

Exploring activism and primary sources with Sweet Justice: Georgia Gilmore and the Montgomery Bus Boycott

NCSS Notable Trade Book Title: Sweet Justice: Georgia Gilmore and the Montgomery Bus Boycott

by *Mara Rockliff*

Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

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Lesson recommended for grades 3–5, though adaptable for younger and older students

Book summary

This story about Georgia Gilmore and her efforts to aid and support the fight for justice in segregated Montgomery, Alabama, is a beautiful reminder of the power of individuals to enact change through specific and intentional efforts. This biography of a woman who protested and testified, as well as fund-raised and fed the people during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, is a needed telling of one of the oft-neglected individual stories of the Civil Rights Era.

NCSS themes

- (1) Time, Continuity and Change
- (2) Individual Development and Identity
- (3) Civic Ideals and Practices

C3 framework

D2.Civ.2.3–5. Explain how a democracy relies on people’s responsible participation and draw implications for how individuals should participate.

D2.Civ.8.3–5. Identify core civic virtues and democratic principles that guide government, society and communities.

D2.Civ.12.3–5. Explain how rules and laws change society and how people change rules and laws.

D2.His.3.3–5. Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped significant historical changes and continuities.

D4.6.3–5. Draw on disciplinary concepts to explain the challenges people have faced and opportunities they have created in addressing local, regional, and global problems at various times and places.



Prior context

Note that this lesson is designed for students who have prior context with some elementary school studies of the US Civil Rights protests and reasons for protesting for equal rights under the law.

Students should have some knowledge of key figures of the movement involving Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks, all standards in elementary social studies curriculum. This lesson is intended to deepen the understanding of this movement beyond those main figures by highlighting a lesser-known, but highly influential activist, Georgia Gilmore. It is essential for students to begin this lesson with a level of knowledge of those figures and a general knowledge that African American citizens in the South, along with some allies from varying backgrounds and places, protested for equal rights through actions like marches, boycotts, and speeches. Having general knowledge of the Montgomery Bus Boycott might also be needed to work further in this lesson. Students will use that prior knowledge to move from the overtaught and superficial understanding of the Civil Rights Movement to a more nuanced conception that everyday individuals and their activism executed in specific ways helped to launch and sustain the larger movement. It is advised to review the above ideas and figures prior to reading this book and moving into this lesson so that students can connect this to prior knowledge and revise misconceptions.

Materials

- (1) *Sweet Justice: Georgia Gilmore and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* by Mara Rockliff, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie
- (2) [Appendix](#) of deidentified quotes, terms from the story and photographs with hyperlinked sources
- (3) chart paper
- (4) markers
- (5) Stick Figure Pattern graphic organizer from Literacy Graphic Organizers (lauracandler.com)
- (6) YouTube video from Jacob Echevarria for the Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church [Black History Moment - Georgia Gilmore - YouTube](#)
- (7) YouTube interview with questions for Georgia Gilmore [Interview with Georgia Gilmore - YouTube](#)

Objectives

- (1) Students will identify core ideals of participatory democracy.
- (2) Students will ask and answer questions as they explore quotes, terms and the people of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.
- (3) Students will describe specific attributes of an activist.
- (4) Students will explore primary sources and their value in research.
- (5) Students will work cooperatively to ask and answer questions about historical figures.
- (6) Students will curate projects in relation to democratic citizenship through real examples of individual and collective activism.

Procedures

Exploration

Before Reading

- (1) Assign students to small groups and offer [Appendix](#) quotes to students. Teachers may choose whether to give all quotes to every group, or to divide the quotes differently among the student groups

- (2) Students will discuss their ideas in relation to the quotes, positing 1-who might have said the quotes, 2-explanations of their meanings and 3-contexts/timeframes/events in which they were offered. Note: It is not necessary for students to identify a specific person who might have said the quotes in the [Appendix](#), though after studying the Civil Rights Movement in prior work, they are likely to attribute the quotes to figures whom they might remember, like Martin Luther King, Jr., or Rosa Parks. The goal of the activity is for students to establish the feeling or sentiment of the person saying the quote. Examples of appropriate responses beyond naming a person could be: I think they were said by someone who was being treated badly. Maybe someone who felt like life was unfair for them said it. I think the person who said this one was afraid or maybe they were trying to be brave. I think this one was said by someone who was tired of walking and then maybe they got to stop.
- (3) After students have had sufficient time to explore, they will then share their ideas with the class as they receive notes from classmates about similarities and differences in their interpretations.
- (4) The teacher will support the students and chart ideas (or allow students to chart) but not offer explanations to confirm or correct their statements.
- (5) The teacher will then repeat the above steps with the [Appendix](#) terms list, and finally with [Appendix](#) photographs, giving students ample opportunities to think and reflect individually and collectively and to compare their thoughts with their classmates' ideas.
- (6) The teacher will then introduce the text and have students examine the book while asking them probing questions about who might be illustrated on the cover, what it might be about, and how it might be related to the prior activities.
- (7) As students make suggestions, the teacher may choose to corroborate responses, clarify misconceptions or might reserve conversation and choose instead to allow all responses. If the latter is chosen, this allows the teacher to revisit the ideas throughout the text to corroborate or clarify when stopping at varied points.
- (8) As students offer discussion related to prior knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement and activism, the teacher will affirm that this shared book will be a biography related to those points as a connection to the next phase of the lesson.

Development

During reading:

- (1) The teacher will read the book *Sweet Justice: Georgia Gilmore and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* to students. Having the teacher read the book to students provides for a shared reading experience and limits any difficulties with fluency and reading levels. This allows all students to participate regardless of abilities. If the teacher wishes to allow students to read for themselves in whole or small groups, those are also feasible options.
- (2) As the teacher reads, students will interact with the text by being allowed to stop the story with an agreed-upon command when they think there is information that should be discussed in relation to prior quotes, terms, and pictures. This interactive students' command to stop can be a hand signal (pointing, hand up), a verbal word (Buzz! Stop! Attention, please!) or an action (hands on head, finger up, head down. clapping).
- (3) As students stop the reader, the teacher will ask for the reasons for stopping. Students should interact with the teacher and make connections from the prior group activity and provide relevant information to the class. Students should ask clarifying questions

- of one another, comment on others' thoughts, and debate ideas in relation to the quotes, terms and pictures.
- (4) Students should begin to make connections aloud, such as the importance of local and individual activism to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and to Georgia Gilmore's specific contributions to these areas.
 - (5) The teacher will guide and prompt as needed to support connections and will chart answers (or allow students to chart answers) by adding, removing and correcting original charts made prior to readings as students offer new relevant information learned from the text.

After reading:

- (1) The teacher will ask students if they had heard of Georgia Gilmore prior to reading and prompt students to explain why or why not, since they likely had prior knowledge of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.
- (2) The teacher will ask students to provide specific information about what they learned about Georgia Gilmore as they create a historical trait graphic organizer.
- (3) Using a historical figure stick figure trait organizer (see link in materials list for an example borrowed from a character trait organizer), students will draw and write to complete information about Georgia Gilmore from knowledge learned through the reading of the text. This can be completed with hard copies and art materials or digitally.
- (4) Students will use the graphic organizer as is, or they can flesh out a more detailed drawing on paper or chart paper. Students will label ideas around the stick figure using words to attach to certain places on the chart. For example, students will fill in thoughts Georgia Gilmore might have held beside her head. They might label some of her actions beside her feet or hands. They could put ways she might have felt near her heart.
- (5) The teacher will ask the students if they think they might learn more about Georgia Gilmore by researching through another source. Students should offer ideas about where they might learn more information and will likely express that it might be found through a video.
- (6) The teacher will then have students watch the following YouTube video of Georgia Gilmore, created by Jacob Echevarria for the Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church [Black History Moment - Georgia Gilmore - YouTube](#). Students will revisit their organizers, adding more information they learned from the video or revising prior ideas.
- (7) The teacher will offer the definition of a secondary source as information that was created later by a person who was not present at the actual event and did not actually participate first-hand. The teacher will explain that secondary sources are typically offered to help comment on or analyze primary or original information.
- (8) Students should then be able to recognize that the book they have shared and the video that they have watched are secondary sources.
- (9) Students will be asked to verbalize how the video as a secondary source adds depth to what they already learned through the reading of the text, also a secondary source. Students should discuss how the sources offer similar or conflicting information that suggests more research is needed. They should also offer that two secondary sources give more information when used together, rather than alone.

- (10) The teacher will ask students what they believe would give them the most information in relation to the events discussed in the text. Students should respond that learning from Georgia Gilmore (a primary source) might be the most helpful, if that were possible.
- (11) The teacher will ask students why they think that talking to her directly or listening to her recorded words would be even more informative than the secondary sources they have used already in the lesson.
- (12) Students should respond with ideas like: Information is probably more accurate from the original source. There are likely more details given in a primary source. It is more compelling to hear from someone who experienced the event.
- (13) The teacher will agree or clarify their examples and offer the definition of a primary source as information that was offered by a person who was directly involved first-hand at the actual event and had the actual and original experience.
- (14) The teacher will ask students if primary sources are always available and have them conjecture as to why or why not information from a primary source may not always be possible.
- (15) The teacher will ask students to write down questions that the students would have liked to Georgia Gilmore if that were possible
- (16) The teacher will play the video of Georgia Gilmore answering some questions. [Interview with Georgia Gilmore - YouTube](#)
- (17) Students can add information to their figures as they listen and after they listen. The teacher will then ask students if some of the questions they wanted to know were answered.
- (18) Students will share their historical trait figures with their peers and can compare what they have each included.
- (19) The teacher will lead the students to discuss the importance of primary sources like the video of Georgia Gilmore explaining her actions. The students will respond with their ideas about why these primary resources are so useful. Examples are: The primary sources provide information from first-hand accounts that other sources could not provide. Primary sources give emphasis to events or ideas that might have been overlooked by others who were not there. Often, emotion and context can be connected in primary sources.
- (20) The teacher will finally guide the students to lead a discussion about the activism of Georgia Gilmore and the problems she encountered as she protested.
- (21) The teacher will ask students to think about the following topics related to Georgia Gilmore. These ideas can be addressed in whole group, small groups, individually or in written responses in a foldable or digitally.
Topics:
 - Georgia Gilmore's individual participation and core values
 - How Georgia Gilmore actions changed rules, laws, society, government and her community
 - Georgia Gilmore's challenges both legally and in other areas as she became an activist.
- (22) Students should note that she faced adversity in many ways as she participated in democratic ideals like speaking out, boycotting, and resisting. Students may also

bring in other examples of problems encountered by Rosa Parks and Dr King as they discuss.

- (23) The teacher will then pose two questions to the students:
 - Why don't more people know about Georgia Gilmore's efforts?
 - What does her example mean for you as a citizen?
- (24) Students can respond verbally, written, in groups or aloud in a whole group. The teacher should begin to steer the students to an understanding of individual and collective democratic ideals connected to individual and collective activism and their own role as an active citizen. The students should note that the beliefs people hold to be important often embolden them to action.

Expansion

- (1) Students will research individual activists from history or from their community. Students will work individually or in groups and present a video showcasing individual activism.
- (2) Activists chosen can be from varied points in history from past to present related to rebellion, revolution, protest or change. Activists can be widespread across time periods or can be selected with all centering on a particular movement.
- (3) The choices for this project can be given from a list curated by the teacher and can include examples from history or from contemporary activists. Preferably, these people would not have been encountered prior readings or lessons, so students are learning about lesser-known activists and teaching their peers about new ones through their projects.
- (4) The teacher should assist students in identifying and differentiating primary and secondary sources as they research information and students should identify, label, and discuss these in their projects. Students should include at least one primary source in their projects if possible.
- (5) Parameters of the assignments and rubrics for the project can be tailored and differentiated for the ages or needs of the children, the research methods and tools available, and the terms of the unit studied.
- (6) Parameters of the project should have students engaged in:
 - identifying core ideals of participatory democracy,
 - asking and answering questions as they explore activism and historical figures,
 - describing specific attributes of an activist,
 - and exploring primary sources and their value in researching individual and collective activism.
- (7) Students should also answer the following questions through their project-
 - How did the activist's actions impact or change rules, laws, society, government and/or their community?
 - How did the activist face challenges both legally and socially as they became an activist?
 - Why don't more people know about the activist's efforts?

- What does the activist's example mean for you as a citizen engaged in demonstrating democratic ideals?

Closure:

- (1) Revisit the original four quotes from the opening activity, two attributed to Georgia Gilmore and two to Dr King. Students should choose one that they believe speaks to their own role as a citizen who can demonstrate democratic ideals.
- (2) Students can create art (multimedia, paintings, collage, sculpture, songs) that incorporates the words of their chosen quotes and their understanding of them in relation to individual activism.
- (3) Students will share and explain how their art relates to Georgia Gilmore, their chosen and researched activist and to themselves as an active citizen.
- (4) The teacher will support students in summation as they reiterate the value in using primary sources to understand people and their actions.
- (5) The teacher will support students in summation as they recognize and verbalize that democratic ideals demonstrated through individual actions can lead to societal changes.

Assessment

Exploration

- (1) Informal evaluation of student responses in [Appendix](#) group tasks will occur, related to core ideals of participatory democracy.
- (2) The teacher will informally assess students' abilities to work cooperatively to ask and answer questions about quotes, terms and people of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Development

- (1) The teacher will assess individual students' historical traits figures for completion and accuracy of comparison in relation to specific attributes of activist, Georgia Gilmore, and in their abilities to use primary sources to gather information.
- (2) The teacher will informally assess students' abilities to ask and answer questions including topics like individual and collective democratic ideals connected to individual and collective activism and students' own role as active citizens.

Expansion

- (1) The teacher will formally assess students' individual/group curated democratic citizenship projects and activist art on individual and collective activism with teacher-created rubrics specific to the needs of their students and specific parameters of the projects.

Suggested extension activities

- (1) The book offers descriptive language through metaphors in relation to segregation like, "Segregation was a long hot summer dragging wishful children past the shady park with the Whites Only sign." Students can create their own metaphors for specific terms related to the unit of study (e.g. unconstitutional, justice, boycott) and then document those with definitions, drawings, and pictures found and cited from primary resources.

- (2) Students can create a “recipe for justice” based on their explorations of activism and in honor of Georgia Gilmore, who used many skills in her efforts toward social justice, including her culinary expertise. In the recipe, they will list what they believe to be necessary ingredients for demonstrating ideals and appropriate steps for working toward a just cause.
- (3) Students can explore their own ideas about democratic ideals in comparison to Georgia Gilmore’s values and beliefs and list their own strengths as an active citizen that could be beneficial to a worthy cause.
- (4) Students can determine a just cause that they believe in and create a realistic action plan that serves as a basis for participatory democracy in their own locale. Students can discuss and potentially address any issues in their own school and communities that they might work toward change with using specific action and activism.

Additional resources

Book:

Pies from Nowhere: How Georgia Gilmore Sustained the Montgomery Bus Boycott by Dee Romito and illustrated by Laura Freeman

This children’s picture book is another retelling of Georgia Gilmore and her activism during the Montgomery Bus Boycott and can be used as another source and companion piece. Resources from Dee Romito’s website can be found at [PIES FROM NOWHERE - DEE ROMITO](#)

Electronic Resources:

Blejwas, E. (2019)

An excellent resource of biographies relevant to notable Alabamians, including collections, galleries and quick facts, this website showcases Georgia Gilmore’s information, as well as others that would be useful in working with students on this or other units.

[Gilmore, Georgia - Encyclopedia of Alabama](#)

Godoy, M. (2018)

This 6 Minute Food History and Culture audio file reports on the life and activism of Georgia Gilmore, including primary resources of the voices of Georgia Gilmore, her son, her friends, and local activists telling of Gilmore’s legacy.

[Meet The Fearless Cook Who Secretly Fed – And Funded – The Civil Rights Movement: The Salt: NPR](#)

Miller, K. (2019)

This *New York Times* article explains Georgia Gilmore’s activism and her lasting impact in the areas of both social justice and culinary arts.

[Overlooked No More: Georgia Gilmore, Who Fed and Funded the Montgomery Bus Boycott – The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

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Appendix

Quotes

- (1) You cannot be afraid if you want to accomplish anything. You got to have the willing, the spirit, and above all, you got to have the get-up.

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(2) My friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression.

(3) The great glory of American democracy is the right to protest for right.

(4) Weary feet and weary souls were lightened. It was such a night. We didn't have to walk no more.

Terms

Table A1.

Terms list	
The Club from Nowhere justice segregation boycott unconstitutional	Collection plate just cause desegregate unconstitutional

Links to photos with sources

Link to Picture 1-
Georgia Gilmore Prepares Box Lunch in Her Kitchen
[Overlooked No More: Georgia Gilmore, Who Fed and Funded the Montgomery Bus Boycott - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

Link to Picture 2-
Montgomery Citizens Walking
[Montgomery Bus Boycott \(1955–56\) | BlackPast.org](#)

Link to Picture 3-
Georgia Gilmore’s House with Historical Marker
[Montgomery’s Georgia Gilmore fed the civil rights movement - Alabama News Center](#)

Link to Picture 4-
Fingerprinting of Rosa Parks
[Rosa Parks, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the Birth of the Civil Rights Movement | Britannica](#)

Link to Picture 5-
Martin Luther King, Jr with police
[Bid considered to wipe Alabama arrest records of Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks \(nbcnews.com\)](#)

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