

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO

Betty BEFORE X

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



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ABOUT THE BOOK

In Detroit, 1945, eleven-year-old Betty's house doesn't quite feel like home. She believes her mother loves her, but she can't shake the feeling that her mother doesn't *want* her. Church helps those worries fade, if only for a little while. The singing, the preaching, the speeches from guest activists like Paul Robeson and Thurgood Marshall stir African Americans in her community to stand up for their rights. Betty quickly finds confidence and purpose in volunteering for the Housewives' League, an organization that supports black-owned businesses. Soon, the American civil rights icon we now know as Dr. Betty Shabazz is born.

In this book—inspired by Betty's real life but expanded upon and fictionalized through collaboration with novelist Renée Watson—Ilyasah Shabazz illuminates four poignant years in her mother's childhood, painting an inspiring portrait of a girl overcoming the challenges of self-acceptance and belonging that will resonate with young readers today.

Backmatter included.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ilyasah Shabazz (left), third daughter of Malcolm X and Dr. Betty Shabazz, is an educator, activist, motivational speaker, and author of multiple award-winning publications, including *X: A Novel*. She is also an active advocacy worker and an adjunct professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City.

Renée Watson (right) is the recipient of a Coretta Scott King Award and a Newbery Honor for her Young Adult title, *Piecing Me Together*. Her picture book *Harlem's Little Blackbird: The Story of Florence Mills* received several honors including an NAACP Image Award nomination in children's literature. She is also the founder of the I, Too Arts Collective and currently teaches courses on writing for children at the University of New Haven and Pine Manor College.



This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. The standards listed throughout the guide reflect the Common Core Standards for grade six to eight and eight and the NCSS C3 Framework for grades six to eight but the activities and questions can be applied to grades four through eight. Please adapt the activities and questions as needed to meet the needs of your students. You know your students better than anyone else!

BEFORE READING ACTIVITIES

1. In the prologue, Betty is horrified by a lynching she sees. She asks her Aunt Fannie Mae, “Why do Negro people die that way?” (p. 6). This event remains part of Betty’s memory for years to come as violence toward people of color continues to escalate. Using resources like the Map of White Supremacy Mob Violence (<http://www.monroeworktoday.org/explore/>) and the “History of Lynchings” article from the NAACP (<http://www.naacp.org/history-of-lynchings/>), create a timeline, graph, chart, map, or table highlighting key facts about the violence of this era. Evaluate current events and determine if instances of violence toward people of color have increased or decreased since Betty was growing up.

CCSS.RL.6.5. Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

D2.His.2.6-8. Classify series of historical events and developments as examples of change and/or continuity.

D2.His.15.6-8. Evaluate the relative influence of various causes of events and developments in the past.

2. To build background knowledge prior to reading this novel, select a person introduced in the text and create a biographical infographic to share what you have learned. Research options are Thurgood Marshall, Paul Robeson, Harry Truman, Billy Eckstine, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Sarah Vaughan, and Malcolm X. To create your infographic, use any of these free creators: <https://www.canva.com/create/infographics/>, <https://piktochart.com/>, or <https://www.visme.co/make-infographics/>.

CCSS.W.7.7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS.W.7.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In chapter 3, we meet Uncle Clyde, Aunt Nina, and their children. They moved from Alabama to Detroit for a job at Ford. However, as Suesetta explains, “My mom said now that all the soldiers are coming home from the war, they will need their jobs back and the factories will start making cars again, so Uncle Clyde got let go” (pp. 38–39). Why would the end of WWII impact the jobs of African Americans at Ford?
2. On page 22, we first learn about the Housewives’ League. Why do they believe that items should be purchased only from businesses that hire African Americans? Will this strategy of boycotting businesses work to further the cause of the Housewives’ League? Why or why not?
3. Suesetta, Phyllis, Kay, and Betty love reading magazines. Two magazines that the girls discuss frequently are *Ebony* and *Negro Digest*. Compare and contrast the two magazines in content and style by creating a Venn diagram.
4. Betty spends a lot of time pondering Miss Emma’s Bleaching Cream and other options for lightening skin tones. Why is this something that concerns her? Do the other girls notice the same ads? Why or why not?
5. In chapter 5, Suesetta, Kay, and Betty go Christmas shopping. While shopping, they are treated with disrespect and are discriminated against. How does this shopping experience change Betty’s opinion of the Housewives’ League?
6. In chapter 15, Deacon Boyd and Mr. Malloy discuss the upcoming visit of Thurgood Marshall and desegregating schools. Both men have very different opinions. How are both opinions included in the chapter? What points do the men disagree about, and do they agree on any points? Whose argument is more convincing?
7. In chapter 18, the women of the Housewives’ League have a discussion about President Truman and his role in preventing lynching. Why are the women frustrated by Truman? What has been happening in the South that is concerning them? Use evidence from the text to explain your thinking.
8. As Kay explains to Betty, “[j]ust because you have a bad season doesn’t mean you stop planting” (p. 190). How does Betty later apply this thinking to her own life? How does Kay make the connection between planting and the civil rights movement?

9. How does Ollie Mae prove to be a dynamic character in chapter 28? What line or incident in the chapter shows her growth as a character?
10. In the Author’s Note, Shabazz writes, “It is my hope that by reading my mother’s story, young people who may be feeling abandoned or neglected, fearful or hopeless, anxious or unsure, will find inspiration” (p. 227). Using evidence from the novel, describe how Betty’s story is an inspiring one. What can we learn from Betty?

CCSS.RL.6.1. Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.6.2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.RL.6.3. Describe how a particular story’s or drama’s plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

CCSS.RL.6.5. Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

CCSS.RL.6.6. Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

CCSS.RL.7.1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.7.6. Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.

CCSS.RL.8.1. Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.RL.8.3. Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.RL.8.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

D2.Eco.1.6-8. Explain how economic decisions affect the well-being of individuals, businesses, and society.

D2.Eco.2.6-8. Evaluate alternative approaches or solutions to current economic issues in terms of benefits and costs for different groups and society as a whole.

D2.His.4.6-8. Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

1. On page 41, Suesetta explains that the Housewives’ League provides learning experiences for members: “There are classes to take—well, not like the classes we have in school, but more like history classes about *our* history.” In 2018, do our history classes cover the history of all Americans? Using a history textbook supplied by your school district, select a chapter at random and create a table that keeps track of the people and history explored in the chapter. Are all races, genders, and colors represented or is there an emphasis on only one narrative? Determine the source of the textbook to determine when and where it was published. Did that determine the history represented? Write a letter to the school administration in regard to your textbook findings. You can either commend the textbook and its use at your school or specify how it fails to present a comprehensive view of American history.

D2.His.13.6-8. Evaluate the relevance and utility of a historical source based on information such as maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

D2.Civ.7.6-8. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school and community settings.

CCSS.W.7.1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

2. In chapter 4, Phyllis asks her teacher Mrs. Collins why students need to learn to sew. “Why? To be able to design something with your mind and your hands is a powerful skill to have. It’s your own creation. Who wouldn’t want to know how to do that?” (p. 49). Like Mrs. Collins suggests, designing and creating something of your own is a powerful thing. Take up a skill like sewing, knitting, crocheting, woodworking, cooking, or another hands-on skill. Design and create an object of your choosing as Betty does frequently throughout the novel. Be prepared to share your creation in class as well as speak about the process of creating and whether or not you agree with Mrs. Collins.

CCSS.SL.7.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

3. Starting on page 94, Betty counts her blessings, listing all the things she is grateful for. This list grows and changes throughout the novel, but Betty tries to focus on the good even when things are not going well for her. Just as Betty did throughout the novel, create a daily blessings list. The format can be one of your choosing, but the content must be clear to the reader and flow in an organized way.

CCSS.W.7.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

4. On page 67, Betty finds Arthur's newspaper on the kitchen table. "It was full of pictures showing Detroit on fire, Detroit in a rage. A car was turned on its side, flames rising to the sky like the burning bush we learned about in Sunday School" (p. 67). Betty was describing the Detroit Race Riots of 1943. Research this event using both primary and secondary sources. Using your research, evaluate Shabazz's description of events. Are they accurate? Did she tell the story of the riots in chapter 6? If not, what was missing and could have been added?

D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

D2.His.4.6-8. Analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.14.6-8. Explain multiple causes and effects of events and developments in the past.

CCSS.W.7.1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

5. In chapter 13, Mrs. Malloy tells the members of the junior Housewives' League she is going to show them what leadership looks like. "When you see something happening that you think is wrong, you do something good about it to make it right" (101). Think about local, national, and international issues that concern you. What is something that is wrong that you would like to fix? Choose an issue and select a person in power to write a letter or e-mail to with your solution to the problem.

CCSS.W.8.1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence

CCSS.W.8.5. With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.

D2.Civ.7.6-8. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school and community settings.

6. After learning about Betty Shabazz, do you think she would be an active participant in the Black Lives Matter movement today? Defend your claim using evidence from the text as well as from additional research.

CCSS.W.8.1.A. Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

CCSS.W.8.1.B. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

CCSS.W.8.1.C. Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.W.8.1.D. Establish and maintain a formal style.

CCSS.W.8.1.E. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

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