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Coretta's Song: *The Life of Coretta Scott King*

Written by Doreen Rappaport • Illustrated by Cozbi A. Cabrera

TEACHING TIPS

"My story is a freedom song of struggle."
- Coretta Scott King (Page 21)

Coretta's Song chronicles Coretta Scott King's journey from a young girl with a love of music to a gifted musician and influential leader in the fight for civil rights. Drawing on its themes, this guide's activities encourage students to explore the power of the human voice to create joy, inspire change, and advance justice. Students will also explore the important role music played in the African American freedom struggle and the American Civil Rights Movement.

ACTIVITY 1: EXPLORE THE POWER OF THE HUMAN VOICE

The vocal ranges of Coretta Scott King and her grandfather are mentioned in the text:

*"Grandfather Scott's deep **baritone** voice opened the singing at church."* (Page 4)

*"Coretta became the lead **soprano** in the school chorus, which toured Ohio and Indiana."* (Page 7)

Prepare a lesson that introduces students to vocal ranges and how the human voice produces different sounds. Introduce the six most common vocal ranges: Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Baritone, and Bass, and listen to examples of each as a class. Invite students to explore the qualities of each voice type, identify their own vocal range where appropriate, and create artwork inspired by the sounds or emotions they hear. To demonstrate that sound is created by vibrations, have students observe the ripples formed when they speak, hum, or sing near a shallow bowl of water.

Discussion Questions:

- What emotions or moods do you feel each vocal range evokes?
- What did you observe when speaking, humming, or singing near the bowl of water?

ACTIVITY 2: EXPERIENCE JOY THROUGH MUSIC AND PLAY

Though Coretta Scott King and other African American children faced discrimination, they still created joy in their communities. One game they played was Sally Walker (Page 5). Have students listen to Ella Jenkins' rendition of "Little Sally Walker" at the Smithsonian Folkways site. Watch online videos of children playing the game and allow students to attempt to play



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the game themselves. Discuss how music, movement, and play can foster community and joy, even in difficult times.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is it important to make time for joy? How can games and music bring people together?
- What activities bring you joy?

ACTIVITY 3: LISTEN AND CREATE MUSIC-INSPIRED ART

"Coretta learned to read music and play the flutophone, trumpet, and piano. Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven filled her ears. So did the voices of the great Black singers Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, and Marian Anderson. 'Learning about them made me dare to dream that I, too, could become a concert artist.'" (Page 7)

In the Illustrator's Note, artist Cozbi A. Cabrera writes that she "chose to represent Coretta with vibrancy because she speaks into our collective future—one whose hard-won foundational freedoms align with our professed ideals." (Page 22)

Play music by the composers and musicians who inspired Coretta Scott King. Discuss how music can shape dreams, goals, and identity. Then, have students create their own vibrant artwork inspired by the music that inspired Coretta.

Extend learning for older students: Assign students a composer, musician, or singer who inspired Coretta Scott King, and have them research and present on that person.

ACTIVITY 4: FREEDOM MUSIC – LEARN, LISTEN, AND PERFORM

"And she, too, traveled from coast to coast, giving Freedom Concerts, weaving songs with stories of the movement." (Page 15)

Using Carnegie Hall's online resource, Timeline of African American Music, ask students to explore the history of Freedom Songs and their role in the Civil Rights Movement. Listen to recordings available at the site and discuss how the songs inspired hope, unity, courage, and action.

Extension activity: As a class, choose a Freedom Song to learn and perform at a school event.



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ACTIVITY 5: READ AND COMPARE

Read aloud *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* also written by Doreen Rappaport and lead students in a discussion comparing its themes and events with those presented in Coretta's Song.

Discussion Questions:

- What qualities did Martin and Coretta share?
- How did each use their voice to help others?
- How can you use your voice to make a difference in your school or community?

Extend learning for older students: Have students write a reflection or essay describing how Martin and Coretta used their voices for good and how students can do the same.

External resources mentioned in this guide:
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings: "Little Sally Walker" performed by Ella Jenkins
Carnegie Hall: "Timeline of African American Music - Freedom Songs"
Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by Doreen Rappaport

