

## Educator's Guide

# A LONG TIME COMING

## A Lyrical Biography of Race in America from Ona Judge to Barack Obama

### About the Book

*A Long Time Coming* is a biography-in-verse of six significant Black Americans—Ona Judge, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Martin Luther King Jr., and Barack Obama. Drawing on primary sources and harnessing the power of poetry, it chronicles both the familiar and the less-told struggles and victories of each historic figure in the fight for racial justice, laying bare how much has changed since our country's founding, and how much has not.

### About the Author

**Ray Anthony Shepard** is a retired history teacher and textbook editor who now writes the kind of books about Black American history that he wishes had been available when he was young. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska College of Education and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where he received a Martin Luther King Jr. Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation. He is the author of two other award-winning biographies, *Now or Never! 54th Massachusetts Infantry's War to End Slavery* and *Runaway: The Daring Escape of Ona Judge*.

"I write to provide readers of any age, especially secondary school students, with a fuller understanding of Black lives in America and a corrective history of the struggle and anguish of courageous individuals seeking full American citizenship."

—Ray Anthony Shepard

## Prepare for Reading and Discussion

In the interest of depicting history authentically, *A Long Time Coming* includes accounts of slavery, racial injustice, and primary source material that contains racist language. This content can be challenging and is best approached with sensitivity and honesty in an environment that promotes respect, dialogue, and understanding. In addition to your school's guidelines, you can use the resource links below to help you decide the approach that is best for your students.

### from *Teaching Tolerance*

Let's Talk! Tips for teaching about race and racism in the classroom: <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/publications/lets-talk>

Teaching about slavery: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2014/tonguetied>

“Straight Talk About the N-Word”: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2011/straight-talk-about-the-nword>

### from *Facing History and Ourselves*

Classroom contracts: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/contracting-0>  
Head-Heart-Conscience: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/head-heart-conscience>

Toolbox for care: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/toolbox-care>

Anticipation guides for discussion: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/anticipation-guides>

Identity: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/identity-charts-0>

## Introduce the Book

### What is creative nonfiction?

Ask this question, and then read and discuss the author's note on page 3 with students. Point out that the purpose of nonfiction is to give information, while the purpose of poetry is often to engage the audience and have an emotional impact. Ask students to consider why Shepard may have chosen to use poetry to tell the history of race in America?

### The power of personal stories

A biography tells the story of an individual. Shepard tells a story of the United States by linking the biographies of six Black Americans. As they read, ask students to consider how learning history through the stories of individuals helps them connect to the text and their own lives. Ask questions such as:

- How can an individual's history reflect the history of the society in which they live?
- How can specific, personal events bring larger historic events into context?
- How does learning the story of an individual help you better understand history and empathize with the larger group of people who lived that history?

## Historical Context

You may want to provide some context for historical events that students are encountering for the first time in *A Long Time Coming*.

- Students can refer to pages 303–323 of the book for a timeline, further reading, bibliography, and source notes.
- The National Museum of African American History and Culture provides free educator resources, including learning labs and book lists: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/educators/resources>.
- “The 1619 Project,” which first appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, tells previously untold stories to reframe the history of Black Americans. It is available, along with additional educator resources at the Pulitzer Center: <https://pulitzercenter.org/education/k-12-programs-and-resources/1619-project-education-portal>.
- Civil Rights Teaching is an organization that provides extensive resources for civil rights history: <https://www.civilrightsteaching.org/resources>.
- Links throughout the discussion and prompts in the next section provide point-of-use historical resources.

## Throughout the Reading

There are several threads, themes, and connections that run throughout the text. Students can benefit from observing and discussing these before, during, or after reading. Consider having students keep a journal or posting observations on a classroom discussion wall.

**Author’s Craft** Invite students to observe how the medium of poetry connects to the meaning and purpose of the text.

- **Craft and Structure** Observe how the craft and structure of a poem—stanzas, punctuation, position of line breaks, rhyme, alliteration—affect tone and what is emphasized in the poem.
- **What’s Left Unsaid** Poetry is often about what is left unsaid as much as it is about what is revealed. In the introduction, Shepard notes that he does not tell all parts of the history. Notice how this plays out throughout the book and within individual poems. What does a given omission make you wonder or think about? Does this make you feel closer to or more distanced from the subject or topic of the poem? What would change if the omitted content were included or spelled out explicitly? How does this impact the details and events Shepard chooses to tell?

- **Repetition** Look for repeated words or phrases within a poem, section, or the whole book. What does this repetition cause you to notice, think about, or feel? Observe how the meaning or impact of the words may change as they are used repeatedly in subsequent poems or scenarios.
- **Multiple Meanings** Look for words and phrases with multiple meanings, connotations, or figurative interpretations. Consider how different people might have a different interpretation of the same word, especially in the context of race and history. Think about how the meaning of a word can change the meaning of the line or stanza. Consider why the author may have chosen to do this.
- **Symbols** Examine how symbols and imagery are used in individual poems and throughout the book.
- **Primary Sources** Quotes from primary sources are printed in italic text. Note when they are used. Analyze the meaning, power, impact, and why the author has chosen to use the quote.
- **Oral Tradition** Poetry is a medium that was born out of an oral tradition. Read some of the poems aloud as a class or in small groups. Discuss the impact of reading orally versus silently.

**Connections** Draw connections between the six individuals profiled in the book. Note similarities and differences in the following:

- The state of racial injustice in the United States at the time of their birth, and how it affected their life trajectory
- Qualities of character that helped them persevere through challenges and tragedy
- Pivotal moments that shaped their character and actions
- Helpful people and institutions who supported them
- Their willingness to use physical force or aggression vs. an insistence on using nonviolent means of resistance

**Themes** Consider examining the following themes in the context of the struggle for racial justice:

- The juxtaposition of symbols and beliefs about American freedom vs. the lived experience of being Black in America
- The role of education and the importance of being educated
- Writing and speaking as powerful tools for change
- Positive change followed by negative, often violent, backlash
- Violence as an intrinsic part of racial injustice
- Who and what is considered dangerous by the establishment vs. the actual dangers people face
- The role of faith, community, and the Black church
- The intersectionality of race and gender

**Moral Arc** In his introduction, Shepard says that he presents “significant events that show how they tilted the country’s moral arc toward liberty, freedom, and justice”. Draw a timeline in the form of an upward arc. For each section of the book, note the progress that is made toward racial justice, and write it above the line. Write setbacks and things that do not change below the line. Use the timeline arc as a prompt and an aid to discussion.

## Reading the Poems

The following prompts and questions are provided to help guide students’ reading and spark discussion. Use your own judgment and the resources in the “Prepare for Reading and Classroom Discussion” section to help you choose prompts and prepare students for discussion. These prompts can be used whether students are reading the whole book or individual poems.

p. 5 — Contents

- Preview the contents and flip to the beginning of each part.
- Why is the book divided into three parts?
- Note that each part begins with a brief personal history from the author. Think about how the author’s history connects to the text and to your own life.
- Examine the artwork by R. Gregory Christie at the beginning of each part and each biography. Use it to predict what the section will be about and revisit it after reading. What does it show? How does it make you feel? How does it enhance the text?

p. 9 — “Did you ever wonder?”

- Why do you think the author chose this as the first poem in the book?
- How is repetition used to get the reader to “wonder”? What is the author asking you to wonder about?
- What is the purpose of *hyphenate* and *hyphen*? When is a hyphen used when referring to race in America? Why would a hyphen mean someone is “more or less American”?

### **PART I: 1773–1913 Enslavement and Emancipation**

p. 10 — “Personal History”

- Why do you think the author uses the phrase “chained together in American history”? What does the chain in the text and artwork symbolize?

**Ona Judge: The Woman Who Stole Herself**, pp. 12–41

- **NOTE:** Before reading, you may want to make sure students understand that Ona Judge was enslaved by George and Martha Washington, President and First Lady of the United States. More information about Ona Judge is available in the [Educator's Guide](#) for Shepard’s second book, *Runaway: The Daring Escape of Ona Judge*.
- **NOTE:** Explain that *c.* refers to the term *circa*. It indicates when a

historical date is approximated because the exact date is unknown. Records of enslaved people's exact births and deaths were not typically kept.

p. 15 — “Ona Judge”

- Why is it significant that she calls herself “Ona,” but the Washingtons call her “Oney”? Think about why what you call yourself and what others call you is important.

p. 16 — “Separation Day”

- What is “Separation Day”?
- **NOTE:** Explain that *mulatto* is an outdated term used to refer to a person of both Black and White ancestry. Many enslaved people had at least some White lineage. This was mainly due to widespread rape of enslaved women and girls by enslavers, though there were some exceptions as in the presumed case of Ona Judge's parents. This pervasive rape has been historically excluded from most school history texts. It is alluded to and mentioned throughout *A Long Time Coming*. The “Prepare for Reading and Discussion” section of this guide contains tips and information to help you decide how to address this with your students.

p. 17 — “Fairy Queen”

- How does skin color play a role in getting “the best job a slave could have”? Why is it “not nearly enough”?

pp. 18–19 — “Ona’s Mama,” “Ona’s Daddy”

- What do you learn about Ona’s parents?
- What important fact do you learn about Virginia law as it applied to the children of slaves?
- **NOTE:** Make sure students understand that *indenture* means to enter into a contract to provide (often unpaid) labor for a set number of years in exchange for passage often from Great Britain or Europe, to a British colony.

pp. 20–21 — “Her Mama’s Warning,” “Mistress of the Needle”

- What is Mama’s warning?
- **NOTE:** The conditions of slavery were considered to be harsher the farther south one traveled, and sending a slave south was sometimes used as punishment for running away. The Caribbean island of Barbados was one of the most brutal places for enslaved people. An account of the young George Washington’s travel to Barbados is available at *The Washington Papers*: <https://washingtonpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/washington-papers-fall17-5-1.pdf> A history of Barbados and slavery is available at the African American Intellectual Historical Society: <https://www.aaihs.org/on-barbados-the-first-black-slave-society/>
- What do you learn about George Washington’s teeth?

p. 22 — “First Maid”

- Think about the author’s choice to refer to Judge and her brother by the titles “First Maid” and “First Waiter.” How do these titles show how they are connected to the presidential family, and how do they indicate that they are apart.

- pp. 23–24 — “Doubts,” “Answers”
- How does Judge’s life in Philadelphia cast doubts?
  - What condition of her life makes it challenging for her to consider freedom?
- p. 25 — “A Velvet Cage”
- What is the symbolism of the “velvet cage”?
- pp. 26–27 — “Fugitives,” “Deceived”
- What is the Fugitive Slave Act?
  - More information about the Fugitive Slave Acts can be found here: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Fugitive-Slave-Acts>.
  - What leads Judge to think that the president is generous. What truth does she later learn about his “generosity”?
- pp. 28–30 — “Betty,” “No Longer,” “Shocks,” “Decision”
- What decision does Judge make? What events led up to her making this decision? Why does this decision require her to be “one of the brave”?
- pp. 30–31 — “Freedom Seeker,” “Stolen Freedom”
- Think about the final phrase “thief who stole herself.” What does this say about her condition both as a woman with personal agency and as someone else’s personal property?
  - Think about the juxtaposition of freedom and fear in the lives of Black fugitives.
- pp. 32–34 — “Ingratitude, Reward,” “Oney!” “A Trifling,” “Unfaithful”
- How does the author use direct quotations from primary sources (in italicized text) to make the message of the poems more impactful?
  - What do the poems show about the Washingtons’ attitudes toward slavery? How does this differ from Ona’s reality?
- pp. 35–37 — “Love and Marriage,” “Trouble,” “Defiance”
- How is Judge neither a slave nor free?
  - How does having a child put Ona in more danger and make her more valuable to her former enslavers? If you are uncertain, refer back to the Fugitive Slave Act.
  - Who is Trouble, and why does he show up at Judge’s door? What is Trouble’s lie and why does it mean nothing to Judge?
- pp. 38–39 — “Freedom Fighter,” “Flight,” “Freedom’s Air”
- How does Trouble’s disregard for the Black waiter aid Judge’s freedom?
  - Think about all the people who helped Judge escape (the freedom fighter, the free Black family, the White ship captain, and the free Black crew). What does this say about the complexity of escaping? What does it say about how individual people felt about the right to freedom in a society where slavery was legal?
  - What event had to happen to assure Judge’s freedom?
- pp. 40–41 — “The Question,” “Ona’s Declaration”
- Think about the choice Ona makes between a life of slavery and luxury vs. one of freedom and poverty. Why would someone make this choice?
  - As you continue to read, think about how Ona Judge’s story sets the foundation for the other biographies in the book.

**Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman: Day and Night Warriors**, pp. 42–69

- This part of the book alternates between Douglass and Tubman and is divided into three sections: “Slavery’s Story,” “Freedom,” and “The Civil War.”

***Slavery’s Story 1818–1849***

- What is meant by “Day and Night Warriors”?
- While reading, think about how Douglass and Tubman approach the fight for freedom in different ways. What circumstances led each to take the approach they did? What values and beliefs do they have in common?

p. 45 – “The Journey”

- How does the city of Philadelphia connect the stories of Douglass and Tubman to Ona Judge?

pp. 46–47 — “Frederick Douglass,” “Harriet Tubman”

- In these poems and throughout this section of the book, pay attention to how the author connects enslaved people to livestock and agriculture (e.g., events are referred to in the context of “planting time” instead of dates). What does this tell you about their lives in relation to the greater society?

pp. 48–49 — “Family,” “Memory,” “Whipped”

- How old is Douglass in these poems? How can you tell? How would you describe his early life experiences?
- “Whipped” references the sexual violence enslaved women endured, and the physical violence they could suffer if they rejected it. This could be upsetting to some students, so use discretion if discussing it. Point out that the italicized portions of text are primary source quotes. Ask students to consider why Douglass would choose to include this scene in his autobiography and Shepard would choose to include it in *A Long Time Coming*. How might this memory have shaped Douglass’s future work?

pp. 50–52 — “Family,” “Rented,” “Tossed”

- What is Douglass’s “pathway from slavery to freedom”?

54–55 — “Thief,” “Stoneheart,” “School”

- Why do you think the author twice mentions “the vocabulary of liberation”? What is it? Why is it important to Douglass?

56–57 — “Another Pigsty,” “Betrayed,” “Apprenticeship”

- Read the last stanza in “Betrayed.” Why do the Auld brothers want Douglass to learn a trade?

You may choose to address the false argument that enslaved people benefited from the trades they were forced to learn. Ask students to consider who benefits most from Douglass learning a trade. Have them think about Douglass’s achievements and consider whether he benefited more from the trade he learned or the education he received and gained for himself. Ask what Douglass and the greater society would have lost if he had not received training as a shipyard caulker. Then ask them the same question about Douglass’s academic education.



pp. 58–61 — “Anna,” “Run or Stay,” “Inside and Out,” “Fugitive”

- What events led to Douglass’s escape?
- How is Anna integral to his success?
- How are Douglass’s feelings about being a fugitive similar to Ona Judge’s?

pp. 61–63 — “Lessons,” “Visions,” “Private Conversations,” “Liberty or Death”

- Tubman cannot read words, but she is taught to “read” other things. How is this other kind of reading important?
- How does Tubman’s head injury affect her?
- Note: A *coffle* is a line of slaves chained together.
- Compare Tubman’s sentiment at the end of “Liberty or Death” to Ona Judge’s feelings about freedom.

pp. 64–69 - “Marriage,” “Thievery,” “Prayer and Fear,” “Trio,” “Frozen Courage,” “Liberty,” “Strange Land”

- As students read, ask them to keep track of the people, places, and networks that made up the underground railroad. You might provide them with additional background information such as this: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/underground-railroad/>.
- What were Tubman’s challenges to seeking freedom? Why did her husband and brothers object?
- Compare Tubman’s fugitive experience with that of Douglass and Judge.

### **Freedom 1838–1863**

- Throughout this section, notice what happens once Tubman and Douglass are free from slavery. What are they still *not* free from? What do they do about it?

pp. 72–73 — “Stand-ins”

- Who are Douglass and Tubman “stand-ins” for?

pp. 74–76 — “Promise,” “Old Scorn,” “Douglass,” “Family”

- How was northern racism similar and different to what Douglass and his wife faced further south?
- How did Douglass create his new last name? Why?

pp. 77–80 — “The Warrior’s Voice,” “Heckled,” “The Narrative”

- Why did William Lloyd Garrison hire Douglass?
- Additional information about William Lloyd Garrison is available here: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1561.html>.
- What was “moral suasion” and why didn’t it work?
- What prompted Douglass to write his autobiography? Why did its publication cause him to need to “escape again”?

pp. 80–83 — “Steerage,” “Privilege,” “Sea Mob,” “Ransom,” “The North Star”

- Describe Douglass’s experience in England and how it led to his eventual freedom and ability to return to the United States.
- Why did Douglass name his newspaper *The North Star*?

pp. 84–85 — “Dreams,” “Bloodhounds”

- Why does the second Fugitive Slave Act have “sharper teeth, greater bite” than the first? Why do you think the author uses the imagery of teeth to describe it?
- How was the judicial process biased?

- pp. 86–88 — “Rescue,” “Her Plan,” “Liberty,” “Husband John”
- How do biased assumptions about how Black people should look like and act help Tubman and others in their freedom missions?
- pp. 89–90 — “Warrior Queen,” “Moses”
- How do Douglass and Tubman cross paths?
  - Explain the significance of the name “Moses.”
- pp. 91–93 — “Celebration,” “Harriet and Dred”
- How do the words “singed ears” evoke a powerful image of the effect of Douglass’s “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro”?
  - What is the Dred Scott decision?
  - Why do you think the author places these two poems together in the text?
- pp. 93–95 — “John Brown,” “Serpent Vision,” “Disaster,” “Trapped”
- The National Archives provides more information on the complex figure of John Brown and Harper’s Ferry: <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2011/spring/brown.html>.
  - Analyze the last four lines of “Disaster.” What contrast in different ways of fighting slavery does the poem illustrate?
- pp. 96–99 — “The Gallows,” “Brothers,” “The Bid,” “Across the River,” “Another Risk”
- Discuss what the story about enslaved Charlie Nalle and his white brother illustrates about slavery.
  - What do these poems illustrate about Tubman’s relentless bravery?
- p. 100 — “Their Land”
- Is the author saying that civil war is a necessity? Why? Do you agree? Explain your reasoning.

### ***The Civil War 1861–1865***

- Throughout the author’s narrative of the Civil War, note the contrasts between the Union’s ideals and fight to end slavery and its treatment of Black Americans and enlisted Black Union soldiers.
- pp. 102–103 — “Abraham Lincoln,” “Secession,” “Disappointment”
- In “Disappointment,” explain what you think Douglass and Tubman mean in each of their quotes.
- pp. 104–105 — “The Spy,” “Emancipation”
- Consider having students research why the Emancipation Proclamation couldn’t free slaves in Union slave states.
  - Examine Lincoln’s approach to ending slavery. Some critics argue that he compromised too much. Compare Lincoln’s actions and choices to those of leaders during the civil rights movement and the racial justice movement today. What do you think is more effective, an all-or-nothing approach or a more gradual one of measured compromise? What are the benefits and risks of each? What might cause a leader to choose one approach over another?
- pp. 106–110 — “Jubilee,” “Father’s Worries,” “River Raid,” “Revenge,” “What Harriet Saw,” “The Harvest”
- What was the 54th Massachusetts Infantry? What happened to them?
  - For a detailed account, see Shepard’s book [\*Now or Never! 54th Massachusetts Infantry’s War to End Slavery\*](#).

- What do you think is the significance of the title “The Harvest”?
  - What does the description “Union Army hospital for Black soldiers” reveal about the Union Army?
- p. 111 — “Giants”
- Why are Douglass and Lincoln “giants”?
- p. 112 — “Double War”
- What makes the Civil War a “double war”?
- p. 113 — “Tossed Again”
- If students are not sure what the major event in “Tossed Again” is, have them look up the date at the top of the page.
- pp. 114–117 — “The Aftermath,” “Day and Night Warriors,” “Freedom,” “Angels of Fairness”
- If necessary, have students look up the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments.
  - Why does the author say “words . . . were not powerful enough to change . . . the myth of race”? Do you think this is still true? Explain your reasoning.
  - Examine the quote at the end of “Day and Night Warriors.” What does Douglass mean by “I have wrought in the day—you in the night”?
  - Why do you think the author uses the imagery of “Angels of Fairness”?

## **PART II: 1862–1968 Freedom and Justice**

- You may want to provide context for this section by helping students understand the history of lynching before they read.  
From PBS: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/emmett-lynching-america/>  
From the NAACP: <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america>
- p. 118 — Personal History”
- How does reading Shepard’s personal experience help you understand the impact of lynching on the lives of Black Americans?

### **Ida B. Wells: The Reason Why**, pp. 120–175

- p. 122 - “Freedom’s Child”
- Wells’s biography is the first in the book about someone who was “born free.” Discuss how being born free allows Wells more opportunities to further the fight for freedom and equality than her predecessors. As you continue to read, think about how each generation is able to build upon the successes of the previous generations.
- pp. 123–125 — “The Lady,” “Coal Dust,” “Natural Law”
- Compare Wells’s experience traveling on the C&O train with the experience of others, such as Frederick Douglass, traveling in White spaces. What had changed in the 20 years since slavery ended? What had not?
- p. 126 — “Slavery’s Next of Kin”
- Wells lived during the Jim Crow era when laws were passed to keep

Black people out of previously white-only spaces and to keep them from achieving equality. Help students understand how the author connects Jim Crow to slavery by referring to it as “next of kin.” Consider having students research Jim Crow and list ways it kept the conventions of slavery in place.

- The second stanza of “Slavery’s Next of Kin” compares Jim Crow to a minstrel show. Provide some background info on minstrel shows, and ask students to analyze and expand on the author’s comparison. From National Museum of African American History and Culture: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/blackface-birth-american-stereotype>

pp. 127–132 — “Family History,” “Hunger,” “Care,” “Butterfly,” “Bird in a Cage,” “Country Teacher”

- What do Wells’s early years reveal about her character?
- What does it mean to be “double trapped in a gender and race cage”? What are some examples of this from Wells’s early life?

pp. 133–134 — “Iola,” “Success”

- Explain that there is a history of authors and journalists using pen names or pseudonyms. Masking their real identity allowed them to write about controversial subjects without attracting negative attention to themselves.
- Why might taking on a pseudonym be particularly important for a writer who comes from a culturally disempowered group?
- Compare the use of pseudonyms by writers in the past to the use of online screen names today.
- Discuss how Wells and Douglass each used words and communication to further the cause of equality.

pp. 135–137 — “School Scandal,” “Free Speech”

- How does Wells become known as “Princess of the Press”?

pp. 137–141 — “Tommie Moss,” “The Curve,” “Showdown,” “The Lynching”

- Read the quote written by the white reporter about the lynching (p. 140). How does this illustrate that whoever writes about an event can shape the perception of it? How does this relate to the importance of Ida B. Wells’s role as a journalist in history?
- What do you think is meant by “She took out her pen [and] . . . plunged it into Jim Crow’s heart”? As you read, keep this question in mind and make a list of examples.

pp. 142–144 — “Reasons,” “Taunt,” “Outrage”

- Why is publishing the truth a “risky” endeavor?
- What happens to Wells’s newspaper business? What was it a result of?

pp. 145–146 — “Exile,” “Telling Her Story Abroad”

- Compare Wells’s *Southern Horrors* to Douglass’s *Narrative*. Discuss the experience each has with how their work is received in the **US** and in Great Britain.

pp. 147–150 — “White City,” “Black Clowns,” “Do You Take This Man?” “The Red Record,” “The Expert”

- What is meant by the line “It was more truth than many readers could take” (p. 150)? What evidence of this is recounted in the poems?

pp. 152–153 — “Mobocracy”

- Explain what is meant by the line, “White votes mattered more than Black lives”? Do you think the author intentionally included this line to connect to the more recent Black Lives Matter movement? To what purpose?

pp. 154–157 — “Pamphleteer,” “National Crime,” “A Swarm,” “List-Makers”

- What do you learn about the purpose of lynching in this section?
- Why wasn’t Wells given a leadership position in the NAACP? How is this another example of Wells being “double trapped in a gender and race cage”? What other things “trap” her in this instance?

pp. 158–159 — “Investigation,” “Ida’s Question”

- Lynching often happened when sheriffs allowed mobs to take prisoners. How did Wells’s relentless action help to change this?

pp. 160–163 — “The Vote,” “Fair or Foul,” “East St. Louis Massacre”

- In what other ways was Wells politically active?
- What are some factors that made it difficult for Black Americans to get government protection from lynching?
- Discuss how the biases within society’s institutions can affect the ability of individuals and groups within that society to enact change?

pp. 164–166 — “Chicago,” “Color Line”

- Why is the death of Eugene Williams “Memphis and Tommie Moss all over again”? Think about instances in which history repeats itself. How do events in Wells’s time connect to current events?

p. 167 — “Peace Conference”

- Why do you think Wells was denied a passport to the world peace conference? What does this say about her power and influence?

pp. 168–175 — “Red Summer,” “The Truth,” “Memory,” “The Constitution,” “Negro Agitator,” “Among the Living”

- Harriet Tubman saved lives by physically helping people to escape slavery. What did Wells do to save lives? What personality traits do Wells and Tubman share that make them similar?
- What factors prevented lynching from becoming a federal crime?
- Share with students that anti-lynching legislation was finally passed by the Biden administration on March 29, 2022. Ask students why they think it took so long to pass this legislation, and what factors they think led to its passing in 2022. For more information on the bill’s passing, see this article: <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/08/1085094040/senate-passes-anti-lynching-bill-and-sends-federal-hate-crimes-legislation-to-bi>.

**Martin Luther King, Jr.: This Lie Will Not Live**, pp. 176–251

- This part of the book is divided into several sections: “In the Beginning,” “Book 1: 1934–1944,” “Book 2: 1944–1967,” “Book 3: 1967–1968,” and “In the End.” As you read, think about why the author chose to structure the text this way.

p. 178 — “Passing the Sword”

- As you read, think about what it means for King to “pick up Ida’s sword and lead an army to the mountaintop.” What does the sword

symbolize? Why do you think the author would use this symbol for an activist who insisted on using only peaceful resistance?

### ***In the Beginning***

pp. 179–181 — “A Nordic Myth,” “Color Codes,” “Junior King”

- What is the “intoxicating lie”? What makes it intoxicating? Look for repetition of these words throughout this section on King, and think about the different meanings of the word *intoxicating* can have in different contexts.

### ***Book One***

- As you read “Book One,” look for events that lay the foundation for the civil rights leader King becomes.

pp. 183–185 — “Martin,” “Guilt,” “Master Orator”

- What does young Martin learn from his father?
- Who are the “Guardians”? Why do you think it is capitalized here? Consider the role of a guardian and how the author uses this term ironically.
- Who else in *A Long Time Coming* was a master orator? What makes oration a powerful medium in the fight for equality?
- American Public Media has additional information about the role of African American public speaking in the struggle for equal rights, including audio and transcript of significant speeches: <https://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/>.

pp. 186–188 — “Bus Ride,” “Sweat and Fun,” “Train Ride,” “A Pledge”

- Compare the events in these poems to those that shaped the lives and activism of the other people profiled in the book. What common threads can you identify?

### ***Book Two***

p. 189 — “Gold Medals”

- How was Gandhi’s teaching of “love those who also hate you” similar to the teaching King received from his father?
- You may wish to provide additional biographical background about Gandhi: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mahatma-Gandhi>.

pp. 190–191 — “Heart Breaker,” “Cupid”

- What does the depiction of King’s early life tell you about his complex character? What does it tell you about Coretta Scott King?

pp. 192–193 — “Montgomery,” “How to Ride a Bus”

- Analyze the language and imagery the author uses to compare northern and southern segregation.

pp. 193–194 — “Gore”

- What feeling does the title evoke and how does it characterize what happened to Emmet Till?
- Remind students that it is Emmet Till’s name that is memorialized in the 2022 anti-lynching bill. Use sensitivity and the tips in this guide when discussing the story of Emmet Till, as many students will find it disturbing. The Library of Congress houses additional information for students who are interested in learning more about his life, the impact his murder had on Black Americans, and his legacy: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and->

[essays/murder-of-emmett-till/](#).

194–199 — “Visiting Speaker,” “Boycott,” “Black Dimes,” “Long Answer,” “Success,” “Response”

- The poems in this section tell the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott. Consider sharing these additional resources: Stanford University Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/montgomery-bus-boycott> Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/rosa-parks-in-her-own-words/about-this-exhibition/#explore-the-exhibit>
- In “Bombed,” what does the author do in the text to emphasize what happened? Consider the question at the end of the poem. What does it reveal about King’s future? What does it reveal about the threats he faced?
- Point out the titles of the poems “Success” and “Response” and how these titles draw attention to a pattern of success followed by pushback—often violent—throughout the struggle for racial justice. As students read the rest of the book, ask them to notice this pattern and the forms it takes. They may also wish to analyze contemporary racial justice movements with this in mind.

pp. 200–208 — “Next,” “Magic or Tragic,” “Easter Shopping,” “The Bull,” “A Letter,” “Young Crusaders,” “Water Blast,” “Bombingham,”

- Why is Birmingham the “Magic City” for Whites and the “Tragic City” for Blacks?
- Who is the Bull? Why is he referred to as the “chief Guardian”?
- How does the author use the extended metaphor of a bull and a bullfight? What does it signify?
- More information about the Birmingham campaign is available from the Stanford University Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/birmingham-campaign>. Live newsreel footage of the protests and violent response from authorities is available from several sources online. If you choose to share this with your students, remind them that these events happened well before cellphone footage of public events was possible, and release of the footage to the public was pivotal in the fight for desegregation. You may use this as a jumping off point to invite discussion about the use of video recording in past and present-day racial justice movements.

pp. 209–211 — “The FBI,” “Gospel and Law,” “Warning”

- How does the United States government respond as King’s civil rights movement gains momentum?

pp. 211–216 — “The Gathering,” “The Speech,” “Nightmare,” “Nightmare Continues,” “Assassins”

- These poems tell the story of the march on Washington, King’s “I Have a Dream” speech, the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing, and the Kennedy Assassination. Compare the author’s depiction of the events to the history you know. How does the use of poetry shape what is emphasized?
- An audio and transcript of King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is available here: <https://www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety>.

pp. 217–218 — “Man of the Year,” “Peace,” “Exposed”

- Why is King shown on the cover of *Time* magazine and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize?
- Why does the FBI tag King “the most dangerous Negro of the future in this nation”?
- Why would there be such a contrast between how King is received internationally and by the **US** media versus the **US** government?
- What does this say about the power of peaceful protest to break down unequal power structures in society? What does it say about how ingrained these unequal structures were in 1960s America?

pp. 219–220 — “Two Giants,” “Malcom and Martin”

- Compare and contrast Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X.

pp. 221–230 — “Three Days,” “Bloody Sunday,” “The New Confederate Army,” “Judge’s Ban,” “He Didn’t,” “Yes, He Did,” “White Blood,” “We Shall Overcome,” “We Shall March!” “Revenge”

- These poems center around the 1965 protests for equal voting rights. Make sure students understand that while Black Americans had the legal right to vote, many southern states passed biased voter registration laws and used voter intimidation to make it nearly impossible for many southern Black people to vote. Additional information and individual stories are available at the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/voting-rights/>.
- In “He Didn’t” and “Yes, He Did,” what difficult decision did King have to make? What didn’t some people understand? What do you think of his decision?
- What effect does the spilling of “white blood” have on the subsequent progress of the voting rights movement? Why do you think this is? Why do you think the author chooses to leave it to the reader to figure out instead of describing in detail?

pp. 231–233 — “Up North,” “Doubts,” “The Protest Preacher”

- How does King expand his work for equal rights and justice?

p. 234 - “Explosion”

- Why do you think the final poem in “Book 2” is called “Explosion”? How does it reference the earlier use of “BOMBED”?

### **Book Three**

pp. 235–238 — “Rabble-Rouser,” “Poor People’s Campaign,” “The Most Hated Man,” “Memphis,” “Storm,” “I Am a Man”

- What was the poor people’s campaign? Why was poverty the next focus of King’s campaign? Why did this make King “the most hated man”?
- Read the quote at the end of “The Most Hated Man.” Why would the government consider someone trying to eliminate poverty to be dangerous? What does this say about King’s power to effect change?
- Why do you think the striking sanitation workers wore sandwich boards with the statement “I AM A MAN”? Recall instances earlier in the book where Black people or poor people were treated as less than human.

pp. 239–249 — “Sidebar,” “Lorraine Motel,” “Sidebar,” “Anguish,” “Deeper,”



“The Call,” “The Mountaintop,” “Believe,” “Hold Fast,” “The Future,” “Sidebar,” “Take My Hand,” “The Battle Hymn”

- The final section of “Book Three” depicts the events near the end of King’s life and his assassination. For reference, students can view a timeline here: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/memphis-hunt/>
- What causes King to almost lose hope? Why doesn’t he give up?
- How does the author use the sections titled “Sidebar”? Why do you think he uses this particular title?
- Why do you think the author focuses more on the events of King’s life than on the depiction of his assassination?
- Explain why the final poem in this section is titled “The Battle Hymn.”

### ***In the End***

pp. 250–251 — “Memory,” “MLK Day”

- What do the poems tell you about how King is remembered today?
- Why do you think the author refers to King as an “American prophet”?

## **PART III: 1961–2008 The Promise of America**

• Before reading Part III, consider, What is “The Promise of America”?

p. 252 — “Personal History”

- The quote in Shepard’s personal history is from Langston Hughes’ poem “I, Too.” The full text of the poem and additional information about Hughes is available at The Poetry Foundation: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too>. Ask students why they think the author referenced this particular poem,

**Barack Obama: The Audacity of Race**, pp. 254–297

- Have students read the section title and opening quote. If necessary, have them look up the definition of *audacity*. Ask them to consider the meaning of “the audacity of race” and the title of Obama’s book “The Audacity of Hope.” Have them pay attention to how audacity of race is referenced throughout this section, and then revisit and discuss its meaning once they have finished reading.

p. 256 — “Passing the Torch”

- How old was Obama when King was assassinated? What changes did King effect that helped set the stage for Obama’s success?
- Think about how each person profiled in the book “passed the torch” to the next.

p. 257 — “The Impossible Made Possible”

- What question does this poem ask? Why? As you continue to read this section, look for answers to this question.

p. 258 — “Child Barry”

- What are the different “way[s] to be strong” that the young Obama learned from adults in his life? How are these ways of being strong reflected in the other biographies in the book?

p. 259–260 — “The Riddle,” “Fifth Grade”

- What challenges does young Obama face? As you read, consider how these shaped who he becomes.
- What lie does Obama tell? Why?

- pp. 261–263 — Reunion,” “The Marriage,” “Reunion Bomb”
- Recall how the word *BOMB* is used in the section on Martin Luther King, Jr.. What does *bomb* refer to here?
- pp. 264–265 — “Guest Speaker,” “A Promise Made”
- How does hearing Obama’s father speak change the attitude of his classmates? What does this say about the power of knowing the stories of people who are different from us? Think about how this relates to *A Long Time Coming*. What do you learn and understand from reading the personal stories of people from history in contrast to reading a general history?
- pp. 266–267 — Race”
- How do the seven examples of “consequences of race” help you understand that these insults were “mild compared to the suffering of earlier generations,” yet still significant?
  - Discuss the question at the end of the poem, “How to Be Black in America but not defined by race?”
- pp. 268–270 — “Charlie,” “Becoming Barack,” “South Africa”
- What is left unsaid in “Becoming Barack”? What can you infer about how young Barry became Barack?
  - Recall others profiled in *A Long Time Coming* who changed their name or invented a new name. Why did they do this? What has been the significance of names and naming in Black American history? Why is it significant that Obama chose to use his given name?
- pp. 271–273 “A Call from Kenya,” “Community Organizer,” “Community”
- Given what you have learned about young Obama, why would he choose community organizing over fundraising?
  - How has community been important throughout *A Long Time Coming*?
- pp. 274–276 — “The Challenge,” “The Gardens”
- What vestiges of slavery does Obama find in Chicago? What does he do?
  - What is Obama’s answer to the question, “Do we settle?”
- pp. 276–281 — “The Ghost,” “Wanting Something More,” “Land of His Fathers,” “The Graves,” “Barack Senior”
- Why does Obama go to Kenya?
  - What does he learn about how English colonialism impacted his family?
  - What does he conclude about self-worth? Why is it important?
- pp. 282–285 — “Harvard Law,” “Meet the Intern,” “Improving Lives,” “Family,” “Politics”
- Summarize how Obama meets his future wife Michelle and begins his professional life. What events and personal qualities stand out?
  - If necessary, help students understand the progression from state senator to the **US** House of Representatives to **US** senator. Explain that this is a common career path taken by people aspiring to become the **US** president.
- p. 286 — “Yes, We Can”
- Explain that “Yes, we can” was the slogan of Obama’s first presidential campaign. Ask students to consider its broader meanings.

- Why would Michelle object to her husband’s presidential run? Base your answer on what you have learned about the history of Black Americans who strived to achieve?
- pp. 287–292 — “The Land of Lincoln,” “The Face of Race,” “Birtherism,” “Sharks Circled”
- Why did many, even those in Obama’s own political party, doubt his ability to win a presidential election?
  - Why did Obama choose not to discuss race on the campaign trail? Do you think it was a prudent choice? Explain your reasoning.
  - Explain the ways opponents attempted to use race to take Obama down. p. 292 — “A More Perfect Union”
  - Why do you think the author chooses to use these quotes from Obama’s speech? How do they echo back to earlier times in American history and earlier biographies in the book?
- pp. 293–294 — “The Complexities of Race,” “The Extra Extraordinary”
- Revisit the meaning of “the audacity of race.” What is the author saying here?
  - What makes Obama “extra extraordinary”?
- p. 295 — “A Long Time Coming,” “Barack Knew”
- What was “a long time coming”?
  - What do you think are some “better chapters” that could be written by future generations?
- pp. 296–297 — “Then and Now”
- Consider the title of the poem. What have you learned about the struggle for racial justice “then and now”?
  - Why do you think the author ends with the line “My country ’tis all of us”?

## EPILOGUE

- pp. 299–301 — “The Long Time”
- Discuss the effect of the repetition of the line “It was a long time coming” at the end of each stanza.”

## Beyond the Text

The following prompts can be used to extend discussion of the text and connect to other texts and current events.

- Ask students to discuss how *A Long Time Coming* connects to recent history. What important events have happened since the election of Barack Obama in 2008? How have things changed? What remains the same?
- Have students connect the themes in *A Long Time Coming* with Amanda Gorman’s 2021 inaugural poem “The Hill We Climb.”
- If students are not familiar with “The 1619 Project,” introduce it and discuss its initiative to reframe Black history in America. Also discuss the almost immediate backlash to the project and efforts by some to

silence the kind of history it provides. Ask: How does *A Long Time Coming* fit with the initiative of “The 1619 Project”? What events in *A Long Time Coming* can help to explain why some people object to “The 1619 Project”? What is the importance of learning a truthful history?

### **Extension Activities**

- Have students write a bio-poem using the resources at this link: <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/bio-poem-connecting-identity-poetry>
- *A Long Time Coming* uses poetry as a medium to tell history. Have students choose one of the figures in the book and retell part of their story using a different creative medium such as video, song, visual art, performance, gamification, or multimedia.
- Continue where *A Long Time Coming* leaves off after the presidential election of Barack Obama. Have students choose a figure from today’s racial justice movement and create a poem, essay, or video about that person’s role in recent history or current events. They should use a minimum of three reference sources including at least one primary source.