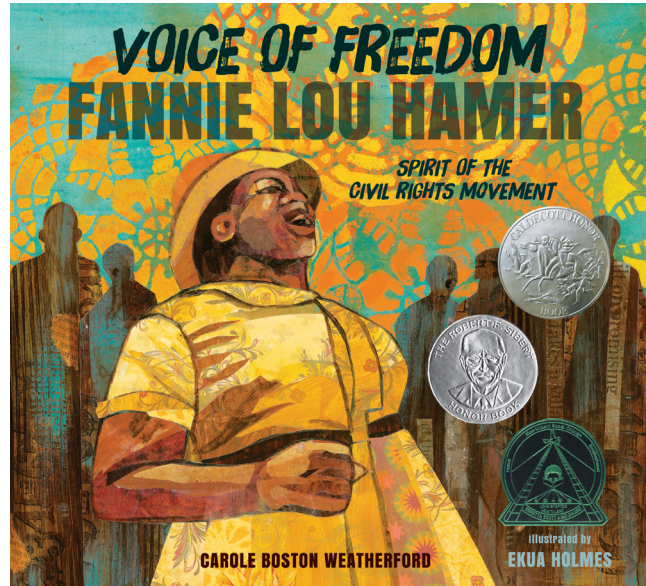


VOICE OF FREEDOM FANNIE LOU HAMER

*SPIRIT OF THE
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT*

CAROLE BOSTON WEATHERFORD

illustrated by
EKUA HOLMES



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About the Book

Through its poetry and illustration, *Voice of Freedom* humanizes a woman whom society tried to dehumanize. Carole Boston Weatherford's lyrical poetry makes real the struggles and heart-wrenching events of Fannie Lou Hamer's life. Vibrant illustrations by Ekua Holmes support the twenty-two poems elegantly, reflecting their rhythm and movement. While the book spotlights some of the specific hardships Fannie Lou Hamer faced, her individual truth evokes the experiences faced by many others and helps students better understand the conditions in which African Americans lived in the mid-twentieth century.

Because *Voice of Freedom* is told with historical accuracy, it serves well as a springboard for discussions about the civil rights movement. This guide provides ideas for helping fifth- through seventh-graders examine our nation's recent history and raises questions about where we are now in relationship to civil rights for all. Questions and activities are included to help students explore the courage of Fannie Lou Hamer and her determined fight for the right to vote.

Common Core Connections

This teachers' guide, with connections to the Common Core, includes an array of language arts activities, book discussion, vocabulary instruction, and more to accommodate the learning needs of most students in grades 5–7. It is best to allow students to read the entire story before engaging in a detailed study of the work.

Notes throughout the guide correlate the discussion and activities to specific Common Core Language Arts Standards. For more information on specific standards for your grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.

This guide was written by Ann M. Neely, professor of children's literature at Vanderbilt University.



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Terms and People

The list below includes some of the people, places, activities, and organizations mentioned in the poems that may need further explanation. Have your students create a glossary on chart paper to post in the classroom. Divide students into small groups and have each group research four or five terms or individuals for the glossary that can be referred to throughout the reading of *Voice of Freedom*.

Andrew Goodman	Freedom Schools	Mississippi Delta
Andrew Young	Ghana	NAACP
Annie Devine	Guinea	Reconstruction
Bob Zellner	Harry Belafonte	Robert Clark
Bobby Kennedy	Head Start program	sharecropping
citizenship school	James Brown	Stokely Carmichael
Congressional Black Caucus	James Chaney	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)
Democratic National Convention's Loyalist delegation	Jim Crow laws	Victoria Adams
Democratic National Conventions of 1964 and 1968	Ku Klux Klan	war in Vietnam
Freedom Farm	Malcolm X	women's liberation movement
	Medgar Evers	
	Michael Schwerner	

Discussion Guide

Distribute these questions to students or answer them as a class. First look at the Prereading Questions, then read the book, and then address the Discussion Questions. You may also choose to revisit the Prereading Questions after students have finished the book.

Prereading Questions

On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being you strongly disagree, 5 being you strongly agree), rate each of the following statements:

1. It is always worth making the sacrifice to stand up for your beliefs. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
2. Sometimes it is impossible to forgive. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
3. Racism no longer exists today. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
4. There never comes a point when you should give up on a cause. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
5. It is always better to think of other people before yourself. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
6. All people should have a political voice. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
7. All people should be proud of their heritage. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
8. Violence solves some problems. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These questions correlate to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Craft and Structure RL.5–6.5; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL.5–7.7; and ELA Speaking and Listening Standards for Comprehension and Collaboration SL.5–7.

Discussion Questions

“Sunflower County, Mississippi” (page 1)

- What is meant by “I am proof that the Delta birthed the blues”?
- Describe what Sunflower County was like in 1917, when Fannie Lou Hamer was born.

“Spoiled” (page 4)

- What was it like for Fannie Lou to be the baby of the family? How did her mother treat her? Her father? Her siblings?

“My Mother Taught Me” (page 5)

- Why was the black doll so important to Fannie Lou’s mother and to Fannie Lou? What did it represent to them?

“Not Everyone Could Move Up North” (page 9)

- What do you think of Fannie Lou’s decision to stay in Mississippi to take care of her mother? What do you think of her siblings’ decision to move north?

“On the Move” (page 16)

- Why did Fannie Lou have to continue to move from home to home?

“The Beating” (page 21)

- What do you think was included in the 1964 Civil Rights Bill? The bill was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. What does the poet mean when she says “The blood of freedom fighters was in his pen”?

“Running” (page 23)

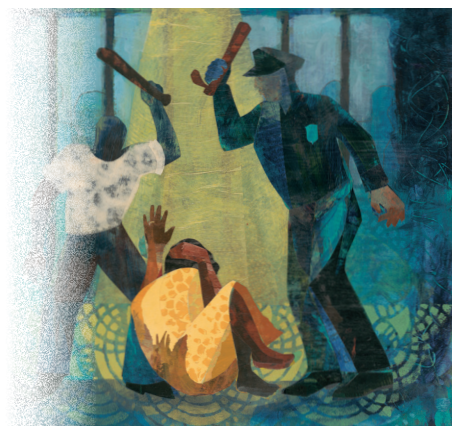
- Why did Fannie Lou Hamer believe it was so important to run for office? Would you have been willing to run for Congress if you had survived the conditions she had survived?

“Freedom Summer” (page 24)

- What were the white student volunteers such as Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman trying to accomplish when they went to Mississippi?

“Africa” (page 28)

- Most people living in the United States come from families who were once immigrants, but they don’t usually feel as if they were cut off from their heritage. Why do you think Fannie Lou felt that slavery had cut the ties with her African ancestors?



“Black Power” (page 33)

- How did Fannie Lou feel about Stokely Carmichael’s requirement that SNCC staff members be black? Why?

“America’s Problem” (page 34)

- By saying that racism was “America’s problem,” Fannie Lou Hamer wanted to make it clear that racism was not just a problem in Mississippi. Do you agree? Is racism still America’s problem today? Why or why not?

“No Rest” (page 36)

- The closing line of the book is “Maybe I had won after all.” What were some of the changes in the United States that Fannie Lou Hamer could consider in her victory?

Activities

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These activities correlate to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Craft and Structure RL.5–6.5; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RL.5–7.7; ELA Speaking and Listening Standards for Comprehension and Collaboration SL.5–7.1; ELA Writing Standards for Text Types and Purposes W.5–7.1 and W.5–7.2; Production and Distribution of Writing W.5–7.6; Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.5–7.7 and W.5–7.8; and Range of Writing W.5–7.10.



“Delta Blues” (page 3)

- Author Carole Boston Weatherford creates beautiful imagery with the words “From sunup to sundown, dew to dark, can see to can’t.” Using this text as an example, have your students select one of the following prompts to begin their own poems:

From last week to today

From first grade to second

From home to school

“Fair” (page 6)

- Many things described in the poem “Fair” are very unfair. Divide your students into small groups and have them list the things that were unfair. Then discuss Jim Crow laws, which allowed and encouraged many of these things to happen in Mississippi from the 1890s until 1965.

“Worse Off Than Dogs” (page 10)

- Pap and Fannie Lou ran her father’s old juke joint. Juke joints were places where music and dancing took place in African-American communities. Today, there is an annual Juke Joint Festival in Clarksdale, Mississippi, that celebrates the Delta blues performers of the past. Have your students find recordings of the Delta blues. They can also find recordings of Fannie Lou Hamer singing spirituals.
- Take a close look at Ekua Holmes’s collages on pages 10 and 11. Have students gather printed images such as newspaper clippings, maps, photographs, and pamphlets and use them to make collages of their own.



“Literacy Test” (page 14)

- In order to register to vote, Fannie Lou Hamer (and other African Americans in Mississippi) were told to read, copy, and explain seven parts of the Mississippi constitution. One of those was Section 32. It reads:

The enumeration of rights in this constitution shall not be construed to deny and impair others retained by, and inherent in, the people.

Have your students read, copy, and explain this piece.

- Section 209 was also included in the list of parts of the constitution to be interpreted by African Americans wanting to vote. It states:

Separate schools shall be maintained for children of the white and colored races.

Discuss what this law meant to children growing up in Mississippi and throughout the country. This is an excellent time to introduce *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

“The Price of Freedom” (page 17)

- Have students consider and research a cause they believe is important today, then write about how they could have an impact in that cause.

“SNCC (“Snick’”) (page 18)

- The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was one of the most powerful groups during the civil rights movement, and Fannie Lou Hamer was an active volunteer with the organization. Have your students find information about SNCC. Of particular relevance is the training for nonviolent protest during the 1960s. Locating film footage of the training and subsequent protests is an excellent way for students to better understand just how difficult nonviolent protesting was.

“1964 Democratic National Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey” (page 26)

- On August 22, 1964, Fannie Lou Hamer addressed the Democratic National Convention’s Credentials Committee. She told the committee about her experiences registering to vote in Mississippi. Students can listen to and read her speech at <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/sayitplain/flhamer.html>.
- A found poem is created by taking words from a narrative text and reframing them as poetry by making changes in spacing or rearranging the text to impart new meaning. Have students use the final paragraph of Fannie Lou’s speech to write a found poem using a portion of the text:

All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America?

Praise and Awards

- A 2016 Caldecott Honor Book
 - A 2016 Robert F. Sibert Honor Book
 - A 2016 John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award Winner
 - A National Council of Teachers of English Notable Children’s Book in the Language Arts
 - A National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Book for Young People
 - The 2016 Flora Stieglitz Straus Award Winner
- ★ “This majestic biography offers a detailed, intelligible overview of Hamer’s life while never losing the thread of her motivations, fears, and heroic triumphs, and places the civil rights movement in personal, local, national, and international contexts.” — *The Horn Book* (starred review)
- ★ “Bold, honest, informative, and unforgettable.” — *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)
- ★ “Bold, unapologetic, and beautiful.” — *Booklist* (starred review)
- ★ “Told in the first person from Hamer’s own perspective, this lyrical text in verse emphasizes the activist’s perseverance and courage, as she let her booming voice be heard.” — *School Library Journal* (starred review)



About the Author

Carole Boston Weatherford has written poetry, historical fiction, and nonfiction biographical works for children. In addition to a Robert F. Sibert Honor for *Voice of Freedom*, she has won numerous awards, including a Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award, a Coretta Scott King Author Honor Award, a Jane Addams Children’s Book Award Honor, a Jefferson Cup Award from the Virginia Library Association, and two NAACP Image Awards. Carole Boston Weatherford is a professor at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina.



About the Illustrator

Ekua Holmes is a fine artist whose work explores themes of family, relationships, hope, and faith. In 2013, she was the first African-American woman to be named as a commissioner on the Boston Arts Commission, which oversees public art projects on city property. She was awarded a Caldecott Honor, a Robert F. Sibert Honor, and a John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award for *Voice of Freedom*, her first picture book. Ekua Holmes lives in Roxbury, Massachusetts, a neighborhood of Boston.