THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PRE-READING TASK


A Southern Plantation, Oak Valley

1. Which states are commonly referred to as the Southern States of the USA?
2. What do you know about the history of these states?

STRANGE FRUIT / Billie Holiday

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant south,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.


Southern Live Oak / Quercus Virginia

(Songwriters: Dwayne Wiggins, Maurice Pearl, Lewis Allan. This is the 1938 version of the song taken from the album *Billie remembers Billie)*

COMPREHENSION

1. What is this fruit that is hanging from the “Southern trees”?
2. Describe the strange contrast in the second stanza of the song.
3. Which words echo very strongly in the song?
4. Comment on the tone used in the song.

GOING BEYOND THE TEXT

1. What is meant by “lynching”?
2. Look up statistics of lynchings in America.
3. What were the reasons for these lynchings?
4. Describe what you can see in the following photographs.
5. When were these pictures probably taken?
6. Describe your feelings when looking at these pictures.

1. Describe what you can see in the following pictures (photographs or posters).
2. When and where were these photographs taken? Justify your choice.
3. What is / are the subject(s) that they all seem to deal with collectively?

PRE-READING TASK

Which places in the world would you find too dangerous to travel to? Explain your reason (s).

Emmett Louis Till (1941-1955)

Mamie Till was a devoted, well-educated mother who taught her son that a person's worth did not depend on the color of his or her skin. Nevertheless, when she put 14-year-old Emmett on a train bound for Mississippi in the summer of 1955, she warned him: "If you have to get down on your knees and bow when a white person goes past, do it willingly."

It was not in Emmett Till to bow down. Raised in a working-class section of Chicago, he was bold and self-assured. He didn't understand the timid attitude of his Southern cousins toward whites. He even tried to impress them by showing them a photo of some white Chicago youths, claiming the girl in the picture was his girlfriend.

One day he took the photo out of his wallet and showed it to a group of boys standing outside a country store in Money, Mississippi. The boys dared him to speak to a white woman in the store. Emmett walked in confidently, bought some candy from Carolyn Bryant, the wife of the store owner, and said "Bye baby" on his way out.

Within hours, nearly everyone in town had heard at least one version of the incident. Some said Emmett has asked Mrs. Bryant for a date; others said he whistled at her. Whatever the details were, Roy Bryant was outraged that a black youth had been disrespectful to his wife. That weekend, Bryant and his half-brother J.W. Milam went looking for Till. They came to a cotton field shack that belonged to Mose Wright, a 64-year-old farmer and grandfather of Emmett Till's cousin. Bryant demanded to see

"the boy that did the talking." Wright reluctantly got Till out of bed. As the white men took Emmett Till away, they told Wright not to cause any trouble or he'd "never live to be 65." A magazine writer later paid Milam to describe what happened that night. Milam said he and Bryant beat Emmett Till, shot him in the head, wired a 75-pound cotton gin fan to his neck and dumped his body in the Tallahatchie River.

When asked why he did it, Milam responded: "Well, what else could I do? He thought he was as good as any white man."

So The World Could See

Till's body was found three days later – a bullet in the skull, one eye gouged out and the head crushed in on one side. The face was unrecognizable. Mose Wright knew it was Till only because of a signet ring that remained on one finger. The ring had belonged to Emmett's father Louis, who had died ten years earlier, and bore his initials L.T.

Mamie Till demanded the body of her son be sent back to Chicago. Then she ordered an open-casket funeral so the world could see what had been done to Emmett. Jet magazine published a picture of the horribly disfigured corpse. Thousands viewed the body and attended the funeral.

All over the country, blacks and sympathetic whites were horrified by the killing. Thousands of people sent money to the NAACP to support its legal efforts on behalf of black victims.

In the meantime, J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant faced murder charges. They admitted they kidnapped and beat Emmett Till, but claimed they left him alive. Ignoring nationwide criticism, white Mississippians raised $ 10,000 to pay the legal expenses for Milam and Bryant. Five white local lawyers volunteered to represent them at the murder trial.

Mose Wright risked his life to testify against the men. In a courtroom filled with reporters and white spectators, the frail black farmer stood and identified Bryant and Milam as the men who took Emmett away.

Wright's act of courage didn't convince the all-white jury. After deliberating just over an hour, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty.

The murder of Emmett Till was the spark that set the civil rights movement on fire. For those who would become leaders of the movement, the martyred 14-year-old was a symbol of the struggle for equality.

"The Emmett Till case shook the foundations of Mississippi," said Myrlie Evers, widow of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, "…because it said even a child was not safe from racism and bigotry and death."

NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins said white Mississippians "had to prove they were superior … by taking away a 14-year-old boy." Fred Shuttlesworth, who eight years later would lead the fight for integration in Birmingham, said, "The fact that Emmett Till, a young black man, could be found floating down the river in Mississippi just set in concrete the determination of the people to move forward … only God can know how many Negroes have come up missing, dead and killed under this system with which we live."

(Taken from *Free at Last*, a book on the American Civil Rights Movement)

COMPREHENSION

1. Describe your feelings and the thoughts going through your head after having read the story of Emmett Till.
2. What kind of attitude do Bryant and Milam display here? How can their actions be explained?
3. How can the jury's verdict of "not guilty" be explained?

PROJECT

1. Analyse Bob Dylan's song '*The Death of Emmett Till'* and point out the differences and similarities between the song and the events described above.
2. What could have been the effect of such a song?

THE DEATH OF EMMETT TILL / Bob Dylan

'Twas down in Mississippi not so long ago
When a young boy from Chicago town stepped through a Southern door
This boy's dreadful tragedy I can still remember well
The color of his skin was black and his name was Emmett Till
Some men they dragged him to a barn and there they beat him up
They said they had a reason, but I can't remember what
They tortured him and did some things too evil to repeat
There were screaming sounds inside the barn, there was laughing sounds
out on the street
Then they rolled his body down a gulf amidst a bloody red rain
And they threw him in the waters wide to cease his screaming pain
The reason that they killed him there, and I'm sure it ain't no lie
Was just for the fun of killin' him and to watch him slowly die
And then to stop the United States of yelling for a trial
Two brothers they confessed that they had killed poor Emmett Till
But on the jury there were men who helped the brothers commit this
awful crime
And so this trial was a mockery, but nobody seemed to mind
I saw the morning papers but I could not bear to see
The smiling brothers walkin' down the courthouse stairs
For the jury found them innocent and the brothers they went free
While Emmett's body floats the foam of a Jim Crow southern sea
If you can't speak out against this kind of thing, a crime that's so unjust
Your eyes are filled with dead men's dirt, your mind is filled with dust
Your arms and legs they must be in shackles and chains, and your blood
it must refuse to flow
For you let this human race fall down so God-awful low!
This song is just a reminder to remind your fellow man
That this kind of thing still lives today in that ghost-robed Ku Klux Klan
But if all of us folks that thinks alike, if we gave all we could give
We could make this great land of ours a greater place to live

COMPREHENSION

1. What exactly does Bob Dylan criticize in his song?
2. What is the message / moral he gives at the end of the song?
3. Pick out two lines from the lyrics and comment on them or analyse their meaning in more detail.
4. What is the picture that he evokes with strong expressions like “a Jim Crow southern sea” and “that ghost-robed Ku Klux Klan”?
5. Point out examples of informal language in the song.

PROJECT

Look at some other Bob Dylan songs like “*Hurricane*”, “*The Ballad of Hollis Brown*” or “*Joey*” and comment on their quality as songs of social criticism.

ESSAY TOPIC

The true artist has the desire to comment on the society that he / she lives in. Discuss.

INFORMATION ON THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE USA

Four of the most important people associated with the American Civil Rights movement are pictured clockwise from top left: W.E.B. Du Bois[1], Malcolm X[2], Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr.

"… *WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness …..*"

(from the ***American Declaration Of Independence***, 4th July 1776)

"*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character*."

(**Martin Luther King Jr**, 1963)

NOTE: On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the **Civil Rights Act** of 1964. It forbade discrimination based on a person's race, color, national

[1] W.E.B Du Bois (1868 – 1963) was a black leader, who had received a doctorate from Harvard University. He believed that blacks should fight for full equality.

[2] Malcolm X was a fierce critic of many civil rights leaders whom he thought were simply being used by white people. He did not believe in non---violence and instead said that black people should use any means to defend themselves.

origin, religious beliefs, or sex. It protected every citizen's right to use public facilities, to get employment, and to vote.

TASK: RESEARCH

Look up information on the following subjects and complete this page with definitions and information

1. NAACP

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2. CORE

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3. Ku Klux Klan

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4. lynching

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5. segregation and desegregation of public facilities

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6. school integration

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7. Jim Crow

8. Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)

9. sit-ins

10. freedom rides

11. Medgar Evers

12. Rosa Parks

13. Montgomery Bus Boycott

14. Black Power / Black Panthers

15. Malcolm X

16. Stokely Carmichael

17. James Meredith

18. Selma to Montgomery, Alabama

19. Reverend Jesse Jackson

20. The Los Angeles Race Riots (1992)

PRE-READING TASK

1. What is meant by activism?
2. Do you know people who could be rightfully called activists?

CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS ABDUCTED AND SLAIN BY KLAN PHILADELPHIA, MISSISSIPPI, JUNE 1964

Mount Zion Methodist Church had stood solid since the turn of the century, but by Sunday, June 21, 1964, nothing was left except a pile of bricks and ashes, a few charred hymnals, and the church bell.

SOURCE: FBI

Three young civil rights workers – Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman – stood amid the rubble, staring dismally at what would have been their first Freedom School. Church members had only reluctantly agreed to make their building available for civil rights activities for fear that something like this would happen.

Now their church was in ruins; several of their members had been beaten by Klansmen; and the three civil rights workers were in danger. The Klansmen who burned the church had been looking for Mickey Schwerner.

Targeted

Schwerner, a 24-year-old social worker from New York City, had worked in Meridian for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) since January and had become accustomed to threats. For the Klan and its sympathizers (including many local law enforcement officials), Schwerner was despised as a symbol of the civil rights invasion that was threatening their way of life. They hated him for his friendships with local blacks, for his attempts to challenge segregation, and not least, for his open disregard for Southern standards of appearance: he wore a short beard at a time when no respectable Southern man wore facial hair.

The White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, who nicknamed Schwerner “Goatee,” had plotted to kill him as early as March, but their attempts so far had failed.

Schwerner's closest associate, James Earl Chaney, had helped convince Mount Zion members to host the Freedom School. Chaney, 21, had grown up in Meridian as the oldest son of a domestic servant and a travelling plasterer. "J.E." as his family called him, had once been suspended from school at age 16 for wearing an NAACP button. By the time he went to work with CORE he knew better than to broadcast his civil rights views. He rarely discussed his activities, even with his closest friends. It was a reckless line of work for a black Southerner, and Fannie Lee Chaney was worried for her son.

But Chaney was invaluable to CORE. He knew every back road, every farmhouse in the country, and he was behind the wheel when he and Schwerner left the church ruins that Sunday.

The third person in the car with them was Andrew Goodman, an anthropology major from New York who was spending his first day in Mississippi as a volunteer for the Mississippi Summer Project. Goodman had participated in one of the earliest civil rights marches in Washington when he was only 14. At age 16, he had picketed a Woolworth's store in New York City in support of the Southern sit-ins.

Trapped

When Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner left the church that afternoon, they headed toward Philadelphia, Mississippi. At the town limits, they were stopped by Neshoba County Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price. Price arrested Chaney for speeding and Goodman and Schwerner for the arson at Mount Zion church. (The ludicrous charge was a familiar ploy of whites who claimed civil rights workers staged their own violence to create sympathy for their cause.)

The arrests of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner set a long-awaited plan into motion. Klansmen immediately began gathering at the home of a member in Meridian. Job assignments were handed out, directions given, meeting times coordinated. Three Klansmen were sent out to buy rubber gloves. Another was assigned to contact a local bulldozer operator.

Deputy Price jailed the civil rights workers without letting them use the telephone. Then, about 10 o'clock that night, he suddenly released them and

ordered them to return to Meridian. Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner had not gone far before Price pulled them over again. This time, he was accompanied by two carloads of Klansmen.

Chaney was struck with a blackjack as soon as he stepped out of the car. All three were ordered into the back seat of Price's patrol car, then driven to an isolated spot off Highway 19. One by one, the three young men were taken out of the car and shot at point-blank range. Their bodies were deposited at a nearby farm where an earthen dam was under construction. The bulldozer operator who had been hired by the Klan scooped out a hole for the bodies, and built the dam above them.

The disappearance of the three civil rights workers sent shock waves throughout the world. Within hours after their disappearance, top officials at the U.S. Justice Department were notified. Within days, President Johnson met with the parents of Goodman and Schwerner. By the end of the week, 100 FBI agents were assigned to search for the missing men.

Despite widespread talk about the abduction and killings, no one in Neshoba County would tell the FBI what they knew. Some suggested the murders were a CORE publicity stunt. Others said the three men were troublemakers who got what they deserved. One local white woman spoke out against the murders and lost her Sunday School teaching job as a result. "It has made me understand how Nazi Germany was possible," said Florence Mars.

The search for the three civil rights workers quickly became the biggest federal investigation ever conducted in Mississippi. The FBI dragged 50 miles of the Pearl River and marched in columns through the swamps looking for the bodies. Agents interviewed 1,000 people and built up a 150,000-page case file.

Finally an anonymous informer revealed the location of the bodies in exchange for $ 30,000 in federal reward money. The next day, a team of FBI agents and a hired bulldozer dug up 10 tons of soil to uncover the decomposed bodies of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner. They discovered Chaney had been shot three times. In the tightly clenched fist of Andy Goodman they found a handful of soil from the dam.

Thousands of mourners and civil rights leaders attended services for Mickey Schwerner and Andrew Goodman in New York City.

At a Baptist church in Meridian on August 7, veteran CORE worker Dave Dennis rose to speak at James Chaney's funeral. The typically quiet man, known as an intellectual, looked down to see James' younger brother Ben crying in the front row, and he was filled with rage. Countless black people, like James Chaney, had given their lives during the struggle for equality. Now, because two whites were among the victims, the world paid attention.

Dennis reminded the crowd of the martyrs who had gone before: Emmett Till, Mack Parker, Herbert Lee, Medgar Evers. And he said, "I'm not going to stand here and ask anyone not to be angry, not to be bitter tonight!" Dennis struggled to control his voice. "I'm sick and tired, and I ask you to be sick and tired with me. The best way we can remember James Chaney is to demand our rights … If you go back home and sit down and take what these white men in Mississippi are doing to us … if you take it and don't do something about it … then God damn your souls!"

In the months that followed, several Klansmen gave information to the FBI, but no charges were brought until civil rights activists sued for the legal right to prosecute the suspects. Finally, the U.S. Justice Department called a federal grand jury and won indictments against 19 men, including police officials and Klansmen, for the murders.

On October 20, 1967, seven Klansmen including Samuel Bowers and Deputy Price, were found guilty of federal civil rights violations in the deaths of the three men. They were sentenced to prison terms ranging from three to ten years. Three other defendants were freed by a hung jury, and three were acquitted.

It was the first time a jury in Mississippi had ever convicted Klansmen in connection with the death of a black person or civil rights workers.

(Taken from *Free at Last*, a book on the American Civil Rights Movement)

COMPREHENSION

1. What were the three civil rights workers doing in Mississippi?
2. What is the impression that you get of their characters?
3. Why did the White Knights want to kill Mickey Schwerner?
4. Why did Florence Mars compare the situation in1960s Mississippi to that of Nazi Germany? What were the consequences for her?
5. What was Dave Dennis' message to the congregation at James Chaney's funeral?

PROJECT

Watch the film *Mississippi Burning* by Alan Parker, starring Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe. The film was made in 1988, and is loosely based on the events described above.

Analyse the different techniques that the two FBI agents Anderson and Ward use to get to the truth. Which one proves to be more effective in the end?

On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 Americans of all races gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. Their goal was to urge the government to take action against racial discrimination and segregation. Dr. King surprised the nation with his speech "I Have a Dream."

I HAVE A DREAM

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the "unalienable Rights" of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned.

Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds."

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. And there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence.

Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

We cannot walk alone.

And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead.

We cannot turn back.

There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest -- quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana,

go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of "interposition" and "nullification" -- one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together."[2]

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.
Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,
From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that:

Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.

From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!
Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

(Speech delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial during the historic *March on Washington*, August 28, 1963)

COMPREHENSION

1. What does Martin Luther King have to say about the situation of the black people in the America of his day? Give examples.
2. What makes this speech so powerful?
3. What are the poetical devices that are used in this speech? Think about rhyme, repetition, striking images, contrast etc. Draw up a list with examples of each of these devices.
4. Which parts of his speech show us that Martin Luther King was a Baptist minister?

PROJECT

1. What is meant by “politics of nonviolent protest”?
2. Give examples of nonviolent protests from 20th century history.
3. Gather information on Martin Luther King’s life and times.
4. Compare Martin Luther King’s speeches with those of Malcolm X or Stokely Carmichael.

ESSAY TOPIC

The use of violence will never be the solution to a problem. In fact, it will always create new ones. Discuss.

PRE READING TASK

1. Is it important to vote in an election?
2. Do you know places where people are denied the right to vote?

LIARS DON'T QUALIFY

Born in Louisiana, Junius Edwards (1929-) was educated at the University of Oslo in Norway. "Liars Don't Qualify" first appeared in Urbanite in June 1961and won first prize in the Writer's Digest Short Story Contest. It was reprinted in Woodie King's Black Short Story Anthology (1972). The story became part of Edwards's 1963 novel If We Must Die (reprinted in 1985 by Howard University Press). The novel adds physical violence to the story - beating, attempted castration, and ultimately the protagonist's death.

Will Harris sat on the bench in the waiting room for another hour. His pride was not the only thing that hurt. He wanted them to call him in and get him registered so he could get out of there. Twice, he started to go into the inner office and tell them, but he thought better of it He had counted ninety-six cigarette butts on the floor when a fat man came out of the office and spoke to him.

"What you want, boy?"

Will Harris got to his feet.

"I came to register."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

"Yes sir."

The fat man stared at Will for a second, then turned his back to him. As he turned his back, he said, "Come on in here."

Will went in.

It was a little office and dirty, but not so dirty as the waiting room. There were no cigarette butts on the floor here. Instead, there was paper. They looked like candy wrappers to Will. There were two desks jammed in there, and a bony little man sat at one of them, his head down, his fingers fumbling with some papers. The fat man went around the empty desk and pulled up a chair. The bony man did not look up.

Will stood in front of the empty desk and watched the fat man sit down behind it. The fat man swung his chair around until he faced the little man.

"Charlie," he said.

"Yeah, Sam," Charlie said, not looking up from his work.

"Charlie. This boy here says he come to register."

"You sure? You sure that's what he said, Sam?" Still not looking up.

"You sure? You better ask him again, Sam."

"All right, Charlie. All right. I'll ask him again," the fat man said. He looked up at Will. "Boy. What you come here for?"

“I came to register.”

The fat man stared up at him. He didn't say anything. He just stared, his lips a thin line, his eyes wide open. His left hand searched behind him and came up with a handkerchief. He raised his left arm and mopped his face with the handkerchief, his eyes still on Will.

The odor from under his sweat-soaked arm made Will step back. Will held his breath until the fat man finished mopping his face. The fat man put his handkerchief away. He pulled a desk drawer open, and then he took his eyes off Will. He reached in the desk drawer and took out a bar of candy. He took the wrapper off the candy and threw the wrapper on the floor at Will's feet. He looked at Will and ate the candy.

Will stood there and tried to keep his face straight. He kept telling himself: I'll take anything. I'll take anything to get it done.

The fat man kept his eyes on Will and finished the candy. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his mouth. He grinned, then he put his handkerchief away.

"Charlie." The fat man turned to the little man.

"Yeah, Sam."

"He says he come to register."

"Sam, are you sure?"

"Pretty sure, Charlie."

'Well, explain to him what it's about." The bony man still had not looked up.

"All right, Charlie," Sam said, and looked up at Will. "Boy, when folks come here, they intend to vote, so they register first."

“That's what I want to do,” Will said.

“What's that? Say that again.”

“That's what I want to do. Register and vote.”

The fat man turned his head to the bony man.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam."

"He says . . . Charlie, this boy says that he wants to register and vote." The bony man looked up from his desk for the first time. He looked at Sam, then both of them looked at Will.

Will looked from one of them to the other, one to the other. It was hot, and he wanted to sit down. *Anything. I'll take anything.*

The man called Charlie turned back to his work, and Sam swung his chair around until he faced Will.

"You got a job?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Boy, you know what you're doing?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right," Sam said. "All right."

Just then, Will heard the door open behind him, and someone came in. It was a man.

"How you all? How about registering."

Sam smiled. Charlie looked up and smiled.

"Take care of you right away," Sam said, and then to Will. "Boy. Wait outside."

As Will went out, he heard Sam's voice: "Take a seat, please. Take a seat. Have you fixed up in a little bit. Now, what's your name?"

"Thanks," the man said, and Will heard the scrape of a chair.

Will closed the door and went back to his bench.

Anything. Anything. Anything. I'll take it all.

Pretty soon the man came out smiling. Sam came out behind him, and he called Will and told him to co me in. Will went in and stood before the desk. Sam told him he wanted to see his papers: Discharge, High School Diploma, Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, and some other papers. Will had them all. He felt good when he handed them to Sam.

"You belong to any organization?"

"No, sir."

"Pretty sure about that?"

"Yes, sir."

"You ever heard of the 15th Amendment?"[3]

"Yes, sir."

"What does that one say?"

"It's the one that says all citizens can vote."

"You like that, don't you, boy? Don't you?"

"Yes, sir. I like them all."

Sam's eyes got big. He slammed his right fist down on his desk top. "I didn't ask you that. I asked you if you liked the 15th Amendment. Now, if you can't answer my questions . . ."

"I like it," Will put in, and watched Sam catch his breath.

Sam sat there looking up at Will. He opened and closed his desk pounding fist. His mouth hung open.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam." Not looking up.

"You hear that?" looking wide-eyed at Will. "You hear that?"

"I heard it, Sam."

Will had to work to keep his face straight.

"Boy," Sam said. "You born in this town?"

"You got my birth certificate right there in front of you. Yes, sir."

"You happy here?"

"Yes, sir."

"You got nothing against the way things go around here?"

"No, sir."

"Can you read?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you smart?"

"No, sir."

"Where did you get that suit?"

[3] The amendment reads: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution in 1870, after the Civil War.

"New York."
"New York?" Sam asked, and looked over at Charlie. Charlie's head was still down. Sam looked back to Will.
"Yes, sir," said Will.
"Boy, what you doing there?"
"I got out of the Army there."
"You believe in what them folks do in New York?"
"I don't know what you mean."
"You know what I mean. Boy, you know good and well what I mean.
You know how folks carry on in New York. You believe in that?"
"No, sir," Will said, slowly.
"You pretty sure about that?"
"Yes, sir."
"What year did they make the 15th Amendment?"
" . . . 18 . . . 70," said Will.
"Name a signer of the Declaration of Independence who became a President."
"… John Adams."[4]
"Boy, what did you say?" Sam's eyes were wide again.
Will thought for a second. Then he said, "John Adams."
Sam's eyes got wider. He looked to Charlie and spoke to a bowed head. "Now, too much is too much." Then he turned back to Will.
He didn't say anything to Will. He narrowed his eyes first, then spoke.
"Did you say *just* John Adams?"
"Mister John Adams," Will said, realizing his mistake.
"That's more like it," Sam smiled. "Now, why do you want to vote?"
"I want to vote because it is my duty as an American citizen to vote?"
"Hah," Sam said, real loud. "Hah," again, and pushed back from his desk and turned to the bony man.
"Charlie."
"Yeah, Sam."
"Hear that?"
"I heard, Sam."
Sam leaned back in his chair, keeping his eyes on Charlie. He locked his hands across his round stomach and sat there.
"Charlie."
"Yeah, Sam."
"Think you and Elnora be coming over tonight?"
"Don't know, Sam," said the bony man, not looking up. "You know Elnora."
"Well, you welcome if you can."
"Don't know, Sam."
"You ought to, if you can. Drop in, if you can. Come on over and we'll split a corn whisky."

[4] John Adams (1735 – 1826) was the second president of the United States. He signed the Declaration of Independence as a representative from the state of Massachusetts. The only other signer who went on to become president was Thomas Jefferson (1743 – 1826), representing the state of Virginia.

The bony man looked up.
"Now, that's different, Sam."
"Thought it would be."
"Can't turn down corn if it's good."
"You know my corn."
"Sure do. I'll drag Elnora. I'll drag her by the hair if I have to."
The bony man went back to work.

Sam turned his chair around to his desk. He opened a desk drawer and took out a package of cigarettes. He tore it open and put a cigarette in his mouth. He looked up at Will, then he lit the cigarette and took a long drag, and then he blew the smoke, very slowly, up toward Will's face.

The smoke floated up toward Will's face. It came up in front of his eyes and nose and hung there, then it danced and played around his face, and disappeared.
Will didn't move, but he was glad he hadn't been asked to sit down.
"You have a car?"
"No, sir."
"Don't you have a job?"
"Yes, sir."
"You like that job?"
"Yes, sir."
"You like it, but you don't want it."
"What do you mean?" Will asked.
"Don't get smart, boy," Sam said, wide-eyed. "I'm asking the questions here. You understand that?"
"Yes, sir."
"All right. All right. Be sure you do."
"I understand it."
"You a Communist?"
"No, sir."
"What party do you want to vote for?"
"I wouldn't go by parties. I'd read about the men and vote for a man, not a party."

"Hah," Sam said, and looked over at Charlie's bowed head. "Hah," he said again, and turned back to Will.

"Boy, you pretty sure you can read?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. All right. We'll see about that." Sam took a book out of his desk and flipped some pages. He gave the book to Will.

"Read that loud," he said.

"Yes, sir," Will said, and began: "'When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they

should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.'"[5]

Will cleared his throat and read on. He tried to be distinct with each syllable. He didn't need the book. He could have recited the whole thing without the book.

"'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they . . .'"

"Wait a minute, boy," Sam said. "Wait a minute. You believe that? You believe that about 'created equal'?"

"Yes, sir," Will said, knowing that was the wrong answer.

"You really believe that?"

"Yes, sir." Will couldn't make himself say the answer Sam wanted to hear.

Sam stuck out his right hand, and Will put the book in it. Then Sam turned to the other man.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam."

"Charlie, did you hear that?"

"What was it, Sam?"

"This boy, here, Charlie. He says he really believes it."

"Believes what, Sam? What you talking about?"

"This boy, here . . . believes that all men are equal, like it says in The Declaration."

"Now, Sam. Now you know that's not right. You know good and well that's not right. You heard him wrong. Ask him again, Sam. Ask him again, will you?"

"I didn't hear him wrong, Charlie," said Sam, and turned to Will. "Did I, boy? Did I hear you wrong?"

"No, sir."

"I didn't hear you wrong?"

"No, sir."

Sam turned to Charlie.

"Charlie."

"Yeah, Sam."

"Charlie. You think this boy trying to be smart?"

"Sam. I think he might be. Just might be. He looks like one of them that don't know his place."

Sam narrowed his eyes.

"Boy," he said. "You know your place?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Boy, you know good and well what I mean."

"What do you mean?"

"Boy, who's . . ." Sam leaned forward, on his desk. "Just who's asking questions, here?"

"You are, sir."

"Charlie. You think he really is trying to be smart?"

"Sam, I think you better ask him."

"Boy."

[5] This is the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence, which was signed on July 2 and adopted on July 4, 1776.

"Yes, sir."
"Boy. You trying to be smart with me?"
"No, sir."
"Sam."
"Yeah, Charlie."
"Sam. Ask him if he thinks he's good as you and me."
"Now, Charlie. Now, you heard what he said about The Declaration."
"Ask, anyway, Sam."
"All right," Sam said. "Boy. You think you good as me and Mister Charlie ?"
"No, sir," Will said.
They smiled, and Charlie turned away.
Will wanted to take off his jacket. It was hot, and he felt a drop of sweat roll down his right side. He pressed his right arm against his side to wipe out the sweat. He thought he had it, but it rolled again, and he felt another drop come behind that one. He pressed his arm in again. It was no use. He gave it up.
"How many stars did the first flag have?"
" . . . Thirteen."
'What's the name of the mayor of this town?"
" . . . Mister Roger Phillip Thornedyke Jones."
"Spell Thornedyke."
" . . . Capital T-h-o-r-n-e-d-y-k-e, Thornedyke."
"How long has he been mayor?"
" . . . Seventeen years."
"Who was the biggest hero in the War Between the States?"
" . . . General Robert E. Lee."[6]
"What does that 'E' stand for?"
" . . . Edward."
"Think you pretty smart, don't you?"
"No, sir."
"Well, boy, you have been giving these answers too slow. I want them fast. Understand? Fast."
"Yes, sir."
"What's your favorite song?"
"*Dixie*,"[7] Will said, and prayed Sam would not ask him to sing it.
"Do you like your job?"
"Yes, sir."
"What year did Arizona come into the States?"

[6] Robert Edward Lee (1807 – 70) could not put his love for country above his love for his native state of Virginia, so he resigned his commission and hoped he would not be called on to lead what would become the Confederate Army, but he was. In 1865, he surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at the courthouse in Appomattox, Virginia. He is buried, with his horse Traveller, at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.l

[7] Daniel Decatur Emmett (1815 – 1904) wrote the song « Dixie » in 1859. The first verse is as follows: "I wish I was in the Land of Cotton / Old times there are not forgotten / Look away! Look away! Look away! / Dixie Land / In Dixie Land where I was born / Early on one frosty morning / Look away! Look away! Look away! / Dixie Land." The chorus then follows: "Then I wish I was in Dixie / Hooray! Hooray! / In Dixie Land / I'll take my stand / To live and die in Dixie / Away! Away! Away! / Down South in Dixie."

"1912."
"There was another state in 1912."
"New Mexico, it came in January and Arizona in February."
"You think you smart, don't you?"
"No, sir."
"Don't you think you smart? Don't you?"
"No, sir."
"Oh, yes, you do, boy."
Will said nothing.
"Boy, you make good money on your job?"
"I make enough."
"Oh. Oh, you not satisfied with it?"
"Yes, sir. I am."
"You don't act like it, boy. You know that? You don't act like it."
"'What do you mean?"
"You getting smart again, boy. Just who's asking questions here?"
"You are, sir."
"That's right. That's right."
The bony man made a noise with his lips and slammed his pencil down on his desk. He looked at Will, then at Sam.

"Sam," he said. "Sam, you having trouble with that boy? Don't you let that boy give you no trouble, now, Sam. Don't you do it."

"Charlie," Sam said. "Now, Charlie, you know better than that. You know better. This boy here knows better than that, too."

"You sure about that, Sam? You sure?"
"I better be sure if this boy here knows what's good for him."
"Does he know, Sam?"
"Do you know, boy?" Sam asked Will.
"Yes, sir."
Charlie turned back to his work
"Boy," Sam said. "You sure you're not a member of any organization?"
"Yes, sir. I'm sure."
Sam gathered up all Will's papers, and he stacked them very neatly and placed them in the center of his desk. He took the cigarette out of his mouth and put it out in the full ash tray. He picked up Will's papers and gave them to him.
"You've been in the Army. That right?"
"Yes, sir."
"You served two years. That right?"
"Yes, sir."
"You have to do six years in the Reserve. That right?"
"Yes, sir."
"You're in the Reserve now. That right?"
"Yes, sir."
"You lied to me here, today. That right?"
"No, sir."
"Boy, I said you lied to me here today. That right?"

"No, sir."
"Oh, yes, you did, boy. Oh, yes, you did. You told me you wasn't in any organization. That right?"
"Yes, sir."
"Then you lied, boy. You lied to me because you're in the Army Reserve. That right?"
"Yes, sir. I'm in the Reserve, but I didn't think you meant that. I'm just in it, and don't have to go to meetings or anything like that. I thought you meant some kind of civilian organization."
"When you said you wasn't in an organization, that was a lie. Now, wasn't it, boy?"
He had Will there. When Sam had asked him about organizations, the first thing to pop in Will's mind had been the communists, or something like them.
"Now, wasn't it a lie?"
"No, sir,"
Sam narrowed his eyes.
Will went on.
"No, sir, it wasn't a lie. There's nothing wrong with the Army Reserve.
Everybody has to be in it. I'm not in it because I want to be in it."
"I know there's nothing wrong with it," Sam said. "Point is, you lied to me here, today."
"I didn't lie. I just didn't understand the question," Will said.
"You understood the question, boy. You understood good and well, and you lied to me. Now, wasn't it a lie?"
"No, sir."
"Boy. You going to stand right there in front of me big as anything and tell me it wasn't a lie?" Sam almost shouted. "Now, wasn't it a lie?"
"Yes, sir," Will said, and put his papers in his jacket pocket.
"You right, it was," Sam said.
Sam pushed back from his desk.
"That's it, boy. You can't register. You don't qualify. Liars don't qualify."
"But.. "
"That's it." Sam spat the words out and looked at Will hard for a second, and then he swung his chair around until he faced Charlie.
"Charlie."
"Yeah, Sam."
"Charlie. You want to go out to eat first today?"
Will opened the door and went out. As he walked down the stairs, he took off his jacket and his tie and opened his collar and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He stood on the courthouse steps and took a deep breath and heard a noise come from his throat as he breathed out and looked at the flag in the court yard. The flag hung from its staff, still and quiet, the way he hated to see it; but it was there, waiting, and he hoped that a little push from the right breeze would lift it and send it flying and waving and whipping from its staff, proud, the way he liked to see it.

He took out a cigarette and lit it and took a slow deep drag. He blew the smoke out. He saw the cigarette burning in his right hand, turned it between his

thumb and forefinger, made a face, and let the cigarette drop to the courthouse steps.

He threw his jacket over his left shoulder and walked on down to the bus stop, swinging his arms.

COMPREHENSION

1. What are the different strategies that the two registrars use to deny Will the right to vote?
2. Why do they not want him to get the right to vote?
3. What is the picture that the reader gets of Will in this story?
4. Comment on any other aspect of the story that you find interesting.

ESSAY TOPICS

1. Sometimes it is quite surprising that so many people do not take up their right to vote in a democratic country. What could be the reasons for this?
2. Voting in a general election is not only a right but also a duty for citizens in a democratic society. Discuss.

PROJECT

1. Find information on the Suffragettes.
2. Find out the dates when women were allowed to vote in the European countries and in America. Comment on that.

SEE WHAT TOMORROW BRINGS

James W. Thompson (1935-), a Detroit-born poet and editor of Umhra during the late 1960s, was part of the Black Arts movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. He later changed his name to Abba Elethea and continued his work as a columnist, dance critic, and poet-in-residence at Antioch University. His work has been presented at international festivals in Africa, Europe, and the United States, and he has published in such journals as Quicksilver, Pegasus, the Gallery, Sail Review, Negro History Bulletin, and Negro Digest. "See What Tomorrow Brings" appeared in the Transatlantic Review in the summer of 1968.

Laughter exploding in an extremely hollow room, that's how this day has been. Its echoes will linger to haunt Muhdear, for days to come. I could tell, immediately, when I came home that she had worried herself sick. She flew from the kitchen like a startled sparrow, her hands perched nervously upon her hips-all set to raise the roof!

"Not going through this worry tomorrow," she commanded. "Soon…school is out, you bring your butt home-just the way you leave here-in that station wagon. You hear me?" She frowned. Before I could open my mouth, she smiled. The little wrinkles about her eyes curved like tooled icing on a chocolate cake. "Wasn't too bad, was it Honey. And tomorrow will be easier. First of anything's always the worst to take. You get used to it." Turning toward my father and sister, who were sitting in the living room, she sighed: "Guess we can eat now." Muhdear went back to the kitchen to re-heat the supper that had turned cold.

"Humphf," Ella Mae said, "you really showed out today-worrying everybody. Like I always say, you don't think about nobody but yourself." It's my sister's habit to accuse others of the crimes she's most guilty of committing. 'You knew just as well we'd be worried." I can't imagine Ella worrying about anything, most of all me. 'When those deputies come here and said you was nowhere to be found, Muhdear almost died. She sent daddy to hunt you up. The whole neighborhood was up in arms." I knew that there wasn't any way for me to explain my reason for having come home late and unescorted, at least not to Ella. My father, to my surprise, remained stony and silent. During supper he stared at me with granite eyes.

Muhdear had prepared my favorite meal: pork chops, smothered in onions, with fried corn and mashed potatoes. "Honey-boy," Muhdear winked at me, "guess what! I made new curtains for your room." She tapped her plate, intermittently, with her fork. "Know what," she said, "think maybe we can get that studio bed you been just raving to have." Muhdear looked at me, then she looked at my plate. I wasn't hungry. I tried to eat. Ella kept interrupting with questions. “Well, what's it gonna be like tomorrow," she wanted to know. I wouldn't dignify

that question with an answer. There are so many tomorrows, and today had just been one of them.

When I discovered the sun, I had been dressed for over an hour. It inched across the sky, a flaming snail on a bleached rock. The sound of Muhdear fussing over her extra-special breakfast drifted from the kitchen along with the scent of cinnamon and strong coffee. It was a wonderful breakfast. (Muhdear makes the best cinnamon pancakes in the world, and these had banana bits in them.) It was an important morning. I was one of four Negroes entering Central High. I was the only one whose parents weren't professionals. I didn't feel half as anxious as the rest of the family. The neighbors had discussed it with the relish of vultures pecking over a delicate dish. You would have thought that I was going to visit the Queen. As I sat looking out of the window, for a moment I wished that I had had their enthusiasm. I didn't feel at all shook; if anything, I felt numb. All I could think of was the time I sat on the front porch with Daddy (The yard lay damp with dew, and the sweetness of evening burst in wisteria and rose, jasmin and mint, mixed with the stinging scent of Dad's cigar and kerosene from the porch lamp - where moths dizzied themselves and the light. Daddy insists on using this lamp), talking about his job and my future. He looked at me. A deep sigh ended in a smile.

He spoke softly, "Honey, sometimes . . . I look upon apples as they hang in trees and wish to have their ripe indifference. One day . . . *you'll* know the feeling."

Muhdear was standing on the porch with me when the two deputies came. She had been reminding me of how I should act. She repeated the same words over, and over, and over. I had ceased listening long ago. "Com'on, boyah," one of the deputies shouted. "Jesse," my mother called, "it's time!" My father stepped onto the porch. He stood, his thumbs tucked in his overalls, his fingers rolled in huge fists. His face, a tight, dark mask, was enlivened only by the brown eyes that darted from the deputies to our front walk (the walk that he had made with bright reddish-brown bricks). The way his head was cocked, the way he held his body, cheered and frightened me. Muhdear monkeyed with my collar again. And for what must have been the twentieth time, she smoothed my tie. "There'll be a pack out there," Muhdear began, "don't let them get your goat, honey. They're more afraid of you than you are of them." Her eyes squinted toward the guards and widened into mine. They hovered over me. Daddy pinched the back of my neck and thumped the back of my head with his fingers. Muhdear dried cool hands on her apron. She does this at the strangest times. . .

When news came that Archie, the rebel hereabouts, had been chased and shot by the Rensalar Boys, she rushed over to his house. I was right on her tail. The other neighbors were leaving when we got there. Muhdear still had on her apron. Mrs. Matthews and Muhdear sat in the front room. I lingered in the hall. She tried to console Mrs. Matthews, who was trying hard not to cry.

"Louise, they kilt my baby."

"Now, Lucille, don't talk about it any more."

"I gotta talk about it - I gotta make myself believe it. I knowed Archie were always on for devilment, only this time. . . You know, 1 tole him time and time again,

'Archie.' (Her voice cracked. She paused, and her hands armored her head; she looked across the room at Archie's picture on the mantelpiece, anchored in a sea of lace.) 'Archie,' I'd say, 'if you so hot on gettin' back at the world, you'll just have to rise above it.' You knowed Archie …. never paid a mind to me. I think, maybe, he kinda thought I was crazy. Oh, I know …. some things I tole him sounded strange. Louise . . . it was *all* I knew." (The whole time she spoke, Muhdear dried cool hands in the folds of her apron.)

“Well, Lucille, if you just gotta talk about it . . ."

"You know them Rens'lar Boys. Archie worked for their father, sometime, at the gas station. They shot him! They were drunk . . . Wanted some fun. . . Seems they tole Archie they wanted a live coon to hunt, and he were it. They went and got their guns and hounds, play-acting, you know. It seems that when Archie conceived their seriousness, he started to run. Why he didn't just com'on home I'll never know. Instead, he lit out behind the gas station into those woods. They chased him. . . shot him down. . ." (She stopped. For a long while she seemed not to breathe. She rocked back and forth on that old red leather chair, her arms clasped across her stomach so tight I could see the veins in her arms from where I stood in the hall.)

Boy led by guards to class

"IN THE BACK. . . shot him. . . MY BABY." (She took a deep breath.)

"And they CUT him."

"Henry, you can go on the porch now."

Muhdear said this without looking in my direction. I knew better than to object, so I went out and sat under the window. I heard Mrs. Matthews ending, "They had no call to do that . . . no call." Then she cried bitterly, and I went back in to see what I could do. Muhdear hadn't moved. She wasn't even crying. In the folds of her apron, she dried cool hands, just as she had done this morning.

When we neared the school, the sun that I’d found so beautiful was crashing over the entrance of Central High. It fell in fake golden specks at the foot of the steaming crowd, casting acute shadows through the calm green trees. They hung like hothouse specimens adopted by a bleak season. (It seems that I read that somewhere.) School. The thought hit me. The chilled air bit the whites of those glaring eyes surrounding the station wagon. Every face that I looked into, as the car crawled, glistened. The din: “Two, four, six, eight, we don't wanna in-urr-grate," split the morning. Arms flailed the air with homemade signs. Bodies hunched. Jaws were thrust dangerously forward, cutting grotesque lines: carving one massive and miserably tortured crowdface. I sat in the back of the station wagon, my back pressed against the hot leather seat. A tomato splashed against the window on my left. I didn't flinch. I felt suddenly tired and tense. I looked out at them, and I could have killed them all and never have felt a thing.

The men, lurching about, were wearing washable work clothes. I spotted an occasional white shirt, And the women, the ones that I could see, wore cotton housedresses and light coats. They looked as though many lusty infants had

suckled at their breasts far too long. The fat ones sagged like old sows. I wanted to laugh. They looked useless and extremely weary. Yet there they were, as my father says, their infernal female spirits stirring. They had come to nourish a dying tradition. It was from them that the men had gathered their will, succored their violence which is the bottom of their fear, and strangely, it was for the women that the men now raged in a barbaric marriage, to the accompaniment of flashbulbs.

The car stopped. The pack writhed and screamed in a wild revival beat. "Two, four, six, eight, we don' wanna in-urr-grate." Little children were sewn in cardboards. NIGGERS NEVER. GOD SAVE US FROM NIGGERS. NO BLACKS IN OUR SCHOOLS. I didn't know whether I should feel angry or proud. Dad had said, way back during the summer after we'd made up following weeks of silence, that when this day came, I should feel proud. "The beautiful story that will become history," he'd said, "is all about you, honey, and you must hold to your dignity and not be daunted." I held. Their children stood, in their huge signs, blank and bewildered. I saw a few burrow between knees in fright when the voice of the rout rose threateningly. They were pummeled, squized, held high, knocked and shaken. I was locked behind glass and steel, waiting for their parents to calm down. Their pathetic little bodies reacted to the changing pressures with wails and tears. They were not soothed. The attention of their mothers and fathers was focused on me. The deputy had maneuvered the car so that it stood directly in front of the entrance, ringed on both sides by the Army and the State Police. When the door opened for me, the frenzy increased, The white-topped helmets of the troopers bobbed, sparkling in the sunlight, a striking contrast to the damp disheveled heads they fought to restrain. I wondered if their ears were ringing like mine, They were closer to the den.

Elizabeth Eckford ignoring the hostile screams and stares of fellow students on her first day at Little Rock Central High School in 1957

Locked between the shoulders of the deputies, I began climbing the steps. I knew that in the minds of those two who were protecting me there was also the feeling that I was an invader. They had not made their feelings secret - I had been told during the drive. The patience of my fathers who had defied the singular death of time, who had traversed from chattel to changling was now concrete in me; I was the black challenger mounting the forbidden stairs; and all of the forces of their depressed and fantastic heritage were fermenting within me. It has yet to erupt! I felt as though I moved in a vacuum, my objective receding, my movement motionless. It was all Jules Verne. The shrill screams of the pack behind me set my stomach on fire. My throat felt parched. I think that I swallowed constantly. "Say, yeh black bastard, we don' wancha here," fell on my ears - gnawed at the back of my brain. It seemed as though the sun cracked over me, a huge egg, depositing a hot yoke. I wished for a big mirror to turn upon the crowd,

then a machine gun. And I wondered, what was it, other than stupidity, that was supposed to be so damned superior about these people. They're barbaric, I told myself. For some reason I stopped on the steps for a moment. One of the guards caught me by the arm. "Com'on now, Nigra," he drawled, "we gotta git you inside." I looked over the face of the building. The American flag fell over the heavily carved masonry of the peaked entrance. I smiled. Vines crept up the dark brick walls, mint-green on brown. The Army stood, legs spread, guns bayoneted held at their sides. I wanted suddenly to shout "TENCHUT." They were silent and unblinking. "Here, blackie," someone yelled. "Two, four, six, eight, we don' wanna in-urr-grate," the crowd chanted. I don't know what possessed me, but I spun around. Flash bulbs, popping, blinded me momentarily. My two heavy-set guards, puffing and sweating, and swearing, too, grabbed my arms. They drug me up the two remaining steps. I looked back once more before entering the building. A white man, very tall and very red, screamed to me. "That's right, black-boy, show'em what you're made of." I think that he would have said more, but he was swallowed by men with clubs, flying. I could not see him any longer. I wonder who he was?

Inside, I was greeted by six students. Four boys and two girls. They had come to wish me luck. Each class today was trying. I'm a senior, and the other three are juniors, so we don't have classes together. And we have a different lunch hour. A redhead tripped me in my history class. And now that I know who he is I have decided to fix him. I don't know what I'm going to do. I don't intend to let him get away without paying. Maybe they should not have chosen me for this; Daddy is not a professional, and he has taught me several different ways to skin a cat, and that redhead doesn't know it yet, but he's got a skinning coming. It will have to be quiet and very indirect, and something that he will not forget.

I knew that among the students I was very visible, and I knew, too, that no one really wanted to see me. Before the last bell I made for the side exit hoping to avoid the deputies. The black and white station wagon was there in front of the door. I was relieved when I saw that it was empty. I was on the sidewalk in seconds. The street looked as though it had been abandoned after a parade. Bits of string, cardboards, and cigarette butts littered the sidewalk. Dark pools of water stood in the gutter, morning's souvenirs, left by the fire hose that had been used to disperse the crowd. I walked along quickly, looking back, hoping that no one would spot me. When I reached my hideaway in the grove at the edge of town, I sat down. I was trembling, so I threw stones in the stream with all of my might. I heard my heart pounding, and I was shocked by the stinging taste of tears. I jumped up, and in an effort to relieve the tremors, I started singing. The road that leads to the grove looked wide and endless beneath the fading arc of trees. I bet my voice must have echoed into the mountain of the evening as I walked singing just as loud as I could, "Hurry down sunshine . . . See what tomorrow brings." And the sun died, bleeding across the sky.

COMPREHENSION

1. What is the boy's name and what is his father's name?
2. How does James Thomson tell his story? Analyse how the author has built up the story in order to provide the reader with a lot of information.
3. What is the purpose of Archie's story in all this?
4. Comment on the boy's emotions when he arrives at the school.
5. How is he treated by the crowd and by his guards?
6. Why does he not want to be taken home by the guards?

PROJECT

1. Look up information on *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.
2. What happened at Little Rock Central High School in Arkansas in September 1957?

FILMOGRAPHY:

Eyes On The Prize / a PBS Home Video 1987

King: Man of Peace In A Time Of War / a 2007 documentary narrated by Obba Babatunde

Malcolm X / a 1992 Spike Lee film starring Denzel Washington

Mississippi Burning / a 1988 Alan Parker film starring Gene Hackman and Willem Dafoe

GLOSSARY

to segregate (n: segregation)	
to desegregate (n: desegregation)	
to integrate (n: integration)	
civil rights	
lynching	
racial discrimination	
a murder trial	
the all-white jury	
equality (opp: inequality)	
bigotry	
racism	
unalienable rights	
public facilities	
a sit-in	
they were abducted	
they were slain	
law enforcement officials	
arson	
to prosecute a suspect	
to register to vote in an election	
the registrar's office	
to qualify (to register)	
a station wagon	
the national guard	