



Freedom Summer

Deborah Wiles , Jerome Lagarrigue (Illustrator)

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John Henry swims better than anyone I know.

He crawls like a catfish,

blows bubbles like a swamp monster,

but he doesn't swim in the town pool with me.

He's not allowed.

Joe and John Henry are a lot alike. They both like shooting marbles, they both want to be firemen, and they both love to swim. But there's one important way they're different: Joe is white and John Henry is black, and in the South in 1964, that means John Henry isn't allowed to do everything his best friend is. Then a law is passed that forbids segregation and opens the town pool to everyone. Joe and John Henry are so excited they race each other there...only to discover that it takes more than a new law to change people's hearts.

Freedom Summer Details

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Author : Deborah Wiles , Jerome Lagarrigue (Illustrator)

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Download and Read Free Online Freedom Summer Deborah Wiles , Jerome Lagarrigue (Illustrator)

From Reader Review Freedom Summer for online ebook

Seth Williams says

Freedom Summer is a book about a young boy and his friend John Henry Waddell. Like any classic childhood friendship these two boys find comfort in their similarities. They both love to play, compete, swim, and dream of being fireman someday. However, there is one difference that hovers continually over their friendship. Our narrator is white, while John Henry is black. This means John Henry can't go certain places our narrator can.

One day our narrator learns that the community pool is now open to everyone, no matter what color. Our narrator is excited, he can finally take his friend to go swimming. However, once they reach the pool they find workers filling it with tar. This confuses our narrator and upsets John Henry. This event and the conversations that follow force our narrator begins to wrap his head around the unfairness of the world he lives in. He decides to do something about it and together, with his friend John Henry, they take the first steps towards equality.

This book best fits within the genre of Historical Fiction.

This book is most appropriate as a read aloud for K-5.

This book is a wow book for a multitude of reasons. The themes and morals contained in this story are valuable and well executed. The illustrations are stunning and set the mood for the setting. The writing is elegant and descriptive with lines like "John Henry's skin is the color of browned butter." To top it all off, the closing sequence where the narrator decides to walk in the store with his friend is simple and real. Our narrator wants to deny the truths in front of him but through friendship is forced to think deeper about the world he lives in. All this blends together to create a beautiful story.

This is a book that I would read out loud during Black History Month as we explored the history of the civil rights movement in our classroom. Before I read this book, I would facilitate a whole group activity to address the primary theme in this story. I would announce a surprise center time. Except today there would be new rules, if you had blue eyes then you would not get to join, instead I would have a worksheet for 'blue eyed' children. Most likely, there would be immediate outrage. I would use this outrage as fuel for a group discussion. Why is it not fair? Blue eyed students, how does this decision make you feel? John, I know Jane is your best friend, but she has blue eyes so she won't get to play with you today in centers, how does that make you feel? After we have had time to discuss the emotions we feel then I would tell them that everyone will get to participate in centers, after we read the book. Once finished with the book I would revisit the emotions we experienced and relate them to the characters in the book.

Sheila says

A moving children's story about a friendship between two boys, Joe and John Henry, which takes place in Mississippi in the summer of 1964 following the passage of the Civil Rights Act. The story shows how this civil rights act didn't necessarily immediately bring about the changes it intended, and that prejudice is a very hurtful thing, especially as it is experienced by John Henry, who is black.

The book does open with a great explanatory text about the story by the author.

(NS) Brea M says

Freedom Summer tells the story of a white boy named Joe who is friends with an African American boy named John Henry during the time of the Civil Rights Movement. Each day the two boys go swimming in the creek (John Henry is not allowed in the public pool) and get ice pops from the local store (only Joe is allowed to go inside). Things change one day when a new law gives African Americans “the same rights and freedom” as whites. Joe and John Henry head to the public pool, excited to swim together for the first time. The boys arrive just in time to see the pool being filled with asphalt. Unfortunately, not everyone is ready to accept equal rights for all. The owner of the pool would rather see it closed than to allow African Americans inside.

This is a thoughtful story that gives children a realistic view of the American South during the 1960's. The simplicity of this story makes it enjoyable yet meaningful for readers of all ages. Young readers would be able to connect to Joe and John Henry's innocent friendship. Older readers would appreciate that the author did not portray everything happy and perfect after blacks were permitted in the pool. Instead, she showed just how imbedded racism was and what a long road it was to move toward true equality. The Civil Rights Act did not create immediate change. Many whites chose to close their stores and restaurants rather than serve African Americans. The author based this story on her own experience growing up in the south. The title Freedom Summer is actually the name of a civil rights movement to register black Americans to vote during the summer of 1964. Deborah Wiles wrote this story because as a child she wanted to change the way blacks were treated. Children who read this story will surely gain an understanding of life during this important time in history. Ages 5-8.

Christy says

Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award (2002)

Ezra Jack Keats Award (2002)

This beautifully written and illustrated book tells the story of two boys, one black and one white, who are best friends living in the American South in the early 1960s. John Henry and Joe do everything together. They swim at the creek and go to the town store. They would swim at the town pool except John Henry can't go to the town pool, because he is black. When they go to the store, John Henry has to wait outside until Joe comes out because only white people are allowed to shop there. Until one day, the law changes and black people are allowed to swim at the pool. Joe is so excited he runs to tell John Henry the good news. The anxious boys cannot wait to swim together at the pool. Unfortunately, when they arrive the pool has been filled with asphalt. The boys know the pool was shut down so black and white people could not swim together. The boys are shocked and saddened. The book ends with a daring and brave gesture. Both boys walk into the town store to shop.

Lagarrigue's illustrations exquisitely depict the friendship between the boys and the emotional turmoil they both experience. Particularly stirring are the paintings of John Henry's brother when they arrive at the pool and the two boys sitting on the diving board looking out over the asphalt. This book can be used by educators who are teaching civil rights and social justice. It is a book about friendship and doing what is right. I enjoyed the book and felt inspired by the courage and friendship developed between John Henry and Joe.

L12aliciacarrera says

In the early 1960's in the South, two young boys are best of friends. John Henry is black and Joe is white. The fact that the color of their skin is not the same does not bother them at all. Joe and John Henry are a lot alike in other ways. They both want to be fireman and they both love to swim. They also like to eat ice pops and go swimming in the creek. "The town pool opens tomorrow to everybody under the sun, no matter what color." The boys are extremely excited as they plan to be the first ones at the town pool. John Henry has never been in a real pool where the water is clear. He's only been in Fiddler's Creek. Their happiness is quickly cut short when they arrive the next morning at the pool only to find that it is being filled with hot and spongy tar. "White folks don't want colored folks in their pool."

This story is told through Joe's perspective which makes the story much more poignant. Deborah Wiles introduces the experiences of prejudice through the two boys. The feelings they experience are of anger, disappointment, and frustration. This story is an account of the "Freedom Summer," which was a movement to register black Americans to vote, which followed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This is a book that can be used with K-3 students to introduce this topic which can at times be very difficult for children to understand. It most certainly can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Carolina says

"Daddy stirs his iced tea and says, "The town pool opens tomorrow to everybody under the sun, no matter what color." "That's the new law," Mama tells me."

Freedom summer is a tearjerking story of two best friends, John Henry Waddell and Joe. They spend most of their time together, except when John Henry, who is Black, cannot go into certain stores or do certain things because of the color of his skin. This book tells the story of the two friends struggling when segregation gets in between their friendship, and what happens even after segregation is outlawed.

The author, Deborah Wiles, includes a note about the text. She writes, "It is fiction, but based on real events." This book would be a great read aloud for teaching about the civil rights movement. Teachers can use it to engage students in thinking about what life was like during segregation.

Erin Ramai says

Freedom Summer is appropriate for students ages 5-8. In 2002, it received a Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award for Jerome Lagarrigue's illustrations and a Once Upon a World Children's Book Award. I feel that the deeper meaning of the book would be appreciated by readers in third through fifth grade as well as adult audiences.

An author's note at the beginning of this text helps explain the true events that inspired the story in Freedom Summer. This text is set during the summer of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which states that "All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment" of any public place, regardless of "...race, color, religion, or national origin." The author of Freedom Summer, Deborah Wiles, was a Caucasian child growing up in Alabama and Mississippi immediately following the passage of this act. She observed that rather than allow African Americans the same rights, many businesses simply closed their doors, some of them forever. Wiles

witnessed the grave inequalities that existed and Caucasian business owners' blatant disregard for the Civil Rights Act—they simply refused to serve African Americans before every white person had been helped. Concurrently, “civil rights workers in Mississippi organized ‘Freedom Summer,’ a movement to register black Americans to vote.” A movement, which became the title of the book.

John Henry Waddell and Joe are best friends during a time when African Americans cannot be friends with Caucasians. It's too dangerous. But they don't care. They have similar interests: they like to shoot marbles and swim. However, instead of swimming together at the town pool, they have to swim in the creek because John Henry isn't allowed. He is also forbidden to enter the general store. When Joe finds out that the “town pool opens tomorrow to everybody under the sun, no matter what color” he runs to tell John Henry. The next morning they wake up early, so they can be the first to arrive at the pool, but when they reach the pool, it is covered in asphalt. The worst part is: African Americans were hired for the job. After they're done paving the pool, Joe and John Henry sit on the diving board staring at metal railings sticking out of black tar, a sight which makes Joe say, “I didn't want to swim in this old pool anyway.” But tears well up in John Henry's eyes; he wants to do everything Joe can do. At the end of the book, Joe is imagining all the things they can do together, the first of which is going to the general store. They walk through the front door together.

This book is very powerful and speaks to the way in which children sometimes transcend the evils of their time when adults cannot. It explains the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as well as race relations during that time in a way that is comprehensible to young children. It could be utilized in a unit on the Civil Rights Movement alongside other fiction and nonfiction texts that illuminate this period in our nation's history from the perspectives of both adults and children.

Lisa Vegan says

Stunningly done. I came close to crying at the end.

There is a wonderfully informative author note, and I'm so glad it was at the start of the book rather than at the end, that explains how the desegregation laws in the sixties didn't necessarily mean true integration took place.

The story itself, of two boys who are best friends, one black and one white, the latter who is the narrator, who learn the real truth, painfully, is wonderfully told. It's a grand but simple story, and its message is woven in seamlessly.

The illustrations are lovely and perfectly fit the story. I loved the art style, the colors used, everything about the pictures.

This is a terrific friendship story and also a fine story to inform kids about what the sixties in the U.S. south was like for black people and for white people. It would be okay as a first book and also would work well as an adjunct to other books and materials.

I looked at what shelves I put this book on and apparently I'm reading it for the Picture Books Club at the Children's Books group. As I recall, the month's theme is friendship.

Adam Glasser says

Freedom Summer, written by Deborah Wiles and illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue, is a powerful historical fiction picture book about the American South in 1964. The story is told from the perspective of Joe, a young boy who is white. Joe's best friend is John Henry, who is African American and whose mom works as a housekeeper for Joe's family. Joe and John Henry have a lot in common, and love to play together. Because John Henry is not allowed in the whites-only swimming pool, the boys swim together in the creek. Because John Henry is not allowed to go through the front door of the general store, Joe goes in and buys ice pops for the two of them. When the Civil Rights Bill passes, Joe and John Henry are excited that they can finally go to the public pool together. When they arrive the next morning, however, they find out the pool has been closed and filled in. They then decide to go into the general store together to buy ice pops. The book ends suddenly, making it unclear whether John Henry will be welcomed at the store.

Although this is a picture book, this book provides readers with a powerful story that demonstrates the complexities of the struggle for civil rights in our country. While the passage of the Civil Rights Act gives these boys hope that they can finally do things together in public, they realize that the reality is much more complex. With one step forward comes a step back. The ambiguous ending further emphasizes the frustration that these boys, and other people who wanted racial equality, must have felt in this time period (and in many ways still continue to feel today).

This book deservedly won the Coretta Scott King Award and the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award.

I would highly recommend using this book as a read aloud for first, second, or third grade students. The book could be used when teaching a social studies unit on the American South and the Civil Rights Movement, or when teaching broader concepts such as equality and justice. Teachers could also potentially use this book when teaching a writing unit on narratives, since it is told as a first person account from the perspective of an elementary school aged boy. Given the sensitive and complex material presented in this book, I would recommend providing background context (available in the book) and preparing guided discussion questions in advance.

Jill says

In the summer of 1964, civil rights workers in Mississippi organized "Freedom Summer," a movement to register black Americans to vote. It was a time of great racial violence and change. This story is told from the perspectives of kids. John Henry is a young African American boy who is best friends with Joe, who is white. There are many areas of town however that John Henry is restricted from going. Instead of using his white privilege and meeting up with John Henry later, as he used to, Joe decides he will only see the town the way John Henry is allowed to see it.

This is a great story with nice illustrations that has won multiple awards. I see it as an excellent book to teach white kids about our past and about making ethical choices.

Cathy says

Thought provoking read my son and I read together. A look at the tough times of racial inequality in the early 60's. It is a great read to have a meaningful discussion with your child about an unjust time in our American history. Beautifully written and illustrated.

Alyson (Kid Lit Frenzy) says

This is a beautiful story of friendship between two children in the south during the tail end of segregation. When I got to the part about the pool, I nearly sobbed.

Jaclyn Giordano says

Freedom Summer is a picture book intended for students from grades one through three. However, it is a powerful story of friendship that spans all ages and grade levels. I gave this book four stars because its thematic content and overall message of both hope and despair really can resound with students and adults alike. The story follows the friendship of a white boy and an African American boy in a Southern town during the Civil Rights movement. And, even though laws of equality were passed, both boys see favorite pastimes (like a neighborhood swimming pool) destroyed before they would be allowed use by all races. The clear and vivid use of visual language allows the reader to put themselves into the action, with phrases such as “stare at the tops of silver ladders sticking up from the tar” and “I swallow hard and my heart says yes.” Deborah Wiles, the author, gives the reader “A Note about the Text” at the beginning of the book. This gives the reader both information regarding the Civil Rights movement and allows the reader to understand that friendships, no matter what color you are, can overcome anything and are blind to color. With this note, the author allows the reader to ponder and think about what it would have been like to be a different skin color. She allows the reader to “put themselves in someone else’s shoes,” allowing for an emotional and empathetic connection to the text. This book does an excellent job of allowing the reader to see that friendship and maturity can blossom, and even thrive, in the face of injustice.

L12_luisespinoza Espinoza says

This book tells a moving story about two best friends set in the backdrop of the segregated south during 1964; Joe is Caucasian and John Henry is African-American. The boys know each other because John Henry's mother works as a housekeeper for Joe's family. In addition, they have many similar interests, like shooting marbles, swimming, and wanting to be firefighters. However, there are things that John Henry cannot do, like walking through the front door of the General Store or swimming in the town pool. One night, though, Joe's father mentions at the dinner table that the town pool will be open to everyone in town the following day because as his mom states, "That's the new law". As soon as Joe hears this, he runs to tell John Henry. The following day, they both race to the town pool only to find that it is being filled with asphalt and come to the realization that it takes more than a law to change people's hearts. This incident angers the boys and affects Joe to the point that he starts to wonder what it must be like for his friend John Henry to live in this town. These thoughts drive Joe to make a simple, yet powerful statement: "I want to see this town with John Henry's eyes". The story ends on a somewhat happy note when the boys decide to be bold by

going to the General store to buy ice pops; but this time, they both decide to walk together through the front door.

The book has an author's note at the beginning of the text, giving a brief explanation of the background of the setting and time period in the story. I feel this can give students a good understanding of some of the issues that were going on during this time period. The story does a really nice job of depicting the disposition and emotions that existed with segregation and does it in a way that is relatable to students, considering the diversity that exists in today's classrooms. As such, the book can be an excellent catalyst to discussions about the civil rights movement of the 1960's. There are also a lot of activities that can come out of this book. For example, the students could write journals about the main characters and having them relate to the characters feelings. The book is also an excellent resource due to the dynamic nature of the topic, and hence, can be used for readers grades 1-6. This Coretta Scott King award-winning book is definitely one that needs to be part of your library collection.

Mississippi Library Commission says

Freedom Summer is picture book perfection. Jerome Lagarrigue won the John Steptoe Award for New Talent for his illustrations and we can see why. The gorgeous impressionism-inspired pictures pulled us even deeper into this story of the South during the summer of 1964. Deborah Wiles's tale of young Joe and John Henry's friendship is incredibly sweet. Joe, who is white, is noticing the ugly side of the segregated world in which he grew up for the first time. He wants his friend John Henry to be able to experience all the same fun things he does in their small town. The ways in which the two small boys act and react to their town's fight against integration is both heartbreaking and inspiring. This is a must read for pre-schoolers and up.
