



MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY RECOMMENDED BOOK LIST

From our consultants at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore

Age 4 to Age 14

Visit your local library to read these books with your children or purchase them from Amazon via the online links listed below for your reference.

Titles for Younger Children

1. [My Uncle Martin's Big Heart](#). Angela Farris Watkins. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2010. Ages 4-8. Martin Luther King Jr.'s niece offers an affectionate tribute to her famous uncle. An unusual and humanizing perspective and handsome, realistic art makes this accessible for the youngest readers.
2. [These Hands](#). Margaret H. Mason. New York: Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2011. Ages 4-8. A grandfather tenderly shares with his grandson the many skills of his hands, even though, in recent memory, they could not touch the dough in the Wonder Bread factory. The story of how those hands joined in union activism makes a moving study of multigenerational relationships and triumph over discrimination.
3. [Belle, the Last Mule at Gee's Bend](#). Calvin Alexander Ramsey. Somerville, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 2011. Ages 5-8. Miz Pettaway explains that her mule has the run of her garden because she deserves it. Ol' Belle not only transported people a half-day's journey around the river to register to vote when the white sheriff closed down the ferry, but also helped pull the wagon that took the coffin of the slain Dr. King through the streets of Atlanta.
4. [Ron's Big Mission. Rose Blue](#). New York: Dutton, 2009. Ages 5-8. Nine year old Ron desegregates his Lake City, South Carolina public library in the 1950's through peaceful resistance. This is a powerful, if fictionalized, account of a true incident in the Civil Rights—era childhood of Challenger astronaut Ron McNair.

Early Elementary Titles

1. [Child of the Civil Rights Movement](#). Paula Young Shelton. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books, 2010. Ages 5-9. Finding simple language to explain the complexity of injustice and oppression to children is challenging. The author, daughter of Civil Rights leader, Andrew Young, smoothly threads together honest, personal anecdotes, including her participation as a four-year-old in the Selma-Montgomery march, with the hope that inspired activists to continue their efforts.
2. [Back of the Bus](#). Aaron Reynolds. New York: Philomel Books, 2010. Ages 6-8. While a perceptive boy sits with his mother in the rear of the bus, lyrical, yet forceful, language conveys his apprehension and Rosa Parks' calm resolve. Warm, lifelike portraits that convincingly evoke the era, the intense emotional pitch of this incident, and the everyday heroism it embodied add up to a child's eye view of history.

3. [As Good As Anybody: Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel's Amazing March Toward Freedom](#). Richard Michelson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008. Ages 7-10. Martin Luther King Jr. and Polish rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who fled Nazi Germany, both grew up in loving, religious households, where each was taught clear messages about self-respect. Chronicling their parallel experiences, we see both men driven to fight bigotry in all its forms, and in a closing image, King and Heschel walk arm in arm in the 1965 March to Montgomery.
4. [Ruth and the Green Book](#). Calvin Alexander Ramsey. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, 2010. Ages 7-10. When African American travelers in the "Jim Crow South" faced blatant discrimination in the early 1950's, the Negro Motorist Green Book listed black-owned gas stations, restaurants, and hotels that offered support and assistance. When Ruth travels from Chicago to Atlanta with her family, the little green book leads them to safe havens along the way and gives the reader a peak at a little known moment in American history.

Upper Elementary Titles

1. [March On!: The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World](#). Christine King Farris. New York: Scholastic Press, 2008. Ages 8-12. Martin Luther King Jr.'s older sister, Christine King Farris (author of *My Brother Martin, A Sister Remembers*, New York: Aladdin, 2005) chronicles the events leading up and including the day when her brother led the march on Washington. The author's unique perspective on the subject makes the skillfully embedded facts compelling, particularly the description of the night he wrote his famous speech.
2. [Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down](#). Andrea Davis Pinkney. New York: Little, Brown, 2010. Ages 8-12. A compelling picture book recreates the renowned 1960 sit-in staged by four black college students at a Greensboro "whites only" lunch counter. This famous act of civil disobedience is conveyed in a reader friendly text with visuals that almost make the lunch counter itself a character, dominating the scenes, lengthening and swirling as the movement grows, finally, in a climactic foldout, forming a highway rolling toward justice.
3. [Birmingham Sunday](#). Larry Dane Brimner. Honesdale, Pennsylvania: Calkins Creek, 2010. Ages 10-14. This moving photo-essay is a factually accurate look at the Birmingham, Alabama, Baptist Church bombing that killed four young girls in 1963. It sets the shocking assassination of the children within a general overview of both the racist segregation of the times and the struggle against it.
4. [We Troubled the Waters](#). Ntozake Shange. New York: Amistad Collins, 2009. Ages 10-14. This unflinchingly honest collection of haunting poems confronts the hatred and brutality that the Civil Rights Movement challenged. Expressive acrylic paintings paired with the poems show the harrowing violence of lynching, the dignity of the common man, and the palpable outrage of Civil Rights icons.

Special thanks to Selma K. Levi, Children's Department Manager at Enoch Pratt Free Library/State Library Resource Center, for her assistance in compiling this book list.

Freedom's Feast Favorites

1. [Martin's Big Words](#) by Doreen Rappaport. New York: Hyperion 2007. Ages 5-9. Enjoy the Pratt Library reading of this book on our site. A lovely biographical account of Martin Luther King's life weaving facts and famous speeches to tell the story.

2. [Freedom Summer](#) by Deborah Wiles. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001. Ages 5-8. A gentle but truthful representation of the challenges of living with new civil rights legislation in a small southern community. Two boys, one white and the other black, are best friends. They are very excited that they can now enjoy all their favorite activities publicly. They learn how hard it is for adults to learn new behavior even when the laws have changed.

3. [Through My Eyes](#) by Ruby Bridges. Scholastic Press, 1999. Ages 9 and up. An autobiographical account of Ruby's year of attending school by herself to integrate the New Orleans School system. We used this book and its photos to introduce our MLK day arts activities at the Children's Museum of Manhattan during our Raising Citizens project. It stimulated wonderful discussions and interactions.

