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When you download RT from ReadAloudPlays.com, you're purchasing more than just a lesson plan. You're getting an original literary work. This one was first published in the January 2003 issue of Scholastic's *Storyworks* magazine. ***Sitting Down for Dr. King's*** dramatic conclusion has made it one of the most frequently republished in the Civil Rights series. Set during the Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-ins of 1960, the event is viewed through the eyes of a middle class white boy who gets angry when the protests prevent him from enjoying his family celebration at the Woolworth. As the events unfold, he begins to understand the plight of the young protesters, choosing in the end to stand *with* them instead of against them. His "aha moment" will resonate with your students. Carefully-researched and based on the actual event, the play is historical fiction. From seven to fourteen parts, use it with students in grades 4 through 8.

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

Sitting Down for Dr. King

Aligns to Common Core

4th Original Play Based on the Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-ins

BY SCHOLASTIC & STORYWORKS PLAYWRIGHT MACKOWIECKI LEWIS

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Sitting Down for Dr. King
Based on the Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-in of 1960

Cast:

HISTORIAN: ADULT DAVID - the Narrator
DAVID NICHOLSON - a twelve year old boy
MRS. NICHOLSON: David's mother
GRANDMA: David's grandmother
BINK: David's six year old sister
PROTESTER #1
PROTESTER #2
PROTESTER #3
WAITRESS
MAN #1
MAN #2
POLICEMAN

HISTORIAN: In the 1960's, Woolworth's was one of many large department store chains with lunch counters.

WAITRESS: Boy howdy. If it isn't the Nicholson family back again. Weren't you in here just last week?

DAVID: Yes, ma'am. I've been getting' good marks in school, so we aim to celebrate!

WAITRESS: Well what'll it be? Rhubarb pie? Damns split?

WAITRESS: Three usuals comin' right up.

ADULT DAVID: There were lots of good things on the menu, but we always ordered Woolworth's famous strawberry shortcake. Nobody loved it more than Bink.

WAITRESS: Why look at that girl cut! You'd think she'd never tasted strawberry shortcake before!

ADULT DAVID: Sometimes I think I got more on her face than in her mouth.

MRS. NICHOLSON: Slow down, Bink. You're making a mess.

WAITRESS: Never you mind about the mess, lad. You just go right on enjoying yourself.

DAVID: She'll be ready for seconds before we're even half done!

BINK: This is good stuff!

ADULT DAVID: On that particular day, though, something we'd never seen before happened. Four black men sat down at the lunch counter.

PROTESTER #2: And how about some of what they're having?

PROTESTER #3: That's right, some of that famous strawberry shortcake!

WAITRESS: Now boys, you know we don't seat you people here.

PROTESTER #2: Pardon me for askin', ma'am, but why is that? Why can't people like us sit down at your lunch counter?

WAITRESS: That's just the way it is. If you don't like it, you can go somewhere else.

ADULT DAVID: At this, my little sister suddenly stopped eating.

PROTESTER #1: You know it's the same everywhere else.

HISTORIAN: Because of "Jim Crow" laws, black people weren't allowed in many places, especially restaurants. Often times they weren't allowed in the same parks or beaches, or even the same churches as white people.

PROTESTER #3: We don't think it's right.

ADULT DAVID: we don't plan on leaving half, boys. But you better take today. We have any shortcake.

Dr. King

Dr. King The second man enter off the stool and yelled in his face. Bink takes a swing at set up and take a word. The protester climbed back on to the stool. Grandma was right. Even though the white men were being violent, the protesters remained peaceful. Again and again the white men threw the protester to the floor, but each time he climbed back on to the stool without striking back. I was relieved to see a policeman push through the crowd.

POLICEMAN: That's enough. You're under arrest.

ADULT DAVID: I couldn't believe it. The policeman put handcuffs on the protester!

BINK: But he didn't do anything! Those men were being mean.

MRS. NICHOLSON: Be quiet, Bink.

ADULT DAVID: The two white men laughed as the protester was being led away. I looked at the empty stool. And it was at that moment I understood what my Grandma had said. The black students weren't hungry for shortcake. They just wanted to be treated fairly. I suddenly realized what I had to do. I swallowed hard and then climbed on to the stool.

WAITRESS: Finally, a paying customer! You want the usual, kiddo?

DAVID: No, ma'am. I'll have what they're having.

ADULT DAVID: The protester sitting next to me patted me on the back.

Epilogue

ADULT DAVID: The protest went on for five more months. Many protesters were mistreated, and some were arrested, but in the end the Woolworth finally gave in and began serving all customers, regardless of race.

HISTORIAN: In the months that followed, over seventy thousand students participated in sit-ins all over the country.

ADULT DAVID: It led to the integration of restaurants in 1988 cities.

HISTORIAN: Today, the section of the lunch counter where David, Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, and Joseph McNeil sat down in search of respect can be seen in the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

ADULT DAVID: It honors those who had the courage to "sit down" for civil rights.

Focus on Common Core - Sitting Down for Dr. King

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. In Scene One, what shows you that Bink is much younger than David?

A. O She gets more shortcake on her face than in her mouth.
B. O She has a silly nickname.
C. O She's eating so fast she's making a mess.
D. O All of the above.

2. This is a work of historical fiction. It's based on real events, but the story itself is imaginary. What does the author do to show you what's factual?

A. O He makes David's character unrealistic.
B. O He uses the Historian to provide factual details.
C. O He separates David's story from the real events from history.
D. O In Scene 4 when he says, "I'll have what they're having."

3. What is the setting of this story?

A. O The recent past in a Woolworth's department store.
B. O The present in a Woolworth's restaurant.
C. O The ancient past in a general store.
D. O The future in an internet cafe.

4. In most stories, the main character grows and changes. At what point in this play does David show he has changed?

A. O In Scene 3 when Grandma explains what protests are all about.
B. O In Scene 4 when he can't hold his tongue any longer.
C. O In Scene 1 when he tells Bink why the men can't have any shortcake.
D. O In Scene 4 when he says, "I'll have what they're having."

5. What's a sit-in?

6. What would you have done?

7. What can a handful of protesters expect to accomplish?

8. Why don't you just go home?

9. What's so wrong about that?

10. You wanna take a swing at me?

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Sitting Down for Dr. King

Based on the Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-in of 1960

Cast:

HISTORIAN

ADULT DAVID – *the Narrator*

DAVID NICHOLSON – *a twelve year old boy*

MRS. NICHOLSON – *David's mother*

GRANDMA – *David's grandmother*

BINK – *David's six year old sister*

PROTESTER #1

PROTESTER #2

PROTESTER #3

WAITRESS

MAN #1

MAN #2

POLICEMAN

HISTORIAN: In the 1960's, Woolworth's was one of many large department store chains with lunch counters.

WAITRESS: Boy howdy. If it isn't the Nicholson family back again. Weren't you in here just last week?

DAVID: Yes, ma'am. I've been getting' good marks in school, so we aim to celebrate!

WAITRESS: Well what'll it be? Rhubarb pie? Banana split?

DAVID: Nope, we'll have the usual.

BINK: That's right. The usual.

ADULT DAVID: My little sister's name is Emily, but we all call her Bink.

MRS. NICHOLSON: Make that three, Gladys.

Scene One

ADULT DAVID: When I was a kid growing up in North Carolina, my mom would sometimes take us to the Woolworth for a special treat.

WAITRESS: Three usuals comin' right up.

ADULT DAVID: There were lots of good things on the menu, but we always ordered Woolworth's famous strawberry shortcake. Nobody loved it more than Bink.

WAITRESS: Why look at that girl eat! You'd think she'd never tasted strawberry shortcake before!

ADULT DAVID: Sometimes I think Bink got more on her face than in her mouth.

MRS. NICHOLSON: Slow down, Bink. You're making a mess.

WAITRESS: Never you mind about the mess, littl'un. You just go right on enjoying yourself.

DAVID: She'll be ready for seconds before we're even half done!

BINK: This is good stuff!

ADULT DAVID: On that particular day, though, something we'd never seen before happened. Four young black men sat down at the lunch counter.

HISTORIAN: Though black people were allowed in the store, they weren't allowed to sit at the lunch counter.

PROTESTOR #1: Excuse me, ma'am, we'd each like a cup of coffee.

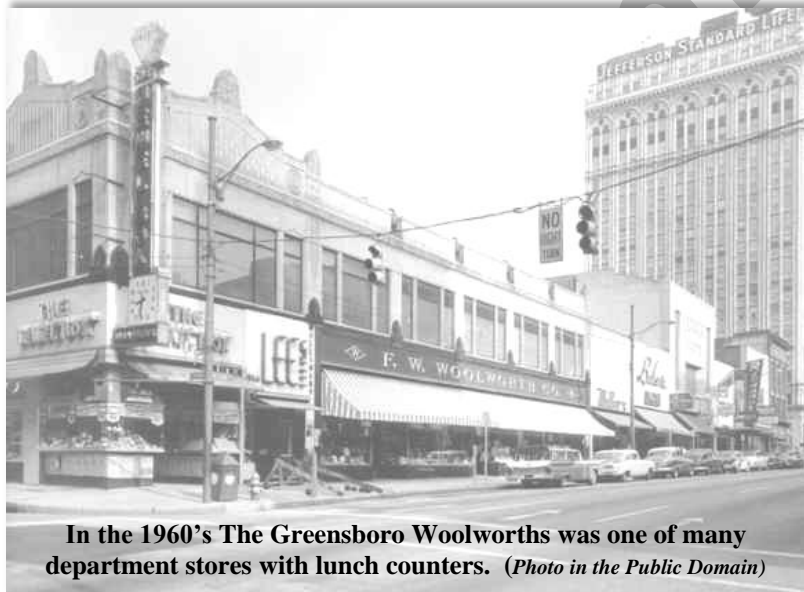
PROTESTOR #2: And how about some of what they're having?

PROTESTOR #3: That's right, some of that famous strawberry shortcake!

WAITRESS: Now boys, you know we don't seat you people here.

PROTESTOR #2: Pardon me for askin', ma'am, but why is that? Why can't people like us sit down at your lunch counter?

WAITRESS: That's just the way it is. If you don't like it, you can go somewhere else.



ADULT DAVID: At this, my little sister suddenly stopped eating.

PROTESTER #1: You know it's the same everywhere else.

HISTORIAN: Because of "Jim Crow" laws, black people weren't

allowed in many places, especially restaurants. Often times they weren't allowed in the same parks or beaches, or even the same churches as white people.

PROTESTOR #3: We don't think it's right.

PROTESTOR #2: So we don't plan on leaving until we get served.

WAITRESS: Suit yourself, boys. But you won't be getting' any shortcake today.

BINK: Why can't they have any shortcake, Mama?

DAVID: Be quiet, Bink. It's because they're colored.

HISTORIAN: "Colored" was a word used to describe people whose skin wasn't white. Today, black people prefer to be called black, African-American, or better yet, just people.

ADULT DAVID: But Bink didn't understand any of that.

MRS. NICHOLSON: We best be on our way, kids.

DAVID: But we just started eating!

MRS. NICHOLSON: I'm sorry, David. You're too young to understand. We'll come back another time.



Scene Two

ADULT DAVID: I couldn't wait to go back. But when we returned two days later, there was now *a whole crowd* of black people sitting in the Woolworth. They had taken up every seat at the lunch counter!

BINK: How come nobody's eating?

DAVID: Where are we going to sit, Mom? All the stools are taken.

MRS. NICHOLSON: I don't know. It looks like they're having some sort of protest.

HISTORIAN: The protest had been started two days earlier by four black students from North Carolina A&T College.

DAVID: We can still have our shortcake, can't we?

WAITRESS: That's it, folks. We're closing early today. Y'all go home now!

MRS. NICHOLSON: I guess that answers our question. It's best you not see this sort of thing anyway.

DAVID: No, wait. Excuse me, ma'am. Can we just get some strawberry shortcake before you close?

WAITRESS: Sorry, kids, not today.

ADULT DAVID: I was angry. These people were keeping me from getting my shortcake. But what could I do? What would you have done?

MRS. NICHOLSON: Let's go, children. We'll try again tomorrow.



Scene Three

ADULT DAVID: I was still mad when we got home. I slammed the screen door.

GRANDMA: What's all this about?

BINK: I think we're mad!

ADULT DAVID: Grandma was old and in poor health, so she didn't get out much. But she seemed to know about everything.

DAVID: We went back to the Woolworth for some shortcake, but they wouldn't serve us!

MRS. NICHOLSON: It seems some black people are having some kind of protest.

DAVID: They took all the seats so the waitress couldn't serve anybody. She got so frustrated she just closed up.

GRANDMA: Yes, I heard about it on the radio! It's a sit-in. They're college students from A&T.

BINK: What's a sit-in, Grandma?

MRS. NICHOLSON: Mother, I don't think this is an appropriate topic for the children.

GRANDMA: Don't be silly. Bink, a sit-in is a kind of non-violent protest. They're protesting because black people aren't allowed to sit at lunch counters. It's a great idea, don't you think?

DAVID: A great idea? What good is it doing them? They're not getting served. And now we're not getting served either.

MRS. NICHOLSON: I understand how hard it is for black people, but all they're doing is making things difficult for the rest of us. Be honest, Mother. Other than messing up our afternoon, what can a handful of protesters expect to accomplish?

GRANDMA: A revolution, that's what. And it's high time they had one.

MRS. NICHOLSON: A revolution? A few college students?

GRANDMA: It all starts with one black person having the courage to sit down where he's not wanted.

BINK: It all starts by sitting down?

GRANDMA: That's right. You're too young to remember Rosa Parks down in Montgomery, Bink. But she started a revolution just by sitting down. These college students hope to do the same thing.

HISTORIAN: You probably know the story of Rosa Parks. She refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white person. It helped start the Civil Rights Movement.

BINK: What's all that got to do with strawberry shortcake?

GRANDMA: Bink, it's not that these people are hungry for dessert. They're hungry for respect.

DAVID: Well I wish they'd all just get out of there so we can have our shortcake. Who do they think they are anyway?



Scene Four

ADULT DAVID: When we went back to the Woolworth the next afternoon, I was hoping the protest would be over. But there were even more black people crowded around the lunch counter. I just couldn't hold my tongue anymore.



Rather than serve black customers, lunch counters would often just close for business. (Photo in the Public Domain)

DAVID: Why don't you all just go home! You know they're not gonna serve you!

MRS. NICHOLSON: David, be polite.

DAVID: All we wanted was some shortcake, but we're not getting it because of you!

PROTESTOR #1: So you want some shortcake, do you? Well, so do we.

PROTESTOR #2: See, we're not so different. Our skin color may not be alike, but we both want the same thing: some strawberry shortcake and a place to sit down. What's so wrong about that?

ADULT DAVID: I considered what Grandma had said, but my thoughts were interrupted when two white men approached the counter. They came up behind one of the protesters.

MAN #1: Listen here, fella—my friend needs this stool.

PROTESTER #3: I'm sorry, this seat's taken.

MAN #2: Where do you come off talking to us that way? You don't even belong here.

MAN #1: Can't you read the sign? *Whites Only!*

PROTESTER #3: I'm a paying customer just like anybody else.

MAN#2: Payin' customer, huh? Well pay for this!

ADULT DAVID: I couldn't believe it. The man unscrewed the top of a sugar jar and slowly poured the sugar over the protester's head.

HISTORIAN: Protesters were often harassed by whites opposed to equal rights for black people.



There are many photos from the sit-ins that catch people "on the wrong side of history." (Public Domain)

MAN #1: Hey, waitress, what'll that cost him?

MAN #2: Didn't you hear me the first time? My friend needs this stool!

BINK: Isn't anyone going to help him?

ADULT DAVID: My mom picked Bink up and started inching toward the door.

HISTORIAN: The protesters believed in Dr. Martin Luther King's policy of non-violence, so they remained quiet

and respectful, even when being harassed.

PROTESTER #3: Listen, mister, I don't want any trouble.

MAN #1: Then get out of my seat!

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ADULT DAVID: The second man yanked the protester off the stool and then knelt over and yelled in his face.

MAN #2 (*laughing*): So what do you think of that?

ADULT DAVID: Without saying a word, the protester climbed back on to the stool. Grandma was right. Even though the white men were being violent, the protesters remained peaceful. Again and again the white men threw the protester to the floor, but each time he climbed back on to the stool without striking back. I was relieved to see a policeman push through the crowd.

POLICEMAN: That's enough. You're under arrest.

ADULT DAVID: I couldn't believe it. The policeman put handcuffs on the protester!

BINK: But he didn't do anything! Those men were being mean.

MRS. NICHOLSON: Be quiet, Bink.

ADULT DAVID: The two white men laughed as the protester was being led away. I looked at the empty stool. And it was at that moment I finally understood what my Grandma had said. The black students weren't hungry for shortcake. They just wanted to be treated fairly. I suddenly realized what I had to do. I swallowed hard and then climbed on to the stool.

WAITRESS: Finally, a paying customer! You want the usual, kiddo?

DAVID: No, ma'am. I'll have what *they're* having.

ADULT DAVID: The protester sitting next to me patted me on the back.

A section of the Woolworth's lunch counter is now on display in the Smithsonian Museum.



PROTESTER #1: Now here's a man for you!

DAVID: All we want is some strawberry shortcake and a place to sit down.



Epilogue

ADULT DAVID: The protest went on for five more months. Many protesters were mistreated, and some were arrested, but in the end the Woolworth finally gave in and began serving all customers, regardless of race.

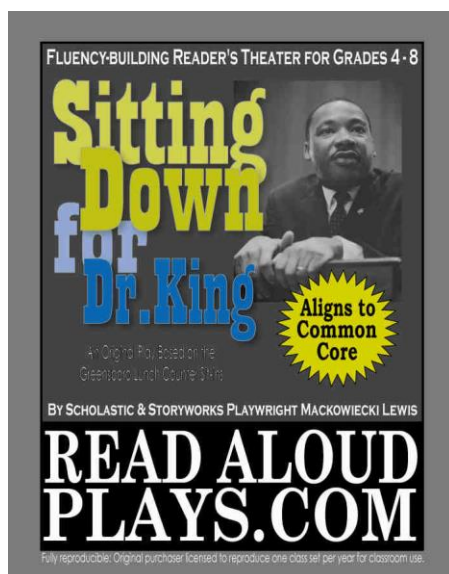
HISTORIAN: In the months that followed, over seventy thousand students participated in sit-ins all over the country.

ADULT DAVID: It led to the integration of restaurants in 108 cities.

HISTORIAN: Today, the section of the lunch counter where David Richmond, Franklin McCain, Ezell Blair, and Joseph McNeil sat down in search of respect can be seen in the Smithsonian Museum of American History.

ADULT DAVID: It honors those who had the courage to "sit down" for civil rights. ♦

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Originally published in the January 2003 issue of Scholastic's *Storyworks* magazine, ***Sitting Down for Dr. King's*** dramatic conclusion has made it one of the most frequently republished in the Civil Rights series. Set during the Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-ins of 1960, the event is viewed through the eyes of a middle class white boy who gets angry when the protests prevent him from enjoying his family celebration at the Woolworth. As the events unfold, he begins to understand the plight of the young protesters, choosing in the end to stand with them. David represents the typical privileged person; his "aha moment" will hopefully resonate with your student.

Though carefully-researched and based on the actual event, the play is classified as historical fiction. It can be adapted for reader's theater, podcast, or stage performance. From seven to fourteen parts, use it with students in grades 4 through 8 to improve fluency, build comprehension, and engage learners.



Pre-teaching: Because this play depicts some traumatic events, educators should carefully preview the script and pre-teach difficult concepts. Characters in the story present several questions designed to be answered either during a class discussion or as a writing prompt. Some of them appear in the comprehension activity. Readers need to connect the concluding scene when David says, "All we want is some strawberry shortcake and a place to sit down," to Grandma's statement in Scene Three: "It's not that these people are hungry for dessert. They're hungry for respect" (see the writing prompt, below)

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 Activities (CCSS Literature items 1, 4, 10). Have students cite evidence from the text when completing and reviewing. The full key appears on page 11.

Extension Activities:

- **Create a timeline** of the Sit-in Movement showing the time and location of each sit-in.
- **Pair** with Andrea Davis Pinkney's picture book, *Sit-in*.
- **Enact alongside other plays.** Consider pairing with *Gonna Let it Shine* (Selma), *We Shall Overcome* (Birmingham), or any of the other Civil Rights reader's theater scripts from *ReadAloudPlays.com*.
- **Writing Prompt.** Have students respond to the following: *How does David's line, "All we want is some strawberry shortcake and a place to sit down," relate to Grandma's statement in Scene Three: "It's not that these people are hungry for dessert. They're hungry for respect."*



Focus on Common Core – **Sitting Down for Dr. King**

Name: _____ Date: _____



1. In Scene One, what shows you that Bink is much younger than David?

- A. ☐ She gets more shortcake on her face than in her mouth.
- B. ☐ She has a silly nickname.
- C. ☐ She's eating so fast she's making a mess.
- D. ☐ All of the above.

2. This is a work of historical fiction. It's based on real events, but the story itself is imaginary. What does the author do to show you what's factual?

- A. ☐ He makes David's character unrealistic.
- B. ☐ He uses the *Historian* to provide factual details.
- C. ☐ He separates David's story from the real events from history.
- D. ☐ Nothing. He lets the reader decide what's true and false.

3. What is the setting of this story?

- A. ☐ The recent past in a Woolworth's department store.
- B. ☐ The present in a Woolworth's restaurant.
- C. ☐ The ancient past in a general store.
- D. ☐ The future in an internet café.

4. In most stories, the main character grows and changes. At what point in this play does David show he has changed?

- A. ☐ In Scene 3 when Grandma explains what protests are all about.
- B. ☐ In Scene 4 when he can't hold his tongue any longer.
- C. ☐ In Scene 1 when he tells Bink why the men can't have any shortcake.
- D. ☐ In Scene 4 when he says, "I'll have what they're having."

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Though the characters are speaking them, the questions include questions in the story he wants you, the reader, to answer. Locate each of these questions in the play and imagine yourself as the character answering them. What would your answer be? Use a separate sheet if you need more space.

5. What's a sit-in?

6. What would you have done?

7. What can a handful of protesters expect to accomplish?

8. Why don't you just go home?

9. What's so wrong about that?

10. You wanna take a swing at me?

Focus on Common Core – **Sitting Down for Dr. King**

Answer Key and Teacher's Notes

(CCSSs referenced are from 5th grade, but similar standards apply at grades 4 through 8)



1. In Scene One, what shows you that Bink is much younger than David? **D.** *All of the above.* (RL 5.1, 5.3)

2. This is a work of historical fiction. It's based on real events, but the story itself is imaginary. What does the author do to show you what's factual? **B.** *He uses the Historian to provide factual details.* (RL 5.6, 5.8)

3. What is the setting of this story? **A.** *The recent past in a Woolworth's department store.* (RL 5.3)

4. In most stories, the main character grows and changes. At what point in this play does David show he has changed? **D.** *In Scene 4 when he says, "I'll have what they're having."* (RL 5.6, RL 5.9)



Though the characters are speaking them, the author includes questions in the story that he wants you, the reader, to answer. Locate each of these questions in the play and imagine yourself as the character answering them. What would you have said? (RL/RI 5.3, 5.6)

Answers may vary widely. Suggest class discussion follow students' written responses with an emphasis on author's intent: "Did you answer the way the author wanted you to? What makes you think so?"

5. What's a sit-in? *A sit-in is a form of non-violent protest (inspired by Dr. King's work) in which participants occupy a site in order to bring about change.*

6. What would you have done? *Given present-day knowledge, many student would say they would speak up on behalf of the protesters, or join in the protest. Students may say they would be afraid to interfere. Others might say they'd do what their mother was telling them.*

7. What can a handful of protesters expect to accomplish? *History tells us that they can accomplish quite a bit. The epilog notes that although four men started the Greensboro sit-in, it spread to 108 additional cities.*

8. Why don't you just go home? *Some students may say that going home meant giving in to the same old discrimination, that things would remain as they had always been. What if the protesters had gone home? David would have had his shortcake, but America might look much different today.*

9. What's so wrong about that? *Some students might note that Bink, although just six years old, was "getting it" long before David. If she could enjoy shortcake, why can't the rest of these people?*

10. You wanna take a swing at me? *Some students might honestly admit that yes, they do want to take a swing at this guy. Others might refer to King's focus on non-violence and point out that, in the end, refraining from taking a swing is what helped make the Civil Rights Movement a success.*