

STUDY GUIDE



Inspired by *Warriors Don't Cry*
A Little Rock Nine Memoir by
Dr. Melba Pattillo Beals

Co-conceived and written by
Donnetta Lavinia Grays

Original music by
Toshi Reagon

Co-conceived and directed by
Tamilla Woodard

A co-production of
TheaterWorksUSA and The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts

This study guide was designed by The Bushnell to help prepare students for viewing Warriors. Much of the language in the play comes directly from the memoir, including language that is historically accurate for the period. The word "nigger," which is used throughout the memoir, is excluded from the play.

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BIOGRAPHIES

DR. MELBA PATTILLO BEALS (Author) – Melba began her work as a champion for civil rights at the young age of 15 when she became one of the Little Rock Nine who first integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. An acclaimed journalist, she’s a former NBC news reporter and has worked for ABC Radio and *People* magazine. Her memoir, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, has sold over a million copies. In her newest book, *March Forward, Girl*, published in 2018, she reflects on what makes one young girl stand up against the injustice around her.

In recognition of her role as one of the Little Rock Nine, Melba and the rest of the Nine received this country’s highest recognition, the Congressional Gold Medal. A mother of three and a retired university professor, she now lives in California. You can learn more about Melba’s life and work at melbapatillobeals.com.



DONNETTA LAVINIA GRAYS (Playwright) – raised in Columbia, South Carolina, Donnetta is a Brooklyn based playwright and actor. Plays include *Where We Stand* (world premiere co-production, WP Theater and Baltimore Centerstage; O’Neill Center National Playwrights Conference semifinalist), *Last Night and the Night Before* (world premiere, Denver Center for the Performing Arts; National Theater Conference Barrie and Bernice Stavis Playwright Award; Kilroys List; Todd McNerney National Playwriting Award; O’Neill Center National Playwrights Conference semifinalist), *Laid To Rest* (Playwrights Realm Writing Fellow finalist; O’Neill Center National Playwrights Conference finalist; Kilroys List, honorable mention; Ground Floor at Berkeley Rep; Space on Ryder Farm Creative Residency), and *The Review* (WP Pipeline Festival; O’Neill Center National Playwrights Conference finalist).

Donnetta is an alumna of Space on Ryder Farm Working Farm Residency, Time Warner Foundation WP Playwrights Lab, Civilians R&D Group, Actors Studio Playwright/Directors Unit and terraNova Collective’s Groundbreakers Playwright group. She is the inaugural recipient of the Doric Wilson Independent Playwright Award. Her plays have been developed with New Harmony Project, Berkeley Rep, Labyrinth Theater, New York Theater Workshop, Orlando Shakespeare Theater, Portland Stage Company, Pure Theatre, Naked Angels and Classical Theater of Harlem. Donnetta holds Commissions from Steppenwolf, The Public Theater’s Mobile Unit, Denver Center for

the Performing Arts, WP Theater and Theaterworks USA. She is currently a Staff Writer for TV's *Y: The Last Man* on the FX Network and formerly *Manhunt: Lone Wolf* for Spectrum Originals/Lionsgate.

Her acting credits include Broadway's *In the Next Room Or the Vibrator Play*. She has originated roles in numerous notable New York theater appearance including *O, Earth* (The Foundry Theatre), *Men On Boats* (Playwrights Horizons/Clubbed Thumb) *Of Government* and *16 Words or Less* (Clubbed Thumb), *Be the Death of Me* and *In the Footprint* (The Civilians- as an Associate Artist), and *Shipwrecked! An Entertainment* (Primary Stages). Regionally, she has enjoyed runs at American Conservatory Theater, Barrington Stage, Westport Country Playhouse, Arena Stage, Hartford Theaterworks, Portland Stage Company, Baltimore Centerstage, Huntington Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival and LA Women's Shakespeare Co. She is a two-time Connecticut Critic's Circle Award Winner and Helen Hayes Award Nominee. Her film and TV credits include *THE Book of Henry* (with Naomi Watts), *Wild Canaries*, *The English Teacher* (with Jullianne Moore), *The Wrestler* (opposite Mickey Rourke and Evan Rachel Wood). She's enjoyed recurring roles on *New Amsterdam*, *Happy*, *Rubicon*, *Mercy* and *Law and Order: SVU*. She has had guest starring roles on *High Maintenance*, *The Night Of*, *Blue Bloods*, *The Blacklist*, *A Gifted Man*, *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: CI* and *The Sopranos*.

www.donnettagrays.com.



TAMILLA WOODARD (Director) – Tamilla is the Associate Director of Broadway's *Hadestown*, winner of eight Tony Awards, including Best Musical. She is the Associate Artistic Director of WP Theater (Formerly Women's Project) and co-founder of PopUP Theatrics, which has created immersive and participatory theatre for audiences in Europe, South America, Mexico and the US since 2007.

She is a 2014-2016 Time Warner Fellow at WP Theater Director's Lab, an alumnus of The Lincoln Center Director's Lab, Usual Suspect at New York Theatre Workshop and a graduate of The Yale School of Drama. Her work has been seen at A.C.T., The Atlantic Theatre Company, The Working Theater, The Classical Theatre of

Harlem, New York Theater Workshop, HERE Arts Center, New Georges, Culture Project, Cleveland Public Theater, Salt Lake Acting Company, The Actors Theatre of Louisville, The Kitchen Theatre, and at festivals and theaters Internationally.

Recently named in American Theatre Magazine as one of Six Theater Workers to Watch, Tamilla is also the recipient of The Josephine Abady Award from The League of Professional Theatre Women, The Charles Bowden Award from New Dramatists and an Off Broadway Alliance Award for Best Family Show.

PRE-SHOW SUMMARY

Summary (in Melba's Words):

"During my junior year in high school, I lived at the center of a violent civil rights conflict. In 1954, the Supreme Court had decreed an end to segregated schools. Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus and states' rights segregationists defied that ruling. President Eisenhower was compelled to confront Faubus – to use U. S. soldiers to force him to obey the law of the land. It was a historic confrontation that generated worldwide attention. At the center of the controversy were nine black children who only wanted to have the opportunity for a better education."

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

Leading Up to the integration of Little Rock's Central High School

1896: *Plessy vs. Ferguson*: Supreme Court Case upholding the constitutionality of racial segregation.



1914: Charles Hamilton Houston graduates valedictorian from Amherst, becomes the first black editor of the *Harvard Law Review* and writes, "Education is preparation for the competition of life." As a lawyer, he devotes his life to overturning the *Plessy* decision and ending Jim Crow laws.

1934: Houston, a leading member of the NAACP, takes it upon himself to train a group of young black lawyers in civil rights law. He takes them on the road to document the reality of "separate but equal" in the south. Armed with a typewriter and a camera, the

group slept in cars and ate fruit when hotels and restaurants refused to serve them. One of Houston's best students, Thurgood Marshall, would go on to win 29 of the 30 cases he argued (including *Brown vs. the Board of Education*) and was the first black Supreme Court Justice.

1947: Levi Pearson of South Carolina, tired of seeing his children walk 9 miles to school when the state would only provide buses for white children, files a lawsuit against the school district. Thurgood Marshall is his attorney.



1950s: Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark conduct [experiments](#) with white and black baby dolls. When asked which doll was “prettier” or “had the smartest friends,” black children pointed to the white doll.



1954: Thurgood Marshall (center) cites the Clarks’ research and argues before the Supreme Court that racial segregation damages the self-esteem of young black children. In the photograph here, Marshall celebrates his victory in *Brown vs. Board*, when the Supreme Court put a unanimous end to segregation **“with all deliberate speed.”** Unfortunately, this vague phrasing of this legislation afforded segregationists the time to organize a violent resistance.

1955: The School Board in Little Rock, Arkansas votes to adopt a plan of gradual integration beginning in September, 1957 (three years after segregation became illegal).

January, 1956: NAACP officials attempt to register 27 black students in all-white Little Rock schools but are rejected.

February, 1956: NAACP files a lawsuit on behalf of 33 black children denied admission to four white schools. Eventually, an appeal is successful and a federal judge is forced to order integration to proceed.

September 24: Little Rock's mayor Woodrow Mann sends a telegram to President Eisenhower explaining the situation:
"The mob that gathered was no spontaneous assembly. It was agitated, aroused and assembled by a concerted plan of action."

As bomb threats and lynch mobs continued to threaten the lives of blacks, Mann desperately wires the President again:
"I am pleading to you...in the interest of humanity, law and order and...democracy worldwide to provide the necessary troops within several hours."



September 25th: Eisenhower sends the 101st Airborne Division to escort the Little Rock Nine to school (above).

Though forced to obey the Supreme Court ruling, President Eisenhower didn't support *Brown vs. Board of Education*. He later confided to his secretary that the case had created "the most important problem facing the government, domestically, today."

[Marshall](#) later said, "[Little Rock was] a black mark on President Eisenhower, and there's nothing in his record that would correct it, in my book."

MUSIC IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

African American spirituals, gospel and folk music all played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement. Singers and musicians collaborated with song collectors to disseminate songs to activists, both at large meetings and through publications. They sang these songs for multiple purposes: to motivate them through long marches, for

psychological strength against harassment and brutality, and sometimes to simply pass the time when waiting for something to happen.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called music the “soul of the movement” and claimed that music played a “strong and vital role in our struggle.”

Let's examine what music was like during this time and then talk about specific songs and musicians that encouraged those around them:

1) Perhaps the most well-known song of the movement, “**We Shall Overcome**,” showcases the adaptability not only of the music but also of the movement itself. The civil rights anthem has its roots in the 19th century hymn, “I’ll Overcome Someday.” During the time between the world wars African American tobacco workers changed the song slightly to the now known title. Some of those workers performed the song for Zilphia Horton of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. Highlander was a hotbed for labor activism and progressive democratic reform in the south well before the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum. Horton showed the song to political activist Pete Seeger who added a few of his own lyrics before Highlander musical director Guy Carawan promoted the song as a mobilizing force for racial equality in the late 50s.

During the civil rights campaign in Albany, Alabama in the early 60s Bernice Johnson Reagon and other black activists involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) transformed the song once again by slowing it down, adding syncopated rhythms, and other elements of black gospel to give us the iconic version we think of today along with other classic civil rights protest songs such as “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize,” “This Little Light of Mine,” “Oh Freedom,” and “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Us Around.”

2) John Coltrane wrote “**Alabama**” after the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four young black girls in 1963. The instrumental utilizes jazz aesthetics to evoke the anger and sadness over the senseless killings in a way that perhaps no lyric could convey. Coltrane also reportedly used cadences from Martin Luther King’s eulogy in the song.

3) In 1965 rock & roll pioneer Chuck Berry released a song called “**Promised Land**” that tells the story of a “poor boy” who leaves his home in Norfolk, Virginia to try and make it big in Los Angeles. He boards a Greyhound bus that takes him through many of the cities and towns where the Freedom Riders had encountered resistance and violence a few years before the song’s release. The bus on which Berry’s protagonist rides bypasses the town of Rock Hill, South Carolina where the Riders first encountered armed white resistance but makes a note of Alabama where the worst violence was experienced in Anniston, Birmingham, and Montgomery with the lines “had most trouble/it turned into a struggle/hallway across Alabam.”

4) Mahalia Jackson, often referred to as “The Queen of Gospel” performed at The March on Washington just before Dr. King delivered his speech. She sang the songs “**How I Got Over**” and “**I’ve Been Buked And I’ve Been Scorned.**” Mahalia also urged King to deviate from his planned speech that was originally titled “Normalcy, Never Again” by making the comment to King, “Tell them about the dream, Martin.”

5) Nina Simone defied genre classifications by tackling a variety of genres from jazz, blues and gospel, to pop and classical. She also defied racial inequality with the song “**Mississippi Goddamn,**” a rebuke of the Jim Crow South that also championed the resilience of African Americans in the face of adversity. The song would herald a shift in the movement as well as it turned more toward black pride and empowerment in the late 60s and 70s with songs like Aretha Franklin’s version of Otis Redding’s “Respect.”

[Learn more about music of the Civil Rights Movement](#)

How to be a Social Activist

Our country has a long history of youth-led movements that brought about significant social change. Young people have advocated for child labor laws, voting rights, civil rights, school desegregation, immigration reform and LGBT rights. Through their actions, the world has changed. Because young people often have the desire, energy and idealism to do something about the injustice they see in the world, they are powerful agents for change. Here are some ways to engage in activism:

Educate Others

This can include school assemblies, community forums, teach-ins, peer-to-peer programs and social media forums. Include opportunities to share the information in interesting ways (written, art, theatre, etc.) and they should also give other students the chance to explore their own thoughts and feelings about the topics.

Advocate for legislation

Change comes about in a variety of ways and one of these is through legislative change. Push for legislation by working with other groups with similar goals, building coalitions and writing letters to their legislators to advocate for specific local, state and federal laws.

Run for Office

Student government provides a chance for students to have a positive impact in their school and learn about how government works on a small scale.

Demonstrate

Marching in the streets enables students to express themselves while meeting and connecting with other people who feel passionate about the same issues.

Demonstrations and protests can be uplifting and empowering and can help students feel like they are part of a larger movement.

Create a public awareness campaign that includes social media

There are many ways to develop or participate in a public awareness campaign. Educating people about an issue in order to inspire change can take place in school, in the community and online.

Engage in community service

In addition to organizing and advocating on a large scale, students should be encouraged to engage in community service on issues they care about.

VOCABULARY

Segregate To separate or isolate from others or from a main body or group
To impose the separation of a race or class from the rest of society

Integrate To make into a whole, unify
To join with something else, unite
To open to people of all races or ethnic groups without restriction

NAACP

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People—the nation’s oldest and largest civil rights organization

Jim Crow

A degrading name for black people based on a minstrel show stock character commonly portrayed by white people in “blackface” (clownish black makeup). These stereotypes were created to portray blacks as lazy, stupid, less than human, and therefore worthy of racial segregation. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4xBAxmVRY&feature=related>

Jim Crow Laws

Named for the black caricature, these laws prohibited blacks from using the same public schools, transportation, and accommodations as whites.

The Doctrine of Separate But Equal

The notion that separating whites and blacks meant they would enjoy equal opportunities. Thurgood Marshall put an end to Jim Crow laws by addressing the reality of this notion.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES FROM THE PLAY

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School

On February 14, 2018, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida gained national attention when a shooting occurred at the campus, leaving 17 dead and 17 more wounded. The alleged gunman, who was a former student at the school, was apprehended hours later. Students from Stoneman Douglas were instrumental in changing Florida law, on March 4, 2018, to raise the legal rifle-owner age from 18 to 21, with a three-day wait, after they had helped to organize nationwide student protests, following the shooting.

The Stonewall Riots

The Stonewall riots (also referred to as the Stonewall uprising or the Stonewall rebellion) were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the gay (LGBT) community against a police raid that began in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Manhattan, New York City. They are widely considered to constitute the most important event leading to the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for LGBT rights in the United States.

Claudette Colvin

Claudette Colvin (born September 5, 1939)^[1] is a retired American nurse aide who was a pioneer of the 1950s civil rights movement. On March 2, 1955, she was arrested at the age of 15 in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat to a white woman on a crowded, segregated bus. This occurred some nine months before the more widely known incident in which Rosa Parks, secretary of the local chapter of the NAACP, helped spark the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott.

Emma González

Emma González (born November 11, 1999) is an American activist and advocate for gun control. As a high school senior she survived the February 2018 Stoneman

Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, and in response co-founded the gun-control advocacy group Never Again MSD. González gave a viral speech against gun violence, proclaiming "We call B.S." on the lack of action by politicians funded by the NRA.[8] Subsequently, González continued to be an outspoken activist on gun control, making high profile media appearances and helping organize the March for Our Lives. Speaking at the demonstration, González led a moment of silence for the victims of the massacre; she stood on stage for six minutes, which she observed was the length of the shooting spree itself.

Sylvia Mendez

Sylvia Mendez (born June 7, 1936) is an American civil rights activist of Mexican-Puerto Rican heritage. At age eight, she played an instrumental role in the *Mendez v. Westminster* case, the landmark desegregation case of 1946, which paved the way for integration and the American civil rights movement. Mendez grew up during a time when most southern and southwestern schools were segregated. In the case of California, Hispanics were not allowed to attend schools that were designated for "Whites" only and were sent to the so-called "Mexican schools." Mendez was denied enrollment to a "Whites" only school, an event which prompted her parents to take action and together organized various sectors of the Hispanic community who filed a lawsuit in the local federal court. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian honor, on February 15, 2011.

Kid President (Robby Novak)

Robby Novak (born January 26, 2004) is an American personality best known for portraying Kid President on YouTube and on television. Novak was featured in a television show on Hub Network called *Kid President: Declaration of Awesome* in the summer of 2014. In October of 2019, the first episode of a new YouTube series titled *Are We There Yet?* was uploaded on SoulPancake's YouTube channel. The series will show Novak's trip around the United States in which he meets children who are trying to "make the world a little more awesome."

Xiuhtezcatl Martinez

Xiuhtezcatl Martinez (born May 9, 2000) is an indigenous environmental activist, hip hop artist and youth director of Earth Guardians, a worldwide conservation organization. Since the age of 6, he has fought for climate protections and spoken to large crowds about the effects of fossil fuels on the Indigenous and other marginalized communities.

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg (born January 3, 2003) is a Swedish teenage environmental activist on climate change whose campaigning has gained international recognition. Thunberg first became known for her activism in August 2018 when, at age 15, she began spending her school days outside the Swedish parliament to call for stronger action on global warming by holding up a sign saying (in Swedish) "School

strike for climate." Soon, other students engaged in similar protests in their own communities. Together, they organized a school climate strike movement under the name Fridays for Future. After Thunberg addressed the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference, student strikes took place every week somewhere in the world. In 2019, there were at least two coordinated multi-city protests involving over one million students each.

Mari Copeny

Mari Copeny, better known as "Little Miss Flint," rose to national fame for her advocacy work, and became a voice for her community amid a devastating and ongoing water crisis in Flint, Michigan, despite being only 11 years old.

Isra Hirsi

Irsa Hirsi is the daughter of U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-MN). She is one of three principal organizers of the school strike for the climate, also known variously as Fridays for Future (FFF), Youth for Climate, Climate Strike, Youth Strike for Climate, an international movement of school students who take time off from class to participate in demonstrations to demand action to prevent further global warming and climate change.

Autumn Peltier

Autumn Peltier (born September 27, 2004) is Anishinaabe-kwe and a member of the Wikwemikong First Nation and an internationally recognized advocate for clean water. She is a water protector and has been called a "water warrior." Peltier addressed world leaders at the UN General Assembly on the issue of water protection at the age of thirteen in 2018.

POST-SHOW

EXCERPT 1 : FREEDOM

Melba

For as long as I can remember, I spent late afternoons with Grandma India in her garden. I would stand beside her skirt as she pulled the weeds or held the water hose. That's when we had our private talks. Once when I was six or so, I explained to her that I believed each human being was really only a spirit - made by God, and that our bodies were like clothes hanging in the closet. I thought that one day I would be able to exchange my body for a white body, and then I could be in charge.

Grandma

Some of your thinking is right, child. We are not these bodies, we are spirits, God's ideas. But you must strive to be the best of what God made you. You don't want to be white, what you really want is to be free, and freedom is a state of mind.

Discussion questions:

- What does freedom mean to you? Do you agree with Grandma that "freedom is a state of mind"?
- Are there any privileges you enjoy that may not be enjoyed by every American?
- When and where do you feel free? Are there areas in your life where you don't feel free?
- The Little Rock Nine felt strongly that they had a right to a good education and defied authority to get one. What might you be willing to stand up for?
- Does having leaders who look like you affect the way you feel about yourself?
- Consider the way "white" is referred to in our society. For example, a color that resembles the skin of a white person is referred to as "flesh tone." How might such references affect nonwhite people?
- How do you think it would feel to be suspected of a crime based on the color of your skin? Has this ever happened to you?

Did you know?

- When Thurgood Marshall was working on a case in Columbia, Tennessee, he drove 45 minutes back to Nashville every night for fear that he would be killed if he slept in Columbia. One night, he was stopped by police and searched for liquor. Though the police found nothing, they arrested him anyway. Do you think this sort of racial profiling happens today?
- A recent CNN poll showed that 41% of Americans who oppose President Obama, who possesses a Hawaiian birth certificate, believe he was born in another country, making him ineligible to be president.

EXCERPT 2 : IMPACTS OF SEGREGATIONS

Melba

My mother teaches high school English and she is one of the first of our people to attend a white people's university. It is located in an all-white neighborhood we only dare travel through during the day. Sometimes on our way there, we pass Central High School in Little Rock. It's seven stories high and stretches along two city blocks, surrounded by trees and a manicured lawn. It's so majestic - like a European castle. It has several fancy kitchens just for home economics, and all sorts of science laboratory equipment.

Grandma

That's where the richest white families send their children. Folks up North know about Central High School.

Melba

I wish I could see inside.

Grandma

Be patient and one day, God willing, you'll see inside that school. I promise.

Discussion:

- Consider the definitions of "segregate" and "integrate" and how they apply to the above excerpt.
- Kenneth Clark, an African-American psychologist, said, "*Segregation is the way a society tells a group of human beings that they are inferior to other groups.*"
- In light of the current educational achievement gap between poor and affluent communities, what relevance, if any, does Melba's conversation with her grandmother have for students today?
- How might poor equipment, out-of-date text books or over-crowded schools affect the way you feel about yourself?
- Melba's experience at Central High School happened more than fifty years ago. Why is it important to discuss it now? What could happen if students don't learn about the struggle of the Little Rock Nine?

Did you know?

- When Minnijean Brown was expelled from school, she went to live with Kenneth and Mamie Clark.
- In Prince Edward County Virginia, schools closed from 1959-1964 rather than integrate, denying 2000 black students an education. Some families sent their children to live with foster parents in other cities, such as Baltimore, in order to have access to school. Would you be willing to leave your family and live with strangers in order to get an education? What might happen if you missed out on 5 years of school?

- Dillon County South Carolina didn't put the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision into action until 1970.
- The University of Alabama's football team didn't integrate until 1971, a year after the University of Nebraska's college football team (an integrated team) defeated Alabama (an all-white team) 38 to 6.

Excerpt 3 : Personal Character

Melba

The school board said they chose us from all the students who volunteered because we had the scholarship, personal conduct, good health, and mental ability to do the job. Grandma says God blessed our family with all those gifts.

At one point, there had been nineteen of us but ten students chose not to participate because of the threats of violence. It frightens me to see our numbers dwindling.

Discussion

- What do you think the school board meant by “scholarship, personal conduct, good health, and mental ability”?
- Why do you imagine there was so much pressure on the Little Rock Nine to be excellent students? What might have happened if they were not?
- One of the Little Rock Nine, Jefferson Thomas, died in 2010. How would you describe the legacy of the Little Rock Nine?
- How might negative stereotypes about gender, ethnicity, nationality or spirituality affect the way people expect you to behave? Are these expectations something you think about regularly?
- The Little Rock Nine relied heavily on friendship to endure their struggle. How might it feel to face challenges without the help of friends?

Did you know?

- During slavery, it was punishable by death for enslaved people to learn to read. Why might slave owners have wanted to prevent literacy among slaves?
- In the early 20th century, South Carolina schools banned black students from taking classes in reading and writing, limiting them to the study of home economics and agriculture.

EXCERPT 4 : DEFINE “WARRIOR”

Melba

It’s mid-October. The newspaper headlines read, “101st Division Cut Back Force Today.” The thought of fewer troops terrifies me. But the warrior growing inside me squares my shoulders and puts my mind on alert to do whatever is necessary to survive. A new voice in my head speaks to me with military discipline: Discover ink sprayed on the contents of your locker? Deal with it. Get another locker assigned. Find new books. Kicked in the shin? Tripped on the marble floor? Assess the damage and remain mobile. Warriors keep moving.

When a passerby calls me nigger, I work at not letting my heart feel sad because they don’t like me. Allowing their words to pierce my soul is exactly what they want.

My Little Rock Nine friends change, too. We joke less with each other. Instead, we exchange information about how to cope. I neither understand nor control the warrior growing inside me.

Discussion

1. In the context of this story, what does it mean to be a warrior? What qualities does a warrior in this story need to possess?
2. Melba’s grandmother tells her that “God’s warriors don’t cry.” If not through tears, what is a healthy way to cope with the type of emotions that the Little Rock Nine experienced?
3. How might having to think about personal safety affect your performance in school?
4. In the book, Melba sites being kicked in the stomach more than once. What would happen in your school if this happened?
5. Do you consider social media a genuine form of activism? If so, how might you use social media to affect social change?

Did you know?

- Friends and colleagues remember Thurgood Marshall as someone with a great sense of humor.
- All human beings are 99.9% genetically identical.
- During slavery, articles containing pseudo-science about the inferiority of African people circulated as a means to justify the institution of slavery.
- African American men fought for the U.S. in the Civil War before being allowed to vote.
- It is well recognized that, historically, [Native Americans](#) have the highest record of service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Imagine you've been asked to be the graduation speaker at your school, 50 years after you graduated. How would you describe your high school experience? What part of school life do you hope will have changed since you graduated? What part do you hope will have remained the same?
2. Melba's story is the account of one year in her life dealing with the struggle for integration. If you were to write about one year in your life, which year would you choose? Would you describe a struggle? A celebration? Something else?
3. Pick a *Warriors* person other than Melba and describe an episode in the story from *his/her* point of view.
4. What comparisons can you draw between Ghandi and Dr. King? What influence, if any, do you think they had on Melba's thinking?
5. Internet Search: What is the most recent integration story you can find?
6. Integration today and in 1957: Do you feel that your school is "integrated"? What is its ethnic breakdown?
7. In 1957, Arkansas' Governor Faubus believed strongly in segregation. How do authority figures affect the way people behave? How difficult might it be to stand up against their views? Would you risk expulsion to stand up for your beliefs?
8. In 1957, "nigger" was a common term, used even by elected officials. Discuss the pros and cons of desensitizing the word. Does using the word as a term of friendship claim power over the pain it once inflicted? Or does casual use of the word today diminish and discount the pain that was inflicted?
9. Ask members of your family who lived through the struggle for integration to tell you their stories.
10. Research another [song from the Civil Rights Movement](#) that resonates with you. What lyrics inspire you most? Why? How might you use the message of this song to use your voice to affect positive change in your community?
11. How can you engage in social activism today?