



THE MUSEUM OF *We the People*

Independence Mall | 525 Arch Street | Philadelphia, PA 19106

**"THERE IS NOT A BLACK AMERICA  
AND A WHITE AMERICA  
AND LATINO AMERICA  
AND ASIAN AMERICA;  
THERE'S THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA."**



**GRADES  
K-4**

# CIVICS IN LITERATURE

★★ *February Lesson Plan* ★★

## 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.

# AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH AND PRESIDENTS DAY

## FEATURED BOOKS AND ACTIVITIES

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

Using examples of people throughout history who have taken “giant steps” this book urges kids to follow in their footsteps and not be hindered by fear or a sense that you are not good enough.

**Activity #1:** “Everyone has it in them to be a hero.” After you read about the heroes in this book, share which one you identify most with and why.

**Activity #2:** Write about someone in your life that you believe to be a hero. Include the ways that they went about making their dreams come true and list the character traits that you believe make someone a hero.

**Activity #3:** The book ends by asking “What is your next step going to be?” Think about something that you would like to see changed and detail how you might go about making it a reality.

### *Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles*

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

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**Mr. Mason:** 15 words

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**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.*

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