

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR **KING** A LIFE

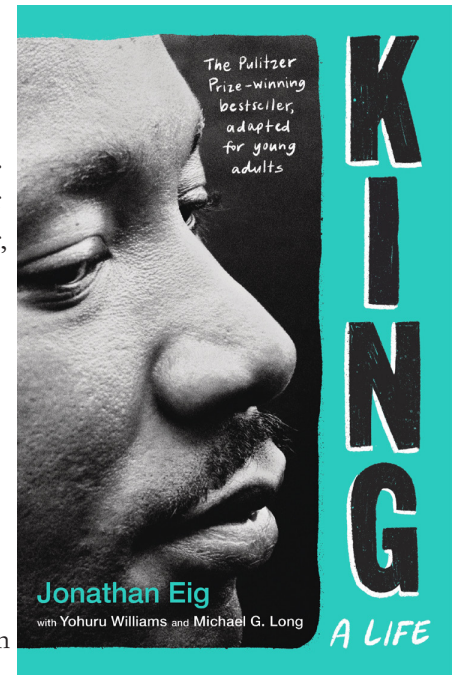
ABOUT THE BOOK

Hailed as “the most compelling account of [Martin Luther] King’s life in a generation” by *The Washington Post*, the Pulitzer Prize–winning bestseller has been adapted for young adults in this new standard biography of the most famous civil rights activist in U.S. history.

Often regarded as more myth and legend than man, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was many things throughout his storied life: student, activist, preacher, dreamer, father, husband. From his Atlanta childhood centered in the historically Black neighborhood of Sweet Auburn to his precipitous rise as a civil rights leader on the streets of Birmingham, Selma, and Montgomery, Dr. King would go on to become one of the most recognizable, influential, and controversial people of the twentieth century.

In this fast-paced and immersive adaptation of Jonathan Eig’s groundbreaking *New York Times* bestseller readers will meet a Dr. King like no other: a committed radical whose demands for racial and economic justice remain as urgent today as they were in his lifetime, a minister wrestling with his human frailties and dark moods, a citizen hunted by his own government.

The inspiring young adult edition of *King: A Life* highlights the author’s never-before-seen research—including recently declassified FBI documents—while reaffirming and recontextualizing the lasting effects and implications of MLK’s work for the present day. Adapted by National Book Award–nominated authors Yohuru Williams and Michael G. Long, this biography for a new generation is a nuanced, unprecedented portrayal of a man who truly shook the world.



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jonathan Eig is a former senior writer for *The Wall Street Journal*. He is the *New York Times* bestselling author of several books, including *Ali: A Life*, *Luckiest Man: The Life and Death of Lou Gehrig*, and *Opening Day: The Story of Jackie Robinson’s First Season*. Ken Burns calls him “a master storyteller,” and Eig’s books have been listed among the best of the year by *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *Slate*. He lives in Chicago with his wife and children.



Yohuru Williams is a professor of history and the founding director of the Racial Justice Initiative at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. A regular contributor to a variety of media programming on CNN and the History Channel, he is the author of numerous books, including *Teaching US History Beyond the Textbook*, *Call Him Jack: The Story of Jackie Robinson*, *Black Freedom Fighter*, and *More Than a Dream: The Radical March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom*. The former chief historian of the Jackie Robinson Foundation, he appeared in Ken Burns’s *Jackie Robinson* and was one of the hosts of *Sound Smart*, the History Channel’s popular YouTube program. His educational videos on civil rights, social movements, and other historic events have garnered more than one million views. He lives in Minnesota.



Michael G. Long has a PhD from Emory University and is the author or editor of numerous books on nonviolent protest, civil rights, and LGBTQ+ rights. His books for children include *Call Him Jack: The Story of Jackie Robinson*, *Black Freedom Fighter*, and the picture book *Unstoppable: How Bayard Rustin Organized the March on Washington*.



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PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1. *King: A Life* was written by Jonathan Eig and adapted for young adult readers by Yohuru Williams and Michael G. Long. When reading nonfiction it's important to determine the credibility of the authors to assess the accuracy of the text. Research each person credited with working on this book and evaluate their credentials. Be prepared to share your findings and analysis with a small group.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.a

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.7

2. The book opens with a verse from Genesis 37:19–21: “They said to one another, Behold, this dreamer cometh . . . Let us slay him . . . And we shall see what will become of his dreams.” Why would the authors begin the book this way? How does this verse prepare the reader?

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3. Before you read *King: A Life*, create a chart of what you think you already know about Dr. King using the organization of the text in seven parts. For example, what do you know about Dr. King's early years, which is part one of the text? As you read, use this chart to assess your understanding by reflecting on the accuracy of what you thought you knew and how your thinking has changed based on what you've read.
4. Scan the images selected to introduce each part of the book. Design a bookmark to support your reading with a sketch or printout of one of the images used in the text. Add a compelling question you have about Dr. King's life, motivations, or how he is remembered to guide your reading of the text.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Readers learn in chapter 1 that Martin Luther King was named Michael King at birth. Explain why his name was changed and the significance behind the choice of Martin Luther.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.1

2. On page 7 the authors state, “The incident may have marked M.L.'s first overt protest of racism.” How did this incident shape who Dr. King became?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.3

3. On page 16 the authors introduce the reader to W. E. B. Du Bois and his idea of double consciousness. Who is Du Bois and what is double consciousness? How did this idea help Dr. King during his time at Crozer Theological Seminary?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4

D2.Civ.14.6-8

4. As the authors explain on page 33, “If they were to boycott, they could put the bus company out of business.” Provide examples of boycotts of the past and present and describe the economic impacts these boycotts can have.

D2.Eco.1.6-8



5. Starting on page 42, the authors share Rosa Parks’s account of what happened the day she refused to give up her seat on the bus. Compare her account to another text, including a newspaper from the time, an excerpt from a textbook, or images from a picture book. What did the other accounts get right and what did they get wrong? Why is this important event often misunderstood?

D2.His.14.6-8

6. The bus boycott was difficult for the many participants as days turned to weeks and weeks to months. Additionally, the officials in Montgomery were frustrated by the bus boycott and put pressure on the participants to stop. How did the officials push back and try to end the boycott?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.3

7. On February 10, 1959, Dr. King arrived in India for a five-week trip. As the authors explain on page 65, this trip was designed so that “King might learn more about Gandhi and gain a perspective on how nonviolent tactics could advance the civil rights movement.” What did Dr. King learn during his time in India and how did it impact his decisions moving forward?

D2.Geo.5.6-8

8. When working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), why was it important to Dr. King and James Lawson to serve “as advisors, not leaders” (page 72).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1

9. On page 75, the authors state, “When Coretta told Daddy King about the call [from Kennedy], he announced instantly that he was switching his vote from Nixon to Kennedy and that he intended to make no secret of it.” What can we learn from this dialogue about the power of voting? How does this example show how voting has the ability to hold politicians and those in power accountable in a participatory democracy?

D2.His.1.6-8

10. Dr. King used letter writing to share his concerns about issues in the United States. After reading his Letter from Birmingham Jail, reflect on why it is important in a participatory democracy to articulate concerns about issues in the way Dr. King did in his letter. Explain how his use of letters raised awareness to important issues, and then make connections to other ways people might share such concerns today.

D2.Civ.10.6-8

11. On page 100 the authors describe a picture taken of “a young Black man under attack by a police dog.” View the [image](#) that was published in newspapers across the country and outraged many Americans. Then select a series of pictures published in the contemporary media that engage the public in similar ways. Describe your picture collection and explain the themes and commonalities of the images you selected.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7



12. What is communism and why was it so controversial in the 1960s? How did communism impact the Civil Rights Movement?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.4

13. John Lewis gave a powerful speech during the March on Washington. Read Lewis's [speech](#) and then watch a [recording](#) of him giving the speech. Compare and contrast the text version versus the recording. Which version of the speech was more powerful and why?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.7

14. "I Have A Dream" is Dr. King's best-known speech. Pull a powerful quote from the speech and design an image to visually represent the meaning of his words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4

15. Who is Malcolm X and how did his views on civil rights differ from Dr. King's?

D2.Civ.10.6-8

16. We now know that the FBI, under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, used their resources to spy on Dr. King and tried to limit his power and voice. Why was this a strategy used by the FBI and what impact did it have on Dr. King?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2

17. After reading chapter 22, view [footage](#) captured by news cameras on March 7, 1965. How does viewing this footage shift your perspective of this event?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7

18. "We Shall Overcome" is a song that symbolizes the Civil Rights Movement. Design a ten-song playlist with other songs that capture this movement and explain why each song was included using evidence from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.4

19. On page 180 the authors argue, "The scenes of white rage in Chicago did not have the effect on the nation that Bull Connor and his dogs had had in Birmingham. King had once again used conflict to bring American racism into the open, but this time it brought no great reckoning." Why did the events in Chicago not bring about the same response?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.4

20. On page 181 the authors explain, "But if King didn't change Chicago—or Los Angeles for that matter—Chicago and Los Angeles changed King." What is meant by this statement? How did these cities change Dr. King?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.1



21. Describe what the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was and how their beliefs and strategies differed from Dr. King's.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.3

22. Chapter 30 is about Dr. King's assassination. The authors very carefully shared the events as they unfolded on April 4, 1968. How does the authors' craft create a powerful moment for the reader?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.5

POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1. Create a timeline of events that occurred both nationally and internationally during Dr. King's lifetime as well as major milestone events for Dr. King. Where does his life intersect other events? Analyze these connections and annotate your timeline with your thinking.

D2.His.1.6-8

2. Throughout the text, the authors share with the reader how Dr. King's choices impacted his wife. On page 62 he argues, "For Coretta, it marked another in a series of compromises." What did she give up because of her relationship with him and what did she gain?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1

3. Throughout the book, the authors provide examples of how leaders of the Civil Rights Movement limited the role of women and LGBTQ+ participants. How did this lack of intersectionality impact the movement? What lessons can we learn from this choice?

D2.His.5.6-8

4. Throughout the text, the authors highlight the role of young people in the Civil Rights Movement. How did students help support the movement?

D2.His.16.6-8

5. The authors argue in the epilogue, "I wanted to help readers discover a King they could relate to. I wanted to remind people that the man who led the Montgomery bus boycott and the march from Selma and who gave some of the greatest speeches of all time also chewed his fingernails, shouted at the TV during game shows, and got mediocre grades in school. As an adult, he wrestled with feelings of self-doubt. At times he got depressed, and he complained that he felt like no one understood him. Does this make him less heroic? No. I think it makes him more heroic." Do you agree with this point of view?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.6

6. Create a map of Dr. King's travels across the United States. Be sure to label each city and state that he visited as described in the text and add the date of his visit.

D2.Geo.1.6-8



7. In the United States, the third Monday of January is a federal holiday honoring Dr. King. Research the history of the federal holiday and how it came to be. Were all states on board? Has the holiday and how we remember Dr. King shifted over time?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.7

8. As the authors explain, many people remember a sanitized version of Dr. King and focus on only his nonviolent approach to making change. They ignore his fight for reparations and economic equality, and his protest against the Vietnam War. Design a social media post using Canva that informs the viewer of the many layers of Dr. King. Include quotes, images, and visuals to show your understanding.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2

This guide was written by Nicole Woulfe who has taught middle-school social studies in New Hampshire for seventeen years. She is also an adjunct professor at Southern New Hampshire University in the competency-based learning program. In 2018, she was named New Hampshire's History Teacher of the Year.

