

DRAMATIZATION
a story based on
real events

THE STORY OF HOW THOUSANDS OF TEENS RISKED THEIR LIVES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

TEEN FREE

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. urged young people to join the Civil Rights Movement.

CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

***NARRATORS 1, 2, 3, 4**

(N1, N2, N3, N4)

COURTHOUSE CLERK

FARMER

***LYNDA BLACKMON,**

a 14-year-old girl

***CHARLES MAULDIN,**

a high school student

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

CROWD

SHERIFF JIM CLARK

GIRLS 1 & 2

YOUNG FREEDOM FIGHTER

***REVEREND HOSEA WILLIAMS**

TROOPER

MR. BLACKMON, Lynda's father

MRS. MOORE, a teacher

JIM LETHERER, a white marcher

MRS. ARDIES MAULDIN,

Charles's mother

**Starred characters are major roles.*



DOM FIGHTERS



AS YOU READ,
THINK ABOUT: **Voting**

Why do the characters in the play risk their lives protesting for the right to vote?

PROLOGUE

N1: The 1960s are a precarious time in the United States. Across the South, segregation and racism

are widespread. African-Americans can't use the same bathrooms, eat at the same restaurants, or even buy soda from the same vending machines as white people.

N2: Often, African-Americans are kept from registering to vote—a basic right of all citizens.

N3: Voting gives people a voice.

N4: Some white Americans don't want black people to have that

voice. They don't want them to be equal citizens.

N1: But a movement, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., is sweeping the country.

N2: Dr. King's followers have had enough, and they're willing to risk their lives in the struggle for fairness and freedom.

N3: Many of these brave souls are teenagers.



Gather and organize protest

SCENE 1

No More Waiting

January 2, 1965

N4: In Selma, Alabama, a black farmer fills out a **voter registration form** at the courthouse.

N1: The farmer can't register unless he passes a test.

N2: The test is impossibly difficult. Only black Americans are required to take it.

N3: This is a common practice used to keep blacks from voting.

COURTHOUSE CLERK: Be sure to answer EVERY question.

FARMER (reading aloud): "What is a *tribunal*?" Well . . . uhh . . .

CLERK: Hurry up already!

FARMER (nervous): Is this test really necessary?

CLERK: You've already failed. You might as well give up.

FARMER: How dare you say I can't register! Voting is my right!

CLERK: Yeah, yeah, whatever.

Now scam before I call Sheriff Clark!

N4: Later that day, 700 Selma residents squeeze

into Brown Chapel. They've gathered to listen to Dr. King, who is explaining his plans for Alabama. The Governor, George Wallace, is a strong supporter of segregation.

N1: Teens Lynda Blackmon and Charles Mauldin are in the crowd.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.: At the rate they're letting us register, it'll take 103 years to register all of the 15,000 African-Americans in this county who are qualified to vote. We don't have that long to wait! We'll march in the streets to make our voices heard!

CROWD: Amen!

DR. KING: I need everyone, young and old, to join me. Parents, don't worry about your children. Don't hold them back if they are sent to jail—it is easier for kids to spend time in jail than for you, since you must work to support your families.

N2: Dr. King's words send a shiver down Charles's spine. Lynda feels

her eyes **welling up** with tears. They ache to join the fight for freedom.

SCENE 2

Sweatbox

February 1965

SHERIFF JIM CLARK: Everyone, in!

N3: Selma's notoriously cruel sheriff shoves Lynda and 22 other girls into a jail cell meant for two.

N4: Since joining the movement, Lynda has been arrested many times. This time, she was arrested for participating in a peaceful protest march.

LYNDA: This cell is too tiny. We can't fit!

SHERIFF: You'll fit if I say you'll fit!

GIRL 1: Maybe we shouldn't have marched.

GIRL 2: What are they going to do to us?

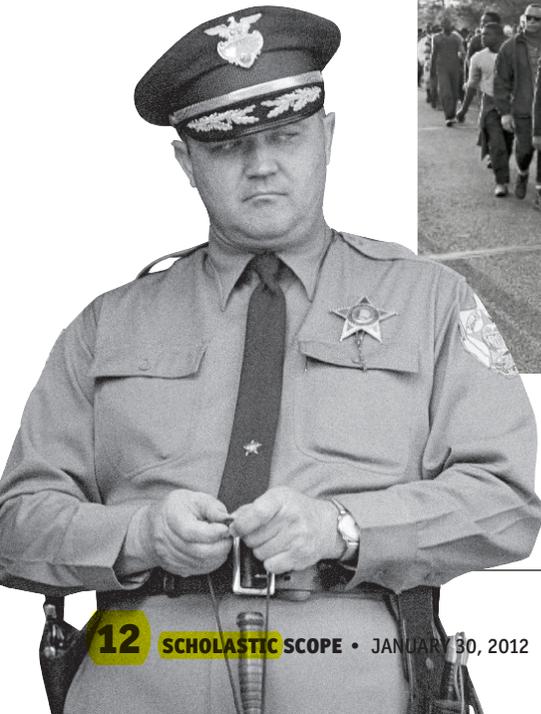
SHERIFF: KEEP QUIET!

N1: Three days later, they are still locked up. One girl vomits.

LYNDA: Sheriff, please. She's sick. Bring a doctor!



On Bloody Sunday, Selma's notorious Sheriff Jim Clark (left) led attacks against peaceful protest marchers (above and right). Reporters caught it all on camera.



Shows how brutal sheriff and police are towards the Black Americans.

SHERIFF: Yeah, right. Take this broom and clean that mess up.

N2: Lynda uses the broom to smash a window.

LYNDA (yelling): Help! Help us, anyone, please!

N3: Furious, officers take the girls to a **sweatbox**. It's pitch-black, hot, and so tiny they can't move.

LYNDA: We'll run out of air in here!

N4: Terrified, Lynda passes out.

N1: She wakes up as they are being released.

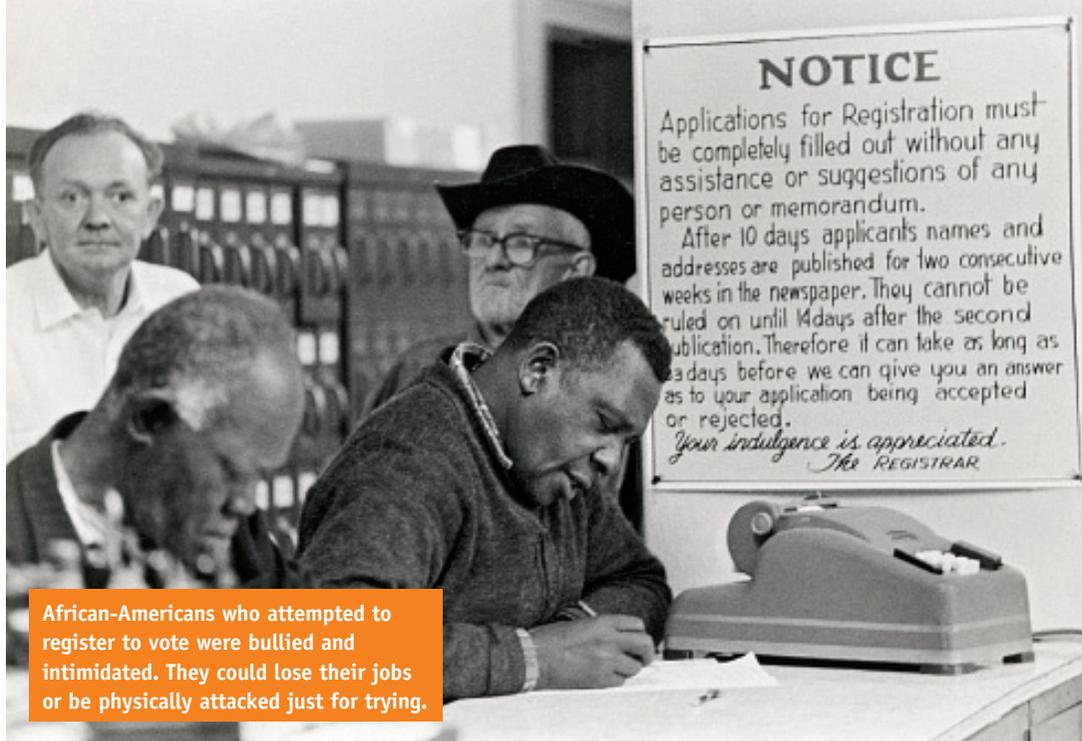
SHERIFF: Now you'll think twice about your little protest marches.

SCENE 3

Freedom Fighters February 1965

N2: Charles attends a meeting of the Freedom Fighters, a group dedicated to ending segregation.

YOUNG FREEDOM FIGHTER: Each time my grandfather tried to



African-Americans who attempted to register to vote were bullied and intimidated. They could lose their jobs or be physically attacked just for trying.

register to vote, the clerk told him the courthouse was closed—even though it clearly was not.

CHARLES: My mother can't afford to pay the expensive "poll tax."

N3: Reverend Hosea Williams, a leader of the Freedom Fighters, is a close friend of Dr. King's. He talks about a plan for Selma's biggest protest yet.

REV. HOSEA WILLIAMS: We will march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital, to make our voices heard.

CROWD: Yeah!

REV. WILLIAMS: Remember, we must not be violent. If they hit us, we cannot fight back—no matter what. But **nonviolence** does not mean **passivity**. This fight takes courage. We may be beaten, spit on, or sent to jail. But we will show Governor George Wallace that we mean business!

CHARLES: That's right!

CROWD: Yeah!

SCENE 4

Bloody Sunday March 7, 1965

N4: By noon, about 600 people, including Lynda and Charles, have gathered for the 50-mile trek to Montgomery.

N1: It's dead silent as they walk.

N2: When they reach the middle of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, which stretches high above the Alabama River, they stop.

N3: Sheriff Clark and his men, all on horseback, block the road on the far side of the bridge. They stand with a line of state troopers in gas masks.

SHERIFF (into a megaphone): Do not come any closer! Turn around!

REV. WILLIAMS: If we turn back, nothing will change!

SHERIFF: This is your last warning!

LYNDA: I have a bad feeling.

CHARLES: We can't give up now!

N4: Nervously, the marchers stand their ground.



Thousands of marchers stream across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the site of Bloody Sunday.



SHERIFF: Charge!

N1: The troopers push into the crowd, swinging clubs and spraying **tear gas**.

N2: Charles's lungs feel like they're about to burst. He ducks down and gasps for air.

CHARLES: I can't breathe!

N3: Horses trample the marchers. People tumble down the riverbank.

N4: A trooper grabs Lynda's collar. She bites down on his hand, and he swings his club at her head.

TROOPER: Arrrrggghhh!

N1: When it's finally over, dozens are hurt. Charles has minor injuries. Lynda is taken to the hospital and given more than 30 stitches on her face and head.

N2: When footage of the incident airs on TV, Americans are shocked and horrified.

N3: The day comes to be known as "Bloody Sunday."

SCENE 5

Recovery

March 8–21, 1965

N4: Dr. King is **distraught**. He wishes he could have been in

Selma to support his friends. He plans another march. This time, he'll march with them.

N1: Lynda talks to her father.

MR. BLACKMON: You just got out of the hospital, Lynda. I'm worried about you.

LYNDA: I want Governor Wallace to know what those troopers did to me. I want him to see my face, swollen and bandaged.

MR. BLACKMON: You're old enough to make your own decisions. If you're sure, I'll let you go. But think about if it's worth risking your life. Is voting really so important?

LYNDA: Dr. King says if you can't vote, you're not free. What's more important than freedom?

SCENE 6

Another Chance

March 21–22, 1965

N2: Two weeks after Bloody Sunday, thousands of marchers set off from Selma. They carry food and tents, planning to make the 50-mile journey in five days.

N3: When they get to the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Charles **shudders**.

The famous speech that Dr. King delivered in Montgomery (quoted at the end of the play) is known as "Our God Is Marching On!"



SCENE 7

Montgomery March 25, 1965

CHARLES: This is where it happened.

N4: But this time, Sheriff Clark isn't there. President Lyndon B. Johnson has sent **National Guardsmen** to protect the marchers, who break into cheers and singing as they safely cross the bridge.

N1: On the second day, Lynda is struck with terror when she sees three National Guardsmen with rifles outside her tent.

LYNDA: They look just like the men who beat me on Bloody Sunday!

N2: She screams and tries to hide. Mrs. Moore, a teacher, comes over.

MRS. MOORE: Is everything all right, Lynda?

LYNDA: Those men are here to kill me!

MRS. MOORE: No, dear, they're here to protect us. Now let's get moving.

LYNDA: No. I want to go home.

MRS. MOORE: You've come so far!

N3: Jim Letherer, a one-legged white man, overhears.

JIM: If I can march on crutches, surely you can do it. Besides, I'd lay down my life before I'd let anyone touch you.

N4: These kind words from a stranger raise Lynda's spirits.

N1: On the fifth day, the group arrives in Montgomery. Lynda, exhausted and overjoyed, falls to her knees and weeps.

LYNDA: I can't believe it!

CHARLES: I've never seen so many people.

N2: A crowd of 30,000 supporters joins the tired marchers.

N3: Reporters and television crews are everywhere. Cameras flash.

N4: Dr. King stands and addresses the sea of people.

DR. KING: Today I want to say to the people of America . . . we are not about to turn around. We are on the move now We are moving to the land of freedom.

N1: The crowd sings.

CROWD: *We shall overcome / We shall overcome.*

CHARLES: Where's Governor Wallace, huh? Where's Sheriff Clark now?

LYNDA: Hiding somewhere!

CHARLES: They're scared of *us* now!

N2: Five months later, President

Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act. The law ensures that African-

Americans will not be kept from voting.

EPILOGUE

Freedom

August 10, 1965

N3: Charles's mom fills out a voter registration form at the courthouse. Charles stands beside her.

MRS. ARDIES MAULDIN: That's it? No test?

CLERK (reluctantly): Nope.

MRS. MAULDIN: No poll tax?

CLERK: No. It's free.

MRS. MAULDIN: Well, that didn't take but a few minutes! I don't know why it couldn't have been like that in the first place.

CLERK: Things have changed.

N4: Mrs. Mauldin's eyes fill with tears. She looks at Charles.

MRS. MAULDIN: They sure have, and my son helped make it happen.

N1: Ardies Mauldin is the first person in the country to register under the new law.

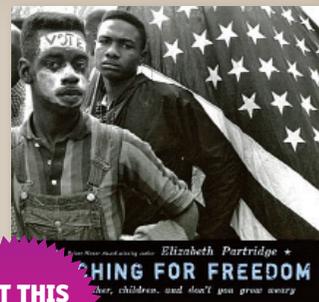
N2: By the end of the year, Alabama has thousands of new African-American voters.

N3: Soon enough, Lynda and Charles will be voters too. ●

CONTEST

The Power of the Protesters

Why were Dr. King's followers in Selma, Alabama, successful in helping to bring about the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965? Write a paragraph answering this question. Include at least three specific factors that contributed to the protesters' success. Send it to **FREEDOM CONTEST**. Five winners will get Elizabeth Partridge's *Marching For Freedom*. See page 2 for details.



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