



Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Monthly Featured Book: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter™: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in ADL Education's programs. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Unstoppable: How Bayard Rustin Organized the 1963 March on Washington

Michael G. Long (Author) and Bea Jackson (Illustrator).

Bayard Rustin was a troublemaker. He spent his life disrupting racism and prejudice with nonviolent direct action. He organized protests against war, nuclear weapons, racial segregation and discrimination. He was a friend and mentor to Martin Luther King Jr., and he was unapologetically gay and Black. When Bayard and his mentor, A. Philip Randolph, set out to organize the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Bayard was targeted by those who wished to see the movement fail. But Bayard Rustin would not be stopped. With the support of Dr. King and future congressman John Lewis, Bayard organized the largest protest in civil rights history.

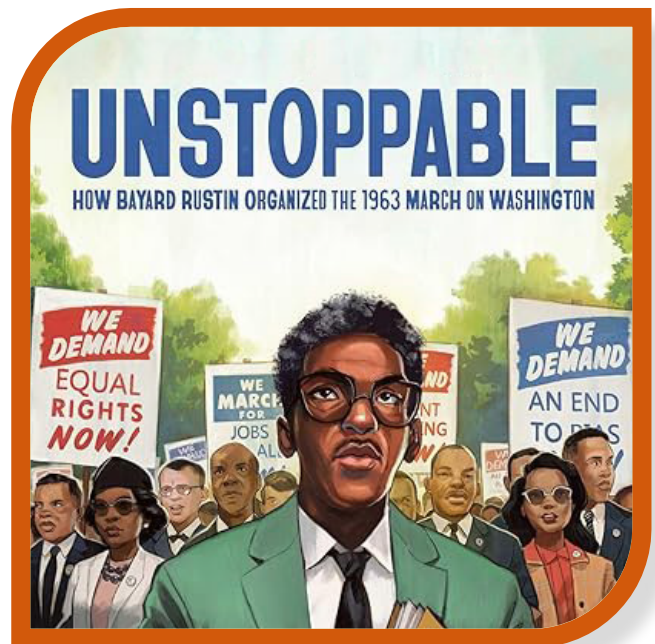
ISBN: 978-1499812060

Publisher: little bee books

Year Published: 2023

Age Range: 6-10

(Note: Compelling picture books can be used with all ages of students.)



Book Themes

Activism, Civil Rights, Nonviolence, Social Justice, "Troublemakers"

Key Words

Discuss and define the words below with students prior to reading the book. Rather than focus on students' retention of all the words, make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind students of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|----------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| ■ activist | ■ demand | ■ inspired | ■ peaceful | ■ separate |
| ■ arrested | ■ dignity | ■ justice | ■ politicians | ■ strikes |
| ■ celebrate | ■ discrimination | ■ march | ■ powerful | ■ troublemaker |
| ■ challenging | ■ equality | ■ nonviolent | ■ protest | ■ unjust |
| ■ civil rights | ■ freely | ■ officials | ■ respect | ■ violent |
| ■ congressman | ■ gay | ■ organizer | ■ segregation | |

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Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- Look at the cover of the book. Who and what do you see?
- What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- Based on the cover and the title, what do you think the book will be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers:

- Why was Bayard arrested? (Page 4)
- Why do you think the march was called "The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom?" (Page 14)
- Who did the staff and volunteers call to tell them about the March on Washington? (Page 21)

After reading the book aloud, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- The first sentence of the book reads, "Bayard Rustin was a troublemaker." What do you think the author means by "troublemaker" here?
- How does Bayard feel about the segregation (separating Black and white people in public places) policies where he grew up? What does Bayard do about it?
- What do Bayard Rustin and his mentor, A. Philip Randolph, dream about in terms of discrimination and fairness?
- In what ways was Bayard Rustin inspired by Mohandas Gandhi from India?
- What were the purpose, goal and demands of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom?
- How did Bayard's being gay impact whether some powerful people wanted to work with him or not? What do you think about this?
- How did Bayard and the volunteers and staff organize the event? Have you ever helped organize an event? What was involved in the planning?
- Why was nonviolence an important part of addressing racism and discrimination to Bayard and others?
- How did you feel when you learned that 250,000 people attended the march? Were you surprised or not surprised?
- How do you think Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph felt when the march was over? What were their reflections about the march?
- How would you describe Bayard Rustin in just a few words?
- What did you learn about Bayard Rustin and the March on Washington after reading the book? What else do you want to know?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What does "unstoppable" mean to you? Why do you think the author used the word unstoppable in the title of the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. How Do Illustrations Help to Tell the Story?

Ask students: *When you read a picture book, what role do the pictures/illustrations play? How do the illustrations help tell the story?* Consider reading the book first without reading the words at all. Instead, do a “picture walk” through the pages of the book and have students enjoy, appreciate and interpret the pictures on the page before reading the book’s words. If you’ve already read the book together, re-read the book and this time, cover up (or don’t read) the words and just have students look at the illustrations. As you look at each page, ask students what is going on in the picture, what they see and don’t see, how they think the characters are feeling and why, what the signs say, and how the plot is moving along. Ask some/all of the following questions as you “read” the pictures: *What’s going on in this picture? Who is here? What do you notice? What do you wonder? What is this character thinking? How does this character feel and how do you know? What do you think will happen next? What do you want to happen next?* Debrief this experience by asking what students learned from reading the pictures without the words and exploring the power of illustrations.

If time permits, engage students in a process where they (either alone or in pairs) create their own wordless picture book. The wordless picture book can contain just a few pages or be longer (a full picture book is typically 32 pages). Students can plan out their wordless picture book by deciding what the book is about, the plot or storyline, the characters and what each page will express to move the plot along. Then they can draw the pictures and put it all together, sharing their books with each other and you can consider having students share their books with younger students in the school.

2. What is Activism?

Ask students: *What is an activist? What examples of activism did you see in the book?* Explain/elicite a definition of activist as follows: “A person who uses or supports actions to bring about change in their community or the world.” Ask: *Is Bayard Rustin an activist? How about the other characters in the book? How do you know? What made them want to get involved in activism?* Explain that there are many ways to be an activist/engage in activism. Read aloud or summarize the article [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#) and ask: *Which of these ideas do you already know about? Which are new for you? Which of these were used in the book by Bayard or the other activists?* If time permits, brainstorm a list of current-day civil rights/social justice issues that are important to students. Engage students in a discussion about their interest and willingness to get more involved in activism around the issue. Elicit from them the risk that is sometimes involved in activism and what their experiences may be. Discuss possible ideas from the handout they could use. If appropriate, implement some of these ideas or connect to a local organization that works on an issue of interest and take steps to actively involve students.

3. Learn More about Bayard Rustin

Ask students: *Who was Bayard Rustin? What did you learn about Bayard Rustin by reading the book?* Together read the Author’s Note on pages 31-32 to learn more about him. Elicit and share some/all of the following information about Bayard Rustin:

- Bayard Rustin was born in 1912 in Pennsylvania.
- He began his lifelong civil rights activism work after moving to New York in the 1930s, where he was involved in early civil rights activism.
- Combining nonviolent resistance with organizational skills, he was a key adviser to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the mid-1950s.

- He and labor leader A. Philip Randolph came up with the idea and led the organizing effort for the 1963 March on Washington. It was one of the largest peaceful demonstrations in U.S. history and paved the way for passing important laws about civil rights.
- Bayard Rustin often worked behind the scenes not only because of his race but also because he was gay. Engage students in learning more about Bayard Rustin by watching and discussing [this video](#).

If time permits, have students conduct research about him by using these and other online resources from [Fact Monster](#), [Kids Britannica](#), [History](#) and [Biography](#). *Rustin*, a film about his life, was released in 2024. Here is a [trailer of the film](#) (note that the film is rated PG-13).

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and other educational resources on activism, social justice and the Civil Rights Movement.

Curriculum Resources

10 Ideas for Teaching Black History Month <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/10-ideas-teaching-black-history-month>

Bellen Woodard, Identity and "Crayon Activism" <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/bellen-woodard-identity-and-crayon-activism>

Judy Heumann and Disability Rights Activism <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/judy-heumann-and-disability-rights-activism>

Martin Luther King, Jr. and Civil Rights: Relevancy for Today <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/martin-luther-king-jr-and-civil-rights-relevancy-today>

The Selma to Montgomery March for Voting Rights <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/selma-montgomery-march-voting-rights>

Websites

10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/10-ways-youth-can-engage-activism>

Civil Rights Movement <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/civil-rights-movement>

LGBTQ+ Pride Month <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/lgbtq-pride-month-and-education-resources>

The Purpose and Power of Protest <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/purpose-and-power-protest>

Children's Books

Books about Civil Rights <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1653>

Books about Social Justice <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1583>