

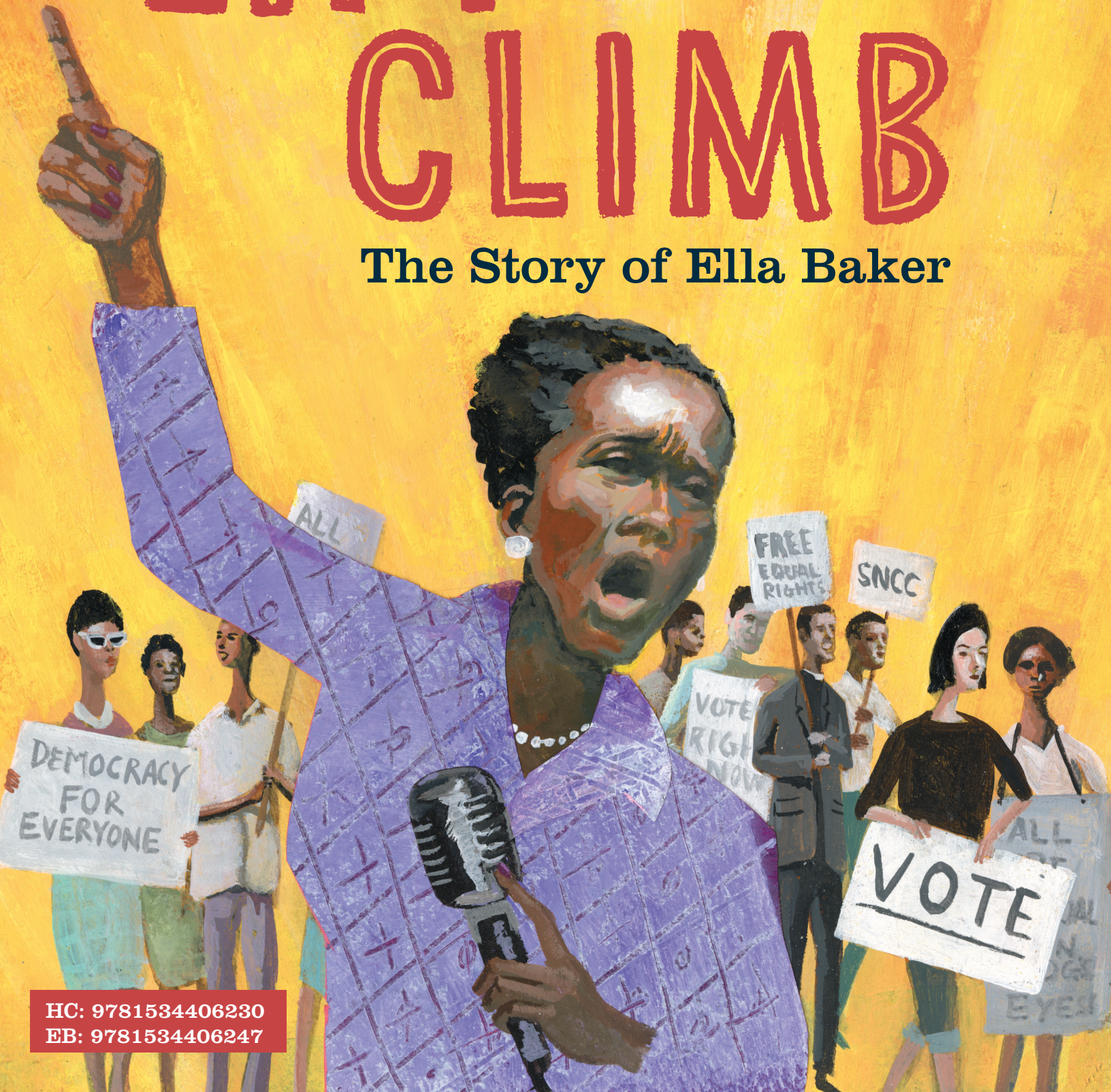
A Common Core Curriculum Guide to

Patricia Hruby Powell

R. Gregory Christie
Caldecott Honor Winner

LIFT AS YOU CLIMB

The Story of Ella Baker



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BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

Ella Baker's life was guided by one question she heard when she listened to her granddaddy preach:

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

Later, after she graduated from college and moved to New York City, she asked herself:

WHAT DO I HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

Still later, when she began to speak to poor and middle class African Americans about their goals, she asked them:

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

And when students held sit-ins at lunch counters to protest unfair treatment, Baker asked them about what they wanted to accomplish, and they, in turn, asked the same question to the people they cared about.

This was Ella Baker's grassroots approach to civil rights leadership. She wanted people to solve their own problems. In *Lift as You Climb*, author Patricia Hruby Powell explains this approach, using free verse poetry filled with descriptive language to narrate Baker's growth and development. R. Gregory Christie's hand-painted illustrations complement the text by showing Ella Baker's strong determination to help people enact change and the way she put her ideas into action. Together, they make Ella Baker's story as a civil rights activist accessible to young readers.





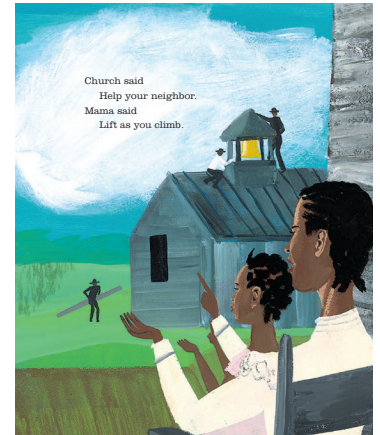
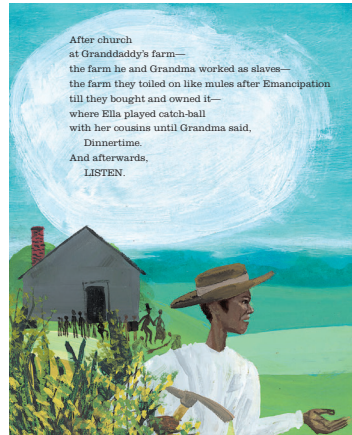
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

Key Ideas and Details

The discussion questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards for Reading and informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about key details in a text (RI.K.1–RI.3.1), identify the main topic and key details that support it (RI.K.2–RI.3.2), and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas (RI.K.3–RI.3.3).

1. By listening to others, Ella Baker learned about giving to those in need, joining together, and taking hold of freedom. What did she learn from the following people?

- Granddaddy Mitchell
- Neighbors
- The Church
- Mama



2. When Mama told Ella, “Lift as you climb,” she meant that as Ella worked to improve her own life, she should also help others improve theirs. What did Ella do to lift her neighbors? What can you do to lift your classmates or community?

3. Imagine you could interview Ella Baker. With a partner, make up questions you could ask. Then take turns being the interviewer who asks the questions or being Ella who answers them. Here are some topics you could talk about:

- Joining voices that demanded, “Don’t buy where you can’t work.”
- Listening to everyday people, and asking them, “What do you want to accomplish?”
- Listening to students who engaged in sit-ins throughout the South.
- Working alongside student Freedom Fighters who traveled on battered school buses to the South.
- Working with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

4. Explain the differences between how preachers wanted to work to make changes, which was top-down, to how Ella wanted to work, which was bottom-up.

5. After listening to the people, what questions did Ella raise with the preachers? In spite of their differences, how did Ella and Dr. King manage to work together?

6. At the end of the book, the author includes this quote from Ella: “The struggle for rights didn’t start yesterday, and has to continue until it is won.” What rights still need to be won? How can we continue to work to promote the fair treatment of all? Do you see any injustices in your school or community? What would you like to see accomplished there?

7. Why is *Lift as You Climb* a good title for this book?

Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases (RI.K.4–RI.3.4), think about the features of nonfiction or literary text (RI.K.5–RI.3.5), and assess the author’s point of view (RI.K.6–RI.3.6). The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

1. **Stop, Think, and Jot.** As you read, reread, or listen to the book, jot down your thoughts about the following using the chart below.

- (1) New information
- (2) “Terrific specifics,” or details that stick in your mind
- (3) New or important words that help you think about Ella Baker
- (4) End-of-the-book thoughts

Stop, Think, and Jot

NEW INFORMATION

What new facts and ideas have you learned?

NEW AND IMPORTANT WORDS

What words help you think about Ella Baker?

“TERRIFIC SPECIFICS”

What details “stick” in your mind?

END-OF-THE-BOOK THOUGHTS

Now that you have finished the book, what are your thoughts about Ella Baker?



2. Find and discuss examples of how the author uses well-crafted language to discuss the life of Ella Baker. Samples of three techniques—repetition, figurative language, and alliteration—are given below. Read each example aloud and discuss how the language makes you think and feel about the topic. Then find additional examples of each technique. How does the language help create meaning?

- **Repetition**, or repeating words and phrases, provides emphasis and rhythm.

Here is how the author described the words of Ella's granddaddy:

“He preached

Give to others.

He preached

Join together.

He spoke

Freedom.”

- **Figurative language** is language that does not use its ordinary, everyday meaning. Instead, it helps us look at the words in a fresh, new way. Here's how the author described the strong impact of Grandma's words on Ella:

“Ella drank up that story

Till it filled her bones.”

- **Alliteration** is the repetition of initial consonant sounds. Here's how the author shows us how Ella helped her neighbors:

“Ella rounded up

the motherless children,

dragged 'em home,

dunked 'em,

scrubbed 'em,

dressed 'em in clean clothes,

returned them to their

grateful daddy.”

Try using repetition, figurative language, and alliteration in your writing. What effect do they have?

3. **Choral Reading: Paying Attention to the Sounds.** In a group, or with your whole class, practice reading sections of the book aloud. Follow these steps:

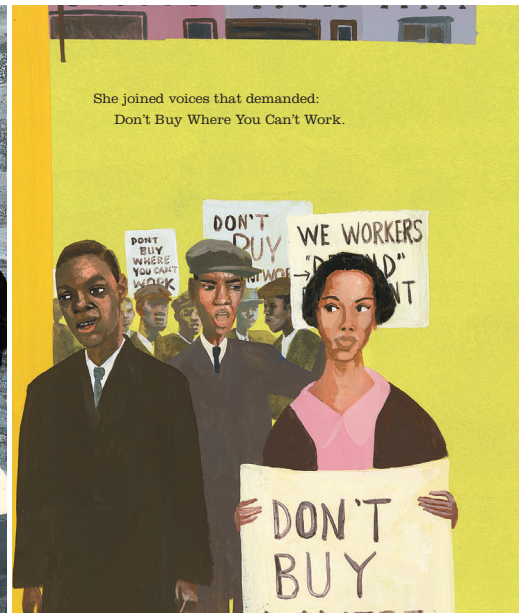
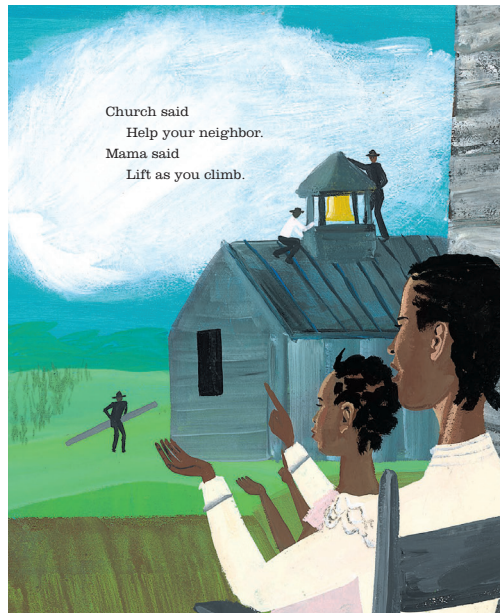
- First, listen to your teacher read the section. Notice how the author uses repetition, figurative language, and alliteration to add interest and emphasize ideas.
- Second, read a section of the book together as a group.

- Third, practice a few times. This helps you to read with more expression and ease.

Some good sections to practice reading are the ones that include repetition to explain Ella's actions; for example, when Ella listened to Granddaddy Mitchell preach, when Ella scrubbed the motherless children, and when Ella listened to the people and then raised their questions to the preachers.

You can listen to a group of children working on choral reading with their teacher at this website:
https://www.ReadingRockets.org/Strategies/Choral_Reading

4. **Looking Closely at Artwork.** In an interview in *Book Links*, artist R. Gregory Christie describes his paintings as “sticking closely to the text,” but also bringing in his own interpretation. Closely examine the paintings below and then discuss your answers to the following questions:



- What is going on in the artwork?
- Describe the colors in the artwork.
- Who is in the foreground (closest to you)?
- Who is in the background (farthest from you)?
- Which area of the artwork is most important? Why?
- What do you think this artist is trying to say in this artwork? What is the meaning or message?
- Close your eyes and describe the artwork from memory. Why do you think you remember what you remembered? Why do you think you forget what you forgot?

WRITING

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion (W.K.1–W.3.1), to inform (W.K.2–W.3.2), and to explain a sequence of events (W.K.3–W.3.3).

1. **Alphaboxes and Letter to the Author or Illustrator.** First, use the Alphaboxes chart below to gather words and phrases from the book that you can use to write about Ella Baker. For example:

ABC: accomplish, climb, citizen

DEF: emancipation, equal pay, freedom

GHI: granddaddy, grassroots, harness the power

A L P H A • B L O C K S

ABC

DEF

GHI

JKL

MN

OPQ

RST

UVW

XYZ

Then use your words and phrases to write a letter to the author and illustrator.

Here are some suggestions for things to write about:

- The information in the book
 - o What new facts and ideas did you learn?
 - o What details from the book stick in your mind?
 - o Now that you have finished the book, what are your thoughts about Ella Baker?
- The author's writing
 - o What do you notice about the author's use of repetition, figurative language, and alliteration?
 - o What do you think about using free verse to tell Ella's life story?
- The illustrations
 - o What do you notice about the illustrations?
 - o How did the illustrations help you learn about Ella Baker?
 - o What do you think the illustrator wants you to know about Ella Baker?

2. **Share Your Thoughts about Ella's Challenging Question.**

Throughout the book, Ella and others challenge us to think about this question:

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

First, think about what this means to you.

- What would you like to accomplish today, this week, this month, or this year?
- Share your ideas with a friend.

Then, begin writing.

- Write down your goals and your plans for accomplishing them.
- Make a drawing of yourself accomplishing your goals.

3. **Write an Acrostic Poem.** Here is an acrostic poem using the word lift.

LIFT

Listen for good ideas
Ideas that inspire you
Filling you with hope and spirit
To help yourself and others

Notice that the word *lift*, the subject of the poem, is written down the left side of the poem. Each letter in *lift* begins a line of the poem. All the lines of the poem are about voting.

Try writing your own acrostic poem. You can use the word lift, or try one of these words:

- Climb
- Accomplish
- Listen
- Justice
- Ella Baker

Or, try this special challenge: Use the phrase *Lift as You Climb*.

4. Find out more about one of the civil rights workers Ella worked alongside:

- W. E. B. Du Bois
- Thurgood Marshall
- Stokely Carmichael
- Rosa Parks
- Fannie Lou Hamer

Share your findings: Write about what this man or woman hoped to accomplish. Do you think this person was successful? Illustrate your writing.

Extending the Experience of Reading the Book

1. Read other books by Patricia Hruby Powell:

- *Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*, illustrated by Christian Robinson
- *Struttin' with Some Barbecue: Lil Hardin Armstrong Becomes the First Lady of Jazz*, illustrated by Rachel Himes
- *Blossom Tales: Flower Stories of Many Folk*, illustrated by Sarah Dillard
- *Frog Brings Rain*, illustrated by Kendrick Benally
- *Zinnia: How the Corn Was Saved*, illustrated by Kendrick Benally

2. Read other books illustrated by R. Gregory Christie:

- *Freedom in Congo Square*, written by Carole Boston Weatherford
- *Sugar Hill: Harlem's Historic Neighborhood*, written by Carole Boston Weatherford
- *Dear Mr. Rosenwald: The School That Hope Built*, written by Carole Boston Weatherford
- *The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth, & Harlem's Greatest Bookstore*, written by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson
- *Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy US Marshal*, written by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson
- *The Champ: The Story of Muhammad Ali*, written by Tonya Bolden
- *Rock of Ages: A Tribute to the Black Church*, written by Tonya Bolden

3. **For more information** on the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), visit <https://snccdigital.org> or <https://www.sncclegacyproject.org>.

4. **Visit Patricia Hruby Powell's website** and watch the author read and discuss *Life as You Climb* and talk about Ella Baker at <https://talesforallages.com/books/lift-as-you-climb-the-story-of-ella-baker/>.

5. **Watch artist R. Gregory Christie** read *Freedom in Congo Square* and discuss his Caldecott Award Winning illustration. Also, watch him paint at <https://www.facebook.com/nytbooks/videos/live-illustration-r-gregory-christie/1537271182970050/>