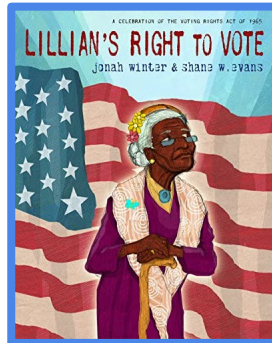


Long-Form Teacher's Guide for
Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965
by Jonah Winter and illustrated by Shane W. Evans



Book Synopsis

As Lillian, a one-hundred-year-old African American woman, makes a “long haul up a steep hill” to her polling place, she sees more than trees and sky—she sees her family’s history. She sees the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment and her great-grandfather voting for the first time. She sees her parents trying to register to vote. And she sees herself marching in a protest from Selma to Montgomery. Veteran bestselling picture-book author Jonah Winter and Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award winner Shane W. Evans vividly recall America’s battle for civil rights in this lyrical, poignant account of one woman’s fierce determination to make it up the hill and make her voice heard.

Historical Background

The inspiration for the character Lillian in *Lillian's Right to Vote* came from a resident of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania by the name of Lillian Allen. Ms. Allen was born in 1908/09, a time when few African American males and no women could vote; she passed in 2015 just before the end of former President Obama’s second term. During her lifetime, she witnessed a century of bias and discrimination against African Americans in the United States, which included voter suppression after the passing of both the 15th and the 24th Amendments, as well as the changes brought by the Civil Rights Movement--all of which the character of Lillian recollects while walking to the polling place to cast her vote. The character of Lillian also remembers literacy tests and poll taxes, both of which were used to suppress votes from African American communities during a majority of the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries. Both literacy tests and poll taxes were made illegal with the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Act would not have passed had it not been for the tireless efforts of those who led and inspired the Civil Rights Movement--people like Martin Luther King Jr., a leader who spoke with passion and led with purpose; Jimmie Lee Jackson whose death inspired the March on Montgomery; former Congressman John Lewis who bore the scar he received from the March on Montgomery and his passion for justice throughout the remainder of his life, and hundreds of others from around the country. It was because of the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that Lillian Allen and thousands of others finally received the right to vote freely, without restriction, in the “Land of the Free.” Just as the

character of Lillian closes the book with casting her vote, Lillian Allen cast her vote for the nation's first African American President Barack Obama in 2008. The life of Lillian Allen inspired the imagery of this book and her life story (all 107 years of it) along with those who led the Civil Rights Movement, continues to inspire younger generations to fight for what they believe in no matter the cost.

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 is Lillian and how does her climb up the hill and visions of history describe the obstacles her family and she faced in order to gain the right to vote?**
 - Lillian is 100 years old and is going to vote. (Based on Lillian Allen, a resident of Pittsburgh's Hill District who was born in Alabama in 1908, the granddaughter of a slave.)
 - She sees generational struggle to gain freedom—
 - Great-great grandparents Elijah and Sarah sold in auction as slaves.
 - Great Grandpa Edmund was forced to pick cotton--still owned by another man.
 - 1870 passage of 15th amendment--Edmund can vote but Great Grandma Ida is not allowed.
 - Grandpa Isaac being charged a poll tax that he can't pay; Uncle Levi being forced to take a test he can't pass so they cannot vote despite the 15th amendment.
 - 1920-Lillian and her family are chased away from the voting booth by a mob because her parents tried to vote.
 - Her own registration process, another test, writing a section of the Constitution--she cannot pass the test; she cannot vote.
 - Jimmie Lee Jackson; John Lewis & Martin Luther King Jr. marching through Selma (1,2,3 times).
- **Even with the passage of the 15th and 19th amendments, what struggles did citizens face in their journey to vote?**
 - Despite legal "protection" there was still racial and gender discrimination. People were required to pay poll taxes, take literacy tests and faced threats of violence and harm.
- **How did the Civil Rights movement progress the work of the Voting Rights Act of 1965?**
 - John Lewis and Martin Luther King Jr. and thousands of other rabbis, teachers, leaders, and community members marched for equal rights

under the law. Their work led Lyndon B. Johnson to pass the Voting Rights Act in 1965 which allowed Lillian the right to vote and inspired her to keep walking up the hill no matter the obstacles.

- **The Voting Rights Act of 1965 accomplished what goals in the national suffrage movement and what protections did it provide?**
 - It secured African Americans' right to vote and made it illegal for states to use literacy tests or poll taxes or any other method to deny American citizens the right to vote. It also provided federal oversight of the election processes in the Southern States to prevent the pattern of discrimination.
 - President Lyndon B. Johnson, who signed the act, stated, "Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote...there is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right...ALL of us...must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome."
- **How does Lillian's journey and story relate to voting rights today?**
 - In 2013, the Supreme Court voted to eliminate the federal oversight of states' election processes, a key protection in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Since then, states have passed "voter ID laws" and other restrictive laws which limit access to voting. This measure greatly affects poor and elderly citizens' ability to vote. Up to his death, John Lewis was still fighting for legislation to improve these laws and uphold the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which he committed his life's work to protecting. Currently, the John Lewis Voting Rights Act is proposed legislation that would restore and strengthen parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as certain portions of the 1965 Act were struck down by the United States Supreme Court in 2013 by *Shelby County v. Holder*.

Teaching with Primary and Secondary Source Documents

The Fifteenth Amendment

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits racial discrimination in voting. The Act enforces the 15th Amendment of the United States Constitution. The 15th Amendment — the third and final amendment to the U.S. Constitution during the Reconstruction Era — was adopted to protect the freedoms outlined in the 13th and 14th Amendments, which were added to the Constitution in order to free enslaved persons. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery and the 14th Amendment gave former slaves rights of US citizens. However, voting laws were still enforced at the state level. The 15th Amendment was added to protect the voting rights of all citizens, with the power of the federal government to enforce. Read the 15th Amendment with your students:

- Section 1: "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."
- Section 2: "The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

Discuss with students what the words "denied" and "abridged" mean. Why would these words need to be included in this amendment? Also make sure students understand the

word “servitude.” What were some ways states still tried to find ways around the amendment? (e.g., poll taxes, literacy tests, intimidation).

What is a Poll Tax?

Poll taxes were laws that required payment of a fee in order to vote, and were implemented in southern states like Tennessee in order to restrict the political power of African American communities. By the 1880s, Tennessee began enforcing poll taxes, which remained active until the 1960s. In many places, poll taxes were combined with other voting restrictions such as literacy tests. Begin by asking students if they think voting is a right or a privilege for US citizens. What would it mean to citizens if voting is a right? What would it mean to citizens if voting is a privilege? Explain to students that poll taxes were meant to keep Black people from voting (although it prevented many poor people—Black and white—from voting). Show students the poll tax receipt for Mr. Robert S. Anderson in Tennessee at the Tennessee Virtual Archive:

<https://cdm15138.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll6/id/8530>

Ask students:

- 1) What information is being collected by the State of Tennessee on this form?
- 2) How much did Mr. Anderson pay to vote? Have students use the Internet to translate what that would mean in current dollars. What would this mean if more than one person in Mr. Anderson’s household wanted to vote?

Ask students to consider the problems with determining a person’s ability to vote by how much money that person has. Ask students if how much money one has continues to affect access to voting today.

African American Woman Suffrage

For Black women, the 19th Amendment didn’t end their fight for the vote. Have students look at the photograph of educator and activist Nannie Helen Burroughs and fellow members of the Woman’s National Baptist Convention.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/black-women-continued-fighting-for-vote-after-19th-amendment>

Use another book in this kit *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women’s Battle for the Ballot Box* to introduce students to Nannie Helen Burroughs (pp. 80-81). Why was Nannie unable to teach in DC’s public schools? How did this experience change her life? What was Nannie’s role in the National Baptist Convention? Consider sharing excerpts from Burroughs’ most famous speech, “How the Sisters Are Hindered from Helping,” with students. You can find the speech here:

<https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2019/09/26/how-the-sisters-are-hindered-from-helping/>

Marching for Freedom

Share with your class the “Freedom March” newsreel footage of the march from Selma to Montgomery, available at this website: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/selma-montgomerymarch>.

Before watching the 1 & 1/2-minute video, discuss the word *Negro*, which was common at the time and is used in the newsreel. Have a discussion in which students connect the

video to the section in *Lillian's Right to Vote* about the three marches. Talk about the concept of a “peaceful protest march” as described in the book. Finally, have students compare the book and the video in terms of what kind of information each provides.

Government & Civics

Standard 5.54. *Describe the structure of Tennessee's government, including the role of each of the three branches, the governor, and state representatives.*

Why Vote?

Have students discuss why voting today is important. Have students consider the following questions:

- What are elections? When are elections? How do we elect leaders?
- Who votes? How do you vote? Where do you vote?
- Why should people vote? Why is voting an important responsibility for citizens?
- What does the governor do?
- What do state representatives do?
- Who are our current elected leaders?
- What is the government? Why does government matter?
- Has a woman ever been the governor of TN? Who are the women in TN state legislature?
- Why is it significant that Kamala Harris is Vice-President of the US?

Also, explain to students that the women's suffrage movement led to increased representation of women in Congress. In 1922, one woman (for a short period of time) and 99 men comprised the US Senate. But women's representation has increased over the years. In 2017, 105 (78 Democrats, 27 Republicans) women held seats in the United States Congress, comprising 19.6% of the 535 members; 21 women (21%) served in the United States Senate, and 84 women (19.3%) served in the United States House of Representatives. Ask students: how do these numbers compare to today?

Teachers may want to read the supplementary texts in the lit kit, *What's the Big Deal About Elections*, by Ruby Shamir and illustrated by Matt Faulkner; *Vote for Our Future!* by Margaret McNamara and illustrated by Micah Player; and *Kamala Harris: Rooted in Justice* by Nikki Grimes and illustrated by Laura Freeman.

How Does a Federal Law Get Made?

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is central to this story, so you may want to talk about how a federal law is created before reading *Lillian's Right to Vote*. The U.S. House of Representatives “Kids in the House” website gives a step-by-step description of how a law is written and passed (<http://kids.clerk.house.gov/grade-school/lesson.html?intID=17>). Depending on students' prior knowledge, you may need to explain briefly what Congress is and how members of Congress are elected locally and sent to Washington, D.C., to make laws. “Kids in the House” offers a useful lesson plan on the topic “From a Bill to a Law,” with an exercise called “Act It Out” in which students play the roles of citizens, representatives, senators, and the president in passing a law (<http://kids.clerk.house.gov/grade-school/teaching-resources.html>).

Shelby County v. Holder

In April 2010, Shelby County, Alabama filed suit asking a federal court in Washington, D.C. to declare Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. Section 5 is a key part of the Voting Rights Act, requiring certain jurisdictions with a history of discrimination to submit any proposed changes in voting procedures to the U.S. Department of Justice or a federal district court in D.C. – before it goes into effect – to ensure the change would not harm minority voters. In September 2011, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia upheld the constitutionality of Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, and in May 2012, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit agreed with the district court that Section 5 was constitutional. Shelby County appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court agreed to take the case in November 2012. On June 25, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the coverage formula in Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act – which determines which jurisdictions are covered by Section 5 – is unconstitutional because it is based on an old formula. As a practical matter this means that Section 5 is inoperable until Congress enacts a new coverage formula, which the decision invited Congress to do. Discuss with students what the implications of *Shelby County v. Holder* are/have been, and how the John Lewis Voting Rights Act aims to redress the portions that were struck down in this case.

What is an Activist?

Ask students: What is an activist? What examples of activism did you see in the book? Remind students about the part of the book (pages 20-25) where a large group of people engaged in a protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama to fight for the right to vote, leading to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Explain to students that activists get involved in different kinds of activities where they work to change something they think is unfair or unjust. If time permits, brainstorm a list of current day issues that are important to students that are happening at their school, in their community or state/country, a situation in which they feel an injustice is taking place. Engage students in a discussion about doing something about that situation. Discuss possible strategies that are modest and age-appropriate.

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*

The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

Distribute copies of the one-page article “Selma-to-Montgomery March National Historic Trail & All-American Road” available at the National Park Service website: <https://www.nps.gov/places/selma-to-montgomery-national-historic-trail.htm>

Ask students to draw a map that shows the 54-mile Selman-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail; it should include nearby highways, rivers, and towns.

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 this powerful book. Note that the woman on the front and back covers of the book is African American. The color of her hair and other characteristics indicate that she is elderly. “1965” in the title should initiate questions. The quote on the back of the book and endpapers should help students make predictions about the story.
 2. Introduce the author and illustrator. Briefly incorporate information about their backgrounds. There is some information about their lives on the back flap of the book. Jonah Winter is an award-winning author who specializes in writing nonfiction children’s books that promote facts, social justice, and artistic expression. He resides in a small town in Pennsylvania and has been a collector of baseball cards since he was a child. Illustrator and author, Shane W. Evans has won numerous awards such as the Orbis Pictus and the Coretta Scott King.
 - Jonah Winter: <https://pittsburghlectures.org/lectures/jonah-winter/>
 3. Students will have a good idea when the story took place because the year is included in the title. They will benefit from a brief discussion about pertinent events that happened during that time period.
 4. 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. This is a story that you will want to reread and make available for students to pursue for assignments or during their leisure.
 5. After the read aloud, entertain questions and mention two or three of the main points in the story.
 6. Examine the backmatter with students because it adds more information, specification, and validity to the book. The story and backmatter address the journey African Americans endured for the right to vote safely.
 7. Show the timeline entry (Voting Rights Act of 1965) and assign a student to personalize it (write five facts about the event inside the timeline entry). Refer to the “Timeline Activity” for directions (see the “Timeline Activity” at the CCYAL website and also in the Appendix). Afterwards, place the entry on the timeline in chronological order. Note that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed forty-five years after women won the right to vote in 1920.
 8. Provide closure for the story according to your students’ needs and interests.

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. *Dear Grandchild*

Lillian cares a lot about family as well as about voting rights. Have students, working alone or in pairs, write a letter from Lillian to her grandchild about the importance of voting. Students can have her relate some of the information from the book and add thoughts of their own about what Lillian would say.

2. *The Value of Voting*

Pretend that there is another scene in the book in which Lillian overhears her grandson and one of his friends talking about voting. They say that voting isn't important and that it doesn't change anything. Write a scene between Lillian and her grandson in which Lillian explains to him why voting is important and should not be taken for granted. You can write this scene like a short story or like a play.

3. *Sources of Inspiration*

This book mentions John Lewis, the civil rights activist who went on to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. Lewis stated that throughout his life, even during his most difficult times, he was inspired by the poem "Invictus," which you can read

here: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51642/invictus>

After you have read the poem, think of the person or thing that most inspires you. It could be a person in your family, a famous person, a poem, a book, or a song—anyone or anything that gives you hope and inspiration. Then write either a poem or a descriptive paragraph about your source of inspiration.

Academic Writing

1. *Exercise Your Right to Vote*

Read the books *What's the Big Deal About Elections*, by Ruby Shamir and illustrated by Matt Faulkner, and *Vote for Our Future!* by Margaret McNamara and illustrated by Micah Player to students (both are in the traveling lit kit). Ask students to discuss why so many Americans choose not to vote. Ask students: What would you say to adults to convince them to exercise this right? Start writing your argument!

2. *Oppressive Obstacles*

This book shows Lillian's—but also all Southern Black citizens'—uphill struggle for the right to vote. The story mentions several obstacles that were thrown up to stop Black citizens from voting. Research one of these topics: poll taxes, voter literacy tests, cross burnings. After you've researched the subject, write a paragraph in which you explain how it was used to stop or scare Black people who wanted to vote.

3. *A Terrible Test*

Go to this website <https://allthatsinteresting.com/voting-literacy-test> and read about the prejudiced nature of voting literacy tests. If you scroll about halfway down the page, you'll find a copy of the state of Louisiana's voter literacy test. Try to take the test, and bear in mind that missing even one question would cause you to fail and be unable to vote. Once you've attempted the test, write a paragraph explaining what the experience was like and whether the questions were fair or unfair.

Art/Media

1. Climbing the Hill

On a long piece of butcher paper, draw a diagonal line to represent the hill that Lillian climbs. As a group, label the hill with years that correspond to the story. Then have each student draw a picture of a character in the book, including those in the marches. Students should place their picture at the right place in the story's sequence. They can also write a short description of the character near their picture. Post the paper on a wall in the classroom or in a school hallway.

2. Pick Your Favorite Scene

Draw your favorite scene and write a few words of *dialogue* (conversation between two or more persons). Is it when Lillian sees her great-grandpa voting for the first time after the Fifteenth Amendment is passed, or when Lillian sees people marching from Selma to Montgomery to fight for voting rights, or is it something else? What might they be saying in the scene? Draw/write in with speech/dialogue bubbles.

3. Birds, Butterflies, the Sky, and the Sun

Throughout the book, Lillian wears a butterfly pin. In more than one picture, three birds are flying away from her into the sky. Talk about butterflies and birds and what makes them special. Why might the Illustrator have put them in the pictures? Also, discuss how parts of the sky, and especially the sun, change in the pictures throughout the book. How does a bright yellow sun make you feel? Why do you think the illustrator shows the sun so often? Talk about what objects in the book besides the sun are yellow.

