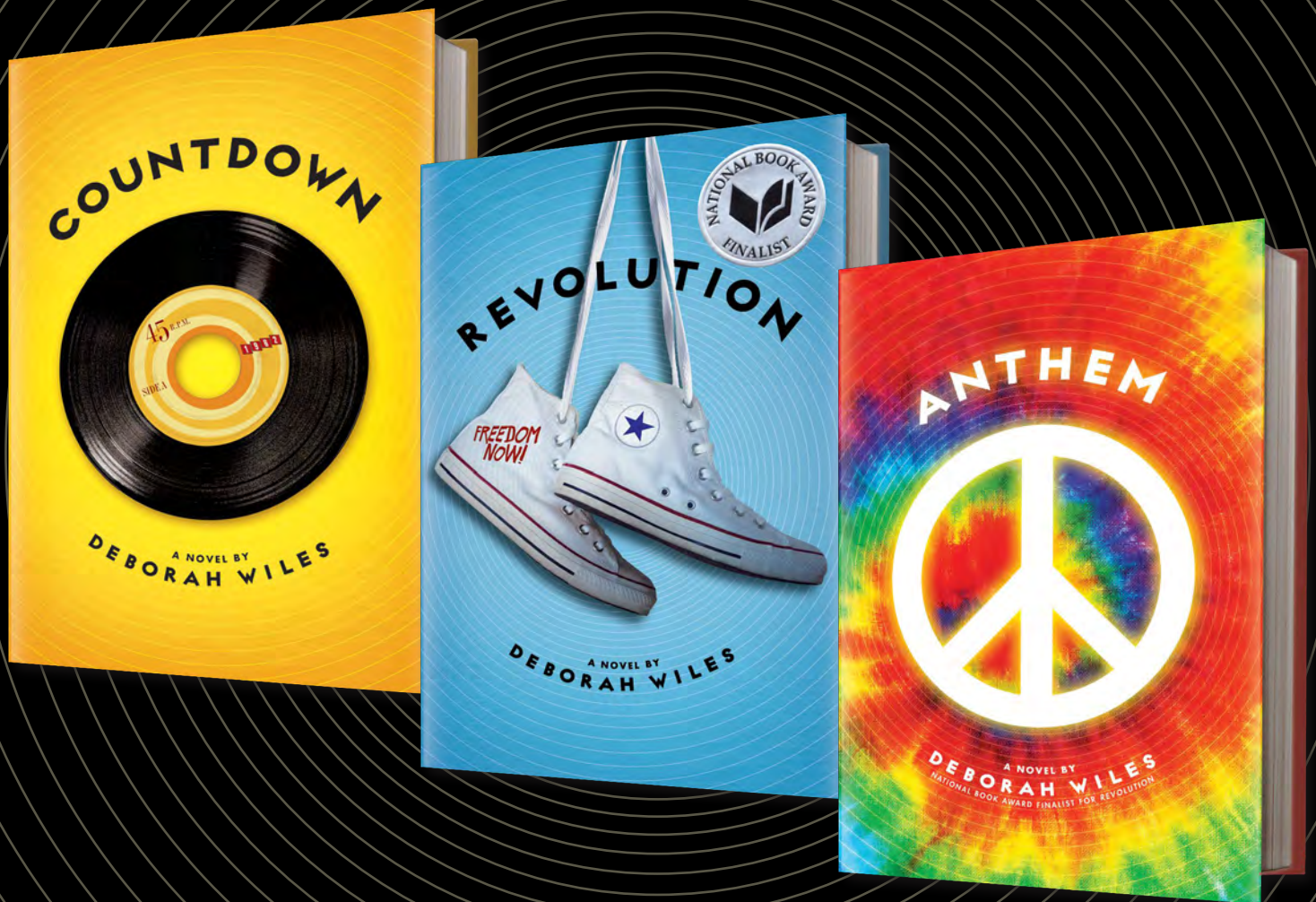
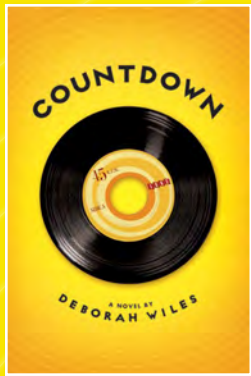


# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## DEBORAH WILES'S **SIXTIES TRILOGY:** COUNTDOWN • REVOLUTION • ANTHEM

Ages 10 & Up  
Grades 5 & Up





# COUNTDOWN

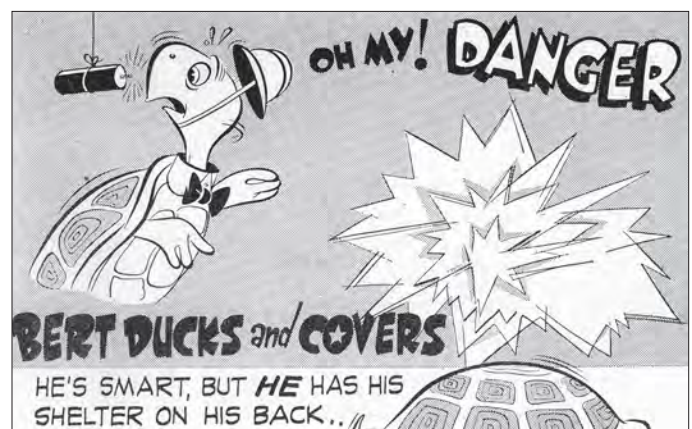
Franny Chapman just wants some peace. But that's hard to get when her best friend is feuding with her, her sister has disappeared, and her uncle is fighting an old war in his head. Her saintly younger brother is no help, and the cute boy across the street only complicates things. Worst of all, everyone is walking around just waiting for a bomb to fall. It's 1962, and it seems that the whole country is living in fear. When President Kennedy goes on television to say that Russia is sending nuclear missiles to Cuba, it only gets worse. Franny doesn't know how to deal with what's going on in the world—no more than she knows how to deal with what's going on with her family and friends. But somehow she's got to make it.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the most important concerns of each member of the Chapman family—Franny, Uncle Otts, Jo Ellen, Drew, and Franny's parents?
2. Why does Franny feel “invisible”? Is she really being ignored by people or does it just feel that way to her?
3. Why is Uncle Otts so anxious to build a fallout shelter? How have previous experiences affected his behavior? Why does Drew find it easier than Franny to handle Uncle Otts's behavior?
4. How does Franny compare herself to her older sister and younger brother? Why does she feel less adequate than each of them?
5. How does the disagreement between Franny and Margie begin? Who do you think is to blame? How does Franny try to patch up her friendship with Margie?
6. What role does Chris Cavas play in the story? Why does Franny tell Chris she is having a Halloween party?
7. Why does Jo Ellen let Franny go to the party at Gale's house when she knows their mother would not approve? Why does Margie say that Jo Ellen is a “spy”?
8. Why is Jo Ellen so secretive about her activities away from home? What effect does her secrecy have on the rest of the family?
9. Compare the standoff between the United States and Russia with the culmination of Franny and Margie's fight in the woods after they leave the party. Can either truly solve their differences?
10. What has Franny learned at the end of the book—about her family, about her friends, and about the world around her?

## EXPLORATIONS

1. Look up information on “Duck and Cover” and “Bert the Turtle” to learn more about the air-raid drill in the first chapter and what the first images mean in the book: [https://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe50s/life\\_04.html](https://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe50s/life_04.html)
2. Learn about the symptoms of PTSD and relate what you have learned to Uncle Otts's behavior in *Countdown*. Learn about effective treatments for this condition that might have helped Uncle Otts: [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand\\_tx/tx\\_basics.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand_tx/tx_basics.asp)
3. What are some of the activities that college students became involved in during this time? Based on the scrapbook collages in the book, which of the movements of the early 1960s do you think has had the most impact on Jo Ellen and made her want to get involved?
4. How does each of the famous people profiled throughout the book—Harry S. Truman, Pete Seeger, the Kennedys, and Fannie Lou Hamer—contribute to the history of the times? How does learning about each of them help you understand the events in the story? Choose one to research further and write a short essay about their cultural and/or historical significance.







# REVOLUTION

It's 1964, and Sunny's town is being invaded. Or at least that's what the adults of Greenwood, Mississippi, are saying. All Sunny knows is that people from up north are coming to help people register to vote. They're calling it Freedom Summer. Meanwhile, Sunny can't help but feel like her house is being invaded, too. She has a new stepmother, a new brother, and a new sister crowding her life, giving her little room to breathe. And things get even trickier when Sunny and her brother are caught sneaking into the local swimming pool—where they bump into a mystery boy whose life is going to become tangled up in theirs.

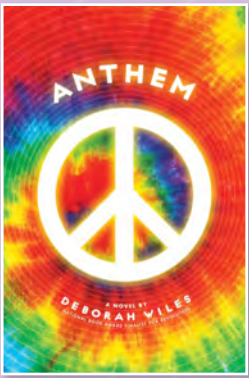
## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Compare Sunny and Gillette. How are they alike and how are they different? How does their relationship change over the course of the book and why? Why is the opening scene important to all three who are at the pool—Sunny, Gillette, and Raymond?
2. Discuss Sunny's feelings toward her stepmother, her grandmother, Laura Mae, Jo Ellen, and the picture of the actual mother she never knew. Which of these women truly knows Sunny best? Why does Sunny react so strongly when she first sees Jo Ellen? How do Sunny's feelings for each of them change during this book?
3. Why do Ray's parents disagree over registering to vote? What are some of the consequences that black people experienced when they tried to register? Why do you think many white people in the South opposed the voter registration movement? Why is voting important?
4. Why do the Freedom Workers and people in Raymond's neighborhood purposefully put themselves in danger? Why does Raymond go to the movie theater by himself the first time?
5. Most of the book is written from Sunny's point of view, but some sections are in the voice of other characters. How does it affect your experience of the story to switch to another person's thoughts, or to read a passage written in the third person?
6. How do the documentary parts of the book help you to understand the culture of Mississippi in 1964, and what was going on in the larger world? How are those events—for example, the Vietnam conflict, the Civil Rights Act, and the disappearance of three civil rights workers—reflected in what was happening in Greenwood that summer?
7. The people coming to Greenwood to help with voter registration are referred to by different names, such as "invaders," "agitators," and "freedom workers." How do those labels affect how people feel about them and how they see themselves?
8. Discuss the theme of friendship in this story. In what ways do the characters rely on their friends? Would Gillette and Raymond be friends if they didn't live during a time of segregation in the South?

9. This novel is divided into three parts that are entitled Encampment, Maneuvers, and Engagement. Discuss the meaning of these terms in the context of the story. What other meanings do these words have?
10. How many instances can you find in this story when characters act in a courageous way—both young people and adults? How do the Freedom Workers help people to act with courage? What do you think might happen when the college students return home at the end of the summer?

## EXPLORATIONS

1. Discuss the biographical profiles of historical figures in this story—Bob Moses, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Polly Cowan and Dorothy Height, and Cassius Clay—and how each profile helps you to understand what was happening in the civil rights movement. What new information did you learn about this period in our history? Choose one of these people to research further and write a short essay, create a poem in that person's memory, or create a piece of art that includes details you learn in your research.
2. Listen to early songs recorded by the Beatles and discuss their strong influence on Sunny and her friends. Why would Sunny have a Beatles wig and name special places after the singers? Compare the Beatles' music to the protest songs of the civil rights movement included in this book. Do they have similar themes?
3. Discuss the name and origins of the SNCC—the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. What did "non-violence" mean to them? What was their reaction when the police and others acted violently toward them? Research more information about this organization, how its workers were trained and operated during Freedom Summer, and how it evolved.
4. Research Willie Mays and his influence on Major League baseball during the 1960s. Write a short essay about the importance of baseball on both a national level and a local level in this novel, including the impact of Willie Mays's career on both Gillette and Raymond.



# ANTHEM

It's 1969. Molly is a girl who's not sure she can feel anything anymore, because life sometimes hurts way too much. Her brother Barry ran away after having a fight with their father over the war in Vietnam. Now Barry's been drafted into that war—and Molly's mother tells her she has to travel across the country to find Barry and bring him home. Norman is Molly's slightly older cousin, who drives the old school bus that they use for their cross-country journey. He's a drummer who wants to find his own music out in the world—because then he might not be the “normal Norman” that he fears he's become. Molly and Norman get on the bus—and end up seeing a lot more of America than they'd ever imagined. From protests and parades to roaring races and rock 'n' roll, the cousins make their way to Barry in San Francisco, not really knowing what they'll find when they get there.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do Molly's and Norman's mothers send them on a trip across the country? Compare Molly's and Norman's own reasons for wanting to go. What does Molly mean when she says, “the heart cannot be held” (p. 68)?
2. What is Molly's initial reaction to the two people they find living in their great aunts' house? Why do they all use assumed names, including Molly and Norman? Look up the lyrics to the songs “Windy,” “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” and “Eleanor Rigby.” How do they reflect the personalities of Molly and “Lucy”?
3. Lucy says she is searching for “a different kind of family” (p. 101). How many different kinds of family can you identify as you read this story? How do Molly's and Norman's ideas of “family” change as they travel across the country?
4. What lasting effect does Ray's short time with them have on Molly and Norman? How does his story make them feel? Discuss Molly's thought that “somewhere inside herself . . . she knew that easier wasn't the answer” (p. 187).
5. What does their encounter with Elvis Presley do to alter Molly's thinking about her brother's draft notice? How do her feelings about Barry's situation change over the course of the trip across the country?
6. Would Molly and Norman have picked up Birdie, Kyle, and others along the way if Ray had not urged them to help others in need? How does each of the people who ride with them shape their journey?
7. Compare the way their stay at the New Buffalo commune affects both Molly and Norman. Discuss Norman's thought that the trip was “growing him up” (p. 243). In what ways does the trip help each of them to grow?
8. Why does Molly decide to bring Victor on the bus? Why do Victor and Sweet Caroline leave so abruptly? Compare Molly's experience of meeting Victor with her experience of finding and reading Barry's letters to Norman.

9. Why are Eddie and Florian so willing to help Molly and Norman? Why does Jo Ellen help them? Compare the reactions of Molly and Norman to Barry when they first see him in the courtroom. Why does Cassandra tell Norman: “He's not worth it” (p. 396)?
10. Why do you think Barry decides not to return home? Why does Isabella want to go with Molly and Norman? Discuss the line on the last page: “the future of America drove home” (p. 418).

## EXPLORATIONS

1. On a map of the United States, follow the journey Molly and Norman take from Charleston to San Francisco, locating all the stopping places you can find based on a careful reading of the text.
2. In Memphis, Estelle tells Molly, “Music heals . . . sadness turns into gratitude . . . Music reminds us of the journey, of where we came from, and it even shows us where we're going” (p. 200). Look up the lyrics to any three of the songs that form chapter headings in this book, and discuss how those lyrics could affect the listener by healing, reminding, or showing the way.
3. Many of the people that Molly and Norman encounter are actual historical figures. Look up some of their names to learn more about each person's role in the development of music in the 1960s (for example: Elvis Presley, Duane and Gregg Allman, Roger Hawkins, Hal Blaine, and Estelle Axton). Write a short biographical sketch of one of these people, including what that person contributed to music.
4. Deborah Wiles states in her author's note at the end of the book: “The only story my many characters can tell is the one they are living and learning about, and they have only the lens they can see through at that particular time.” Write a paragraph on one of the characters Molly and Norman meet, and how that person sees the story through their own point of view.



# THE SIXTIES TRILOGY

## Discussion prompts for the series

- ☮ These books are called “documentary” novels. What does that term mean to you? How do the documents, images, and song lyrics included in each of the novels help you to understand the time period in which the story takes place? Are there images, events, and/or themes that are included in all three books?
- ☮ Which characters appear in more than one of these novels? What part does Jo Ellen play in all three? Why are Drew and Ray the characters the author chose to include in the third book? What does each of these recurring characters contribute to the story? Discuss how varying points of view are created in each of the books.
- ☮ Identify parts of each book when people are making unfair judgments about other people. How do those scenes make you feel? Have you encountered similar experiences in your own life? With your class or reading group, brainstorm activities that will promote peace and friendship in our families, our schools, our neighborhoods, and our country.
- ☮ Compare the United States in the 1960s to the present day. What fears and concerns occupy people today? How are the news stories and events of today different, and how are they similar, compared to the 1960s? Why is it important to be aware of what is happening in the world around you?
- ☮ Music plays a large role in each of these novels—from the popular songs and folk music of the early sixties to the protest songs of the civil rights and anti-war movements to the rock music of the late sixties. How does the changing music reflect the action in each of these books? Why do you think the author chose to head each chapter of the third book with a particular song?
- ☮ Discuss Eddie’s statement at the end of *Anthem*: “Music is the rhythm of our humanity . . . the soundtrack of struggle and peace, birth and death, love and war, joy and pain” (p. 415). List specific songs mentioned in each of these books that reflect this belief. Discuss music in your own life that has represented these concepts to you.

# Praise for THE SIXTIES TRILOGY



- ★ “Wiles skillfully keeps many balls in the air, giving readers a story that appeals across the decades as well as offering enticing paths into the history.”—*Booklist*, starred review
- ★ “The larger story . . . told here in an expert coupling of text and design, is how life endures, even triumphs, no matter how perilous the times.”—*Horn Book*, starred review
- ★ “References to duct tape (then newly invented), McDonald’s and other pop culture lend authenticity to this phenomenal story of the beginnings of radical change in America.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
- ★ “Wiles palpably recreates the fear kids felt when air-raid sirens and duck-and-cover drills were routine . . . this story is sure to strike a chord with those living through tough times today.”—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

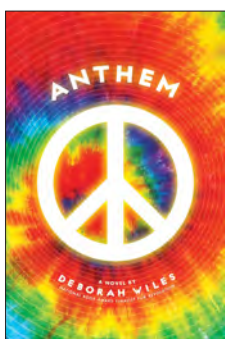
COUNTDOWN | HC: 9780545106054 • \$19.99 | PB: 9780545106061 • \$9.99 | Also available as an ebook and audiobook



National Book  
Award Finalist

- ★ “It’s an ambitious, heady endeavor that succeeds wonderfully in capturing the atmosphere of that pivotal and eventful summer, with the documents offering a broader context.”—*Horn Book*, starred review
- ★ “Though the novel is long, it’s also accessible and moving, and it will open many eyes to the brutal, not-so-distant past out of which a new standard of fairness and equality arose.”—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review
- ★ “Wiles emphasizes the danger and upheaval of this civil rights campaign, as well as the incredible importance of standing up for change and the power of the vote. Compelling and complex, *Revolution* is a revelation in historical fiction.”—*Shelf Awareness*, starred review
- ★ “Fifty years later, 1960s words and images still sound and resound in this triumphant middle volume of the author’s Sixties Trilogy.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
- ★ “*Revolution* is a book that lingers long after the last page.”—*School Library Journal*, starred review

REVOLUTION | HC: 9780545106078 • \$19.99 | PB: 9780545106085 • \$9.99 | Also available as an ebook and audiobook



- ★ “Wiles opens and closes this musically and culturally immersive road trip with extensive montages of period news photos, quotes, headlines, and lyrics, scatters smaller documentary sheaves throughout, and enriches the song titles at each chapter head with production notes.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
  - ★ “Wiles, in this third volume of her Sixties Trilogy, intersperses the narrative with portfolios of contextual period photos, headlines, quotations, and more. The result is a brilliant exercise in verisimilitude . . . the novel is wonderfully true to the reality and spirit of the times.”—*Booklist*, starred review
- “Wiles’s prodigious research informs the narrative, and each of five sections is introduced with photomontages, excerpts from news stories and speeches, and song lyrics . . . one hell of a nostalgia-driven road trip in store.”—*Publishers Weekly*
- “A wide-ranging collection of primary source documents—photographs, quotes, newspaper articles—help readers understand the historical context with its complex voices. The result is a “documentary novel” of great impact . . . A gripping read with a satisfying conclusion.”—*School Library Journal*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deborah Wiles is the author of the picture book *Freedom Summer* and the novels: *Love*, *Ruby Lavender*; *The Aurora County All-Stars*; *Each Little Bird That Sings*, a National Book Award finalist; and *A Long Line of Cakes*. She is also the author of the documentary novels *Countdown* and *Revolution*, a National Book Award Finalist, and *Anthem*. She has vivid memories of ducking and covering under her school desk during air-raid drills at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis. She also sang in the Glee Club, was a champion speller, and hated Field Day. Deborah lives in Atlanta, Georgia. You can visit her on the web at [deborahwiles.com](http://deborahwiles.com).



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