this was a trick and they were waiting with their lights turned off? A long time passed. Bob could hear frogs and crickets. A dog barked. Then he thought he heard a different sound; a kind of whispery sound. He listened harder and heard it again, just a little louder, "Psssst, hey mister!" He didn't dare answer or move. There it was a third time, even a little louder, "Hey mister! They're gone!" Bob couldn't stay curled up much longer. He decided to take a chance and crawled out of the thicket. There in the moonlight, just at the edge of the yard where the woods began stood a little



"The bramble bush"
by Josh

brown-skinned boy no more than seven or eight. He reached out and took Bob's hand. "Follow me," he whispered and turned into the trees. Bob followed. The boy moved like a shadow through tree trunks, briars, and brambles, holding back the thorny branches for Bob to pass. He never stopped but seemed always to know the way, though they twisted and turned and the leaves overhead blocked the moon's light. They walked for a long time. Then it seemed the woods grew less thick and Bob could see light ahead. They came out of the trees and stood on a sidewalk a long way from where they had started. The street was quiet and deserted. The boy pointed the direction that Bob should go and then melted back into the woods. "Wait," Bob whispered. The boy turned. "Thank you," Bob said softly. The boy smiled, nodded, and disappeared. Slowly Bob made his way back to the house where he was staying. His heart pounded until he was safely inside.

That night in bed Bob thought of the little boy who had saved him. How calm he had been, how smart and how brave. He was a little freedom fighter, and since Bob didn't know his name, he always thought of him that way. In all the years between then and now, in bed at night, Bob has thought often of the little freedom fighter and thanked him again with all his heart.

Sit Down, Marie!

Eugenia Fortes at the Hyannisport Beach

As told by Eugenia Fortes, written by Maggie Donovan

Eugenia showed Marie all around the house. It was a big house, and Eugenia knew every corner. She often stayed here when the family she worked for was away. She had been waiting for weeks for Marie to arrive for her first visit to Cape Cod. She had the day well planned. First the house tour and then a walk to the beach just down the road. They wouldn't stay long—it was too hot—but Eugenia wanted Marie to enjoy the shining sands and blue waters of Nantucket Sound.

Marie and Eugenia had met when Eugenia boarded in Boston for the winter to take a job there. They both lived in a house for African-American young women because they were not allowed to stay in white boarding houses or at the YWCA. Eugenia was 13 that year. Marie was a college student from Ohio. In the years since, Eugenia and Marie had stayed in touch. They had always dreamed that Marie would come to Cape Cod.

When they reached the Hyannisport Public beach that perfect summer day, they paused at the edge of the sand to choose the best spot for sunbathing. Then they spread their blankets and stretched out. Marie wiggled her toes in the sand and breathed the salty air. The ocean stretched calm and sparkling before them. Eugenia felt happy inside. Her friend seemed so taken with how beautiful everything was. She sighed, closed her eyes, and let the sunshine spread over her.

"Excuse me." A deep voice right beside them roused the friends from their day-dreams. They looked up startled to see a police officer staring down on them. "We've had a call at the station from one of the neighbors here. This is the white side of the beach. You need to move over there to the colored side."

Marie and Eugenia stared at the man in amazement. Then Marie scrambled to her feet. Eugenia reached up and grabbed at the hem of Marie's skirt. She gave a hard tug on the cloth.

"Sit down, Marie!" she commanded.

Marie looked at the policeman's red, nervous face. Then she looked at Eugenia's brown, determined one. Eugenia's eyes almost shot sparks, they looked so angry. Her arms were folded and her back was straight. She was sitting up staring at the ocean. Marie sat back down.

Eugenia never looked at the police officer but she said in a clear voice, "This is a public beach. We're staying right here!"

Marie glanced up at the man. His face was sweaty and his hands were shaking a little. Marie glanced at Eugenia. Her face was calm and her eyes never left the water.

And so they sat. No one said anything. After a while, the man gave up and walked away. Marie was hot and thirsty. She started to feel a little hungry too. And she was worried that the police officer might come back or the neighbors might gather.

"Why don't we go back now, Eugenia," she suggested. "You made your point. I'm hot. Didn't we plan to just stay a few minutes?"

"We're not going anywhere," Eugenia replied.

And so the two friends sat and watched the sun drop lower and lower toward the horizon. Not until the first star shone in the evening sky did they get up and leave the beach.

Language

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

Groups of tired children with their parent chaperones drifted back to the grassy hill where we were meeting before riding the bus back to school. We had just spent three hours at the Roger Williams Zoo in Providence, Rhode Island. We were hot, thirsty, dusty, and generally worn out, though we'd had a lot of fun. Two groups were still lingering inside, and those of us sitting waiting were getting restless. I had asked the children to sit, since the hill was next to the parking lot where countless school buses were pulling in and out. For a while they remembered, but then one or two started to pop up and move around. "Sit down," I reminded them and they did, but someone else would pop up. "Sit down," I kept repeating. After a few reminders the seated children took up my words. "Sit down!" They scolded their fidgety classmates, "Sit down."

Among the chorus of "Sit downs!" I heard a voice say, "Sit down, Marie!" There are no Maries in our class, but those words have been spoken many times as children acted out the story of Eugenia Fortes and her friend Marie. Now the children on the hillside all began to say, "Sit down, Marie!" to each other. It became a game. Someone would jump up, everybody would shout together, "Sit down, Marie!" and the person would sit back down fast to be replaced by one or two others who, in their turn, were told to, "Sit down, Marie!" The minutes flew by until the missing classmates returned. Then they were quickly taught, "Sit down, Marie!" before we boarded the bus.

On the long ride home I mulled this new game over in my mind. This memorable phrase, spoken on a segregated beach on Cape Cod 60-something years ago had become part of our classroom vocabulary, serving both as a directive and a group game. It belonged to us all and when the children gleefully shouted "Sit down, Marie!" all those standing promptly sat down. No one had waited or changed the game by refusing.

The weight of history was tangled in those words and the ritualized action that accompanied them. It seemed to me that both the language and the actions of Eugenia Fortes had been internalized by these children who so strongly identified with the spirit of her story. "Sit down" is the spirit too of Rosa Parks, of all those who sat in at lunch counters, of African-American children who sat at their desks in school and studied as all around them white classmates pulled their desks away, of Freedom Riders on Greyhound buses. And I believe these first-graders feel heir to that spirit and are welcoming it into their lives.

As a confirmation to this idea, some children riding in the back of the bus began to sing, "If you miss me from the back of the bus..." and everyone took up this favorite song and sang with gusto. We traveled to the music of our own voices raised in the songs of freedom all the way home.

Sit-Ups

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

Often teachers wonder how much influence their teaching of a particular lesson holds. What do children retain, and how have they interpreted the lessons within the lesson? Usually we don't know, but sometimes we get a sign. On Friday mornings in my classroom students write in their journals about something they have learned in school during the week. Later this information appears in a family newsletter.

One Friday, in a week where we'd talked about sit-ins, two girls asked if they could sit together so that they could compare notes. They wanted to write about the same thing in each of their journals. The two girls, one black and one white, alternately whispered and wrote. Their heads were down and almost touching, they seemed wholly absorbed by their task.

After a while Amber called me over. She wanted to know how to spell sit-ups. I helped her figure it out but inwardly I felt a familiar itch of irritation. Children were writing about gym class once again when I hoped for a more academic focus. More time passed. Kali called me over. She needed help spelling ketchup. Once again I obliged and once again I felt the itch. First gym, now lunch!

Finally they were finished. They seemed very pleased with their work and called me over to see it. Each girl had written, "The students held sit-ups at lunch counters. People poured ketchup and mustard on them." They had illustrated their pages with vivid, detailed drawings. When we brought our journals to a sharing circle, the girls read their entries. I had been tempted to correct them, but fortunately I had held my tongue.

Their classmates considered the entries carefully. Some said they thought the term was sit-ins. Amber and Kali held their ground in their reply. Perhaps so, but the students didn't slouch at that counter. They kept their backs straight and their heads high because you've got to sit UP for your freedom. This argument was greeted with noisy approval. Children's backs straightened as they sat. That year was the year of the sit-up movement in our class. And once more I had seen how young children make history their own.

Bigger Than a Hamburger

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

“A hamburger is such a little thing,” exclaimed seven-year-old Hannah during a discussion about sit-ins. She was expressing her surprise and annoyance at so much fuss, so much hostility and resistance, to someone ordering a hamburger. I reminded her that the issues behind the sit-in movement were, in Ella Baker’s words, “bigger than a hamburger.” She nodded, as did most of the children sitting in a circle with her.

We had discussed the layered nature of sit-in goals several times before, and children understood that the students at the lunch counters wanted both a hamburger and racial justice. They knew that Ella Baker is a figure of central importance in the Civil Rights Movement. They were familiar with her work for the NAACP and as an advisor to the students who sat in and later formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. She

“The Southern Leadership Conference made it crystal clear that current sit-ins and other demonstrations are concerned with something much bigger than a hamburger or even a giant-sized coke.

Whatever may be the different approach to their goal, the Negro and white student are seeking to rid America of the scourge of racial segregation and discrimination not only at lunch counters, but in every aspect of life.” —Ella J. Baker, *Southern Patriot*, May 1960.



“Freedom, justice, peace, happiness, friends and birds flying.” by Makaila

is one of many figures from the Movement whose voices are heard in our classroom. Ella Baker’s words, and Hannah’s, resonated with me as I thought about another way to help students respond to sit-in stories. I suggested we make a hamburger bulletin board. Its purpose would be to explore what ideas might be bigger than a hamburger.

I drew a large burger, complete with cheese, lettuce, tomato, and onion, in a bun, and made copies for everyone. I cut up strips of oak tag for students to write on. Children colored and cut out the burgers and then wrote on the oak tag strips their ideas of what’s bigger than a hamburger. Each child stapled a strip over the hamburger. We made a big

display across the back wall of our classroom.

Among the words the children wrote were:

- freedom
- justice
- equality
- joy
- peace
- happiness
- love

When the bulletin board was complete, we sat beneath it as we discussed why we had chosen certain words, why those words are still important, and what they meant to us. We wanted people passing through to ask the meaning of our display, and they did.

The first-graders deepened their own understanding as they answered the visitors' questions and quoted both Hannah and Ella Baker on the size of a hamburger. Playing with size and making things bigger are two experiences that deeply engage young children. Linking size to sit-in stories allows them to explore Movement history and their own ideas and fantasies about power. It also enriches their language experiences as they consider symbol and metaphor. I am pursuing my own size fantasy by realizing that I can make those paper hamburgers a whole lot bigger. Next year I plan to introduce giant burgers, really big strips of paper covered with huge words and an enormous display which may spill out of the classroom and into the corridor. "These ideas are big," we'll be saying. "They are powerful. They must be struggled for. The struggle continues."

Dollar Days

By Maggie Nolan Donovan

When I develop curriculum about the Civil Rights Movement, it is often in response to things my students say to me or each other. We follow a pattern which grows out of stories I have told and their responses to those stories. It is a kind of dialogue. They respond to my stories, I respond to their responses. I spend a lot of time thinking about how I can extend their ideas. Often children will surprise me by returning to a topic we discussed months before. The following anecdote is one such instance.

We had studied slavery in the late fall and winter, focusing on slave resistance: Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and the Underground Railroad. We had not discussed slaveowners. While we had talked about Abraham Lincoln, we had not mentioned George Washington. Now it was spring. Eddie and Anthony, two seven-year-olds, were arguing quietly but heatedly at their desks. I noticed but did not intervene. After a while they came to me. Eddie, highly indignant, said Anthony had just told him that George Washington owned slaves. Anthony, resolute, said that was what his brother had told him and he believed his brother. Eddie implored me to correct Anthony's misunderstanding. When I quietly confirmed what Anthony had said, Eddie looked stricken. There was a pause. I expected him to say George Washington was the first president or the Father of Our Country but what he said was, "But he's on the dollar bill!"

After school and into the night I pondered Eddie's words and where they might lead our class. In the morning I had a plan. I put a dollar bill in the copy machine. I then cut the oval containing George Washington's picture out of the copy. I enlarged the copy and made a stack of large green dollar bills with blank centers. I called the class together. We talked about Eddie's outrage, and I asked them who they felt should be on a dollar bill. Someone who had done something to help other people they agreed. Some children suggested sports stars and singers. Most suggested historical figures whom we call freedom fighters.

I sent them off to draw whomever they wanted on their dollar bills. Among the people chosen were Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, Ruby Bridges, Martin Luther King Jr., and Abraham Lincoln. One child, a traditionalist, I guess, drew George Washington. Another child drew her great-grandfather who had fought in World War II. We had fun shopping with our dollar bills. Then we made a wall display and sitting close by it talked again about our choices. We also speculated as to what kind of campaign might result in getting some new faces on the dollar bill.

This experience might be extended to include research on when and how Washington first appeared on the dollar bill and letter-writing to inquire how to open up a selection process so that other faces might also appear on dollar bills. I find the combination of taking symbolic and real action to be compelling because children visit the issue on two different levels. The symbolic is powerful because it allows students and teachers to envision something different, to experience change. Washington on the dollar bill seems immutable, but we changed it in a flash. Change is possible. Real action is also empowering because it usually elicits some response and, while frustrating, allows students to experience the energizing effects of speaking out, of dissent. It also can produce unexpected allies and support, especially when letters are written to the press. However, teachers have to be vigilant in making sure that children are taken seriously and not seen as cute.

Finally, real action teaches the lesson of persistence, which is central to understanding the Civil Rights Movement. Real change takes enormous, sustained effort. I also like working with money because it emphasizes the relationship of racism and economics.

Usually, when slavery is addressed in lessons with young children, its economic roots are not mentioned. Therefore, the purpose of slavery and the network of financial benefit which spreads over the whole country are never explained. For northern children slavery becomes a terrible thing that happened in another time and place, for reasons that are never explained. The subsequent relationship between segregation and profit is also not addressed. Nor is the present-day connection between economics and racism. I think that part of a teacher's responsibility is to name this connection and keep it on the surface of lessons in social justice.

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