

A CURRICULUM GUIDE TO:
malcolm LITTLE

The Boy Who
Grew Up to Become
Malcolm X

By Ilyasah Shabazz
Illustrated by AG Ford



**MALCOLM LITTLE:
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to Become Malcolm X**
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BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

This picture book biography of Malcolm X, written by his daughter Ilyasah Shabazz, emphasizes the enduring values and lessons that young Malcolm learned from his parents. Drawing on stories Ilyasah heard from family members, personal experience, and research, the author describes how Malcolm learned about self-reliance, perseverance, faith, and optimism from his father, and about brotherhood, love of education, and the importance of family roots from his mother.

Since this biography ends when Malcolm is in junior high school, there is an opportunity for teachers and librarians to provide additional material to delve more deeply into Malcolm X’s life story and his various transformations along the way. In addition, students can also read other partial biographies that focus on the childhoods of well-known people such as Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, Sojourner Truth, and Jim Thorpe.

The paintings by AG Ford reinforce the theme of the text—the continuing relevance of values and lessons learned at home—by envisioning many of the defining moments in Malcolm’s early life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES

Main Idea and Key Details

The Common Core State Standards suggest that students should be able to identify the main idea of a text and explain the key details that support it (RI.1–5.2), ask and answer questions about key ideas in a text (RI.1–3.1), and describe the connection between two events (RI.1.3). The activities below incorporate these skills by focusing attention on key ideas and supporting evidence.

1. Main Idea: The Importance of Family Values and Lessons

In both the first and last paragraphs of the book, the author states the main idea. Have students reread the first and last pages of the book and state the main idea in their own words.

First Paragraph

Malcolm X was one of the most influential men in American history. But before he became Malcolm X, he was Malcolm Little. Malcolm was born on May 19, 1925, in the small Midwestern town of Omaha, Nebraska. *He was born into a tight-knit family with parents who not only encouraged his natural curiosity as a boy, but also taught him lessons about discipline, fortitude, and self-determination.* [italics added]

Last Paragraph

Malcolm may have lost his family, but he never lost the values for which the Little family stood, and for the rest of his life, whenever doubt, sadness, fear, or pain would come creeping into his thoughts, he would firmly hold on to one constant force that always gave true meaning to his family life: love. [italics added]

2. Key Details: How Malcolm Learned Values and Lessons

The chart below lists values and lessons that Malcolm learned from his parents. Give evidence from the book showing how Malcolm learned each value and lesson. The first two items have been completed as examples.

Value/Lesson	How Malcolm Learned This Value or Lesson
Hard Work	After their home was set on fire, Malcolm watched his father build a new home for his family.
Equality/Brotherhood	In the garden, his mother taught her children how to love every creature equally. Malcolm also heard his father preach about equality.
Optimism	
Faith	
The Value of Information	
Discipline	

3. Asking and Answering Questions: Taking on a Role

Ask student volunteers to take the role of people mentioned in the book. In turn, have the other students ask them questions based on the book. Here are some roles to try out:

- Earl Little, Malcolm’s father
- Louise Norton Little, Malcolm’s mother
- Big Boy, Malcolm’s friend
- Mr. Ostrowski, Malcolm’s teacher

For example, students could ask Earl Little these questions:

- What values do you want your children to have?
- Why are you an optimistic person?
- Why do you support Marcus Garvey?

Encourage students to ask questions using the following “starters”:

- *Who . . . ?*
- *What . . . ?*
- *When . . . ?*
- *Where . . . ?*
- *Why . . . ?*
- *How . . . ?*
- *What if . . . ?*
- *What could have happened when . . . ?*
- *What is important to know about . . . ?*

4. Explain how Malcolm used his power of observation to find a better way to catch fish. What does this incident tell you about Malcolm?
5. What lessons did Malcolm learn in his mother’s garden that he could use throughout his life?
6. What does the author want you to know about Malcolm?

Craft and Structure

The Common Core State Standards ask us to pay attention to how a text presents information and uses structure to advance an explanation. The first two activities (#7 and #8) focus on the meanings of words and phrases in the text (RI.1–5.4). The third activity (#9) deals with nonfiction text features (RI.1–3.5).

7. Figurative Language: Similes

Similes are used to compare one thing to another. Often they contain the words *like* or *as*. Discuss how the similes below help you understand the author’s meaning.

- Description of Earl Little, Malcolm’s father
 - o “His voice resounded like gentle thunder whenever he spoke.”
 - o “His protection and guidance stretched up and around his family like the great live oak trees in his home state of Georgia.”
- Description of beetles and snails in the garden
 - o “In this sacred garden, beetles hustled about like harried businessmen on their way to important meetings, while snails lolled leisurely, as if they were on some kind of half-speed permanent vacation.”
- Description of lessons in the garden
 - o “And so this special garden became a source of knowledge, a Little family sanctuary where lessons came each day like tiny droplets of sweet morning dew.”

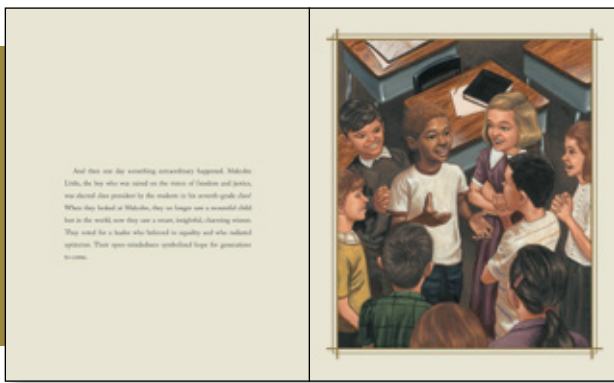
8. “A Charismatic Boy”

The author describes Malcolm as “a charismatic boy,” “someone who they [his classmates] adored and respected,” and “a smart, insightful, charming winner.”

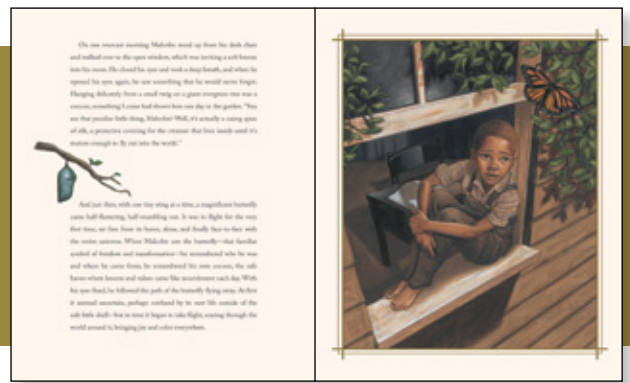
Someone who is *charismatic* can inspire or influence a large number of people. They inspire enthusiasm and devotion. A charismatic person is appealing, fascinating, and likeable. He or she speaks well and is said to have “a way with words.” A charismatic person has *charisma*.

The opposite of a charismatic person is someone who is dull, boring, unexciting, and unlikeable.

- Using the picture in the book of Malcolm surrounded by his classmates, discuss how the illustrator shows that Malcolm was a charismatic boy (*see Example 1 on next page*).
- Describe someone you think is a charismatic person. Give details about the way they behave. This person could be a friend or relative or someone from history like Cleopatra, Napoleon, or Joan of Arc.



Example 1



Example 2

9. Nonfiction Text Features: Front Cover, Back Cover, Title Page, Overall Chronological Structure, Author's Note

Discuss the following text features:

Text Feature	What to Point Out and Discuss
Front Cover	Point out the title. It suggests that the book will deal with the question: What was Malcolm X like as a boy? Examine the illustration. What can we predict about Malcolm from the open book on the chair and from his expression? Discuss the author and illustrator. Use the information on the back flap.
Back Cover	After reading the book, discuss why the illustrator put a framed butterfly on the back cover.
Title Page	Go over the information included about title, author, illustrator, and publisher. After reading the book, discuss why the illustrator put roses on the title page.
Overall Chronological Structure	Point out that this book is written in chronological order, beginning with Malcolm's birth in 1925 and ending with his junior high school years. List some of the major events in the book and put them in chronological order, referring back to the book to check information.
Author's Note	Point out the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the author is related to Malcolm • Her sources of information about him • The imagined dialogue in the book • The meaning of her father's collection of butterflies

Integration of Information

The Common Core State Standards ask students to use both the illustrations and details to describe key ideas and to show how images contribute to and clarify a text (RI.1–4.7).

10. In several places in the book, the words and the illustrations show how, just as a butterfly emerges from the safety of its cocoon when it is ready to be in the world, Malcolm also emerged from the safety of his home for a larger role in the world.

Have the students review both the text and illustration of Malcolm watching a butterfly (*see Example 2 above*).

Discuss what the text tells readers about this two-page spread:

- What information is only given in the written text?
- What information is only given in the illustration?
- How do the written text and the illustration work together?

11. Find other two-page spreads that deal with the same idea—one page written text and one page illustration. Study each spread and share your findings:

- What information is only given in the written text?
- What information is only given in the illustration?
- How do the written text and the illustration work together?

Here are some suggested two-page spreads to use. (*Refer to the examples on page 4.*)

- (*Example 3*) Malcolm figures out a better way to catch fish
- (*Example 4*) Malcolm's teacher discourages him from becoming a lawyer
- (*Example 5*) Malcolm as a charismatic speaker
- (*Example 6*) Malcolm has developed strong values

Writing

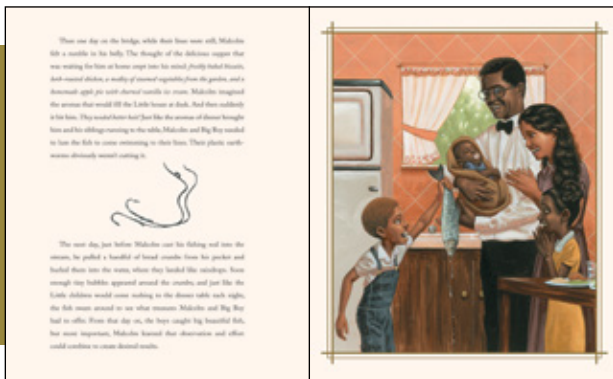
The Common Core State Standards emphasize writing to express an opinion (W.1.1, 2, 3), writing to inform or explain (W.1–3.2), and writing to recount sequenced events (W.1–3.3). The writing activities below reflect these standards.

12. The author suggests that values such as hard work, equality, optimism, faith, and knowing information are important. Which value or values are most important to you? Tell why.
13. After losing his parents and being separated from his family, how did Malcolm change from being a sad, lonely boy to being a smart, insightful, charismatic boy? What experiences caused him to change for the better?

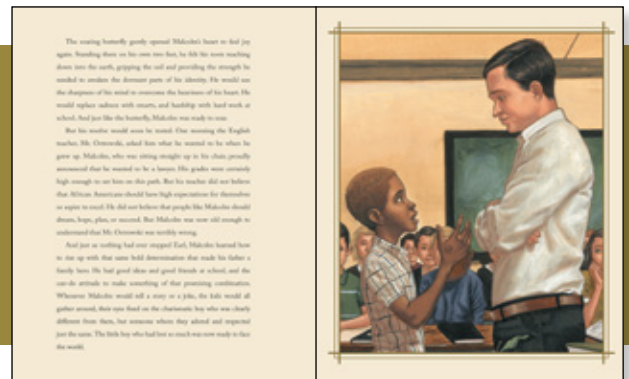
Draw two illustrations to go with your explanation. In the first illustration show Malcolm before he changed after being separated from his family, and in the second illustration show him after he changed while in his new school.

Extending the Experience

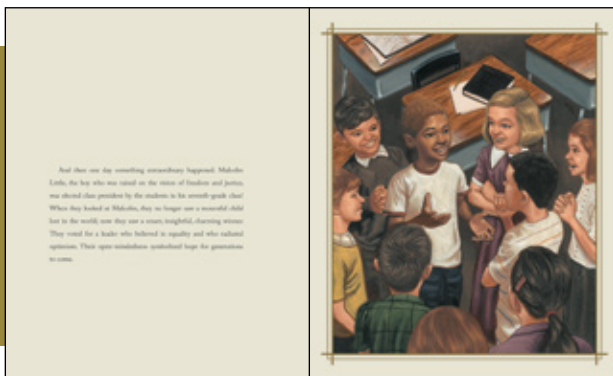
14. Learn more about the illustrator AG Ford. Visit his website at AGFordIllustration.com
15. Learn more about author Ilyasah Shabazz at IlyasahShabazz.com
16. Find out more about Marcus Garvey, the leader who inspired Malcolm's parents by watching a video mini-biography at YouTube.com/watch?v=R-XjloOKI60. This is appropriate for upper grade students and teachers.
17. Discuss selected quotes by Malcolm X. Quotes can be found at MalcolmX.com/About/Quotes_By.html



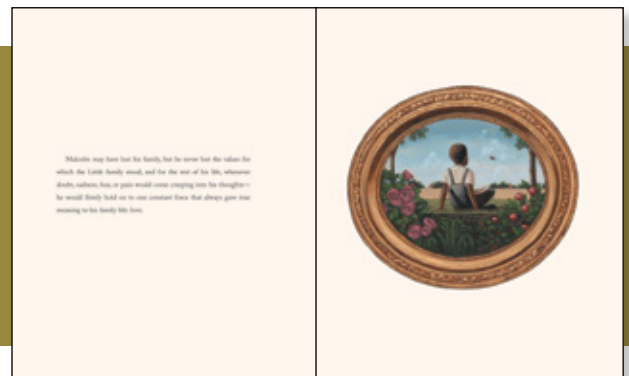
Example 3



Example 4



Example 5



Example 6



ATHENEUM BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS
SIMON & SCHUSTER CHILDREN'S PUBLISHING

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TEACH.SIMONANDSCHUSTER.NET • KIDS.SIMONANDSCHUSTER.COM

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