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A GUIDE TO  
Doreen Rappaport's  
Big Words Books



TEACHER'S GUIDE  
Disney • HYPERION BOOKS





## About Doreen Rappaport's Big Words Books

The Big Words books by Doreen Rappaport give young readers an accessible, thorough introduction to the lives of our nation's most compelling historical figures. Drawing upon quotes from her subjects, and a variety of sources, Rappaport's lyrical prose creates very human portraits of Martin Luther King, John Lennon, Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy. By beginning from childhood and showing the obstacles that each subject faced on their path of accomplishment, the books allow readers to admire and identify with people who might once have seemed difficult to relate to. Illustrated by an impressive roster of award-winning illustrators, each person and their world is recreated with accuracy and in stunning detail. A thorough list of sources and suggested books for further reading is included in each book to help readers expand upon their newfound knowledge.

## Biography Project

You can use these activities with all of the Big Words books or other biographies. Create a web to organize information on any person you study in a biography unit. You might want to, as a class, brainstorm the topics that are most important to find out about a person. Or, you could create a web on the following topics: Person's name, early years, major accomplishments, education, sports and hobbies, etc.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 Why do you think the author chose this person to write about? Whom would you write about? Why?
- 2 What do you think is the most important thing to know about this person? Why? What will you remember about them a year from now? Five years from now?
- 3 How do people find information to create biographies?
- 4 Which biography is your favorite? Why?
- 5 Why do you think students should study biographies? What is the purpose of reading about another person's life?

# Across the Curriculum

## Reading

As you read a biography fill out the following chart:

| Important FACTS about this person's life | QUESTIONS (and things I wonder) that pop into my head as I read about this person | RESPONSES to what I am reading, like thoughts, feelings, and opinions I have |
|--|---|--|
|  |   |  |

After reading, discuss with a reading partner.

## Writing

Research the life of someone you think is important to know about. Write a newspaper article about them and include at least five important facts.

## History

Great research is best done with primary sources rather than secondary ones. Primary sources are actual letters, notes, diaries, pictures, or other firsthand documentation of a person's life. As you research a famous person for a biography list the types of resources you find and highlight the ones that are primary resources.

## Music

Research the type of music that was popular during your subject's life. You could look at the year they were born and also the year they died. What do you notice about the music's lyrics, instruments, beats and rhythms, and style?

## Art

Create a piece of sculpture or collage that best represents the person you are studying. Use objects that show important aspects of their life. Explain your choices in a brief paragraph.

# Jack's Path of Courage: The Life of John F. Kennedy



## About the Book

As a boy, Jack Kennedy was frequently ill and fought to stay out of the shadow of his older brother. Jack worked hard to be recognized for his own talents and strengths. He came into the public eye as a writer, war hero, U.S. senator, and then a most vital American president. But this image did not come easily. He still struggled with his health problems and faced tough decisions that affected the country and the world. Despite these difficulties, John F. Kennedy forged a path that made him beloved by all. His path demanded strength, compassion, determination, and a tremendous amount of courage.

*Jack's Path of Courage* follows John F. Kennedy from childhood to the White House. In her signature style, Doreen Rappaport combines quotes from Kennedy and those close to him with her own lyrical prose to create a moving portrait of a beloved figure. Matt Tavares's stunning artwork vividly depicts this unique time in history.

## Pre-reading

Do you agree with this quote from Jack Kennedy: "Things do not happen. Things are made to happen." What does he mean by this?

Create a KWL chart like the one below to use before, during, and after reading this biography.

| What I KNOW about JFK | What I WANT to know about JFK | What I LEARNED |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
|                       |                               |                |

# Discussion Questions

## EARLY YEARS

- 1 Young Jack loved adventure stories. What types of stories do you love best? Do you think his habit of reading a lot as a young person helped him become successful?
- 2 How did Jack's father push his children? Do you think his father was right about competition? Do your parents push you to compete?
- 3 What sports did Jack excel at? What was the effect of Jack's hurting his back while playing football? Did this injury hold him back?
- 4 How did Jack become famous at the age of twenty three? What do you think his book was about?

## A LEADER AND HERO

- 1 Describe what happened when Jack's PT boat was hit during the war. How did he react and show courage? What did he say when he was asked about this incident?
- 2 What happened to Joe, Jack's oldest brother? What expectations landed on his shoulders because of this loss?
- 3 How did Jack's campaign for Congress go? Why did he find such easy success with people?
- 4 Do you think Jack's second book, *Profiles in Courage*, helped shape him as a politician and leader? How? What do you learn from reading biographies of leaders? Why do you think he chose this topic to explore?
- 5 How is JFK's story a *Profile in Courage* itself? What do you think is the most courageous thing about his story?

## PRESIDENT

- 1 How was Jack different than U.S. presidents that had come before him? Why did even his own close friends and family believe that he might not get elected? Why do you think he was able to overcome this prejudice?
- 2 What did he ask people to think about in his acceptance speech? What does this mean to you?
- 3 Discuss his two responses about being president. Why do you think he answered this way? What did he mean?
- 4 Some of Jack's decisions were misguided. What were the most serious mistakes he made as a leader? How could this have ended badly for the United States? What other conflicts did he face as president?
- 5 Why was his death such a shock to the nation? How did Lyndon Johnson try to carry out his legacy?



# Across the Curriculum

## Reading

After filling out the KWL chart from the pre-reading activities, discuss in small groups what facts were placed inside the graphic organizer. What do you think is the most important thing to know about JFK?

## Writing

Inspired by this book, write a biography of another U.S. president in this same style.

## History

Create a time line of JFK's life and include at least five facts on it. Be sure to also add three important events from history on the time line too.



# Eleanor, Quiet No More: The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt



## About the Book

As First Lady of the United States, Eleanor was often criticized for her beliefs. But she still spoke up, to change things that needed changing, and to help those who felt too vulnerable to speak for themselves. Doreen Rappaport lyrically combines poignant biographical details with Eleanor Roosevelt's words, while Gary Kelley's moving illustrations re-create a true first in First Ladies, and the world she helped make better. The quotes in this book have been taken from Eleanor Roosevelt's autobiographies, her letters to Franklin, speeches before various Democratic women's groups, her newspaper columns, and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Rights.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 Why does the author, Doreen Rappaport, include quotes at the end of each page? Why do you think it was important to include Eleanor's own words? How do you know when Eleanor is speaking?
- 2 What did Franklin love most about Eleanor? Do you agree with him that "most people only pretend" to listen? How do you become a good listener?
- 3 What issue helped Eleanor find her voice? How did she organize women to help? How do you think we can help soldiers today?
- 4 Which illustration is your favorite? How do the illustrations help the reader know about the time period? Why do think Gary Kelley chose the colors he did?
- 5 What can you learn from reading about the life of Eleanor Roosevelt? Which quote in the book is your favorite? Why?

## Across the Curriculum

### Reading

Create a character web based on the life of Eleanor Roosevelt. Brainstorm a list of adjectives to describe Eleanor (for instance, *brave*) and then list examples from the book that support it.

## Writing

Write a response journal to the book or to your favorite Eleanor Roosevelt quotation. What does the quotation make you think about? How does it make you feel? How can you apply what you've learned to your own life?

## Mentor Text

Study how the author uses quotes from Eleanor to enhance the story. How can you add direct quotations to strengthen a connection between the reader and your topic? Where can you find quotations for your next piece?

## Math

Research the cost of living during the Great Depression and the cost of similar goods and services now. Be sure to also find the average salary of Americans of each time period. Compare.

## Science/Health

President Franklin Roosevelt was stricken with polio. Research this disease and how vaccines have nearly eradicated it.

## Current Events

Research the New Deal. Find out what kinds of projects FDR initiated to help fuel the economy. Compare them with solutions that were used by President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama. In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?





# Abe's Honest Words: *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*



## About the Book

From the time he was a young man, Abraham Lincoln was pained by the cruelty and evil of the institution of slavery. A voracious reader, Lincoln spent every spare moment of his days filling his mind with knowledge—from history to literature to mathematics—that helped him make difficult and crucial decisions when he eventually became president. Lincoln guided the nation through a long and bitter civil war and penned the document ending slavery in the United States. Doreen Rappaport's accessible, absorbing prose reveals the passion for humanity that defined Lincoln's life.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 Why do you think the author makes a point to tell us in the first sentence that Lincoln was born in a slave state?
- 2 Why are some of the words in the book printed in italics? Why do you think the author decided to include them?
- 3 What jobs did Lincoln hold? Did they correspond to what he liked to study?
- 4 How did he pursue a career that satisfied him? Which job would you most like to have? Which jobs would you least like to do?
- 5 Why did people doubt Lincoln's skill to lead the country during war? How did he react to everyone's negative views of him?



# Across the Curriculum

## Reading

In the following chart, pull important facts, quotes, or details from the book and list them on the left side. On the right, share your reactions, including feelings, thoughts, memories, or connections you made to the text.

| Important Quotes, Facts, or Details                               | Connections and Reactions   |
|---|---|
| <i>Ex.</i> “He had just a mite of schooling, yet he loved words.” | Wow! I just figured that Lincoln didn’t have much schooling, but his passion for education came from reading books. |
|   |   |
|   |   |
|   |   |

## Music

Learn the lyrics for both “Battle Hymn of the Republic” and “Dixie.” After singing them, discuss what the lyrics mean.

## Social Studies

Create a three-dimensional map of the United States as it looked during the Civil War. Be sure to label which states fought for the Union and which for the Confederacy.

## Dates to Remember

**February 12, 2009** was the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth. His birthday is a legal holiday in some U.S. states, but even if it's not, you can celebrate the anniversary of his birth.

**November 19, 1863** is the date he gave the Gettysburg Address; students may enjoy revisiting the speech on or around that date.

Other important dates of interest can be found at the back of *Abe's Honest Words*.





# John's Secret Dreams: The Life of John Lennon



## About the Book

John Lennon's influence on music and culture is legendary. He was a rebel, a genius, an innovator, and a peace activist. From a young age he dreamed of fame and fortune. When he achieved it as one of the Beatles, he recognized the need for a deeper meaning in life. As a follow-up to their award-winning title, *Martin's Big Words*, Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier combine narrative and song lyrics, cut-paper collage and watercolor art to capture the energy and the essence of a man whose vision and creative genius continue to inspire people today.

## Discussion Questions

- 1 John Lennon is quoted on the first page of the book as saying, "I like to write about me, because I know about me." What does this mean? Do you like to write about your own life? Should all writers just write about themselves? Why or why not?
- 2 Even though his Aunt Mimi discounted John's dreams of being an artist or musician, he stuck with it. Why do you think he was able to stay true to what he wanted?
- 3 Biographies are stories written about a person's life. Why do you think John Lennon is an important person to learn about? Whom would you choose if you wrote a biography about someone?
- 4 A palette is the colors that an artist chooses to show the feelings of a picture. Choose and compare two pictures in the book. Why do you think Collier used these colors for each part of the story?
- 5 Review the lyrics mentioned in the book. Which are your favorite? Why? Do they remind you of any other music or poetry you've listened to?

## Across the Curriculum

### Language Arts

Write a letter to John Lennon about your own secret dreams and wishes.

John Lennon and Paul McCartney collaborated on song lyrics. Try your hand at collaborating with a friend: You write one line and your partner writes the next.



## History

Interview someone who remembers when the Beatles were popular. Ask at least five questions about the time in which the Beatles were most popular.

Make a time line of historical events that spans John Lennon's lifetime. Then add notations about major events in John's life. In a short journal (or classroom discussion) explain if you think some of them are related.

## Art

Choose one of the Beatles' or John Lennon's songs to illustrate. Use any technique you prefer, but consider a collage inspired by Collier's illustrations.

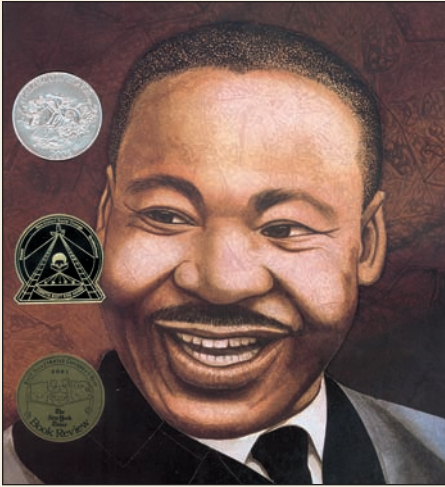
## Music

Listen to the music of the Beatles and John Lennon! Throw a 60s party featuring the music, clothing, and sayings of the period.



# Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Cover art © Flip Schulke



## About the Book

This picture book biography of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. brings his life and the profound nature of his message to young children through his own words. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the most influential and gifted speakers of all time. Doreen Rappaport uses quotes from some of his most beloved speeches to tell the story of his life and his work in a simple, direct way. Bryan Collier's stunning collage art combines watercolor paintings with vibrant patterns and textures. A time line and a list of additional books and web sites help make this a standout biography of Dr. King.

## Pre-reading

What is a leader? What does a person do to become a leader? What makes a good leader?

## Genre: Biography

We study biography to learn from the lives of others. Why is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. an important person to read about? What can we learn from the way he lived his life? The author inserted many of Dr. King's own words throughout the text. Why do you think this was an important thing to do?

## Illustration

Read the illustrator's note and study each page before answering the following questions: What does the collage add to the story of Dr. King? Which illustration is your favorite? Why? Why do you think they decided not to put any words on the cover of the book?

What does Bryan Collier mean when he says, ". . . windows allow you to look past where you are." Why is that idea important to the civil rights movement?

## Theme: Equality

The civil rights movement worked to create equal opportunities for African-American people. What are some specific examples in education, employment, and public settings that needed to change for equality? Are there still things that need to be changed?

## Setting

What are the major settings in the biography of Dr. King? Which illustrations give you a clue that it is in a different time than today? What part of the country did most of Dr. King's work focus on? Why?

## Across the Curriculum

### Language Arts

Write a biography of another hero or major figure of the civil rights movement. Use a style similar to that of Rappaport—allowing your subject to speak for himself or herself whenever possible.

Write a letter to Dr. King about what you learned from him.

### Vocabulary

Define the following words and draw a picture that will help you remember what they mean: *hymn*, *citizen*, *courage*, *protest*, *rights*, *movement*, *peace*, *freedom*, and *segregation*.

### Social Studies

In small groups, research one of the following events or people from the civil rights movement and create a pamphlet about it. Include who was involved, where it took place, why it is important, and what effect it had. Present your findings to the class.

- *Brown vs. Board of Education*
- Rosa Parks
- Montgomery bus boycott
- Ruby Bridges
- March on Washington, D. C.
- Bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama
- Civil Rights Act
- March on Birmingham, Alabama
- Voting Rights Act
- Twenty-fourth Amendment

### Art

Explore the technique of collage and depict another scene or person from the civil rights movement.





## Science/Health

Dr. King worked hard to help people earn a living wage, to make enough money to help their families get out of poverty. Research what effects poverty has on children's health and education. Make a poster about what you learn.

## Music

Find recordings of these songs that were sung during the civil rights movement. Write a brief journal about why you think they were important.

- "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing"
- "We Shall Overcome"
- "Oh, Freedom"
- "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize"
- "We Shall Not Be Moved"
- "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round"







## About the Author

Doreen Rappaport has written forty books on American history for children, focusing on stories of liberation and biographies of celebrated and not-yet-celebrated Americans whose courage and actions influenced history. Among her numerous award-winning books are *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*; *Abe's Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*; *Victory or Death! Stories of the American Revolution*; and *No More! Stories and Songs of Slave Resistance!* She is the recipient of the Washington Post–Children's Book Guild award for lifetime achievement in nonfiction writing for children. She lives in upstate New York but spends much time visiting schools throughout the United States, hoping to inspire confidence in our country's next generation of writers.

## Q&A with Doreen Rappaport

### 1 Can you describe your process for bringing your biographies to life?

The idea to tell a person's life including his or her words came from writing the first biography on Martin Luther King, Jr. I thought about *what* was the *essence* of Dr. King, how did he communicate his ideas and beliefs to the world, how did he reach other Americans, many who were not concerned with the difficulties of being black in the United States? I worked in the civil rights movement in the South and in the North. I was at the march on Washington and heard the famous "I Have a Dream" Speech. I was well acquainted with the power of other of Dr. King's speeches. So as I was researching the details of his life, I heard his words. I believe in the power of words to convince, to persuade, to clarify. I wanted children to hear words that inspire, that confront and declare the values I believe in, and so as I shaped my narrative for my biographies, it was natural to include words in all of them.

### 2 What have you learned about writing over your career?

Writing is a process of thinking, focusing, and refining. The hardest books to write are the ones for younger children, for you must simplify complex ideas and use fewer words, always taking care not to "dumb down." Writing cannot be rushed. Writing a good book always takes longer than you want, but the time between the drafts, the time you let the manuscript sit waiting for your next revision, is crucial time for you to get a fresh eye on what works and what doesn't. It takes time. You must go over and over your words. You must have the courage to cut out phrases you love if they do not belong.

### 3 Why do you think it is important for young people to study biography?

Like all of us, the people I write about struggled with how to overcome hardship, how to shape their lives, how to confront contradictions, and how to make meaningful choices to lead lives of integrity. Martin Luther King, Jr. gathered inner strength from his family and religion despite the degradation of racial segregation. John Lennon dealt with the pain of his abandonment by his mother by secretly dreaming of being a poet and musician. Eleanor Roosevelt had the luck to have a great teacher who helped Eleanor value herself and opened her mind to “think” and “respond” to the world around her. Abraham Lincoln refused to let his lack of formal education limit his life. John F. Kennedy struggled to create his own path out of the shadow of his older brother. I know lots of children and adults who face or faced similar problems. I believe reading about people’s lives and struggles helps young people understand their own capacities for change and that change is possible.



## About the Illustrators



### Matt Tavares

#### *Jack's Path of Courage*

Matt Tavares is the illustrator several books, including *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*; *Jack and the Beanstalk* written by E. Nesbit; *Iron Hans: A Grimms' Fairy Tale*, retold by Stephen Mitchell; and *Lady Liberty: A Biography*, written by Doreen Rappaport.



### Gary Kelley

#### *Eleanor, Quiet No More*

Gary Kelley earned a degree in art from the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. Among his many awards are twenty-three gold and silver medals from the Society of Illustrators and the 1991 Hamilton King Award for best illustration. Gary lives in Cedar Falls.



### Kadir Nelson

#### *Abe's Honest Words*

Kadir Nelson is the illustrator of many books for children, including *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* by Carole Boston Weatherford, an NAACP Image Award winner, a Caldecott Honor Book, and a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award winner, and *Ellington Was Not a Street* by Ntozake Shange, a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award winner. He is also the author/illustrator of *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*, which won the Sibert Medal, a Coretta Scott King Author Award, and a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor.



### Bryan Collier

#### *Martin's Big Words, John's Secret Dreams*

Caldecott Honor Book and Coretta Scott King Book Illustrator Award winner Bryan Collier has created art for many award-winning children's books, including his master achievements: *Rosa*; *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*; *Freedom River*; and *John's Secret Dreams: The Life of John Lennon*. Bryan lives in New York City with his wife and daughter.



Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, award-winning children's author and literacy specialist, created this guide.

Many more teacher's and discussion guides can be found on the Disney • Hyperion Web site at [www.disneyhyperion.com](http://www.disneyhyperion.com).

## Doreen Rappaport's Big Words Books



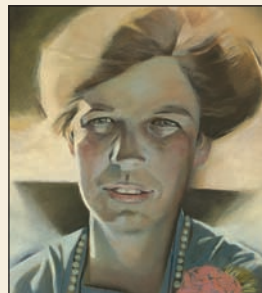
### Jack's Path of Courage The Life of John F. Kennedy

Illustrated by Matt Tavares

Tr. ed. 978-1-4231-2272-2

"This beautifully illustrated and gracefully told story serves as a superior introduction to our 35th president."

—*School Library Journal*



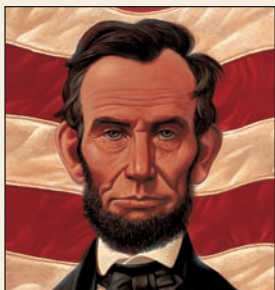
### Eleanor, Quiet No More The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt

Illustrated by Gary Kelley

Tr. ed. 978-0-7868-5141-6

★ "Once again Rappaport celebrates a noble, heroic life in powerful, succinct prose, with prominent, well-chosen, and judiciously placed quotes that both instruct and inspire."

—*School Library Journal* (starred review)



### Abe's Honest Words The Life of Abraham Lincoln

Illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Tr. ed. 978-1-4231-0408-7

★ "[A] fine celebration of a man who needs little introduction."

—*Booklist* (starred review)



### John's Secret Dreams The Life of John Lennon

Illustrated by Bryan Collier

Tr. ed. 978-0-7868-0817-5

"Striking in both its simplicity and complexity."

—*School Library Journal*



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### Martin's Big Words The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Illustrated by Bryan Collier

Tr. ed. 978-0-7868-0714-7

Pbk. ed. 978-1-4231-0635-7

★ "A stunning, reverent tribute."

—*School Library Journal*  
(starred review)

*Caldecott Honor Book*

*Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award*

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