

FLUENCY-BUILDING READER'S THEATER FOR GRADES 4-8

# MILK'S Freedom March

Aligns to  
Common  
Core

An Original Play  
Based on the 1963  
"I Have a Dream" March  
for Jobs & Freedom

BY SCHOLASTIC & STORYWORKS PLAYWRIGHT MACKOWIECKI LEWIS

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An Original Play by Mack Lewis

# MLK's Freedom March

Based on the 1963 "I Have a Dream" March for Jobs & Freedom



## Cast:

- Historians 1 & 2   ★ Adult Lucy – *the Narrator*   ▪ Lucy – *an eleven year old girl*
- James– *Lucy's teenaged brother*   ▪ Mom & Dad – *their parents*   ★ Grandma
- Clayton – *a young man from California*   ▪ Erik – *a young man from Ohio*
- ★ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



## Scene One

### *The Dinner Table*

ADULT LUCY: I was still just a kid in 1963, but even I could see America was still divided.

HISTORIAN 1: In many communities black people were still denied the right to vote.

HISTORIAN 2: They also had a hard time finding jobs, and even when they did, they were often paid less money for doing the same work.

HISTORIAN 1: There were marches and protests, with participants demanding an end to **segregation** and for **equality** in housing opportunities and education.

HISTORIAN 2: The March on Washington was about jobs—about black people getting fair and equal pay.

ADULT LUCY: My family and I were gathered around the dinner table when my brother James brought up the March.

DAD: I don't know how they expect a man to take care of his family on less than \$2 an hour.

MOM: Your father asked for a raise, but his boss said no.

JAMES: That isn't fair.

DAD: That's just how it is.

JAMES: It doesn't have to be, Dad. You should come to the march. We all need to be there!

ADULT LUCY: We were all quiet for a spell, hoping that James and Daddy wouldn't get into another of their arguments. James had been reading about Dr. King. He was excited about the changes taking place. But Daddy, well, he didn't exactly want things to stay the same. He just didn't know what he could do about it.

DAD: We already talked about this, James.

JAMES: You could still change your mind.

DAD: Ah, son. You know I can't afford to miss work.

JAMES: But Dad, it's all about work. Dr. King and the others are trying to convince the president to sign a law that'll help people like you get paid fairly. They're hoping a hundred thousand people will show up.

DAD: When your Uncle Louis went on one of these marches, his boss fired him—said he didn't appreciate how good he had it.

JAMES: When this is over, you'll be able to get a new job—a better job!

DAD: My job is just fine. It paid for that meatloaf you're eating right now.

MOM: Your father just wants to keep us safe. They just had a big march down in Birmingham where a lot of people got hurt.

DAD: That's right. The marchers were met with fire hoses and police dogs.

JAMES: But Dad, you know Dr. King preaches non-violence. Besides, this march is going to be different. If enough people show up, it could be a turning point.

DAD: Like I said, James, I can't risk losing my job.

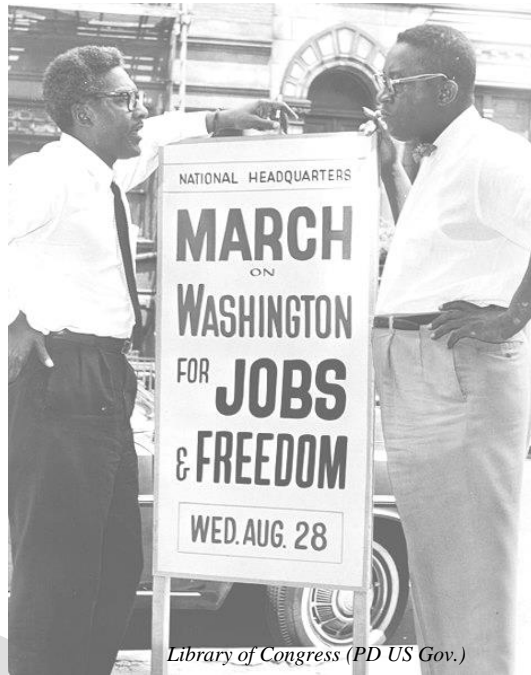
MOM: And I have much too much to do, what with taking care of Grandma and all.

LUCY: Is Grandma going to be all right? Lately she hardly ever gets out of bed.

MOM: I don't know, honey. I want her to go see a **specialist**, but she's being stubborn.

JAMES: I sure wish you'd all change your minds about the March. If folks like us aren't willing to risk a little for freedom, who will?

DAD: That's enough, son!



## Scene Two

### *The Health Clinic*

ADULT LUCY: The truth was that I wasn't thinking much about the march. Grandma hadn't been feeling well, and we'd just found out she had cancer. Momma wanted her to see a special doctor.

MOM: The clinic isn't going to take care of this, Mother!

GRANDMA: We don't have the money, and that's that. What's another doctor going to do anyway?

ADULT LUCY: Momma was beside herself, but she knew she could never get her way with Grandma.

GRANDMA: Don't worry now. These clinic doctors always treat me well. There's one sweet fella in there who reminds me of your Grandpa back in the day.

LUCY: Grandma!

ADULT LUCY: Grandma may have been sick, but she kept her sense of humor to the last.

GRANDMA: You know that boy of yours is right, don't ya?

MOM: What do you mean?

GRANDMA: About that civil rights march goin' on next week. If people like us don't take a stand, who will?

MOM: Oh, Mother. Don't we have enough to worry about already?



### Scene Three

#### *Grandma's Bedside*

ADULT LUCY: Because of the cancer, Grandma spent most of her time in bed and Momma spent most of her time crying, so I helped out whenever I could.

LUCY: Here's your medicine, Grandma. Can I get you anything else?

GRANDMA: Sit down a spell. . . . You heard anything more about that march?

LUCY: Just what James has been telling me. It's tomorrow—the 100th anniversary of the **Emancipation Proclamation**.

GRANDMA: Is that right? Imagine that!

LUCY: Folks are going to march from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial and sit down a bit. There's going to be famous singers and important speakers—and lots and lots of people.

GRANDMA: Sounds a bit like a church picnic—a great big church picnic.

ADULT LUCY: Grandma started to drift off, no doubt dreaming about church picnics from her past, so I started to tiptoe toward the door.

GRANDMA: Lucy? Tell your momma to come in here, will you?

LUCY: Yes, ma'am.

ADULT LUCY: I went and found Momma. She gathered herself up and looked in on Grandma.

MOM: What can I do for you, Mother?

GRANDMA: You still want me to see that specialist?

ADULT LUCY: Momma perked up.

MOM: Of course. I can make arrangements right away!

GRANDMA: I'll make a deal with you. I'll go see the specialist if you take these grandkids of mine to see Dr. King.

MOM: The March again? Mother, someone needs to stay here and take care of you!

GRANDMA: That's why you're gonna take me with you. I'm gonna get out of this bed tomorrow mornin' and march if it's the last thing I do.

MOM: But Mother, you're too sick.



GRANDMA: Maybe so, but nobody ever said standin' up for what's right wouldn't be a bit painful.



## Scene Four

### *The March*

ADULT LUCY: It was still dark the next morning when Grandma struggled out of bed and started banging her cane on each of our doors to get us marchin'. Soon, after a long, difficult bus ride, we were **hobbling** toward the Lincoln Memorial.

MOM: It doesn't look like they're getting the turn out they'd hoped for. There seems to be more police officers than marchers.

HISTORIAN 1: The small crowd early that morning had organizers worried, but before long more people began flowing in.

JAMES: It's early yet—just you wait!

MOM: I hope so. I don't want your poor grandmother to have gone through all this for nothing. Where do you want to sit, Mother?

GRANDMA: I think it would be nice to sit there on the edge of the water and cool my toes.

MOM: Your feet in the Reflecting Pool? I don't think that's allowed.

GRANDMA: Before the day is over there are going to be thousands of people crowded in here. Do you think anyone's going to care if an old lady puts her tired tootsies in the water? Help me over there.

ADULT LUCY: With some effort we **maneuvered** Grandma into place and she immediately took off her shoes and started soaking her feet in the Reflecting Pool. Before long, other people joined in.

CLAY: Mind if I squeeze in here?

GRANDMA: My, those shoes of yours look plumb wore out.

CLAY: No surprise there, ma'am. I've walked all the way from California.

LUCY: You walked here from California?

CLAY: Pert near. Caught a ride where I could find one.

GRANDMA: Well get them shoes off and cool your soles in here.

ADULT LUCY: As the microphone squealed to life, more and more people joined the crowd. People were

carrying signs with messages like, "Decent Housing Now" and "We March for Integrated Schools."

GRANDMA: How 'bout you, young fella? What's your story?

ERIK: Me? Well, I hopped a bus in Ohio.

LUCY: You came all this way and you aren't even black?



Library of Congress (PD US Gov.)

ERIK: You don't need to be black to believe in fairness, do you?

JAMES: No, sir.

ERIK: Look around you: black, white, rich, and poor—we're all people.

ADULT LUCY: Soon the immense statue of Abraham Lincoln was looking past the pillars of the Memorial at a sea of faces. There were a quarter of a million people in the crowd.

MOM: Oh, my Lord, is that...

DAD: It's a miracle I found you! Is there still room for me?

JAMES: Dad, you came!

DAD: Believe it or not, the boss brought me over. He had it up on the TV and thought we should be a part of it!

GRANDMA: Well, Hallelujah. Now it really is like a big ol' church picnic!

MOM: Maybe there's hope for that raise yet!

ADULT LUCY: Over the course of the day we heard famous singers such as Joan Baez and Mahalia Jackson and important speakers such as A. Philip Randolph, the organizer of the March. But everyone agreed the highlight was the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

MOM: Are you all right, Mother?

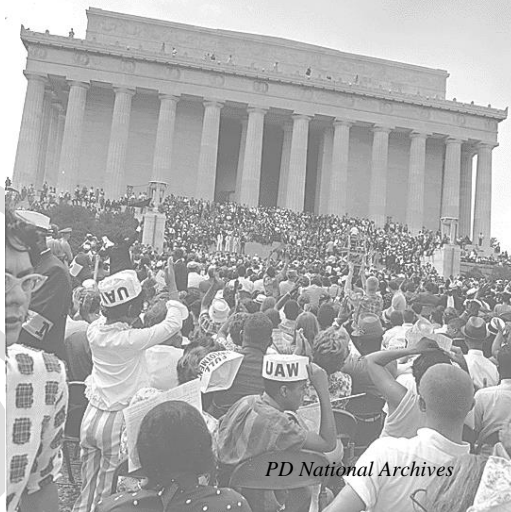
GRANDMA: All right? I've never been better.

LUCY: Why are you cryin' then?

GRANDMA: Lucy, I've lived my whole life thinkin' things would never change for black folk. I guess I'm just glad I've lived long enough to see that things might be better for my grandkids.

JAMES: Look—it's Dr. King up there at the microphone!

KING: I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.



HISTORIAN 1: Dr. King's speech was the last of the day. It was televised all over the world.

KING: I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be **self-evident**: that all men are created equal."

(continued)

HISTORIAN 2: Following the speech, King and other Civil Rights leaders met with President Kennedy in the White House.

KING: I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

HISTORIAN 1: The event helped pass the *Civil Rights Act* and the *National Voting Rights Act*.

KING: I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

HISTORIAN 2: Today, Dr. King's speech is considered the greatest of our time and a turning point in American history.

ADULT LUCY: Dr. King had told us of his dream, and thanks to my Grandma, I had gotten to witness it.

KING: And when this happens . . . we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children . . . will be able to join hands and sing... "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

✧ ✧ ✧ ✧ ✧ ✧  
**Epilogue**

ADULT LUCY: Grandma kept her promise, too. Seeing the specialist helped her get better for a time. She held on through both the bad news and the good news of that next year.

HISTORIAN 1: Due in large part to the success of the March, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act on July 2, 1964.

HISTORIAN 2: It helped give African-Americans the rights they were promised a century before.

ADULT LUCY: Soon after, Grandma passed away. Whenever I think about her, I remember being there for the March on Washington. I remember the tears in her eyes and her feet in the Reflecting Pool. And I remember her courage the day she climbed out of her sickbed and stood up for what's right. ▣







**“MLK’s Freedom March”** originally appeared in the Feb./Mar. 2010 issue of Scholastic’s *Storyworks* magazine under the title *March for Freedom* (at left). It’s told from the perspective of an 11-year-old African-American girl named Lucy. Her family’s internal problems seem to fade away when Lucy’s sick grandmother unites them all at the 1963 March on Washington where Dr. King delivers his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Grandma’s fortitude in the face of cancer presents a compelling example of overcoming one’s own struggles to unite around the cause of racial equality.



**Instructions:** 1. Print a class set and assign parts. 2. Have students use highlighters to mark their individual roles. 3. Meet regularly for guided reading practice while having students practice their individual parts independently (such as for homework). 4. When ready, practice “on stage.” 5. Perform in front of an audience. 6. Hold a feedback and self-assessment session. 7. Make use of the comprehension and extension activities.

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**Comprehension Activity** (CCS Lit items 1,2,3,4) **Key:** 1. A; 2. F; 3. K; 4. P; 5 & 6. *answers may vary*; 7. *possible answers might include that Lucy learned that one must overcome their difficulties, that those difficulties sometimes contribute toward the greater good, that her Grandmother loved her so much that she got out of her sick bed to make sure she could have that life-changing experience*. 8. *possible answers include positioned, guided, steered, or moved*.

#### Extension Activities:

- **Listen to an MLK speech.** King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is available on video through most public libraries and online.
- **Enact along side other plays.** *ReadAloudPlays.com* has numerous Civil Rights plays. Consider teaming *MLK’s Freedom March* with *Sitting Down for Dr. King*, *We Shall Overcome*, or *Gonna Let it Shine*. Many of them are only available at *ReadAloudPlays.com*



# MLK'S Freedom March

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Comprehension Quiz:** Select the best answer in each grey box. Write out a detailed answer in each white box. Be prepared to support your answers by locating evidence in the story. Use the back of the page if you need more space.

**1. What agreement did Grandma make with Lucy's mom?**

- A. ☐ She'd see a specialist if Lucy's mom took them all to hear Dr. King.
- B. ☐ She'd see a specialist if Lucy's dad got a raise in pay.
- C. ☐ She'd see a doctor at the clinic if Lucy's mom took them to hear Dr. King.
- D. ☐ None. She refused to agree.

**5. Identify three facts from the story about the March on Washington:**



**6. What is something from the story that surprised you? What made it surprising?**



**2. Based on the story, what description best fits Grandma?**

- E. ☐ Tired out and self-pitying, but stubborn too.
- F. ☐ Good humored and selfless, but stubborn.
- G. ☐ Indifferent.
- H ☐ None of these.

**3. What can you *infer* about the relationship between James and his father?**

- I. ☐ Like many dads and their teenaged sons, they spent a lot of time together.
- J. ☐ They got along really well.
- K. ☐ Like many dads and their teenaged sons, they tended to argue about things.
- L. ☐ Dad wanted James to focus more on his studies.

**7. What do you think Lucy learned from watching all her family members interact?**



**8. What's the meaning of *maneuvered* in Scene 4? Can you find a few synonyms?**



**4. What reasons did Mom and Dad have for not going to the March?**

- M. ☐ Dad was worried about getting fired from his job.
- N. ☐ Mom was too busy taking care of Grandma.
- O. ☐ The march down in Birmingham had turned violent.
- P. ☐ All of these.

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