

MOVING FORWARD

written by
Chris Barton

illustrated by
Steffi Walthall

**FROM SPACE-AGE RIDES
TO CIVIL RIGHTS SIT-INS
WITH AIRMAN ALTON YATES**

ABOUT THE BOOK

Throughout his youth, Alton Yates found the strength, determination, and inspiration to move past hardships and unfair treatment. When he was in junior high school, he heard Air Force Captain Daniel “Chappie” James speak and was inspired by him. Afterwards, Alton decided he would one day join the Air Force, where he would receive equal treatment. When he joined the Air Force, Alton volunteered to work with Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Stapp’s research team investigating how to make airplane, spacecraft, and automobile travel safer. Even though this was a hazardous job, it was a necessary and rewarding one. Alton liked his life in the Air Force and facing the physical challenges asked of him.

But when his family needed him to return home to Jacksonville, Florida, Alton left the Air Force and came face-to-face once again with an old challenge—unfair treatment of Black people due to the Jim Crow laws in the South. These laws separated Blacks and whites and even prevented Black people from voting. Alton’s experiences at home—having to deal with things like not being allowed to use restrooms or to enter restaurants because he was Black—made him angry. He decided to stand up against this unfair treatment, but not in a violent way. Readers will learn what Alton Yates did to make his life and the lives of others better, safer, and fairer.

Author Chris Barton tells Alton Yates’s story with clarity, emphasizing his unique contributions to social justice. Illustrations by Steffi Walthall emphasize the feelings of Alton and others as they moved against injustice. Together, the words and illustrations create a memorable portrait of a man determined to move forward and to make social change.



READING AND RESPONDING TO THE BOOK

1. What did Alton Yates learn from listening to his neighbor's stories about returning home from World War I? How were these stories like the stories of other soldiers and sailors?
2. How did Air Force Captain Daniel "Chappie" James inspire Alton? How was joining the Air Force a way for Alton to move forward?
3. Explain why Alton decided to join Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Stapp's research team. What was Alton asked to do on this team? Was it a good idea to join the team?
4. What happened to Alton on the way home to Jacksonville that made him angry?
5. How was the way Alton was treated during his four years in the Air Force different from the way he was treated in Jacksonville?
6. Alton Yates was part of a team when he was in the Air Force and when he joined the NAACP Youth Council. What was the purpose of each team? What did Alton do when he was part of each team?
7. In the author's note of *Moving Forward*, Chris Barton writes that he was startled by how the great advances in science and technology that Alton Yates worked on in the Air Force took place at the same time as hateful incidents like Ax Handle Saturday. Can you think of any other examples of scientific or technological progress occurring at the same time as acts of injustice?
8. Imagine that you could interview Alton Yates. With a partner, make up questions you could ask. Then take turns being the interviewer who asks the questions or being the person who answers them. Here are some topics you could talk about:
 - Listening to a neighbor's stories about returning home from World War I
 - Hearing Air Force Captain Daniel "Chappie" James speak
 - Joining Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Stapp's research team
 - Leaving the Air Force

- Joining the NAACP Youth Council and fighting for civil rights
- Sharing his life story with author Chris Barton

9. **Yes/No, Why?** Answer each of the questions below. First, decide on whether the answer is "yes" or "no." Then explain why. Some vocabulary words from the book are underlined in each sentence. Discuss what these words mean before answering the questions.

1. Were Black people treated fairly under the **Jim Crow laws**?
Yes/No? _____
Why? _____

2. Was Alton's work in the Air Force **physically punishing**?
Yes/No? _____
Why? _____

3. Was Alton's decision to accept a job with **hazards** a good one?
Yes/No? _____
Why? _____

4. Was Alton's **mission** to make a stand against Jim Crow important?
Yes/No? _____
Why? _____

5. Is Alton Yates **optimistic** about the future?
Yes/No? _____
Why? _____

10. Share your thoughts about the following quotes from the book:

- "Being a warrior doesn't mean being violent."
- "Sometimes progress is hard to see."

11. Why is *Moving Forward* a good title for the book?

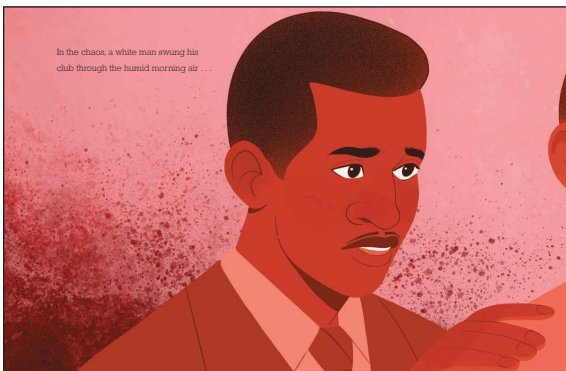
EXAMINING THE AUTHOR'S CRAFT

1. Using a Flash-Forward to Show Social Progress.

Toward the end of the book, author Chris Barton leaps ahead in time in the story he is telling. After telling readers about sit-in Saturdays and Ax Handle Saturday in 1960, he jumps ahead to describe meeting with Alton and his wife Gwen fifty-seven years later in 2017. Let's take a closer look at how this is done.

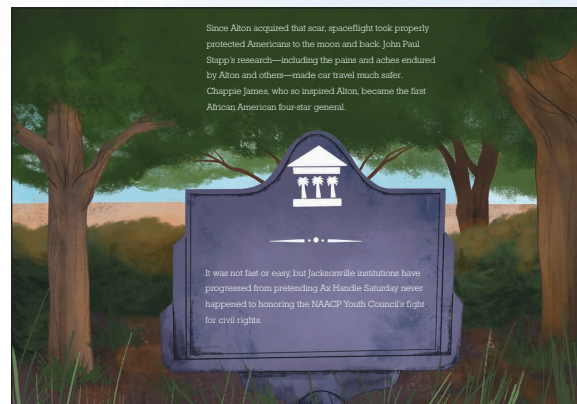
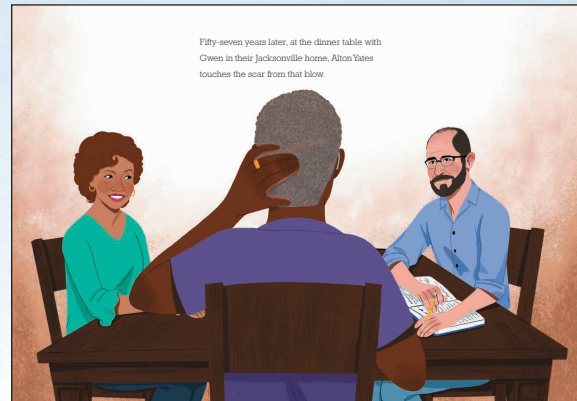
First, examine the pages before the flash-forward. Then discuss these questions:

- What is happening to Alton Yates and other Black people?
- How did Alton and others respond?



Second, examine the page with the flash-forward and the page that follows. Then discuss these questions:

- Who are the people in the picture? How do you know?
- How does the author tell us that he is making a big leap in time?
- What social progress has been made since the Saturday sit-ins and Ax Handle Saturday?



Third, discuss the author's use of a flash-forward. Discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think Chris Barton used a flash-forward?
- What do you think he wants readers to know? Pay attention to the writing on the page that follows the picture of three people at the dinner table.

2. Explaining Word Meanings. Author Chris Barton explains what the words *fight* and *warrior* **mean** and what they **don't mean**. This helps us understand his use of these words.

Here is what he said these words **don't mean**:

Being a warrior doesn't mean being violent. And a person's willingness to be violent doesn't make their cause noble or right or worthwhile.

Here is what he said about what they **mean**.

But a willingness to fight for what's just and what's fair—that willingness is what has made the United States of Alton Yates's life a work in progress.

Try out this way of explaining words. With a partner or small group, discuss what the following phrases mean and what they don't mean to you:

- Meeting a challenge
- Making progress
- Making a sacrifice
- Putting yourself in peril
- Fighting for civil rights
- Staging sit-ins

EXAMINING THE ILLUSTRATOR'S CRAFT

1. Using Color to Show People's Feelings and Emotions.

Illustrator Steffi Walthall uses colors to show the feelings and emotions of people she is illustrating. In this way she is emphasizing what the author is writing about and helping us feel these emotions too. Explain how she does this in each of the illustrations below:



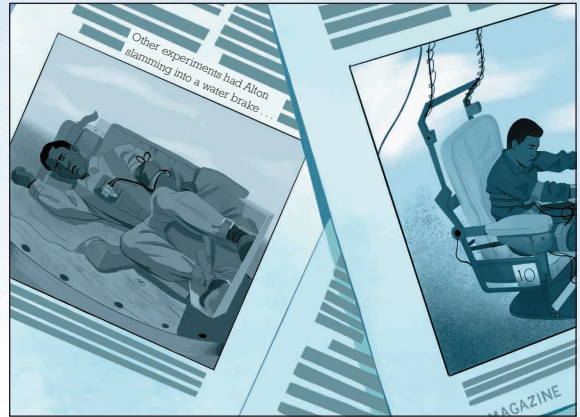
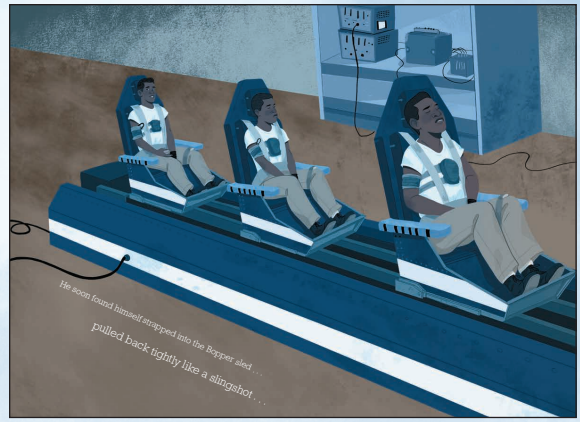
How do the colors gray and black make you feel about Mr. Jeffcoat's experience when he returned home from World War I?



How does the color green make you feel about Alton's experience listening to Air Force Captain Daniel "Chappie" James speak at his school?



2. Using Motion to Show a Dizzying Feeling.



How did the illustrations help you understand the physical hazards Alton faced when he was part of the experiments at Holloman Air Force Base?

How do the colors black and red make you feel about what happened to Alton and others when they were attacked by a white mob?

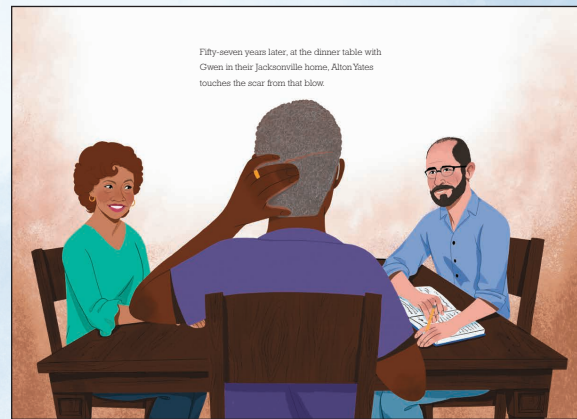
WRITING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. Explain How Alton Yates Moved Forward. Alton Yates moved forward in his life by helping himself and others make progress. Draw and illustrate three things he did to move forward. Consider the following:

- Joining the Air Force
- Joining Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Stapp's research team
- Working with the NAACP Youth Council
- Taking part in Saturday sit-ins
- Sharing his story with author Chris Barton

2. What will you do to move your life forward in the future? Write about and illustrate something you plan to do to move your life forward. How will this action help you? How will it help others?

3. Bring this picture to life.



Write the conversation you think Alton Yates, Gwen Yates, and Chris Barton are having at the dinner table fifty-seven years after Ax Handle Saturday. What questions do you think Chris Barton asked? What answers do you think Alton and Gwen Yates gave?

EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE OF READING THE BOOK

1. Watch videos and listen to an audio recording of Alton Yates:

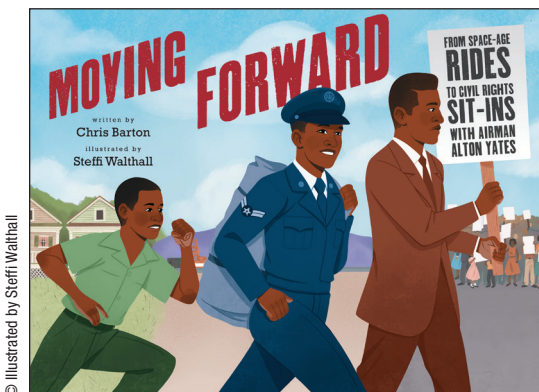
- Watch a video of an interview with Alton Yates at the National Museum of the US Air Force: [youtube.com/watch?v=115--7LpFsc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=115--7LpFsc).
- Watch the Jacksonville Legacy Series video feature on Alton Yates: jaxpbs.tv/video/WJCT-Presents-Jacksonville-Legacy-Series-Alton-Yates/.
- Listen to Alton Yates being interviewed by his daughter Toni Yates on Story Corps: [StoryCorps.org/Stories/Alton-Yates-and-Toni-Yates/](https://www.storycorps.org/Stories/Alton-Yates-and-Toni-Yates/).

2. Read other books by Chris Barton:

- *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That?: The Story of Extraordinary Congresswoman Barbara Jordan*
- *Whoosh!: Lonnie Johnson's Super-Soaking Stream of Inventions*
- *How to Make a Book (About My Dog)*
- *All of a Sudden and Forever: Help and Healing After the Oklahoma City Bombing*
- *The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch*
- *The Day-Glo Brothers: The True Story of Bob and Joe Switzer's Bright Ideas and Brand-New Colors*
- *Dazzle Ships: World War I and the Art of Confusion*

3. Read other books illustrated by Steffi Walthall:

- *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round: My Story of the Making of Martin Luther King Day*
- *John Lewis* (You Should Meet series; Ready-to-Read, Level 3)
- *Wonder Woman: The Way of the Amazons*



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