“THERE IS NOT A BLACK AMERICA AND A WHITE AMERICA AND LATINO AMERICA AND ASIAN AMERICA; THERE’S THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.”
 ABOUT THIS LESSON
The National Constitution Center’s Civics in Literature initiative is designed to enhance and build upon current civic education curriculum through children’s literature and other famous historical texts. Help your students build their basic civic knowledge and understand their role as active citizens. Each month, we will share a reading list and suggested activities that correspond with a specific civic holiday and enhance learning.

READING LIST

Henry’s Freedom Box
by Ellen Levine

Freedom Summer
by Deborah Wiles

Giant Steps to Change the World
by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis Lee

Grace for President
by Kelly DiPucchio

AUTHOR
Anne Spector

Anne Spector is an educator whose career has taken her into classrooms from first grade to 3rd year law students. She has taught in both the School District of Philadelphia and the School District of Cheltenham Township where she also served as a Central Office Administrator. Mrs. Spector holds an undergraduate degree in psychology, a teaching degree in Secondary English, a graduate degree in Reading, and Elementary and Secondary Principal Certification.

Throughout Mrs. Spector’s career she has dedicated much of her time to developing and implementing programs that promote student voice and citizenship education through a marriage of literacy and civic literacy. With a team of educators that includes her writing partner Elaine Scarpino, Anne is helping to create the We the Civic Kids program for elementary students, grades K to 5. Her work in this field began over twenty years ago when she collaborated with Temple University’s LEAP program (Law Education and Participation) to help in the development of law-related education material. She continued her work in elementary civic education by creating a K to 4 program known as Let’s Take Two...Two Steps Back, Two Minutes to Think, Two People to Solve a Problem.

After retiring from Cheltenham, Anne joined the staff at the National Constitution Center as the Director of PennCORD, First Lady Marjorie O. Rendell’s Pennsylvania Coalition for Representative Democracy. Through her work with PennCORD Mrs. Spector created S.T.A.R. Force (Students Thinking and Acting Responsibly), a K to 6 program that married literacy and civic literacy as a way to teach basic civic knowledge, promote public action between and among our youngest citizens, and provide practice in democratic deliberation.

Mrs. Spector embraces the notion that...reading is our first freedom. She is thrilled to be able to bring this philosophy to children and their teachers across the country through materials that highlight children’s literature with lessons that connect young minds to complex concepts and build student voice.
Joe and John Henry are a lot alike. They both like shooting marbles, they both want to be firemen, and they both love to swim. But there’s one important way they’re different: Joe is white and John Henry is black, and in the South in 1964, that means John Henry isn’t allowed to do everything his best friend is.

Activity #1: Deborah Wiles writes that Freedom Summer was a result of her feelings surrounding this time in history. She says, “I dreamed of changing things, and yet I wondered what any child—black or white—could do.” Do you believe children can make a difference in the world? Can you think of a way you might make a difference?

Activity #2: At dinner, Joe’s dad tells the family, “The town pool opens tomorrow to everyone under the sun, no matter what color.” “That’s the new law,” his mother continues. Rather than break the law, some town people order the swim club to be closed and the pool filled in with asphalt. Can you think of another way the town might have handled the new law without closing the town pool so that no one could swim there?

Activity #3: The first time they get ice pops, John Henry does not come with Joe through the front door of Mr. Mason’s General Store because he’s not allowed. After the boys find out about the new law and about what happened at the town pool, John Henry says that he wants to pick out his ice pop himself. Read the scene below in which John Henry asks Mr. Mason for an ice pop. The last line of the scene—the resolution—is blank. Think of words for both Mr. Mason and John Henry that would allow them both to win.
**John Henry**: 6 words  
I am John Henry, Joe’s friend.

**Mr. Mason**: 6 words  
I know...but you can’t enter!

**John Henry**: 7 words  
I am already in your store, sir.

**Mr. Mason**: 7 words  
I would like you to leave my store.

**John Henry**: 12 words  
Do you know the new law that says I can be here?

**Mr. Mason**: 12 words  
I know about the law but I do not believe in it.

**John Henry**: 10 words  
I am a trailblazer...but there will be many others.

**Mr. Mason**: 10 words  
Good point, son. What do you suggest I should do?

**John Henry**: 15 words  

---

---

---

**Mr. Mason**: 15 words  

---

---

---

End of Scene
Activity #4: At the National Constitution Center, February is the month to celebrate American Presidents and African American trailblazers. A trailblazer is a person who makes, does or discovers something new and makes it acceptable. Do you think John Henry, with his friend Joe’s support, was about to do something new and try to make it acceptable? Be prepared to support your answer. Would you like to be considered a trailblazer? In what area?

Activity #5: Many of our Presidents were trailblazers. President Obama said, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” In what way do you think President Obama is a trailblazer? Think about President Washington and President Lincoln, the Presidents for whom Presidents’ Day is celebrated. In what way(s) were these two leaders trailblazers?

This project is supported by the Rendell Center for Citizenship and Civics at Arcadia University in partnership with We the Civics Kids.
Whether planning a field trip, looking for innovative ways to enhance classroom instruction or seeking a deeper understanding of American history and active citizenship, the National Constitution Center is an educator’s ultimate civic learning resource.

Learn more at CONSTITUTIONCENTER.ORG/EDUCATION