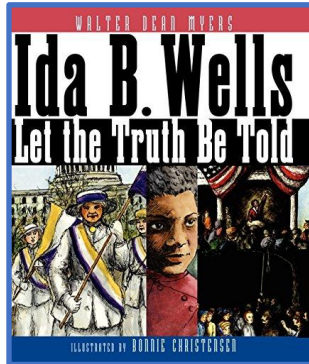


Long-Form Teacher's Guide for
Ida B. Wells: Let the Truth Be Told
by Walter Dean Myers and illustrated by Bonnie Christensen



Book Synopsis

Ida B. Wells worked bravely as an activist, educator, writer, journalist, suffragist, and pioneering voice against the horrors of lynching. An inspiration for generations of civil rights crusaders, Wells' own words are used throughout this picture book biography (which is based on Ida B. Wells' autobiography, *The Crusade for Justice*) to introduce young readers to this leader. Ida used fierce determination and the power of the pen to educate the world about the unequal treatment of African Americans in the United States. In this award-winning book, *New York Times* bestselling author Walter Dean Myers tells the story of this legendary figure, which blends harmoniously with the historically detailed watercolor paintings of illustrator Bonnie Christensen.

Historical Background

Ida B. Wells' life started in hardship, born into slavery July 16, 1862, in Holly Springs, Mississippi and orphaned by the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878. After the Civil War ended and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, life for thousands of former slaves was fundamentally changed, yet prejudice and violence still plagued their communities. Lynchings, unfair trials, segregation, and voter suppression only represent a fraction of the injustices faced by African American men and women in the United States during and after her lifetime. Sometime after Ida moved to Memphis, Tennessee, with her siblings she became a journalist, later co-owning and writing for the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*. Ida's activism against lynching started after the lynching of her close friend Thomas Moss and his associates Will Stewart and Calvin McDowell, due to the success of their grocery store, The People's Grocery Store. Ida urged readers of her newspaper to boycott white-owned businesses and urged people to leave town if they could, resulting in a mass exodus that had a lasting impact on the city of Memphis, Tennessee. Mary Church Terrell, a native of Memphis and a close friend of Thomas Moss, joined Ida on her campaigns against lynching and met with then-President Benjamin Harrison to implore him to take a public stand against lynching. President Harrison, much like the Presidents before and after him, did not take a public stand against lynching, but Terrell was not deterred, and she continued working and

campaigning against lynching. Ida herself investigated lynchings across the Southern United States, reporting on 728 lynchings during the 1890's. Soon after she published her findings, threats were made against her life and her office in Memphis was burned to the ground. Fortunately, Ida was in New York visiting T. Thomas Fortune, co-owner of *The New York Age* at the time. During her time in New York, she published her findings in a booklet titled *Southern Horror: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, made possible by Maritcha Remond Lyons and Victoria Earle Mathews. She also traveled abroad to England in the early 1890s, speaking to large crowds about the horrors of lynching and inspiring the formation of the London Anti-Lynching Committee. In addition to her work for Civil Rights, Ida also campaigned for women's rights and fought for suffrage alongside Mary Church Terrell, both of whom advocated for suffrage to be granted to African American women in the United States. Ida also had frequent interactions with Susan B. Anthony, often discussing segregation within the Women's Suffrage Movement. Anthony was of the belief that allowing African American members of the movement to address the South or participate in public affairs would alienate the Southern delegation. The lack of support from many white suffragists led to the formation of African American women's suffrage clubs that specifically addressed the needs and issues African American women faced within the suffrage movement and in their everyday lives. One of these clubs was the Alpha Suffrage Club, founded by Ida B. Wells and co-founded by white suffragists Belle Squire and Virginia Brooks in the year 1913. The Women's Suffrage Parade, led by Alice Paul and the National American Woman Suffrage Association, took place a day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in 1913, and Helen Gardner and Alice Paul chose to segregate the parade, something that Ida B. Wells and many others did not agree with. Just before the parade began, Ida slipped away from her group, joining them as they marched by taking her place next to Virginia Brooks and Belle Squire representing the Illinois delegation of suffragists. In the years after 1913, Ida either formed or assisted in forming many social organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the National Afro-American Council. She also ran for State Senate in 1930 and even though she did not win, her voice was heard, and she became the first African American woman to run for public office in the United States. Ida B. Wells' life started with hardships and ended with progress; as a Civil Rights pioneer and suffrage activist, she saw to it that the foundations for the Civil Rights Movement were laid and could be continued by later generations. The life of Ida B. Wells was full of strife and hardship, but her compassion and determination to do what was right inspired the generations that came after her passing to continue her work and to fight for their rights well into the 21st century.

Tennessee Social Studies Standards and Practices

Standard 5.09. *Analyze the major goals, struggles, and achievements of the Progressive Era, including: Prohibition (18th Amendment), women's suffrage (19th Amendment), and the lack of child labor laws.*

Essential Questions: What were the major goals, struggles, and achievements of the women's suffrage movement? What did suffragists hope to achieve? What obstacles stood in their way? What are some milestones in the movement?

Sub questions:

- **Who was Ida B. Wells? Is it important for people to know about Ida B. Wells? Why or why not? Why do you think Walter Dean Myers and Bonnie Christensen created a book about her?**
 - Ida B. Wells was born on July 16, 1862 as the oldest child to James and Elizabeth Wells, both enslaved until the passage of the 13th Amendment. She took over the responsibility for parenting her younger siblings when her parents died of yellow fever. Ida later became a teacher and then an activist after publicly suing the railroad for not allowing her to be seated in the ladies' coach. Ida used her education and activism to start writing and became partial owner of *Free Speech and Headlight*, where she fought against the crime of lynching. Ida then went on to write her own book on lynching called the *The Red Record*. She continued her leadership through speaking and organizing what would later be known as the NAACP as well as founding the Alpha Suffrage Club, which was the first voting organization for Black women in the state of Illinois. She joined others in the 1913 march for women's suffrage and continued her work for equality by refusing to march separated from her white peers.
 - Ida B. Wells is one of the trailblazers for civil rights both in terms of race and gender equity in the United States. It is vital that we learn about her work as it paved the way for suffragists like Susan B. Anthony and others. Her work also set precedents for the use of the press, organization of protests, and the power of education to shift public policy and law.
 - Walter Dean Myers and Bonnie Christensen created this book to explore the longevity and historical significance of Ida's life and work as critical to our understanding of suffrage and justice.
- **How did Ida B. Wells' work lead her to join Susan B. Anthony in the cause of suffrage?**
 - Ida's work as an activist against the crime of lynching positioned her as a "crusader for justice" in Susan B. Anthony's eyes (p. 26). The two women corresponded but ultimately, Ida realized she was not going to have the support of many white suffragists for Black women's suffrage. Ida realized she would need to take up the cause of suffrage as a critical issue for Black women. She founded the Alpha Suffrage Club, the first Black suffrage organization, in 1913 in Chicago, Illinois. See another book in this kit *Finish the Fight: The Brave and Revolutionary Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote* to learn more about "how bias nearly ruined the suffrage movement," (pp. 13-18, *Finish the Fight*).
- **What obstacles did Ida face?**
 - Throughout her life, Ida faced many obstacles such as the early loss of both of her parents as well as the responsibility of becoming the head of her household at the same time. She faced prejudice and discrimination when the railroad wouldn't let her sit in the white ladies' coach of the train. Ida sued the railroad over this, and even though Judge Pierce ruled in Ida's favor, the decision was later overturned. Ida lost several friends to lynch mobs, had her offices destroyed due to her writings, and was

eventually forced to leave her home in Memphis. Even though she fought for suffrage for ALL women, Ida (and other African American women) were asked to separate themselves from their white peers in the women's suffrage procession in 1913.

- **What major achievements did Ida receive in her fight for women's right to vote?**
 - Ida founded the first organization in the State of Illinois for Black women called the Alpha Suffrage Club, which played a critical role for Ida B. Wells in the 1913 Women's Suffrage Procession.

Teaching with Primary and Secondary Source Documents

Ida Sues the Railroad

On September 15th, 1883, twenty-year old school teacher Ida B. Wells purchased a ticket for a trip by train from Memphis to Woodstock (ten miles north of Memphis), where she was teaching at a public school. She chose a seat in the rear car with white ladies and gentlemen but was forcibly removed and told to move to the forward car, where smoking and drinking were allowed and where Black and white passengers rode together. She refused and sought damages in a challenge to Tennessee's 1882 statute, which ordered common carriers to provide accommodations equal in all respects in comfort and convenience to the first-class cars on the train for non-white passengers. The case, in which she was represented by prominent Memphis attorney, Thomas Frank Cassels, a free Black man who had served in the 42nd Tennessee General Assembly (1881-1883), was appealed to the Tennessee Supreme Court in April 1885. The Court found for the Railroad Company, reversing the earlier decision by the Circuit Court of Shelby County. Visit this website to see the legal brief filed by Greer & Adams and T.F. Cassels on behalf of Ida B. Wells, and sections 19-23 of transcribed testimony regarding the case before the Tennessee Supreme Court in April 1885.

<https://cdm15838.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15838coll7/id/276>

Ida B. Wells, Susan B. Anthony, and the Alpha Suffrage Club

The picture book details that Ida and Susan were friends, in amiable disagreement about marriage, but in full agreement about Black equality and voting rights. However, in 1870, white suffragists found themselves on opposing ends of the equal-rights battle when Congress passed the 15th Amendment, enabling Black men to vote (at least, in theory) — and not women. Susan B. Anthony famously spewed, “I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ask for the ballot for the Negro and not for the woman.” Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National Woman's Suffrage Association, argued, “You have put the ballot in the hands of your Black men, thus making them political superiors of white women. Never before in the history of the world have men made former slaves the political masters of their former mistresses!” When the 15th Amendment passed, white suffragists began pushing harder for voting rights for white women, to the exclusion of Black, Native American, and Asian Women. As a result, Ida B. Wells (and white suffragist Belle Squire) saw the need to demonstrate cooperation between Black and white suffragists. Squire said, “The time has come...[to] enlist all women to our cause, regardless of race or color, if we are to be successful.” Ida B. Wells established the Alpha Suffrage Club (ASC) in Illinois—the first Black suffrage organization (Ida B. Wells

also helped start the National Negro Committee, which would become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP]). Within five months of the formation of the ASC, Illinois granted women the right to vote. Use this link to see first issues of *The Alpha Suffrage Record*, published by the Alpha Suffrage Club. <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/ibwells-0008-009-07.pdf>. Through this newsletter, members of the ASC educated the community about candidates and local issues appearing on ballots. Refer to another book in this kit *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box* to learn more about the Alpha Suffrage Club and other ways African American women fought hard for their right to vote.

Ida B. Wells, Candidate for Delegate to Republican National Convention

Refer to another book in this lit kit, *Finish the Fight: The Brave and Revolutionary Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote*, to share more information about Ida B. Wells with students, including a photo of a candidate card supporting Ida B. Wells as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1928 (p. 66, *Finish the Fight*). Take the opportunity to explain how the Republican and Democratic parties have shifted ideologies over time, and explain who delegates are and why this role is important.

Explain to students:

- 1) **State delegates are the people you see waving banners at the national conventions.** They are sent to the national convention to choose the party's nominee, essentially serving as proxies for voters back home.
- 2) **The number of delegates (i.e., votes) a state gets depends on its population and voting history.**
- 3) **Anyone can be a delegate.** Aspiring delegates simply pledge themselves to a candidate and campaign for a spot in the delegation.
- 4) **There are different types of delegates.**
- 5) **In a contested convention, delegates have major power.**

You may also want to tell students that Ida B. Wells—unhappy with the nominees of the major parties to the Illinois state legislature—decided to run for the Illinois State legislature in 1930, which made her one of the first Black women to run for public office in the US. She didn't win. She died the next year, in 1931, at the age of 68.

The Ida B. Wells Stamp

The Ida B. Wells stamp was issued February 1, 1990. See a picture of it here:

<https://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibition/the-black-experience-prominent-journalists/ida-b-wells>

Explain to students that in 1957, the U.S. Postal Service created the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee to float ideas for stamps. Members from the fields of art, education, science and tech, history, politics and other areas of public life are appointed by the Postmaster General to evaluate stamp ideas from the public. Today, the committee receives more than 30,000 idea submissions per year. The mail is opened in the U.S. Postal Service office known as Stamp Development, which determines whether submissions meet stamp guidelines and criteria. The staff create big binders of potential stamps to be studied and evaluated by the committee members, who meet four times a year. Ask students why they think the committee decided that Ida B. Wells was a good person to put on a stamp.

Geography

SSP.06. Develop geographic awareness by:

- Analyzing the spatial relationships between people, circumstances, and resources
- Examining how geographic regions and perceptions of the regions change over time

Give students a blank map of the United States and ask students to track Ida B. Wells' travels in pursuit of justice and equality for women and African Americans. Locate Holly Springs, Mississippi, on the map, as well as Memphis, Tennessee, and Chicago, Illinois. Ask students to determine the distance between Holly Springs and Memphis, and Memphis to Chicago, IL. Ask students why Ida moved to Memphis, and again to Chicago. Why was Ida forced to leave Memphis? Why was it significant that Ida B. Wells moved North? What were the names of the newspapers in these cities where Ida was published? Why did Ida write under the name "Iola," and why was she called the "Princess of the Press"? Where was the "March of 1913"? How far is Washington, DC, from Chicago, IL?

Exploring the Book

Teachers might:

- Change the order
 - Select steps you believe would be best for your students
 - Add ones that you feel are important
1. Read and talk about the title of the book. Draw attention to "Let the Truth Be Known." What does that mean? How do you find the truth? Have students look at each panel on the cover. What is happening in the two side drawings? One is the Women's Suffrage Procession in 1913 (note the colors of the sashes and the Capitol Building in the background) and the other is of Ida B. Wells lecturing to a large crowd. Below that scene is an illustration of a lynching. What types of messages do you believe Ida B. Wells is imparting during the lecture? Look at her portrait in the center and use specific words to describe her. Examples might be stern, decisive, focused, etc. Tell students that they will see these illustrations again in—in fuller detail—in the book. Explain that these illustrations must mark important moments in Ida's life. Read the book to find out what these moments are!
 2. Introduce the author and illustrator. Briefly incorporate information about their backgrounds. Walter Dean Myers (1937-2014) is an award-winning African American author of many books for children and teens. Learn more about Walter Dean Myers here: <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/walter-dean-myers-41>
 3. Show students the numerous historical quotes from and about Ida B. Wells on pp. 36-37. Read some of those and ask students what they can infer about Ida based on these quotes.

4. The book ends with the quote, “She has plenty of nerve and is as sharp as a steel trap.” Ask students what this means. Refer back to the portrait of Ida B. Wells on the cover of the book and expand her description with that quote and students’ previous descriptive words.
5. Read aloud and/or picture-walk the story. (You might do both.) Be sensitive to your students’ needs and curiosities and briefly pause to address those areas. You might interject your thinking aloud to make sure everyone comprehends the story. However, do this sparingly because you want students to discover and enjoy the overall story for themselves. During the read aloud, highlight how the folk-style watercolor illustrations strengthen the nonfiction narrative.
6. After the read aloud, entertain questions and mention two or three of the main points in the story. Encourage students’ connections and comments.
7. Discuss the timeline at the back of the book (pp. 34-35). Have students guess Ida B. Wells’ birth year (1862). Note that she was born one year after the beginning of the Civil War.
8. If you are doing the “Timeline Activity” with your students, continue with an entry for Ida B. Wells (see “Timeline Activity” at the CCYAL website and in the Appendix in the curriculum guide book). Assign Ida’s timeline entry and have a student write five facts about Ida inside the timeline entry and illustrate the entry. Afterwards, place the entry on the timeline in chronological order according to her birth year. You may want to review the timeline, discussing what happened in each person’s life. Highlight the experiences the various people endured to win the vote. While having the timeline discussion, show each book to help students remember what happened in each of them. Encourage a lively discussion and connections. Ask students how these experiences are relevant to them today.

Interdisciplinary Activities

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English Language Arts/Writing

Creative Writing

1. *Mightier Than the Sword*

In her writing, Ida B. Wells was famous for her vivid descriptions of the horrors of lynching and racism. Because her descriptions were so vivid, she helped make people aware that change was necessary. Think about a wrong that needs to be righted in society today and write a descriptive paragraph that brings this injustice alive for readers. Choose a subject you feel strongly about and use vivid language to make your feelings clear.

2. *Ida in Her Own Words*

At the end of the book is a collection of quotations by Ida B. Wells. Choose one of the quotations and write a scene based on it. For example, you could write a scene of Ida and her mother attending school together or a scene between Ida and Susan B. Anthony

in which Ida defends her choice to get married. You can choose how to write your scene; it can be written like a scene in a short story or like a scene in a play.

Academic Writing

1. *Going to the Front of the Line*

Follow this link to the National Park Service's *Suffrage in 60 Seconds* video about Ida B. Wells:

https://www.nps.gov/articles/ooo/suffrage60seconds_ida_b_wells.htm

- How was Ida B. Wells treated by some of the white suffragists at the Women's Suffrage Procession? How did she respond to this treatment? What does her response say about her personality?

2. *Winning the Pulitzer*

In May 2020, Ida B. Wells was awarded a posthumous (after her death) Pulitzer Prize for journalism. Using what you learned from reading *Ida B. Wells: Let the Truth Be Told*, explain why you think the Pulitzer Prize committee decided to give her this award.

Art/Media

How are Alice Paul and Ida B. Wells connected to the 1913 parade?

In the "Author's Note" in another book in this kit, *Fight of the Century: Alice Paul Battles Woodrow Wilson for the Vote*, we learn: "Alice's belief in equality was tested. Leading African American suffragists like Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells-Barnett encouraged Black women's suffrage clubs and universities to participate in the parade. Alice originally supported their full participation. When many white women refused to march with Black women, Alice's committee segregated African American suffragists at the back of the parade. Wells-Barnett ignored the order and marched with the white Chicago delegation...Alice's support of her organization's discriminatory actions damaged her historical reputation as a fighter for equal rights." Have students look at the first picture panel on the left-hand cover of the picture book (and on pp. 30-31 in the picture book)—it depicts Ida B. Wells marching at the front of the 1913 parade in Washington. What is ironic about this picture, knowing what you know about what African American women were told when they tried to march in the parade? What do you notice about the facial expressions on the white women standing behind Ida? Why were white pro-suffragists worried about African American women joining the movement? You may also want to refer to other books in this kit, *Finish the Fight: The Brave and Revolutionary Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote* and *Lifting as We Climb* to learn more about Ida B. Wells and who she marched with in the 1913 parade (pp. 61-66) and other ways African American women fought for the right to vote.

