

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

# MARCH

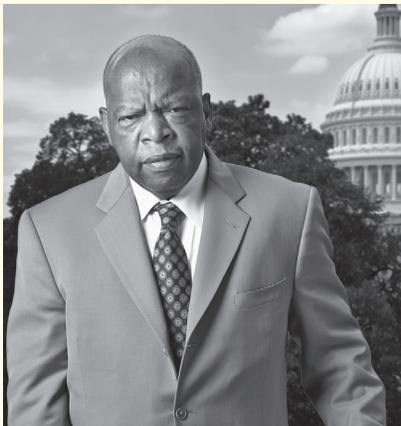
## BOOK ONE

JOHN LEWIS  
ANDREW AYDIN NATE POWELL

*It is rare for an engaging work of graphic history to be told from the perspective of a central figure in that history itself—yet that is precisely the case with John Lewis's personal account of the U.S. civil rights movement. As such, the autobiographical trilogy March provides a unique opportunity for exploring an eyewitness report of important events while simultaneously studying the memoir form: it represents "literacy across the disciplines" of the most authentic sort. In addition, its main idea—how to overcome violence and injustice through nonviolence—remains vitally resonant today.*

### THE STORYTELLER: AN ICON OF CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

Photo by Eric Etheridge



Congressman John Lewis (b. 1940) first joined the civil rights movement as a college student in Nashville, organizing sit-ins and participating in the first Freedom Rides. He soon became the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and one of the “Big Six” national leaders of the movement, alongside such figures as Martin Luther King, Jr. and A. Philip Randolph. He was the youngest speaker at the 1963 March on Washington and a leader of the 1965 Selma–Montgomery March (known as “Bloody Sunday”), where police brutality spurred national outrage and hastened passage of the Voting Rights Act of

1965. His subsequent career has included voter registration activism, service on the Atlanta City Council, and over 25 years in Congress.

Lewis received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011, and was the first recipient of the John F. Kennedy “Profile in Courage” Lifetime Achievement Award. His 1998 book *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, called “the definitive account of the civil rights movement” (*The Washington Post*), won numerous honors, including the Robert F. Kennedy, Lillian Smith, and Anisfield–Wolf Book Awards, and was named “Top of the List” by the American Library Association’s *Booklist*. His most recent book, *Across that Bridge: Life Lessons and a Vision for Change*, received the NAACP Image Award.

### A NOTE TO EDUCATORS & LIBRARIANS FROM JOHN LEWIS

*When I was a young man, a comic book called Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story was used by Jim Lawson and others to spread the word about our movement and teach the philosophy of nonviolence. I believe comic books and graphic novels can again be a tool to educate and inspire new generations. It has been a great joy for me to work on this graphic novel, and I hope you will find it useful in your schools and libraries. I am truly grateful for your hard work.*



## STANDARDS ALIGNMENT - COMMON CORE AND NCSS

### Common Core State Standards

As an exemplar—perhaps even a mentor text—of the personal memoir, *March* consistently aligns with the “Reading: Informational Text” strand across all secondary grade levels in English Language Arts. This strand comprises three areas of focus which this Teaching Guide calls out via the following icons.

- 1 Key Ideas and Details
- 2 Craft and Structure
- 3 Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

In addition, the seventh standard (the first under “Integration of Knowledge and Ideas”) emphasizes the skills involved in reading various media, a goal that the graphic storytelling in *March* naturally supports.

These alignments are called out in the Discussion Questions with the above icons, while the two student worksheets provide additional reinforcement related to “Craft and Structure.”

### The Ten Themes of Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has identified ten key themes for teaching and learning within the discipline, and these are listed below. While virtually all of *March* correlates extremely well to the tenth theme, “Civic Ideals and Practices,” the pages that follow highlight additional alignments.

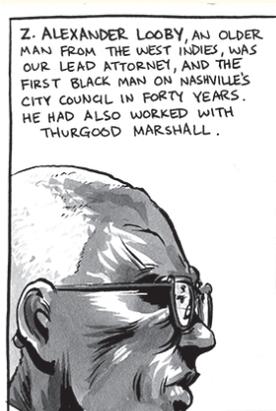
- 1 Culture
- 2 Time, Continuity, and Change
- 3 People, Places, and Environment
- 4 Individual Development and Identity
- 5 Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- 6 Power, Authority, and Governance
- 7 Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- 8 Science, Technology, and Society
- 9 Global Connections
- 10 Civic Ideals and Practices

## ADVISORY ON LANGUAGE

Please note that, in its accurate depiction of racism in the 1950s and 1960s, *March* contains several instances of racist language and other potentially offensive epithets. As with any text used in schools that may contain sensitivities, Top Shelf urges you to preview the text carefully and, as needed, to alert parents and guardians in advance as to the type of language as well as the authentic learning objectives that it supports.

## BEFORE READING

Build/activate background knowledge about the Civil Rights Movement as needed, since the text assumes that readers have some prior knowledge of both the U.S. South during the Jim Crow era and the nonviolent tactics employed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers beginning in the mid-1950s. For example, *March* starts without preamble, introductory narrative, or even its framing device—readers may not recognize the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, but they are expected to understand the basic context of African Americans peacefully staging a protest march and why that might be met by violent opposition from a local police force.



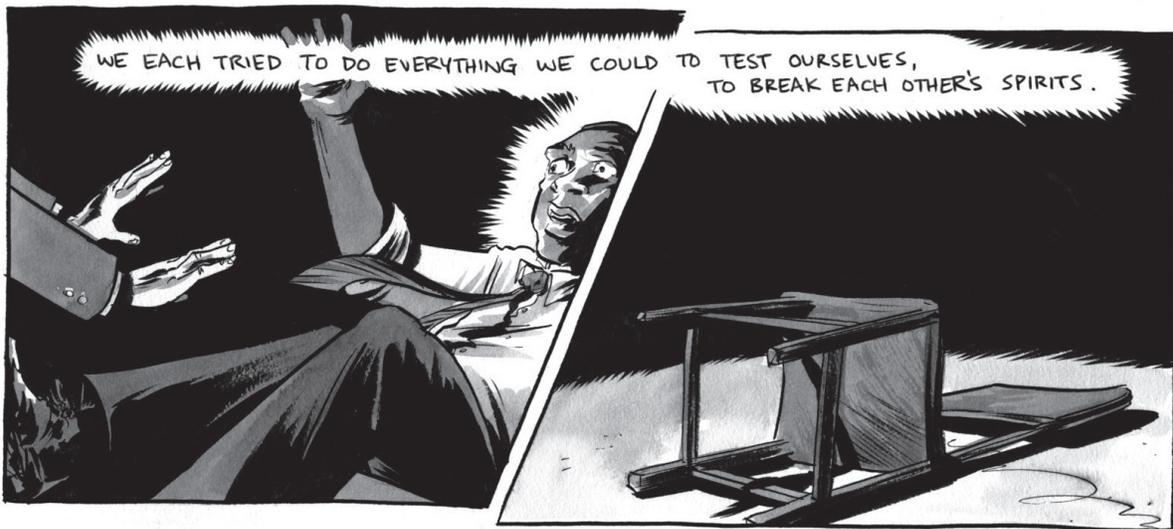
- What do you know about major figures, events, and concepts of the period that appear in *March* such as segregation, the social gospel, boycotts, sit-ins, “We Shall Overcome,” Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks? What about people and concepts not mentioned explicitly in the text but which inform the politics depicted, such as Thoreau and “civil disobedience”? **1**
- What do you know about other cultural and historical figures mentioned in the text such as Thurgood Marshall (pp. 106, 111), Ralph Bunche, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Harry Belafonte (p. 109)? **2 3**
- To what political or legal ideas/rulings do we owe such terms such as “unlawful assembly” (p. 6) and “separate but equal”? **6**
- Why does the framing story take place on January 20, 2009? What is the significance of that date to the civil rights movement? **2**



## DURING READING

Encourage students to employ comprehension strategies while reading by asking them to use a reader-response journal to record any thoughts sparked by the following prompts.

- Where does understanding *March* require that you make inferences? What are those inferences, and how does the comics medium both rely on inference-making and provide the necessary visual clues? Examples include “the opposite is just as true” with respect to non-violence (p. 100), Lewis’s attitude toward the ministers he knew in his youth (p. 54), and “it took a toll” (p. 25) in relation to how he “forced” hens to set longer than they naturally would have. **10 3**



- What predictions can you make—and confirm—while reading? How do the book’s flashbacks and flashforwards affect your predictions? For example, when Lewis makes the decision to leave home to attend college (pp. 64–65), will the role of his family in his life become diminished? (This can be confirmed on pp. 71–72.) Similarly, how do you think the training in non-violence (pp. 80–82) will work in the real world—how is it similar to, and different from, the situations encountered by Lewis in the Nashville sit-ins (pp. 99–102) or the march that opens the book (pp. 8–9)? Overall, how is your reading of Lewis’ story affected by your knowledge that Lewis will eventually reach the House of Representatives (pp. 16–20)? **2**

- How do you think that the details of Lewis’s early life, especially distinctive traits and actions such as “preaching” to the chickens (p. 28) or disobeying his parents to attend school (p. 50–53), might foreshadow later events or his personal values? **5 1**



# SHIFTING POINTS OF VIEW

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

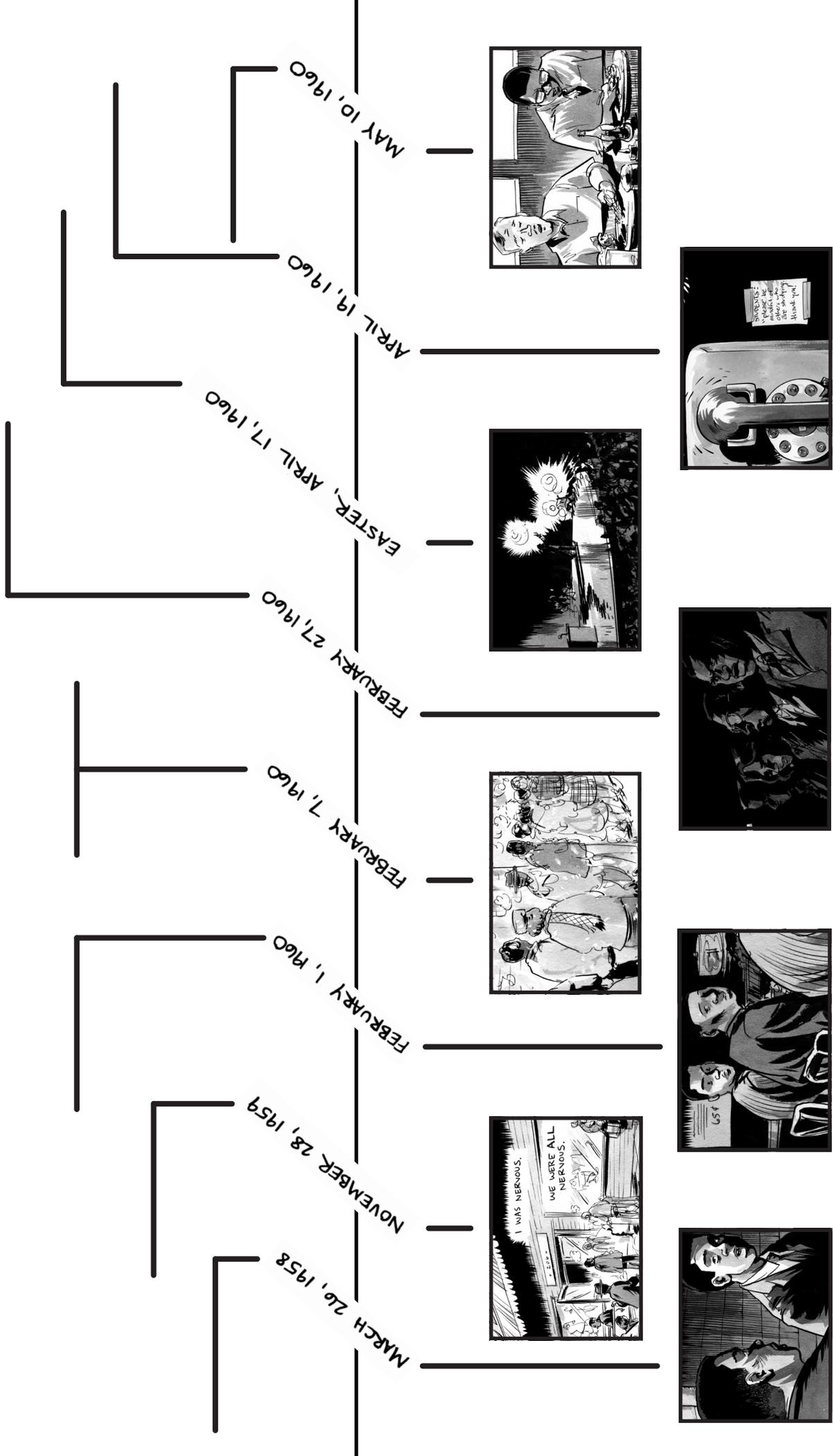
A memoir is told from a single point of view, but as readers we must always be wondering what other people could be feeling. Fill in the thought bubbles with what you imagine each person is thinking at that particular moment in *March*.



# TIMELINE GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Use this timeline to keep track of events as you read *March*, or to review their sequence after reading. What significant event in the history of Nashville's desegregation happened on each of these dates?



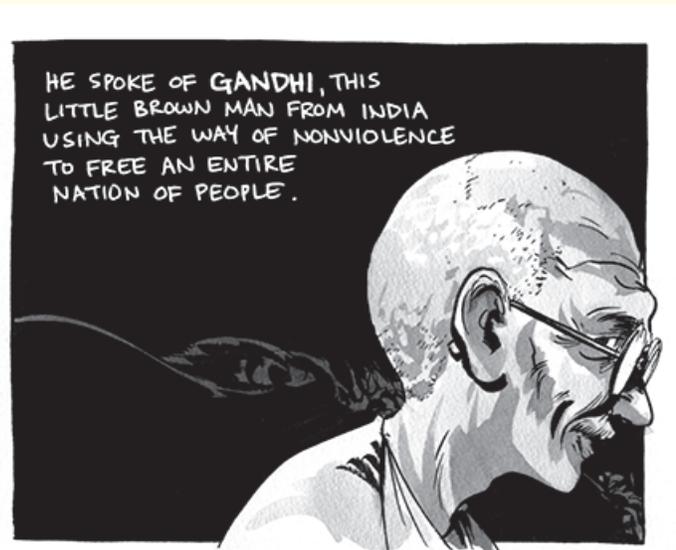
## AFTER READING

In addition to discussing the following questions, you may also want to review individual responses to the reproducible student pages in this Guide. Those pages can be distributed prior to reading to aid comprehension and recall, or completed after reading as a form of assessment.

- Why might this trilogy be entitled “March”? How many marches can you find depicted or mentioned in *March: Book One* (front and back covers, pp. 5–9, 19–20, 88, 90–91, 96, 110, 116, 117)? Analyze the multiple meanings, and connotations, of the word march with respect to the “how far we’ve come” theme (p. 19) that runs throughout the frame story. Specifically, how do the actions of Lewis and his comrades exemplify the defining characteristics of marching, such as being resolute, unified, and steady? If the word is usually used to describe the movement of an army, what is the significance of nonviolent groups doing the same? Finally, how might John Lewis’ line “We have to march,” in response to the bombing of the Loobys’ house (p. 116), signal the climax of the book? **5 1**

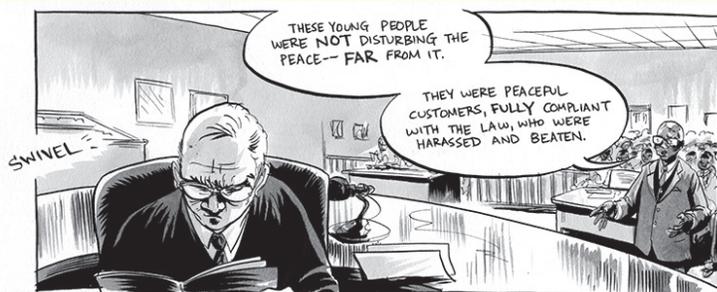
- How does nonviolent resistance as espoused by Gandhi, King, and Lawson (pp. 76–77) work to bring about social change, and how does it compare to other methods? **10 9**

Contrast the violence which opens the book with the emphasis on the “peaceful transition to power” in the 2009 television’s broadcast (p. 14) and the similarly peaceful, largely silent pages (pp. 10–12) that precede it. What is the historical message implied by this contrast? **6 2 3**



- In what ways do Lewis’s religious background and values influence his approach to the struggle for civil rights as well as the movement as a whole (e.g., pp. 8, 27–28, 56, 104)? **1** Do you feel that love of one’s attacker is a requirement for effective nonviolent resistance (p. 82), and are there any signs of it in the book (p. 95)? **1**

- History is often considered to be made up of recorded facts. In contrast, what important role might subjective factors such “dreams” and “fate” play in history, according to *March*? Trace the theme of wishes, dreams, and the “spirit of history” during the course of the book (pp. 19, 25–26, 50, 73, 87, 113). When the alarm clock on page 13 goes off, in what ways might it signify the end of a nightmare, or the transition from a dream to a reality, in terms of national race relations? Does the inauguration of Barack Obama represent the complete fulfillment of Dr. King’s dream, or merely a step? **4 2 2 3**

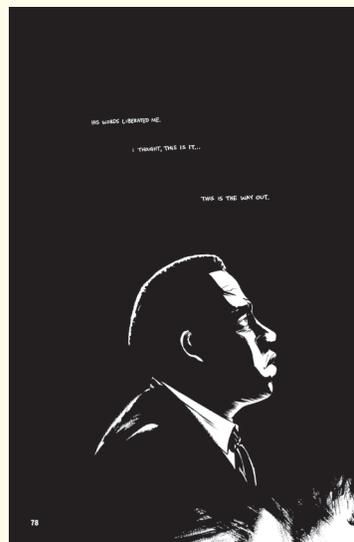


- The phrase “law and order” seems to imply that maintaining social order is an important function of police and other law enforcement authorities. But what happens when preserving the existing status quo makes such authorities the instigators of violence rather than those who protect citizens from it (pp. 6, 101)? How should individuals and groups respond when the justice system itself is bent to serve certain positions and interests (p. 107)? **6**

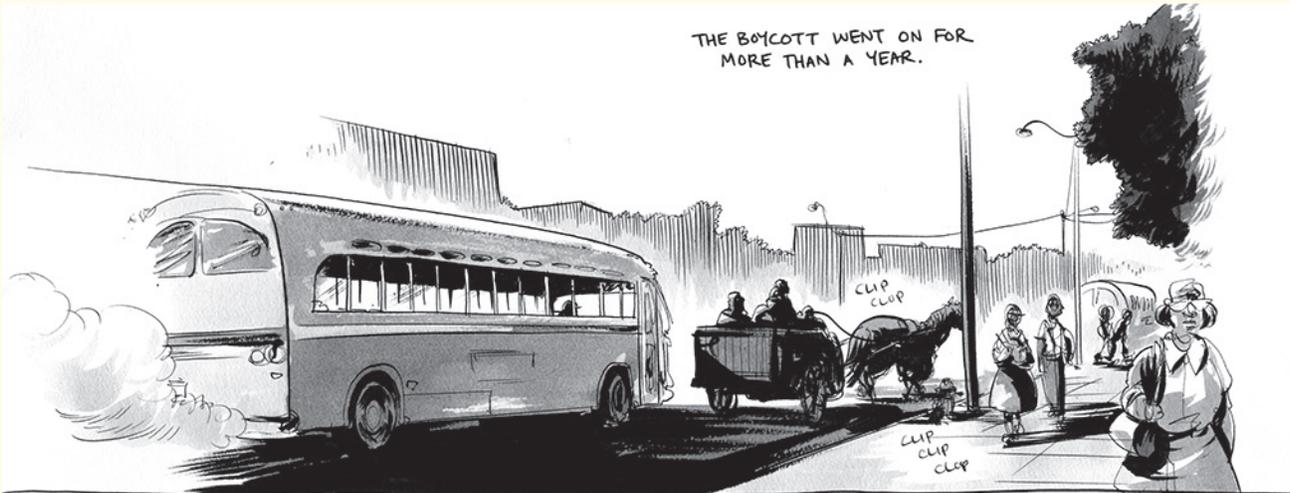
- What is the relationship between geography, community, and politics in *March*? As just one example, how does the isolation of the chickens in their henhouse reflect the isolation of Lewis’s family on their farm (pp. 20–22, 28)? What visual elements help convey these ideas? Similarly, how does the trip to Buffalo, with its bright lights and vertical heights (p. 42) that mirror the scale of Lewis’s aspirations for himself and society, illustrate his dawning sense of possibilities both figuratively and literally (as a Northern city free of the everyday prejudices of the South)? On the other hand, in what ways does the rural community of Alabama exemplify the notion of a tight-knit community despite being spread out geographically (pp. 58, 72)? **3 10 3**

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- To practice a crucial skill when reading the memoir form, identify and analyze the “turning points” in John Lewis’s life. Some of these the text’s language highlights for us, as in “home never felt the same” (p. 66), Jim Lawson’s words signaling a “way out” (p. 78) and “my first arrest” (p. 103). What would you add to such a group? For example, is the attempt to transfer to Troy State (p. 66) a turning point even if it does not work out? How do the authors use the visual layout of their pages to emphasize important moments and emotions (for example, by giving a large amount of space to a single image, up to a full page or “splash page”)? **4 2**



- What does the book's portrayal of various media tell us about their relationship to social and political change? As a youth, Lewis himself supplements firsthand accounts of the Montgomery Bus Boycott with those communicated via radio and newspaper (p. 59), and a comic book turns out to be an important way to learn of Martin Luther King's ideas (pp. 76, 87). What conclusions might we draw from such examples? To be more specific, how would you disseminate new ideas and coordinate political actions if you did not have access to tools such as email, mobile phones, and the Internet? **8 1**



- What role did economic factors play in the process of desegregation? Specifically, if African Americans had represented a far smaller part of the buying public, do you think tactics such as boycotts and sit-ins would have been as effective? (pp. 59, 83–84, 92–93, 96, 110) What example of economic freedom early in *March* may have inspired Lewis by providing a model of what racially integrated commerce looks like in practice (pp. 42–45)? **7**

- How do the events depicted in *March* connect to your life personally? Discuss with an older family member or friend their memories of the early 1960s and the civil rights movement. Alternatively, is there a modern-day issue for which you might be willing to take a stand? Would you use the same techniques as the Nashville Student Movement, or a different strategy? Has reading *March* changed your perspective, and if so, how? **5 10 3**

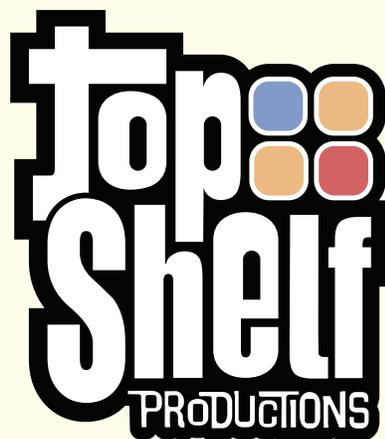




## ONLINE RESOURCES

Here are some multimedia resources that can be used to build background prior to reading, enrich discussion after reading, or function as media texts to which *March* can be compared and contrasted per the seventh standard of CCSS’s “Informational Text” strand. Readers might especially appreciate hearing Lewis talk about his life in his own speaking voice, and consider how that voice is similar and different to that of the graphic novel.

- *The Tennessean*, the major newspaper of Nashville, has built a very informative multimedia web site about the Nashville student protests, including in-depth profiles of John Lewis, Diane Nash, and other key people and places featured in *March*. Students can view videos, photos, timelines, and even a Google Map of the protests.  
<http://www.tennessean.com/civil-rights/>
- CSPAN’s BookTV conducted a one-hour video interview with John Lewis in 1998 for his memoir *Walking with the Wind*. This web site includes the video as well as a full transcript.  
<http://www.booknotes.org/Watch/107917-1/John+Lewis.aspx>



**WWW.TOPSHELFCOMIX.COM**

This guide was developed and written by Peter Gutierrez. A former social studies teacher, Gutierrez is a spokesperson on comics and graphic novels for the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). He has written about comics and education for *School Library Journal*, *The Graphic Classroom*, and Teachers College Press, and has authored teaching guides for acclaimed graphic nonfiction titles such as *Economix* and *My Friend Dahmer* (Abrams ComicArts).