

THESE ARE SAMPLE PAGES.

To download the full PDF, please visit: <https://dorothycottoninstitute.org/how-to-teach-freedom>

HOW TO TEACH FREEDOM

A K-12 Educational Guide to Accompany the Documentary

*Move When the Spirit Says Move:
The Legacy of Dorothy Foreman Cotton*

Written by Leslie W. Bray, M.Ed



THE DOROTHY COTTON
INSTITUTE



PHOTOSYNTHESIS
PRODUCTIONS



www.dorothycottoninstitute.org

Dorothy Cotton Institute is a project of the Center for Transformative Action

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5 Purpose

6 Overview of Documentary

8 Grades K - 2; Typically, children ages 5-7 or 8

Part 1: Biographical Information

Example Lesson Plan:

Story 1: "The Young Teacher"

Part 2: Engagement and Discussion

Part 3: Activities and Projects (K-2)

Part 4: Additional Resources (K-2)

Extended Learning

17 Grades 3 - 5, Typically Children Ages 8-10

Part 1: Biographical Information

Unit 1: Finding Her Voice (Early Life & Education)

Part 2: Engagement and Discussion

Theme 1: Leadership Through Teaching

Theme 2: Social Change

Theme 3: Civic Participation

Theme 4: Personal Transformation

Part 3: Activities and Projects (Gr 3-5)

Role-Play Scenarios: Leading Like Dorothy

Guidelines for Each Scenario:

Scenario 1: Teaching Others to Read

Scenario 2: Building Courage Through Song

Scenario 3: Working Together to Solve Problems

Scenario 4: Teaching About Rights

Follow-up Activities:

Part 4: Additional Resources:

Field Trip Destinations & Programs

Virtual Resources & Experiences

31 Grades 6-8, Typically Young People Ages 11-13

Overview of Units

Part 1: Biographical Information

In-depth exploration of her strategies and collaborations with other leaders.

Unit 1: Education as a Tool for Freedom

Lesson 1: The Power of Learning

Lesson 2: Teaching for Transformation

Lesson 3: Music and Movement

Lesson 4: Building the Network

Unit 2: Working Together for Change

Lesson 1: The Inner Circle

Lesson 2: Building Bridges

Lesson 3: The Strategy Sessions

Project-Based Learning Options

Option 1: Modern Citizenship School

Option 2: Civil Rights Leadership Documentary

Option 3: Freedom School Experience

Option 4: Movement Mapping Project

Option 5: Leaders' Collaborative

Unit 3: The Art of Teaching Freedom

Lesson 1: Breaking Down Barriers

Lesson 2: The Power of Story

Lesson 3: Teaching Through Music

Project-based Learning Options for "The Art of Teaching Freedom"

Option 1: Modern Freedom School

Option 2: Digital Teaching Archive

Option 3: Community Rights Education Campaign

Option 4: Teaching Through Art and Music

Part 2: Engagement and Discussion (Gr 6-8)

Discussion Themes: "Strategies for Change"

1. Nonviolent Direct Action vs. Other Approaches

2. Education as Strategy

3. The Role of Music and Culture

4. Building Leadership

Debate Unit & Sample Lesson Plans

Structured Debate Formats:

Lesson 1: Choosing Our Methods

Lesson 2: Education as Strategy

Lesson 3: Building Movement Power

Part 3: Activities and Projects

Research Project Themes

Pick one project theme to do a project on.

Theme 1: The Power of Citizenship Education

Theme 2: Women Leaders in the Movement

Theme 3: Teaching as Transformation

Extension Activity Options

Option 1: Modern Movement Analysis Project

Option 2: "Community Education Campaign"

Option 3: "Movement Music Project"

Part 4: Additional Resources

53 Grades 9-12, Typically Young People Ages 14+

Part 1: Biographical Information

Comprehensive analysis, including primary sources and historical context.

Section 1: Early Life & Formation of Leadership Philosophy

Lesson Title: Foundations of Leadership: Dorothy Cotton's Early Years

Research Activities:

Activity 1: Mapping Segregation in Goldsboro

Activity 2: Economic Life in 1940s Black Communities

Activity 3: Healthcare Access and Impact

Activity 4: Education Under Segregation

Section 2: Educational Journey & Transformation

Section 3: Development of Teaching Philosophy

Section 4: Leadership Role in SCLC

Part 2: Engagement and Discussion

Discussion Questions:

Essay Topics:

Part 3: Activities and Projects

Research Papers:

1. Educational Strategy

2. Leadership Analysis

3. Movement Impact

Research Paper Guidelines

Debate Topics:

1. Strategic Approaches

2. Leadership Methods

3. Contemporary Applications

Debate Guidelines

Interactive Project Ideas with Hand-on Experience with Cotton's Methods:

1. Modern Citizenship School

2. Oral History Project

3. Community Action Research

4. Music and Movement Project

5. Digital Teaching Lab

Part 4: Additional Resources

64 New York State Standards for K-12 Students*

68 North Carolina Standards for K-12 Students*

*Note: This version of the curriculum refers to both the North Carolina and the New York State Standards. If you are teaching in another state, you may find comparable standards that will apply to each grade level.

Watch the film

Learn about streaming options, screenings, and how to purchase a DVD:

www.movewhenthespiritsaysmove.com



Copyright

© Center for Transformative Action, 2025.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 License.

To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en>



Acknowledgments

Author: Leslie W. Bray, M.Ed., for this guide and its engaging lessons and activities, faithful to the popular education approach used by Dorothy Cotton in the Citizenship Education Program. Thanks to Mrs. Aljosie Harding, National Advisor and “pollinator” who introduced DCI to Leslie.

Graphic design: by Shira Evergreen: upliftedithaca.com whose fresh, beautiful, accessible and unpretentious art lights up Ithaca and beyond and speaks to everybody.

Background page illustrations: by Camilo Nascimento: camilographics.com for use of his evocative original drawings from the documentary.

Photos: Dorothy Cotton Institute; Ms. Cotton's personal photo collection; stills from the film provided by Ry Ferro; and photos of the SCLC, 1961-63, from the Bob Fitch Collection at the Stanford University Library; stock photos from Pexels.com

Contributors and editors: Laura Branca Project Director and Senior Fellow; and Ann W. Martin, DCI Steering Committee/Advisor.

The Film: *Move When the Spirit Says Move: the Legacy of Dorothy Foreman Cotton*, directed and edited by Deborah Hoard and Ry Ferro, PhotoSynthesis Productions: pspny.com, in happy and fortuitous collaboration with Dorothy Cotton Institute and the Center for Transformative Action.

Funders: In addition to many individual and group donations to make our film, we thank the Park Foundation for two major grants for film production, plus a third grant for educational materials to go with the film. 1) *How to Teach Freedom*, 2) *two DCI Discussion Guides for after-film reflection* 3) *a college-level course* designed by DCI advisors, Dr. Ann W. Martin and Dr. Belisa Gonzalez.

Many Contributors to our film: for the personal memories and insights shared on-camera, and your behind-the-scenes feedback and guidance. Your stories show us Dorothy's humanity and power, adding depth, humor, color, history and wisdom to our film.

- **Dorothy's Family and Friends:** Bishop William Barber, Ava Barbry Crawford, Gwen Perry, Jerry R. Barbry, Juanita Gibbs, Tony Genslen, Millicent Clark-Maynard, Mimi Melegrito, Dr. Nia Nunn, Cal Walker, Kofi Acree, Aloja Airewele, and Rabbi Brian Walt.
- **National Advisors and Interviewees:** Ms. LaTosha Brown, Dr. Clayborne Carson, Jeff Furman, Mrs. Aljosie Harding, Prof. Bob Harris, Rev. Lucas Johnson, Rev. Bernard Lafayette, Rev. Carolyn McKinstry, and Ambassador Andrew Young.
- **Highlander Center:** Tufara Muhammad, Ash-Lee Woodard Henderson, Allyn Maxfield-Steele.
- **DCI Senior Fellows and Advisors:** Laura Branca, Dr. Margo Hittleman and the late Kirby Edmonds. Dr. Ann W. Martin, Dr. Sofia Villenas, and Dr. Belisa Gonzalez
- **Distinguished Fellow and Co-Founder:** Deep appreciation for the late Ms. Dorothy Foreman Cotton, with the strongest voice in the film, for her inspiring legacy and being a “Ready Girl” who moved, when the Spirit said Move!

HOW TO TEACH FREEDOM

A K-12 Educational Guide to Accompany the Documentary

Move When the Spirit Says Move: The legacy of Dorothy Foreman Cotton

Purpose

To offer teachers, parents and young people more ways to understand the life and work of Dorothy Cotton.

This guide is a doorway, an entry point, to which deeper discovery and exploration can be made based upon interest and ability. The examples of lessons, activities, discussions and other hands-on projects are shared to offer participants more ways to engage with history and make their own mark upon it.

The resources shared are starting places for further research and understanding. As a living resource, more links, photos and offerings will be added as they are found, suggested and used.

This guide is divided and grouped into sections that match the typical grade levels (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12). Activities are matched to corresponding education standards for the state of North Carolina. It provides a progression of social studies standards from K-12, with particular focus on topics that align with Dorothy F. Cotton's story and the Civil Rights Movement.

Key themes that emerge across grade levels include

1. Understanding cultural practices and diversity
2. Civic engagement and participation
3. Rights and responsibilities of citizens
4. Impact of individuals and groups on historical change
5. Evolution of freedom, equality, and justice
6. Study of discrimination, resistance, and reform

The standards become progressively more complex and analytical as students advance, moving from

- Basic understanding of rules and fairness (K-2)
- Introduction to civic participation and cultural diversity (3-5)
- Analysis of historical events and social movements (6-8)
- Critical evaluation of American identity, civil rights, and social justice (9-12)

Overview of Documentary

This powerful documentary tells the story of Dorothy F. Cotton, a crucial but often overlooked leader in the Civil Rights Movement who served as the Education Director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The documentary reveals several key themes and aspects of her work:

1. The Citizenship Education Program (CEP):

- Dorothy Cotton led and expanded what became known as “the best kept secret of the Civil Rights Movement.”
- The CEP Dorothy Cotton focused on teaching literacy, civic engagement, constitutional rights and the principles of nonviolence.
- Dorothy Cotton and her colleagues empowered people to understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens.
- Dorothy Cotton trained local leaders who would return to their communities to teach others.

2. Dorothy Cotton’s Teaching Philosophy: employed the principles of Popular Education, developed by Septima Clark, Esau Jenkins and Myles Horton at the Highlander Folk School. Popular Education:

- Engaged learners as people with lived experience and expertise on the race- and class-based violence and barriers to full citizenship that they faced, and the basic freedoms they were seeking.
- Met people where they are, affirmed their assets as respected community members, validated what they already knew, and “un-brainwashed” them of false, negative internalized beliefs about themselves.
- Nurtured people’s capacities
 - to work collectively to solve their own problems,
 - to exercise their constitutional rights,
 - to move from a “victim” mindset to one of “agency” and “full citizenship”
- Emphasized personal transformation and empowerment.
- Used storytelling and shared experiences to build connections.
- Taught that every person had innate leadership potential.
- Combined practical skills (literacy, voter registration) with deeper understanding of democracy. and the principles and strategies of nonviolent direct action for racial justice.



Part 2: Engagement and Discussion

Prompts for further exploration

Lesson Duration: 45-60 minutes each

A. Circle Time Discussions

Theme: Basic discussions on fairness, equality, and community helpers

1. Community Helpers (Based on Dorothy's work)

- Who helps in our community?
- How do teachers help us?
- What makes someone a good helper? Connect to documentary: Dorothy's work teaching others

2. Working Together (From documentary's citizenship schools)

- How can we help each other learn?
- What can we do when something is hard?
- Why is it important to encourage others? Sample prompt: "Remember how Dorothy helped others learn to read? How do you help your friends?"

3. Music and Movement Discussions

- How does singing make us feel brave?
- Why did Dorothy use songs to teach?
- When do we sing together? Include songs from documentary: "When the Spirit Says Move"



Part 4: Additional Resources

Media and field trip ideas

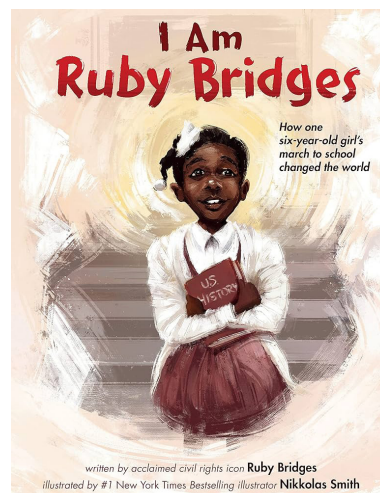
A. Book Recommendations

1. For Students:

- *I Am Ruby Bridges* by Ruby Bridges
- *Martin's Big Words* by Doreen Rappaport
- *The Story Of Martin Luther King Jr.* by Johnny Ray Moore
- *The Youngest Marcher* by Cynthia Levinson
- *We Shall Overcome* by Bryan Collier
- *Let Freedom Sing* by Vanessa Brantley-Newton
- *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer* by Carole Boston Weatherford

2. For Teachers:

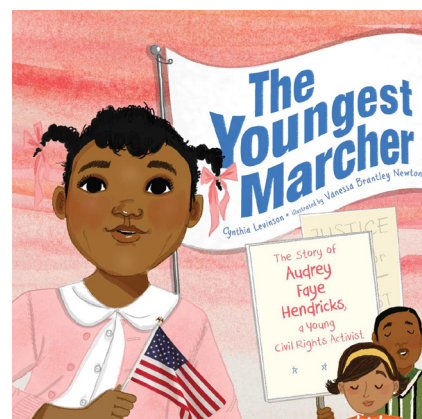
- Citizenship Education Program materials (simplified):
https://www.crmvet.org/docs/cit_schools_brochure.pdf
- Civil Rights songs collection:
<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLb0F4Ln35b3iQULEC-R3fQP4-RZ1ihh0PY&si=9GXs0cWyByLEANLX>
- Picture books about community helpers



B. Multimedia Resources

Age-appropriate video clips showing:

1. Community helpers
2. Children working together
3. Simple civil rights history
 - *Can Children Help?*
<https://youtu.be/8b3Y9xVvQzw?si=tIb6MHA6lErZ7BT2>
 - *What Is Segregation?*
https://youtu.be/cgjDPa15NLs?si=Na9MD_McDWL0yJmn



C. Parent Resources

Discussion Guides:

- How to talk about helping others:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DIDXuGMvMsW6Za8B-Kn558zwqYP2UrxzH6ErQE9vaBIg/edit?usp=sharing>
- Ways to encourage learning at home:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NCx4g7xQOYIQAuE67Ftk-F61ovE82ZuftihbC2kqsfr0/edit?usp=sharing>
- Activities for family involvement:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ctrWzmyyp6IXEHoN8aok-1jrVpyYPQsfZqMt1NtiUaygo/edit?usp=sharing>

D. Field Trip Ideas

Local Connections:

- Visit community helper locations
- Local civil rights landmarks
- Libraries and learning centers

