

# Warriors Don't Cry

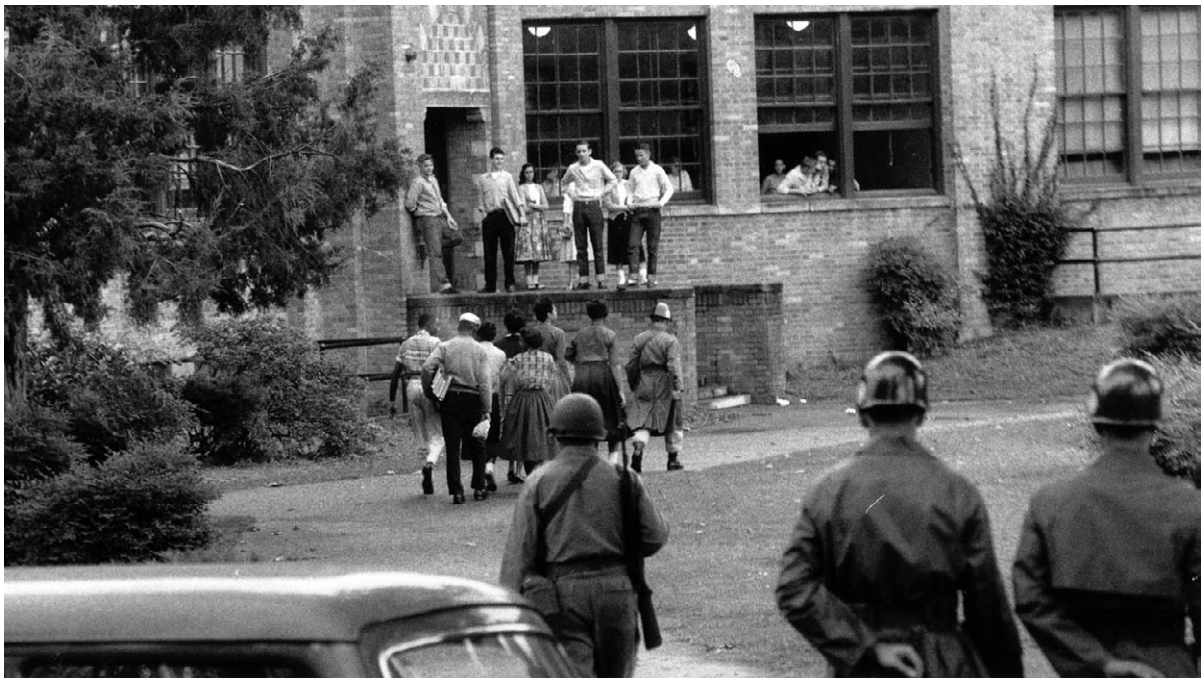
## Connecting History, Literature, and Our Lives

By LINDA CHRISTENSEN

IN HER MEMOIR, *Warriors Don't Cry*, Melba Pattillo Beals walks students into the events of Central High School and makes them feel the sting of physical and emotional abuse the Little Rock Nine suffered as they lived the history of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Beals' book tells the story of young people who became accidental heroes when their lives intersected a movement for justice in education, and they made the choice to join the movement instead of taking an easier path.

Because the book is written about Melba's high school experience, it hits close to home for students. They wonder how she kept going. And while they admire Grandma India, they think it's

unfair when Melba isn't allowed to attend the school's wrestling matches. They feel Melba's pain when her friends don't attend her birthday party and they applaud Minniejean for dumping chili on the boy who harassed her. They discuss the horrors that the students faced—the mobs, the daily acts of violence—and wonder how the Little Rock Nine persevered. These conversations open the door for us to talk about how Melba and her family see her actions as a part of a collective struggle for African Americans, not just an act for Melba's self-improvement. Through the story of the Little Rock Nine, students can see that at points in history, people have the power to reshape the course of events.



With a National Guardsman as an escort, seven of the Little Rock Nine make their way across the Central High campus to school in October 1957.

Getty Images

Beals' memoir also underscores how hard African Americans have worked to get an "equal" education in this country, how much they have sacrificed—including their lives—for the right to learn. *Warriors Don't Cry* is a home-run book with students: They not only read it, they get passionate about it. In Portland, students read *Warriors* in many untracked 9th-grade academies that integrate language arts, social studies, and science classes. I taught this memoir in the junior year when I taught a combined Literature and U.S. History class. In fact, the book can be taught from 5th grade on up.

## Overview of the Unit

I start with a role play to give students background knowledge of the historical context of segregation and the struggle for civil rights. After the role play, students write a "Writing for Justice" narrative about an incident from their lives. (See *Teaching for Joy and Justice* for a more detailed description.) Then students engage in a literary tea party as they meet key players in the book. While students read, they keep a dialogue journal where they keep track of their insights and questions. They also identify targets and perpetrators of injustice as well as allies and bystanders. During the unit, students write an essay, poetry, and interior monologues. They draw literary postcards, engage in improvisations, and create character silhouettes to collect evidence for their essay. I interlace footage from the videos *Eyes on the Prize* and *Standing on My Sisters' Shoulders* so students can see and hear events described in the memoir. The videos and other texts from the time period help students understand that the story of the Little Rock Nine was part of a larger movement to reshape U.S. society. The book also provides a jumping-off point for a study of schooling—including personal connections, and local and national education struggles for education.

## A Historical Framework

Instead of leaping into Beals' memoir as an unproblematic celebration of *Brown*, I give students a sense of the discussions that might have

happened over dinner tables, in barbershops, or at church socials as Little Rock community members argued about integrating Central High School. I wrote a role play to make sure that even before starting the book, students could understand how different groups in the city might have responded to integration. I opened the role play with the question: Should Central High School be integrated? To be honest, as a literature major, I was appallingly ignorant about much of U.S. history. However, my lack of knowledge helped me understand the gaps in historical information that students might have. For example, I didn't know that some African Americans did not want to integrate schools for a variety of reasons, including a fundamental distrust in a government that had never taken their well-being into account. I didn't really know the history of the struggle. I knew the big stuff. I had a basic understanding of the Supreme Court decision and Thurgood Marshall's role, and I had the visual images of one of the Nine, Elizabeth Eckford, hounded by the mob; but to teach this book effectively, I needed details. I read, I researched, and I wrote the roles.

The year is 1957. In the role play I play the Little Rock School Board, and I invite five groups, who hold a variety of opinions on integration, to a meeting to make suggestions about how to proceed with desegregating Little Rock's schools following the *Brown* decision. Each group has an opportunity to persuade the school board—me—to agree with their resolution and to question their opponents.

After informing students of their responsibilities, I divide them into the five groups: Families of the Little Rock Nine, African Americans Opposing Integration, Governor Orval Faubus, Local Business Owners, and the NAACP. Then I give students a menu of resolutions to present to the school board—or the choice to create their own:

- Central High School should be immediately opened up for any African American who wants to attend.
- A handful of African American honors students may attend Central High School as a test case to determine whether or not integration will work.



Associated Press

White students take turns hitting an effigy of an African American student during a 75-student walkout protesting the integration of Central High School. Soldiers policing the school grounds broke up the demonstration.

- Instead of integrating Central High School, the state should increase funding for a segregated black school, so that “separate but equal” means just that.
- Arkansas should create a voluntary integration program for white and black students at a neutral site—a new school that would iron out the problems and create a map for future integration.
- There should be no integration. Central High School should remain segregated and black-only Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School should also remain segregated.

After discussing the resolutions, students read their roles and discover information about their group’s position that they share with the rest of the class later during presentations and deal-making.

For example, the Families of the Little Rock Nine role helps students understand the huge sacrifices these students and their families made because they dreamed for a better future:

*You understand that the segregation laws that keep blacks and whites separate and unequal must be broken. You and your children know that they are the intellectual equals to white students who attend the school. There is no reason except racism for black students to attend poorly funded schools. It may be rough going for a while, but nothing in life comes easy. In the long run, your families’ sacrifices will benefit all African Americans and the country as a whole. (See the full roles below.)*

The roles also alert students to the social issues and pressures at work in Little Rock. The



African Americans Opposing Integration role raises issues of funding and violence, but also questions whether white teachers at Central will care about black students:

*You aren't sure that putting your children in a school with white children is going to make them better educated. Dunbar Senior High School is the only high school for blacks in Little Rock. Students come from throughout the state to attend Dunbar in order to get what many consider the best education. Dunbar is known for its remarkable student body and faculty. You know these teachers have your children's best interests at heart. You worry that if integration is successful, it will ultimately lead to the defunding of Dunbar High School because white students will not transfer to black schools. As enrollment decreases, outstanding black teachers may lose their jobs. They will most likely not be hired at Central High School.*

## Interior Monologues

After students read over their roles, they write interior monologues—the thoughts and feelings from their characters' points of view. I use interior monologues throughout my units as a way for students to develop an understanding and appreciation for how a literary or historical character might feel at a critical point in a novel or historical event. I've discovered that writing helps students get into the heads of historical characters, to imagine the hopes and fears behind the choices that people confronted. Students use information from their role as they write their interior monologue. For example, an African American parent who opposes integration might discuss her fears for her child's safety in an integrated school, but also write about her despair over Jim Crow laws. I usually give a few models to students so they can see how someone else approached this writing task.

For this particular interior monologue, I encourage students to create identities—name themselves, name their children. The more they inhabit the role, the more effectively they will

be able to participate in the role play from their group's standpoint. A small business owner, for example, might name the business and tell a little about it, but also discuss their perspective on the question of integration and back it up with information from their role. To get students started, I say, "Read over your role. Think about how your group will address the question: Should Central High School be integrated? Give yourself a name. Name your children. Using ideas from your role, write your character's thoughts and feelings about integrating Central High School. Write as if you are this person thinking about the question. Use the word 'I.'"

After writing for 10 to 15 minutes, students share their monologues with their group members. This helps clarify their understanding of their groups' concerns as well as their positions. Alisha, a student in Sandra Childs' class at Franklin High School in Portland, wrote in part:

*My name is Cyd. I'm 32. I'm a single mother and I own a bookstore. I have two kids, Robert and Ann. They both go to Dunbar Senior High School. I want my children to get the best education they can. I know and trust that my kids will get what they deserve. Integration will only cause trouble. Things will get violent, I know, I've heard white kids talk. I've heard what they say. I don't want my kids to get shot. I believe that everything should stay the way it is because nothing good will come of this.*

After sharing their writing, the group reads over the menu of resolutions and decides which resolution best represents their feelings about integration. At this point, the group either chooses one of the resolutions or creates a resolution to present to the school board. I tell them, "After you decide on your resolution, think about your arguments. Go back to your roles and interior monologues and list your reasons. Everyone in the group needs the list of arguments because you will all need to be able to explain your position." Then they are ready to meet the other groups—to find allies and to uncover their opponents' arguments on the topic.

## Alliance-Building

Prior to the actual role play, students engage in an alliance-building session. This activity helps them find others who support their position. I tell them, “Choose half your group as ‘travelers’ who will move to the four other groups and attempt to find allies—people who support your point of view. The more allies you have when you go before the school board, the better chance you have of determining the decision on integrating Central High. You may have to slightly change your resolution to win allies, but you don’t want to change so much that you are no longer consistent with your group’s perspective. Half of your group will ‘stay at home’ and receive visitors and share your perspective and attempt to gain allies as well.”

This session often whips students up. They might be ho-hum about the assignment until this point. They gain clarity about their position as they argue with other groups. As students try to persuade others to support their resolution, they hone their arguments, compromise with their allies, and sniff out their opponents’ perspectives. While students roam the room or entertain guests, I listen in on the groups. If a group member or a group strays too far from their role’s position, like Gov. Faubus immediately opening all Little Rock high schools to blacks, I may intervene. I also stir the pot by pointing out their differences.

After students reconvene in their small groups, they write up a “statement” to be delivered at the school board meeting about their position on integrating Central High School. In this statement they must identify their group, state their resolution, and use solid reasons to convince the school board to support their position. I encourage them to return to their roles and their interior monologues as they build their arguments.

“Everyone in your group needs to contribute to this statement, and everyone needs to

have a copy because you are all responsible for speaking at some point during the meeting. You might choose one or two group members to give your statement and then choose one or two group members to answer questions or cross-examine other groups.” I award points to each speaker: If every member of the group speaks, then each group member earns double credit. This encourages the loquacious to give up some airtime to their shy or reluctant classmates.

## The Role Play

The students and I arrange the room in a circle. Each group sits together with a placard displaying its name—Little Rock Nine, NAACP, etc. I pound the gavel (or stapler) to open the Little Rock School Board meeting; I announce the order in which I will hear their testimony; I pair pro and con in my speaking list to encourage spirited debate—for example, Business Owners and NAACP. Before beginning my role as School Board Chair, I tell students, “Take notes during each group’s testimony, so you can ask questions and point out flaws in your opponents’ logic or information. Think about what information you have that

will counter their arguments.” If students aren’t pointing out problems with each other’s resolutions, I will ask a question or two to model the process. For example, I might ask the parents supporting integration, “Aren’t you worried about what will happen to your children when those doors close? Have you seen what happened when Autherine Lucy, an African American student, was admitted to the University of Alabama? White students and residents rioted. You put all of our lives in danger.”

After each group has had an opportunity to share their statement and argue, I cut off the arguments. I learned over the years to stop while they are still passionate instead of waiting until they are tired of the question.

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*The role play gives students a sense of the discussions that might have happened as community members argued about integration.*

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## After the Role Play

At the end of the role play, I ask students to lay their group role aside and write about what they think happened in real life. How do they know? Typically, students write that those who supported integration won because students from diverse racial backgrounds go to school together.

Then we discuss which resolution they think should have been made at the time. Students rarely choose the historically “accurate” resolution; their history and perspectives play into their decisions. Typically, at Jefferson, a predominantly black school, students believe that Central High School should be opened up immediately for any African American. Theresa Quinn and Heidi Tolentino, two 9th-grade language arts teachers, use this role play at a predominantly white school across town, where students usually decide that a neutral site should be chosen for voluntary integration.

As students grapple with the issues of segregation, integration, and injustice, argue with their classmates, and give impassioned speeches to convince me, as the head of the school board, of their position, they also learn some key background knowledge that helps them better understand Melba Pattillo Beals’ story. Perhaps more importantly, they see that there was nothing inevitable about integration.

For example, after participating in the role play, when students begin reading *Warriors Don’t Cry*, they understand why Melba’s family is angry that she signed up to integrate Central without telling them. The African Americans Opposed to Integration group talks about the threat of violence that will be aimed at the entire community over integration. They’ve witnessed the violence aimed at blacks in other states who attempted to integrate buses and lunch counters. So students understand Melba’s family’s reaction when she writes in *Warriors Don’t Cry*:

*We all stood like statues as the newsman talked about Little Rock’s segregationists, who were determined to stop our children from entering white schools at any cost . . . By then Mother was pale, her lips drawn tight as she glared at me. All of them circled around me.*

*With horrified expressions they looked at me as though I had lied or sassed Grandma. . . . When had I planned on telling them? Why did I sign my name to the paper saying I lived near Central and wanted to go, without asking their permission? Did I consider that my decision might endanger our family?*

Throughout the book, Melba shows readers both the economic hardship and the violence wreaked on the black community because of the Supreme Court decision. By the time we finish the role play, most students are beginning to understand that the narratives behind the still photos of historic moments are filled with complicated choices and heroic actions of ordinary people who worked together to bring about change.

## Writing for Justice Narrative

As students read *Warriors Don’t Cry*, they examine the methods used by civil rights groups to crack school segregation. While this is Melba’s story, it is also the story of an alliance of groups that came together over decades to end the apartheid conditions of blacks in the United States. Because I want students to understand how people working together can create change, I ask them to write a narrative about a time when they acted as an ally, perpetrator, target, or bystander—described in greater detail in *Teaching for Joy and Justice*. Writing the narrative before reading Melba’s story roots the terminology and themes in their own lives first, so they can more readily identify those roles during their reading.

## The Tea Party: Discovering Characters and Themes

In this tea party, students become one of five characters in the book: Melba Pattillo Beals, one of the Little Rock Nine; Daisy Bates, a member of the Little Rock NAACP; Grandma India, Melba’s maternal, gun-toting, Bible-quoting grandma; Danny, a soldier in the 101st Airborne; or Link, a white senior at Central High School. Each role gives students information about the character’s relationship to Melba, and hints at larger issues in the book—from

President Eisenhower sending in troops to the NAACP organizing to help the students.

After students read their roles, I say, “Underline key facts about your character. The key facts are: Who are you? What is your relationship to Melba? What is your perspective on integration? Also, underline any interesting fact or piece of information you think others might want to know. After you have underlined, turn your card over and list those key facts. Doing both of these activities will help you remember your role, but also, if you forget, you can look down and see those facts.”

Grandma India’s role, for example, gives students a sense of her feistiness as well as her connection to Melba and her ideas about integration:

*You are going to love me. I am a tough love kind of Grandma. You might find me sitting in a rocking chair, but instead of knitting and crocheting, I’ll have my rifle on my lap. My grandbaby Melba is integrating that high school to make things better for African Americans, but as Frederick Douglass said, “Freedom does not come without a struggle.” No one is going to make this easy. So I’ve got my gun ready in case anyone plans on troubling us. I am highly religious, but I am highly practical as well. Don’t mess with my grandbaby.*

Students note that she’s Melba’s grandmother, that she understands the need to sacrifice for the greater good of her people, and they love that she’s got her gun on her lap as she sits in her rocking chair.

Prior to the tea party, I demonstrate how to “become the character.” As students begin the tea party, I tell them, “Your goal is to meet four other characters from the autobiography. Find out as much as you can about each character and write down this character’s relationship to Melba, their perspective on integration, and other details. Do not read each other’s cards. You must introduce yourselves. Talk. You can’t sit down and yell for other characters to come to you. You can’t just hand your card to someone else and say, ‘Here, read this.’ You must

mingle. This is a ‘get up and move around’ activity.” Once students have introduced themselves two or three times to their classmates, they are comfortable presenting the information about their character. They don’t need to look at the card anymore.

After students have met the four other characters, I ask them to write down three questions and three predictions they have about the book. I also ask them to draw a diagram or picture that explains the relationship of the characters. “This is important work,” I tell them, “because your mind is making connections now that will help you as you read. Figure out how these characters are related now to avoid confusion later. Also, good readers automatically begin asking questions and making predictions as they read. These are reading habits that keep you engaged as you read.”

Students’ questions have included: Will Grandma shoot someone? Will Melba get hurt when she goes to school? Their predictions often follow typical romance novels: Melba will fall in love with a white boy and get married. But others are more serious: Someone will get hurt or die before the end of the book. Melba’s mother will lose her job. I often write these on the blackboard or overhead so we can return to them as we read the book.

Although it may seem redundant to use both a role play and a tea party prior to reading this book, these activities cover different territory. The role play provides historical background. The tea party introduces characters in the book.

## **Warriors’ Dialogue Journal: Allies, Perpetrators, Targets, and Bystanders**

*Warriors Don’t Cry* provides students with role models of ordinary people who became extraordinary when they chose to act against the injustice they experienced. Before students read the book, I remind students of the terms they encountered in the “Writing for Justice” narrative: ally, perpetrator, target, and bystander.



I tell students, “These roles aren’t static. As a result of personal relationships and education, people who are perpetrators can become allies. Think about your own lives. There might have been times when you stood by and watched something happen, then you made a decision to act. In this book, I want you to keep track of Melba’s allies and perpetrators, but I also want you to watch for those times when people changed roles. What happened that allowed them to act? What changed for them?”

I use students’ dialogue journal notes and questions about allies, perpetrators, targets, and bystanders as discussion prompts. At the beginning of the period, students share their questions and notes in small groups. I ask each group to write a question on the board. Students wrote: Was Link really an ally? He helped Melba to safety, but he never renounced his friends’ activities. When Minniejean wanted to sing, were the rest of the Little Rock Nine allies to her? Who in the community helped Melba’s mother when her job was threatened? And what about the teachers in the school? Who made the classroom safe? Who didn’t? What strategies could the community have used to help the Little Rock Nine?

Over the years, students have noted different forms of allies—from the NAACP leaders who fought for integration through the courts; to Grace Lorch, who led Elizabeth Eckford to safety on the first day of integration; to Melba’s white classmate, Link, who called each night to let her know which halls to avoid, and who helped her escape torture on numerous occasions.

### **Strategies for Deepening Conversation and Bringing Students Back to Class**

I don’t give reading quizzes or tests. If I engage students daily in the content of the book by taking them back to the text through drawings, photographs, improvisations, discussions, and poetry, I keep students mentally and physically engaged in the class. As we read a book, I try to vary the work,

both to keep students interested and also to make the work more academically rigorous. Some days, students meet in small groups of four or five students to share their dialogue journals and engage in a discussion. Groups select a quote and a question for the class to discuss, and these become the jumping-off point for our day’s discussion.

Over the years, I designed strategies to immerse students more thoroughly in our readings. I discovered that these also catch up stragglers who have come back to class after absences or students who have entered class midway through a unit. If we think of a unit as a journey, then we’re stopping at cafés, reading historical plaques in rest areas, and walking by the ocean as we move forward. We pause throughout to debate, draw, make connections, write, talk, and listen as we examine texts more closely. These activities aren’t make-work designed to keep students busy; they fulfill vital functions. As students replay key scenes during an improvisation or sketch a metaphorical drawing, they rehearse arguments for their essays, develop stronger reading skills, and explore tough issues that affect their lives. Through engagement in these learning activities, I want students to find places that ignite their passion for learning while I bring students who have fallen behind back into the class.

### **Improvisations: Returning to Key Scenes**

Improvisations are short scenes that students act out. Sometimes these are straight from the book we’re reading, and students act out the scene, so we can discuss the characters’ actions or think about alternative decisions characters could have made. I also use them to put students in the shoes of historical or literary characters who had to make tough choices. I use them to provoke discussions about the tender, tense places where interesting issues erupt.

After arguing whether Melba was right to sign up to integrate Central High School without her parents’ consent, students who have disengaged from the unit or reading can get hooked back into the book. Improvisations provide an opportunity to catch up because students need to reread key



sections and talk with classmates about the text. Students also see chunks of the book acted out, so they get the gist of what they've missed. And, in complete honesty, for struggling readers, they don't have to reread the entire text in order to be pulled back into the class.

About halfway through *Warriors*, I say, "Write down what you believe are the five pivotal scenes from the memoir so far—times when people made key decisions, when people were confronted with tough choices." As students share their lists, I write them on the board and add ones that I think are important. Even creating the lists produces interesting discussion as students explain or defend their choices. I divide the class into groups and assign each group a scene to act out.

I tell the class, "First, reread the section you will act out. Read it aloud or to yourselves and then discuss it. After you read, figure out how you will act out the scene and designate which character each of your group members will play." Because I've taught teenagers long enough to know almost every way they can undermine my lesson through adolescent silliness, I also say, "If you don't take this seriously, you will have to redo the scene." The more fully I articulate my expectations, the more seriously my students take the assignment.

As students rehearse the scenes in the classroom and in the hallway, I rearrange the desks so there is room for an acting space. I also move from group to group, listening in on their conversations, prodding them when needed, helping them get in character, reminding them that they are not reading from the book, they are acting out the scene. They needn't memorize the exact language from the text—it's an improvisation, not a scripted play.

When it's show time, I say, "Introduce the scene. Give us a brief overview and tell us which character each of you is playing." Because I am shy and I know how hard it can be to get up in front of their peers, I also tell students, "This can be

awkward. It's hard to see our classmates acting in an unfamiliar role. We might be tempted to laugh at the incongruity, but we don't laugh at people attempting to work, nor do we laugh at the painful scenes humans have had to endure." To encourage thoughtful participation, I ask students to take notes on each scene. "Listen for the lines you love. Sometimes in the moments of these unrehearsed scenes, your classmates deliver incredible lines. Write them down. You will write an interior monologue from one of the characters' points of

view, so steal some lines along the way. You will also ask questions about character motivation and actions. Take notes so you will be prepared."

After each improvisation, I ask students to stay "on stage" and in character, so the rest of the class and I can ask them questions. For example, we might ask Danny, the soldier from the 101st Airborne, how he felt when he saw Melba attacked during the assembly. Or we might ask Grandma India why she wanted Melba to stay at Cen-

tral High School when the threats to their lives escalated.

Improvisations prompt students to reread the text for nuanced understanding. They discuss contentious issues—Should the Little Rock Nine have stayed at Central or returned to Dunbar High School?—and argue them from multiple perspectives. As students probe these charged situations through questions, they move into more complex understandings of the material. The arguments and discussions prompted by these skits help students become better readers, better thinkers, as well as inform their essays at the end of the unit. But they also bring back into class the students who have strayed or fallen behind.

## Literary Postcards

Cynthia MacLeod, my daughter Anna's 5th-grade teacher and co-director of the Portland Writing Project for many years, introduced me to literary

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postcards. In this activity, students draw postcards of significant scenes from the book and then write poetry, letters, messages from one character to another, interior monologues, or diary entries explaining what's happening in their lives at that moment.

Together the class brainstorms significant events out of the chapters we've read up to that point in the same way we do with the improvisations. I list the scenes on the board while students find the page numbers. For example, students listed the day Melba burned her books in the backyard, Grandma India sitting in her rocker with her embroidery and her gun after Melba received threatening phone calls, Minnijean dumping chili on the boy's head in the cafeteria, Melba waiting for her friends to come to her birthday party.

Most students enjoy a day of crayons and drawing, and a quiet descends on the class as they search their books or draw. However, some students feel challenged by their drawing talent. I tell them, "I am not worried about your artistic ability. I want you to draw the scene in any way that is comfortable for you. You can draw stick figures. You can use colors to express the tone. Don't get hung up on the artwork. However, I would like you to write the line or passage that inspired your drawing."

Once students draw the picture on the front of the card, I give them choices about what to write on the back. I say, "You can choose what you want to write on the back. You can write a letter from one character to another expressing their thoughts or feelings at that moment or describing where they are and what's happening. Melba keeps a diary, so you can write a diary entry from Melba's voice. I don't want a recitation of events. I want you to write from the character's feelings rather than just tell what's happening. You might choose to write a poem from the character's point of view or an interior monologue that helps show us what the character is thinking or feeling about this situation."

Again, the pause to go deeper into the book, to slow it down, benefits both students who rip through novels as well as the ones who struggle

to find their way in. Sharing the postcards and letters or poems also opens up opportunities for discussions about our different understandings and interpretations of big moments in the book.

## Character Silhouette

The character silhouette is a playful, joyful activity for most students. Students spread across the floor of the classroom and into the hallway, tracing a classmate's body on big rolls of paper, searching for quotes and page numbers, and arguing about a character's influences as they work on their silhouette. Like the improvisation and literary postcard, this activity takes students back to the text and provides time for them to talk about the book or unit with a small group of students. I assign this activity about two thirds of the way through a novel or play; then we come back to the posters again at the end of the book.

I begin by asking students to name the book's main characters. In *Warriors*, students name Melba, Grandma India, Link, and Danny. Sometimes students include Melba's mother. In most classes, I need seven or eight groups because ideally each group has four students. I let students choose their groups. If no group chooses to work on a character, I don't fuss about it. I might end up with four groups creating silhouettes for Melba and four for Link, their favorite characters. The point isn't coverage, it's pushing students to have more in-depth conversations about the character.

Each group spreads a body-sized sheet of construction paper on the floor and outlines the body of one of their classmates. I remind students to take their dialogue journals to the work group, so they can more easily locate their notes as well as find the page numbers and references as they work. On the inside of the body, they list the character's traits and goals, then they find quotes or actions that illustrate those traits. They note the page numbers next to the quote. On the outside of the body, they write key influences on the character, including laws, historical events, and race and/or class restrictions that

shaped this person. For example, with Melba, students would write *Brown v. Board* as an outside influence because this Supreme Court decision plays a key role in the story. They would cite instances and quotes about the struggle for integration around the outside of Melba's silhouette. On the inside, they might put "hard-working" and "smart" as well as other character traits with passages and page numbers.

At the end of the period, each group tapes their silhouette to the classroom or hallway wall and shares highlights from their poster. The posters provide quick references for students, reminding them of page numbers or important events as we discuss the book over the course of the unit. For the struggling student, the small-group work provides a place to catch up on the book; for other students, the character silhouette creates a pause point to ruminate on a character, exchange ideas with classmates, percolate ideas for essay topics, and gather evidence.

Each of these activities serves multiple purposes. They deepen student reading and understanding of the book by constructing opportunities for students to reread the text numerous times and with a critical and historical lens. They present opportunities for students to create interpretations of the text—as a poem, interior monologue, improvisation, drawing. They also provide context and material for student writing. As often as possible, I try to make student work in class a "performance" instead of merely an assignment that students turn in to me, because when there is a larger audience for their work, students tend to be more engaged, and frankly, they take more time and care in their writing when they write for their peers.

## Eyes on the Prize

After we've read through the third chapter, we watch the first segment of *Eyes on the Prize: Fighting Back: 1957-1962*. This segment of the documentary about the Civil Rights Movement focuses on the integration of Central High School; it prepares students to understand the background and climate that Melba and

the other eight students entered. The segment opens with a preacher quoting scripture to justify segregation: "Desegregation is against the Bible." Mississippi's Sen. James Eastland states that, "All the people of the South are in favor of segregation. Supreme Court or no Supreme Court, we are going to maintain segregation down in Dixie." The documentary shows white students shouting, "Two, four, six, eight. We don't want to integrate!" in scenes of riots that occurred when Autherine Lucy was admitted to the all-white University of Alabama.

At the end of chapter three of *Warriors Don't Cry*, Melba is preparing to go to school. As the family listens to the news, they learn that Gov. Faubus has called in the Arkansas National Guard and people are gathering at the school. Melba hears on the news, "Hundreds of Little Rock citizens are gathered in front of Central High School awaiting the arrival of the Negro children. We're told people have come from as far away as Mississippi, Louisiana, and Georgia to join forces to halt integration."

As we watch *Eyes on the Prize*, Gov. Faubus' threat in the role play to bring in the National Guard to stop integration turns into visual images of the Little Rock students attempting to get past the guards. My students watch Elizabeth Eckford try to enter Central High School that first day, and see the subtle movement of the guards twitching their batons, as they follow the governor's orders to allow only white students to enter. They later read this passage from *Warriors*:

*The anger of that huge crowd was directed toward Elizabeth Eckford as she stood alone, in front of Central High, facing the long line of soldiers, with a huge crowd of white people screeching at her back. Barely five feet tall, Elizabeth cradled her books in her arms as she desperately searched for the right place to enter. Soldiers in uniforms and helmets, cradling their rifles, towered over her. Slowly she walked first to one and then another opening in their line. Each time she approached, the soldiers closed ranks, shut-*



*ting her out. As she turned towards us, her eyes hidden by dark glasses, we could see how erect and proud she stood despite the fear she must have been feeling.*

I call students' attention to the white woman, Grace Lorch, who rescues Elizabeth, takes her to the bus, and rides with her because she is a great example of an ally. I stop the video at this point and return to the book.

Grace and her husband, we discover in chapter four, organize tutoring sessions for the Little Rock Nine, so they can keep up on their lessons during the time they are denied entrance to Central High. We read chapters four, five, and six, where Melba discusses the struggle between Gov. Faubus and President Eisenhower over whether states have the right to refuse to obey a federal law. Then we resume watching the rest of the segment. We watch "the face of resistance" as an unruly mob attempts to get at the Little Rock Nine. We watch as the crowd goes after two African American reporters, hitting one on the head with a brick. Finally, we watch as Eisenhower calls in the 101st Airborne to protect the black students. I end the video after Gov. Faubus and other governors close down schools across the South rather than integrate—about 30 minutes into the *Eyes on the Prize* segment.

Students then write a poem or interior monologue. We brainstorm moments in the video to write from: Thurgood Marshall when he's asked about gradualism, Elizabeth Eckford when she's surrounded by the white crowd, Grace Lorch when she gets ready to board the bus, the brick that hits the black reporter, Minnijean when she dumps the chili on the head of the boy who hassled her, the African American cafeteria workers who applauded Minnijean's actions.

## Writing the Essay

As I discuss in "Writing Wild Essays from Hard Ground" (in *Teaching for Joy and Justice*), I don't assign specific essay topics. Students generate these along the way. When students hit on an idea during discussion, I might say, "Write that down. That would make a great essay." As we move to the end of the book, I ask students, "We've been reading *Warriors Don't Cry*, studying integration and ally behavior. What moved you? What interests you? Make a list."

After about five to 10 minutes, I begin collecting their ideas on the board: Sandra wanted

to write about Grandma India's role in sustaining Melba's spirit; Travis and John were intrigued by the whites who act as allies in the book and in the *Eyes on the Prize* video; Damon wanted to look at the larger context of school integration by connecting Little Rock with the earlier case Thurgood Marshall argued in *Westminster v. Mendez*; Carl chose to examine the effects of Melba's decision to integrate on the rest of her family. In other words, students choose topics based on their interest. My only

condition is that they use material in the book as part of their evidence.

Once we have a strong list of potential topics on the board, we brainstorm evidence, referring back to sections of *Warriors* as well as other videos and articles we read during the unit. When we discuss evidence, I encourage students to think about incidents from their own education. We also discuss potential audiences for the essay. Who needs to read about this period of history?

After the group collectively develops evidence, students return to their own topic and their dialogue journals to gather quotes and page numbers, remind themselves of scenes. On

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*The battle to end segregation and the battle to win equal access to a rigorous and relevant public education continue today.*

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a follow-up day, I move students to topic-alike groups to share ideas and evidence. While these groups work, I pull the stragglers together and work with them on generating topics, giving them sections to reread, and making dates to show parts of the videos again.

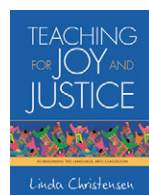
## Moving Beyond *Brown*

The battle to end segregation and the battle to win equal access to a rigorous and relevant public education continue today. As Melba Pattillo Beals writes in the introduction to a new edition of her book printed after the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board*:

*I am grateful for this time of celebration but I don't want it to obstruct all our perceptions of the fact that there is still a lot of work to be done . . . The first round of this battle was never about integration, in my opinion. It was always about access—access to opportunity, to resources, to freedom. The enemy was more visible, the battle lines drawn in plain sight . . . Until I am welcomed everywhere as an equal simply because I am human, I remain a warrior on the battlefield that I must not leave. I continue to be a warrior who does not cry, but who instead takes action.*

After reading *Warriors Don't Cry*, I want students to celebrate the hard work and sacrifices of Melba Pattillo Beals and the Little Rock Nine, but I also want them to understand that the battle isn't over. I end the unit with an education research project that helps students place this decision in the larger context of both the history of education as well as our current struggles for racial equality.

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# Should Central High School Be Integrated?

## Menu of Resolutions

- Central High School should be immediately opened up for any African American who wants to attend.
- A handful of African American honors students may attend Central High School as a test case to determine whether or not integration will work.
- Instead of integrating Central High School, the state should increase funding for a segregated black school, so that “separate but equal” means just that.
- Arkansas should create a voluntary integration program for white and black students at a neutral site—a new school that would iron out the problems and create a map for future integration.
- There should be no integration. Central High School should remain segregated and black-only Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School should also remain segregated.

## Group Directions

*Your group will attend a meeting of the school board. The question before the board is: Should Central High School be integrated? Your group’s job is to convince the school board to agree to your resolution. You will do this in two ways—by writing convincing arguments to persuade the board and by finding allies who support your resolution. Remember there is strength in numbers.*

1. Your group may choose one of the resolutions listed above or craft one of your own. After you have a resolution, state your reasons for supporting this action. Use evidence from your role.
2. You will choose half of your group as “travelers” who will move to the four other groups and attempt to find allies—people who support your point of view. The more allies you have when you go before the school board, the better chance you have of determining the decision on integrating Central High. You may have to slightly change your resolution to win allies, but you don’t want to change so much that you are no longer consistent with your group’s perspective.
3. Half of the group will “stay at home” and receive visitors and share your perspective and attempt to gain allies as well.
4. After you have determined who your allies are, your group will reconvene and write up a statement to be delivered at the school board meeting. In this statement you want to:
  - State who you are—your group’s name.
  - State what you want to happen—your resolution.
  - Give solid reasons for your resolution.

*You also want to determine who is going to speak and who is going to answer questions from other groups.*



# African American Families Opposing Integration

## Should Central High School Be Integrated?

Let's get one thing straight: You are opposed to segregation and to the Jim Crow laws—written and unwritten—that keep African Americans from gaining true equal rights under the law.

But you aren't sure that putting your children in a school with white children is going to make them better educated. Dunbar Senior High School is the only high school for blacks in Little Rock. Students come from around the state to attend Dunbar in order to get what many consider the best education. Dunbar is known for its remarkable student body and faculty. You know these teachers have your children's best interests at heart.

You worry that if integration is successful, it will ultimately lead to the defunding of Dunbar

High School because white students will not transfer to black schools. As enrollment decreases, outstanding black teachers and principals may lose their jobs. They will most likely not be hired at Central High School.

You are also concerned about the outbreak of violence that is accompanying integration throughout the South. In 1956, a young African American woman's presence on campus set off rioting at the University of Alabama and the University's authorities forced her withdrawal.

In the past, the jobs, the homes, and the lives of African Americans have been at stake when big changes have been proposed. You see the handwriting on the wall: Those who attempt to integrate are going to be the targets of segregationists. You want change, but you are unwilling to sacrifice your children.

# Local Business Owners

## Should Central High School Be Integrated?

The Supreme Court ruled during the famous court case *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation in the public schools was unconstitutional. As they stated, “separate schools are inherently unequal.” They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with “all deliberate speed.”

You are worried about what the Supreme Court decision to desegregate is going to do to your business. It’s fine for some judges to say that whites and blacks should go to school together, but you know how much citizens value their children’s education. If Central High School is desegregated, white parents are going to take their children and their business to towns where desegregation isn’t

happening. Who is going to move in? Who will buy or build new homes? This just isn’t smart business.

You don’t get why the NAACP is picking on Little Rock when there is an outstanding black high school—Dunbar Senior High School. Is there really a need to integrate in Little Rock?

You’ve always gotten along with everyone in town. But you are concerned about the violence that might spring up when people are forced to do something they don’t want to do.

Businesspeople value stability above all else. This is a radical, unprecedented change and there’s no telling what protest and turmoil this integration could bring to Little Rock. Your businesses and communities will suffer.

# Governor Orval Faubus

## Should Central High School Be Integrated??

You are up for re-election. In the last election you beat an all-out segregationist at the polls. You've earned a reputation as a moderate. But then the Supreme Court integrated schools with *Brown v. Board of Education*, stating that "separate schools are inherently unequal." They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed."

Folks are mad. Your state was one of the targets of that court decision. The federal government is telling you and the people of your state that you cannot continue to have separate schools for white and black children.

It's true that Arkansas, including Little Rock, integrated buses, but lots of folks in your state want segregation to continue. They did not want to integrate buses, lunch counters, bathrooms, pools, or drinking fountains. But they especially do not want to integrate schools. Nor do they want the court system to tell them how to educate their children.

These folks who elected you are furious. You have a tough situation on your hands. The local NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is pressuring local school boards to desegregate schools with "all deliberate speed." Nine African American students plan to integrate Central High School in Little Rock.

You have said repeatedly that you will not desegregate schools.



# Families of the “Little Rock Nine”

## Should Central High School Be Integrated?

The Supreme Court ruled during the famous court case *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation in the public schools was unconstitutional. As they stated, “separate schools are inherently unequal.” They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with “all deliberate speed.”

Your children have been chosen by the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) to integrate Central High School. In fact, they volunteered to integrate and because of their outstanding academic performance, they were the nine students accepted. All of your families are hardworking, church-going people who expect your children to earn good grades.

While you know that the African American teachers at Dunbar High School are excellent and have high expectations for your children, you also know that Central High School has the money to offer more classes and newer books. They have well-equipped science laboratories.

But more than that, you consider this an action for the recognition of equal rights for African

Americans. As one student chosen to integrate wrote, “I hope that if schools open to my people, I will also get access to other opportunities I have been denied. ... Our people are stretching out to knock down the fences of segregation. ... I read in the newspaper that one of our people, a woman named Rosa Parks, had refused to give up her seat to a white man on an Alabama bus. Her willingness to be arrested rather than give in one more time led to the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. I felt such a surge of pride when I thought about how my people had banded together to force a change.”

In addition, you understand that the segregation laws that keep blacks and whites separate and unequal must be broken. You and your children know that they are the intellectual equals to the white students who attend the school. There is no reason except racism for black students to attend poorly funded schools.

It may be rough going for a while, but nothing in life comes easy. In the long run, your families’ sacrifices will benefit all African Americans and the country as a whole.

# NAACP

(National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)

## Should Central High School Be Integrated?

You celebrated the victory of *Brown v. Board of Education* when the Supreme Court ruled that public school segregation was unconstitutional. As they stated, “separate schools are inherently unequal.” They also said that offending states must desegregate schools with “all deliberate speed.”

The victory was sweet, not because it immediately desegregated the Jim Crow schools, but because it gave you the prize you had been seeking for 58 years—since the Supreme Court upheld segregation in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision.

Before this you had the moral conviction that these schools were wrong and contrary to the guarantees of American citizenship. You were forced to go to back doors. You were forced to live in hollows and alleys and back streets. You were forced to step off sidewalks and remove your hats

and call anyone white “Sir” or “Ma’am.” If schools were provided, your children went to shanties while whites went to real schools. Your children used hand-me-down books and school supplies. You rode in the rear seats of buses and trolleys and in the dirty, dangerous front end of train coaches. You could not vote. You were beaten, shot, and burned, and no man was punished for the crime.

Slowly in this 58 years, you have wiped out lynching. You knocked out the strongest barriers to voting. Men and women are working at more and better jobs and at better and better wages.

Now, your children at long last will have equality in education. You recognize that you must use the law to push for integration as swiftly as possible in every community where segregated schools still exist. The law is now on your side. This generation of children will receive the education they deserve.

# Tea Party Roles

**Melba Pattillo Beals:** This book is my autobiography. I wrote it because I was involved in a major historic event in United States history. I was one of the Little Rock Nine—one of the nine African American students chosen to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the 1950s. Let me tell you, I had some hard times. People kicked me, spit on me, tried to kill me, but I survived. I wrote this book to tell my story and to ease my pain.

**Grandma India:** You are going to love me. I am a tough love kind of Grandma. You might find me sitting in a rocking chair, but instead of knitting and crocheting, I'll have my rifle on my lap. My grandbaby Melba is integrating that high school to make things better for African Americans, but as Frederick Douglass said, "Freedom does not come without a struggle." No one is going to make this easy. So I've got my gun ready in case anyone plans on troubling us. I am highly religious, but I am highly practical as well. Don't mess with my grandbaby.

**Link:** It's true that I'm white, and it's true that my friends wrote up cards saying things like, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate." I am a witness to all of the terror that Central High students caused the Little Rock Nine. It's true that they chased Melba and urinated in Ernest Green's gym locker, but I'm not like them. I see beyond skin color. I saved Melba's life.

**Danny:** I'm the one who told Melba that warriors don't cry. She was on the battlefield in that high school. She was a soldier in the war against segregation, and I helped her. President Eisenhower sent in the 101st Airborne to stop the violence against the black students who attempted to integrate Central High School. I had Melba's back.

**Daisy Bates:** I work with the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). I own and write for a local black newspaper. I am a longtime activist who understands the sacrifices we need to make to better the conditions of blacks in the United States. I took these nine children under my wing because I knew how hard they were going to have to struggle in order to make change.

# Tea Party Questions

Write about each of the other four characters you meet at the tea party.

Character name: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

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Character name: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

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Character name: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

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Character name: \_\_\_\_\_

Description: \_\_\_\_\_

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On the back of this paper:

1. Write four questions that you have about the characters or the book.
2. Write three predictions about the book or the characters.



# rethinking schools

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