



## When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders

*J. Patrick Lewis , John Parra (Illustrator) , Tonya Engel (Illustrator) , R. Gregory Christie (Illustrator) , Meilo So (Illustrator) , Jim Burke (Illustrator)*

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In moving verse, Children's Poet Laureate J. Patrick Lewis gives new voice to seventeen heroes of civil rights. Exquisitely illustrated by five extraordinary artists, this commanding collection of poems invites the reader to hear in each verse the thunder that lies in every voice, no matter how small. Featuring civil rights luminaries Coretta Scott King, Harvey Milk, Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Sylvia Mendez, Aung San Suu Kyi, Mamie Carthan Till, Helen Zia, Josh Gibson, Dennis James Banks, Mitsuye Endo, Ellison Onizuka, Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Yunus, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

## When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders Details

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# **From Reader Review When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders for online ebook**

## **Elizabeth Miller says**

Amazing book of poetry that tells the stories of many famous and less famous (at least to me) Civil Rights Leaders. These leaders go beyond just leaders from the African-American Civil Rights movement, but includes men and women of various races and from all over the world.

Excellent book but would require A LOT of background knowledge for 1st graders to really get anything out of it.

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## **Elizabeth says**

This is a beautiful book with short poems and fitting illustrations. These dark, historical events are not muted but are presented in ways that children and adults can understand and appreciate. Each page features new colors and images in order to signify a new, diverse individual and the battle that they waged on hatred and discrimination. Many of the poems are written in different styles of verse that also create diversity. It is a wonderful book for all ages.

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## **Amanda Vander hyde says**

This is a book of poetry looking at important people through the history of the Civil Rights Movement. It is very powerful and shows individual instances in which these people were discriminated against, no matter if it was an act more recently where people were killed or if it was back at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, perhaps even before. It is a great poetry book for older readers, especially in close reading, because the illustrations depict the people and are perhaps not the most captivating for a read-aloud in front of a class, unless one or two wanted to be read.

Lewis, J. Ill. Burke, J. (2012, December 26). When Thunder Comes. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books.

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## **Paul says**

This collection of fifteen of Lewis's poems speaks of or for civil rights leaders, some African American but also Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Burmese, South African, and from Bangladesh. Five illustrators created the visuals to accompany the poems, but the book without page numbers doesn't help credit which painted which. (Great for reading out loud at an airport waiting for a plane departure.)

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## Betsy says

Poetry is of the people by its very definition. Though sometimes considered the property of the elite (usually by folks who were forced to eat poetry unfiltered in high school by bored teachers) at its best it is a format that any human with a sense of rhythm and/or timing can use to their advantage. Poetry is the voice of people who are oppressed. When Chinese immigrants found themselves detained for weeks on end on Angel Island, they scratched poetry into the very walls of the building. Not curses. Not cries. Poems. It seems fitting then that J. Patrick Lewis should cull together poems to best celebrate “civil rights leaders” both known and unknown. People of different races, creeds, religions, and even sexualities are celebrated in a book that can only be honestly called what it is: one-of-a-kind.

Seventeen people. That doesn't sound like a lot of folks. Seventeen people turning the tide of history and oppression. Seventeen individuals who made a difference and continue to make a difference every day. And to accompany them, seventeen poems by a former Children's Poet Laureate. In *When Thunder Comes*, J. Patrick Lewis highlights heroes of every stripe. And, in doing so, lets young readers know what a hero truly is.

Lewis isn't phoning this one in. These poems are straight up honest-to-god works of poetry. Though the book is a mere 44 pages or so, its picture book size is misleading indeed. Consider this poem about Aung San Suu Kyi containing the following lines: “When a cyclone flicked off the roof of my prison / like the Queen of Hearts, turning my life to shame / and candle, the General had a mole removed. / When they added four words to the constitution - / my name – to bar me from ever running for office, / the General signed it with his fingernail made of / diamonds and disgust.” We're on beyond nursery rhymes and patter here. There are also individual lines you just can't help but admire. I like this one about Nelson Mandela in particular: “It is as if he's landed on the moon / Five years before the actual event.”

The content is noticeably more mature as well. Kids have plenty of books to choose between when it comes to the Freedom Riders and Walkers, but the deaths of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner are dark as dark can be. That poem is told, not in broken up sections, but as a single long, square paragraph. Other ideas, like Muhammad Yunus and his microcredit system or Harvey Milk and his fight for gay rights require a bit more worldly knowledge on the part of readers.

Lewis makes some interesting choices along the way. He's careful to include familiar names (Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Jackie Robinson, etc.) alongside lesser-known figures (Aung San Suu Kyi, Helen Zia, Ellison Onizuka, etc.). Some are living, some long dead. Each person has a title (“activist”, “auntie”, etc.). For “the innocent” he names Mamie Carthan Till but not her son, Emmett. At first I was confused by the choice, but the end matter made it clear that it was Mrs. Till that insisted that her son's funeral be an open casket affair. An act of rebellion in and of itself. And this is undoubtedly the first book for children I've read that made special note of Harvey Milk. I know that some smaller presses have highlighted him in the past, but it's particularly satisfying in this day and age to see him properly named and credited. A sign of the times, if you will.

Another thing I like about the book is its ability to highlight individuals that should be, and are not, household names. If Sylvia Mendez truly paved the way for *Brown v. Board of Education*, why isn't Mendez v. Westminster better known? Certainly the book is ideal for writing assignments. The poems vary in terms of style, and I can see teachers everywhere assigning even more too little lauded heroes to their students, asking them to cultivate poems of their own. It would have been nice if somewhere in the book it said what the types of poems featured were (villanelles don't come along in children's books every day, after all).

Teachers hoping to make connections between some of the subjects then and now might also point out things like how Emmett Till bought candy prior to his death, not unlike a more contemporary hoodied young man.

Of the various objections I've heard leveled against this book, there is the problem that each piece of art is not directly credited to its artist. Meilo So's style is recognizable enough. Ditto R. Gregory Christie. But who did that image of Josh Gibson? Or Dennis James Banks for that matter? Now, the artists *are* listed on the publication page with references to their images, but since the book itself isn't paginated this isn't as useful as it might be. And some of the images work better than others, of course. While I wasn't as taken with the images of Coretta Scott King, Mamie Carthan Till, or Dennis James Banks, I really liked Josh Gibson wearing his "Grays" garb, standing against a sky full of clouds. A different librarian objected to the fact that the three men murdered by the Klan in 1964 are featured with very similar, dark skin tones. I see the point, but since the shot is taken at night and the whole of the image is itself dark, this didn't worry me as much.

In many ways the book most similar to this is Marilyn Singer's recent "Rutherford B., Who Was He?: Poems About Our Presidents Like Singer's book, Lewis presents the poems and people first and then provides an explanation of who they were at the end. Both give new slants on old names. But for all that, Lewis's book is unique. Maybe not 100% perfect, but chock full of better poetry than you'll find in a lot of children's rooms, highlighting folks that deserve a little additional attention. Certainly bound to be of use to teachers, parents, and kids with an eye towards honest-to-goodness heroism. A lovely addition, no matter where you might be.

For ages 10 and up.

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### **Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says**

J. Patrick Lewis always writes such interesting poetry books. In this one he writes a poem for each of 15 civil rights leaders, some of whom I'd never heard of (Mitsuye Endo, Helen Zia, Dennis James Banks). His poetic form varies from poem to poem. My favorites are "The Auntie" (Aung San Suu Kyi), "The Innocent" (Mamie Carthan Till), and "Banker to the Poor" (Muhammad Yunus). The theme throughout is that ordinary people can rise to the occasion and do extraordinary things to help others. Lewis provides further information about these civil rights leaders at the end of the book. Young readers should feel inspired and filled with hope that they, too, can make a difference.

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### **Charly Carbray says**

Filled with 10+ poems, this book dives into the major issues and even some of the unheard of stories of civil rights leaders in the past. We learn about black children, killed for flirting with white women, and about businessmen who were attacked for no reason besides the color of their skin. Not only dealing with racism, this book also includes poems on gay rights, staying current with the times. The poems are all told by different authors, and the style of the writing reflects it. Accompanied by beautiful illustrations that I think really capture the despair of the poems.

This would be a great book to read a poem or two from each day during a civil rights unit. I used this novel in a text set for civil rights and made sure to mention it when discussing The Lions of Little Rock, due to their connections of some of the people from history.

As a class assignment, I might ask students to examine all the aspects of a certain poem. They could also do the historical research behind the poem! (The back of the book is the best place to start for the research as it gives little bits of information for each poem).

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### **Jess says**

What a beautiful way to bring awareness to men, women, and children, who acted for equality and liberty.

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### **Hannah Gookstetter says**

When Thunder Comes is an anthology of poems about Civil Rights leaders and activists. It focuses on both familiar and unfamiliar leaders and activists. Additionally, this collection of poems provides a new perspective to the struggles of those yearning for Civil Rights. What I really liked about this book is that it includes poems from a diverse group of activists from all different races, ethnicities, and cultures: Native Americans, African Americans, Japanese, Chinese, Indians, and Americans. By including poems featuring a diverse group of activists, the reader obtains an understanding of how the struggle for Civil Rights affected many different populations in the United States. One thing that I wish was different about this book is that all of the illustrations were consistent. I understand that all of the illustrations differ for each poem because they embody the unique struggles of each of the leaders and activists. However, if the illustrations were more similar, there would be more unity within this book because the illustrations would be an additional unifying element. This book should be used in the classroom as a read aloud during a unit about Civil Rights. However, some of the leaders and activists included in the book are ones that are very unfamiliar and unknown to most people, so these people will need some introduction to students. Because of this, this book should not be used as an introductory element to a unit about Civil Rights.

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### **Ann says**

J. Patrick Lewis, the 2011-2013 Children's Poet Laureate, does an excellent job with this handsome picture book featuring poems and bios about civil rights leaders.

This is not run of the mill, because the book is so well-written and eye-catchingly illustrated by five artists, and also because of the variety of leaders Lewis chose to feature. There is Coretta Scott King, Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Jackie Robinson. But there is also Dennis Banks of AIM; Mitsuye Endo, of the World War II Japanese Internment camps; Muhammed Yunis, Bangladesh banker and Noble Peace Prize winner; and San Francisco Mayor Harvey Milk ("They say I came before my time/but who else would redress/ unmitigated suffering due/ to such small-mindedness?").

Timely and highly recommended for young readers of the appropriate age.

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### **Edward Sullivan says**

A stirring collection of poems about global peacemakers and social activists, quite a few lesser-known but

worth knowing. Brief biographical sketches follow the poems. A good collection of contributing illustrators, too,

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### **Alyson (Kid Lit Frenzy) says**

Great collection of poetry focusing on a variety of global men and women who have stood for change.

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### **Laura says**

Beautiful poems about civil rights leaders - Coretta Scott King, Aung San Sun Kyi, Josh Gibson, Mamie Carthan Till, Ghanaian, Mitsuye Endo, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner, Helen Zia, Ellison Onizuka, Dennis James Banks, Harvey Milk, Muhammad Yunus, Nelson Mandela, Jackie Robinson, Sylvia Mendez

If your children or students aren't ready for the content, read these poems for yourself...out loud.

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### **Cindy Hudson says**

Children's Poet Laureate J. Patrick Lewis has created a new book of poems for young people about the lives of those around the world who sought to break race, class and sexual equality barriers through their actions. *When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders* is a collection of poems highlighting the lives, strengths, and accomplishments of seventeen men and women who fought against the restrictions put upon them by the societies they lived in.

Included in the list are well known activists such as Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Coretta Scott King. But there are also lesser-known names, such as Mitsuye Endo, a Japanese American woman interned during World War II, and Dennis James Banks, who cofounded the American Indian Movement.

Each person listed is given an honorific title, like "the first" for Jackie Robinson, who was the first African American baseball player in the modern era, and "the crusader" for Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man to be elected to public office in California.

Five artists illustrate the poems: Jim Burke, R. Gregory Christie, Tonya Engel, John Parra and Meilo So. At first I worried that this may make the drawings too separate and feel unrelated to each other. Instead, it brings richness to the illustrations that highlight the unique qualities of each civil rights leader.

Brief biographies at the back add detail to the lives of the leaders celebrated through verse. *When Thunder Comes* is a great book to share with your children and introduce them to some of the major issues of the 20th century.

The publisher gave me a copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

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## **Ben Truong says**

*When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders* is a children's poetry anthology and picture book written by J. Patrick Lewis and illustrated by Jim Burke, R. Gregory Christie, Tonya Engel, John Parra, and Meilo So. It is a collection fifteen poems about seventeen civil rights leaders with a wonderful illustration from one of the illustrators about each civil right leader.

The poems are directed to children or young readers so the poems are rather straightforward and direct with very little artistic symbolism. At the end of the book, there is a paragraph to give extra information on the people the poems are trying to shine. The illustrations, for the most part, are wonderful and while each illustration has different styles – it did not lessen the flow or enjoyment of the collection.

The fifteen poems are focused on Josh Gibson, Harvey Milk, Aung San Suu Kyi, Jacki Robinson, Coretta Scott King, Sylvia Mendez, Mitsuye Endo, Dennis James Banks, Mamie Garthan Till, Nelson Mandela, Helen Zia, Muhammad Yunus, Mohandas Gandhi, Ellison Onizuka, and the group of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

All in all, *When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders* is a wonderful collection of poems about important civil rights leaders around the world.

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