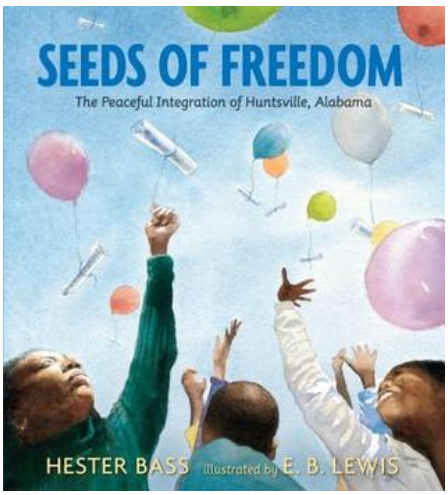

Seeds of Freedom: The Peaceful Integration of Huntsville, Alabama

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Explore a little-known story of the Civil Rights movement, in which black and white citizens in one Alabama city worked together nonviolently to end segregation.

Mention the Civil Rights era in Alabama, and most people recall images of terrible violence. But something different was happening in Huntsville. For the citizens of that city, creativity, courage, and cooperation were the keys to working together to integrate their city and schools in peace. In an engaging celebration of this lesser-known chapter in American and African-American history, author Hester Bass and illustrator E. B. Lewis show children how racial discrimination, bullying, and unfairness can be faced successfully with perseverance and ingenuity.

Seeds of Freedom: The Peaceful Integration of Huntsville, Alabama Details

Date	:	Published January 27th 2015 by Candlewick Press
ISBN	:	9780763669195
Author	:	Hester Bass , E.B. Lewis (Illustrations)
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From Reader Review Seeds of Freedom: The Peaceful Integration of Huntsville, Alabama for online ebook

Sunday Cummins says

I like this text because it's complex and there's content worthy of close reading and collaborative discussions. Bass, the author, does not just tell a straightforward narrative about what happened in Huntsville, AL; instead her narrative (of sorts) requires the reader to make inferences, to synthesize and grapple. She uses the metaphor of planting and growing seeds of freedom--tapping into what these seeds need to grow - "But the seeds of freedom need news to grow, so another plan is hatched." From there she describes "Blue Jean Sunday" when the African Americans boycotted local businesses and wore denim for Easter in 1962. The way she tells it, though, the reader has to make an inference that this was the "hatched" plan and the reader also has to infer how this was "news" to grow the seeds of freedom. With her audience in mind, the author has provided just enough content for the reader to do this. She continues to build on this idea of "needing news to grow the seeds of freedom" throughout the book.

I'd do the following with intermediate (at least 4th) and higher students (through 6th) -
1) Read this book aloud;
2) then read aloud the author's notes and discuss;
3) then ask the students to return to this book and read excerpts closely with an essential question in mind for discussion and written responses (like "How does Blue Jean Sunday reveal the main idea of collaboration?" or "Explain how the author uses evidence to support the idea that 'seeds of freedom need news to grow.'")

Background knowledge about Jim Crow and segregation would be helpful in understanding this book, but a student could also read this book at the beginning of a unit of study as a way to begin an inquiry into this period. They could generate questions for research along the way. This would be a good opportunity to compare texts on the same topic - even just comparing one page of text from this book with a primary source (news article, photo, memoir, etc.). It would be interesting to research others' perspectives on what the author calls "the peaceful integration of Huntsville, Alabama."

One disappointment - I thought the metaphor of growing seeds of freedom was powerful, but I felt like it was dropped towards the end of the book. For several pages - the metaphor remained at the seed stage. Then late in the book there is one page where the "tender plant of freedom" is mentioned; at the end of that page, I was confused when the author wrote, "Are the seeds of freedom wilting?" I was thinking it should have been "Are the tender plants of freedom wilting?" There is no other mention of the tender plant and then on the last page, the last sentence, after the schools of Huntsville have been integrated, the author writes, "to taste the sweet fruit homegrown from the seeds of freedom." It felt like a leap given the heavy emphasis on the seeds earlier in the book. BUT why not have students go back and think about where there are tender plants and how they might have wilted and then how the fruit was growing and so forth? This metaphor could serve as a frame for thinking about other events in the civil rights movement and how it took time and perseverance for change to occur.

Amy Nicole says

Great summary of many ways that black people living in Huntsville protested and boycotted during the 1960s, including the sit-ins, marches, Blue Jean Sunday, school integration, planned arrests, and balloon

message releases in response to George C Wallas.

Stephanie Chiaro says

Twelve students were admitted to an all-black school without any protests in one city, the same week that four African American students were denied entry into an all-white school in the same district. Within two weeks of this denial, on Monday, September 9th, 1963, the first African American child kept his peace as he walked into this same previously all-white school for the first time. This is the story of Huntsville, Alabama. School was the last major hurdle for African Americans, facing inequality during this time period. The first, as described in the book, began with a sit-in, many sit-ins, but the one that caught the media's attention was performed by three women....and a baby. The women (and the baby) were arrested for refusing to leave a Huntsville restaurant. A few months later, city officials managed to convince business owners to integrate their shops and restaurants. African Americans of Huntsville sent balloons off with notes attached, which asked to "support the freedom," intended to spread the message near and far. Public places in Huntsville began to integrate, slowly but surely.
So what are my thoughts? My criticisms on the book begin with the idea of time and date stamping. The story starts off being date stamped and then it subsides. It comes back later, but for a good portion of the book, I asked myself when this happened, compared to the rest of the story. My second one deals with the structure of the book. I found myself asking why Huntsville? Bass only discusses its school system for the last five pages (if I exclude the all-picture pages), out of fifteen. So if the book only discusses the school system for a third of its pages, and that seems to be the only real unique feature of Huntsville, then why was this city chosen? If Bass was not going to key in on the most important feature of the book, the story part, and planned to focus more on the background, then suddenly, we do not have a story; we have a Wikipedia entry. If this was his plan all along, then he could have chosen any city, but oddly enough, he chose one which had a story that was not well-known to most people (which is rare to discover a unique, untold story). The problem was that he did not focus on Huntsville's uniqueness. He spent more time focusing on the background of the story than he did the actual story, itself. So because my second critique could have really changed a good portion, over half, of the book, I couldn't rate the book that high, but I do have to say, the author was close with this one. He had the right idea of the story, and to choose a true story, and he knew how to use his words to appeal to his audience. It was almost like for months, years even, he trained for a marathon, become a top athlete, lined up at the start, and forgot to go. He was almost there, yet he completely missed the mark.

LauraW says

I wanted to like this book better than I did. It is an important addition to books set in the Civil Rights era. But it just doesn't feel very compelling. The focus is on a series of events, so there isn't the identification with major characters and their doings and there isn't the suspense leading up to a single event. I am glad Huntsville escaped some of the more serious violence, but it just felt a bit detached to me.

That said, quite a few of my relatives live in the Huntsville area and it was interesting to me from that perspective.

Diane says

Though Huntsville did not experience the violence that other cities in the south did, there were "invisible lines not to be crossed." Segregation was seen simply as "just the way it is." But Huntsville was also known as the "Space center of the Universe" and economics and publicity had a huge impact on the town.

So, when things started to change, they started quietly and slowly. First, sit-ins at the white diners and a visit from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "The seeds of freedom are planted in Huntsville. What will it take to make them grow?" Then three women were arrested for trying to eat lunch in a white diner. They had a baby with them. When they're arrested, it made the magazines because of the baby. "It's hard to keep it quiet when a baby goes to jail." Finally, the press was taking some interest. Then, knowing that money speaks volumes, Blue Jean Sunday is organized. This is an event in which black citizens did not do their shopping for fancy Easter clothes at the downtown merchants in Huntsville. Instead, they went elsewhere and bought blue jeans to wear that Sunday. It was estimated that the merchants lost almost a million dollars because of this event. The seeds of freedom are taking root.

"Little by little people come together." Finally in July of 1962, Black civil rights leaders and white city officials convinced business owners to integrate very quietly and without any fanfare. Consistent economic pressure and quiet determination started to make an impact. The final step was to integrate the schools.

Such an interesting book that would be perfect for civil rights units. Understanding how economics can impact social change is a lesson that students need to hear. I love the fact that the story came out of the author reading two historical markers regarding the events of the integration of the public school and the reverse-integration of a private school. A selected bibliography is included for further reading.

Peggy Tibbetts says

During the 1960s, riots broke out all over the South as blacks and whites clashed over the civil rights movement. In the quiet town of Huntsville, Alabama, the “Space Center of the Universe,” a different kind of uprising was occurring. Individuals in the black community demanded equal rights along with their brethren across the country. But they were committed to non-violence. They staged sit-ins at restaurants and public parks. Instead of buying new Easter clothes at the local shops, members of the black community wore their blue jeans to church in what was known as Blue Jean Sunday. The peaceful protests were so successful that within a few months public places and businesses were open to everyone – blacks and whites. But the greatest goal challenge lay ahead. Was it possible for black children and white children to attend the same schools without violence?

Throughout this engaging story about Huntsville’s peaceful uprising, Bass skillfully intertwines the history of the civil rights movement. Lewis’s watercolor illustrations portray momentous events like snapshots in a photo album. “Seeds of Freedom” is a stirring revelation of how the skirmishes and successes of one community caused a giant ripple across the nation.

Barbara says

In the same thoughtful, respectful fashion in which she approached the unique painting methods of Walter Anderson in her previous book, the author explores what might be a side note about the civil rights to many. Although I'd like to think I am well-versed in this area of history, I hadn't heard much, if anything, about the changes that occurred in Huntsville, Alabama, during the turbulent 1960s. It's interesting that many of us assume that change occurs solely through large protest movements or legal avenues. But as this book demonstrates in admirable fashion, sometimes change starts small, in little towns or cities where a handful of folks decide to do the right thing. Even if the changes are motivated by economics, at least they are moving in the right direction. The book points out Huntsville's unique position during that particular time in history. I like the fact that the author begins with January 1962 and concludes with September 1963 with one classroom being integrated. I smiled as I read about Blue Jean Sunday and fell in love with every single one of the watercolor illustrations. My favorite has to be the one showing a young girl with a tracing of her foot, necessary because she would not have been allowed to try on shoes in the store. The author's use of imagery surrounding seeds--seeds "sprouting" (unpaged) and "seeds of freedom" (unpaged), for instance--draw readers' attention to the very fact that sometimes it's necessary to be patient and wait and give time for those seeds to sprout and grow. I also appreciated the connection to the nation's involvement in the space race during that particular time. Back matter includes an Author's Note giving more information on what happened in Huntsville and beyond. Lest readers think everything went down as smoothly as butter, the author acknowledges some of the unpleasant moments experienced in Huntsville during this time. This is a wonderful addition to a collection of civil rights books or one devoted to how one person can make a difference. All it takes is one, two, maybe a handful of individuals to notice and work to right a wrong.

Edward Sullivan says

Unlike other cities in Alabama, the integration of Huntsville was a mostly peaceful transition. Honest, hopeful, and inspiring.

Tasha says

Violence was a large part of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. However in Huntsville, Alabama something quite different happened, quietly and successfully. They managed through cooperation, quiet civil disobedience, and courage to stand up for what was right for all members of their community. There were lunchroom protests where young black people sat at the counters they were not allowed to eat at. There were marches with signs. There were arrests, even one of a mother with an infant that gained national news. There were lovely protests like refusing to purchase new clothes for Easter and instead dressing in blue jeans to deny some stores their business. There were balloons with messages of coming together even as a segregationist ran for governor. There were brave children who attended schools where they were the only people of color. Yet it all happened in a community of support and with no violence at all.

Bass emphasizes throughout her book that there were challenges in the society and reasons for protest. Time and again though just as the reader thinks things will be more rough and confrontational, it abates and progress is made. Her use of details from the other cities in Alabama as well as the national Civil Rights Movement will show children how violent the struggles often were. It is against that backdrop that the progress in Huntsville really shines.

Lewis’s paintings also shine. He captures the strength and determination of those working for their civil rights. On each page there is hope from the children reaching to the sky with their balloons to the one black child in the class and his smile. It all captures both the solemnity of the struggle and the power of achieving change.

Beautifully told and illustrated, this nonfiction picture book offers a compelling story about a community’s willingness to change without violence. Appropriate for ages 7-10.

Ricki says

The metaphor of the seeds of freedom dances across the pages of this book. E. B. Lewis' illustrations are masterful. I spent a long time on each spread, soaking in the way the artwork connected with the words. This is a book about civil rights, and it is also a book about the goodness of people and the quiet persistence of the people of Huntsville, Alabama as they saw injustice, and they pressed on to fight against it. Students will learn a bit about history, but they will learn a lot about themselves. I plan to use this book in my methods classes to show how history can come alive in picture books. This book shines brightly.

Holly Mueller says

I like how the author juxtaposed the amazing accomplishments and good things that were happening in the early 1960s with the ugliness of prejudice that was going on simultaneously. The 60s were such a time of conflict and change. The metaphor of the seeds of freedom is carried throughout the book - growing, struggling, wilting, recuperating, blooming, and finally producing fruit - as the author explains events such as lunch counter sit-ins, arrests, Blue Jean Sunday, letting go message balloons, integration struggles, defeats, and victories. I recognized the illustrations as the work of the illustrator of Each Kindness. I love E.B. Lewis's watercolors. He expresses the pain and joy of those tumultuous times.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

February is Black History Month and this year's theme is A Century of Black Life, History and Culture. So it only seems appropriate that more and more children's books are being published introducing today's young readers to the often turbulent, sometimes violent struggles of African Americans for equality of the last century. But it was also a century of change and one of those changes was the peaceful integration of Huntsville, Alabama.

As Hester Bass shows in her new book Seeds of Freedom, the 1960s in Huntsville, Alabama was a study in contrasts - as the "Space Center of the Universe," great scientific minds working on America's space program, but an invisible, uncrossable line dividing Huntsville into black and white existed.

However, things were happening all over the country and seeds of freedom were being planted by leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, college students who were being trained in non-violence and staging sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, and demonstrators carrying protest signs. By Easter 1962, those seeds of freedom had been planted in Huntsville, Alabama by its African American citizens who decided it was time for those seeds to grow there as well.

Bass tells the story of the peaceful integration of Huntsville event by event, month by month beginning with Easter 1962, when no African Americans bought their traditional new clothes for the holiday, choosing to wear blue jeans instead, an economic measure strongly felt by the white store owners. More peaceful demonstrations followed. Slowly, but peacefully, integration began to happen in Huntsville. But it took a lawsuit brought by four families to finally integrate the schools. The peaceful nature of the events in Huntsville, however, sets it apart from so many other towns and cities in the south where demonstrators were confronted by armed police, dogs and fire hoses.

In this picture book for older readers, Bass has presented the story of Huntsville in clear, concise yet lyrical language. She not only describes the events in Huntsville, but gives some history of the Civil Rights movement and its leader Dr. King, as well as what was happening elsewhere.

Young readers will certainly find Seeds of Freedom an inspirational story, the more so because it is a true story. And, it will definitely resonate with today's readers given some recent events in the news that sometimes make us feel that we are slipping back to those days of racial divide. Hopefully, it will be the example of courage and sacrifice in the face of resistance that readers will carry away with them.

Complimenting and enhancing Seeds of Freedom are the watercolor paintings of E. B. White. White always manages to catch just the right expression of the faces of the individual people he paints, and just as beautifully switches to an impressionist style for depicting crowds, such as those demonstrators who were met with firehouses elsewhere in Alabama. Either way, White's illustrations are sure to move the reader.

Be sure to Author's Note at the end of the book, explaining why she decided to write Seeds of Freedom and giving some important background information. Bass also includes a Selected Bibliography for further exploration.

Seeds of Freedom is an excellent and welcomed addition to the ever increasing body of literature on the Civil Rights Movement.

This book is recommended for readers age 7+
This book was sent to me by the publisher, Candlewick Press

This review was originally posted on Randomly Reading

Jenny says

Loved both the illustrations and the writing in this wonderful nonfiction book about how Huntsville, Alabama was peacefully integrated. It was especially neat to read about the reverse integration that took place at a private Christian school where 12 white students enrolled on September 3, 1963 without incident. Just 6 days later, 4 African-American students were enrolled in white schools in Huntsville...despite the efforts of Alabama Governor Wallace to prevent this from happening. (Had Wallace not closed public schools in Alabama, the integration of public schools would have taken place on September 3, the same day as the reverse integration.) I also liked reading of the wisdom and courage of both town leaders and civil rights leaders as they approached integration. This is a lovely book.

Vannessa Anderson says

Seeds of Freedom, the Peaceful Integration of Huntsville, Alabama was a heartbreaking read. We learn as recently as 1962

-black children weren't allowed to try on shoes in a store
-restaurant owners turned away black families
-in Huntsville there were invisible lines not to be crossed
-blacks were not allowed to use public restrooms
-black schools had no libraries, no cafeterias and no school buses
-a very bad man named Governor George Wallace believed blacks were inferior to whites and did everything he could to delay equality to blacks

Seeds of Freedom, the Peaceful Integration of Huntsville, Alabama is an essential read for everyone because it is a part of American History that should never be forgotten.

Richie Partington says

Richie's Picks: SEEDS OF FREEDOM: THE PEACEFUL INTEGRATION OF HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA by Hester Bass and E.B. Lewis, ill., Candlewick, January 2015, 32p., ISBN: 978-0-7636-6919-5

"That's just the way it is
Some things'll never change.
That's just the way it is
Ha, but don't you believe them."
-- Bruce Hornsby "The Way It Is"

"Life is good in the mountains of north Alabama. Huntsville is the 'Space Center of the Universe.' German scientists, enemies of the United States just twenty years before, are working peacefully beside American engineers. Rockets that will take astronauts to the moon are sprouting beside the cotton fields. But these aren't good times for everyone."

SEEDS OF FREEDOM tells the little-known Civil Rights-era story of how Huntsville, Alabama sort of overcame segregation in the early sixties in a sort of civilized manner. This civic evolution moved forward despite Alabama governor George Wallace's racist demagoguery, which was infecting a new generation and inspiring horrific and oft-deadly acts of terrorism against blacks all over the South.

I may sound sort of ambivalent about SEEDS OF CHANGE. But that's not the case. This nonfiction storytelling is filled with nuances and contradictions that make it well worth reading, sharing, and discussing with middle grade and middle school students.

Why did Huntsville sort of move forward with integration in a manner that was sort of different from the rest of the south? It all had to do with money.

The federal government’s Redstone Arsenal, next to Huntsville, was previously a WWII chemical weapons manufacturing facility. By the sixties it had become the geographic center of NASA. NASA was then working to fulfill JFK’s dream of putting a man on the moon. Huntsville was in relatively good fiscal shape because of the federal funding coming to NASA.

Some in power in Huntsville feared federal funds might be at risk if the city exploded in racial strife. In addition, the black community had staged a successful economic boycott that cost the white merchants a whole lot of money.

So the almighty dollar trumped racism and an uneasy truce was struck to avoid racial explosions. Meanwhile, a lawsuit by several black families seeking to integrate the city’s schools led to a federal desegregation order. Integration in Huntsville was not a clean and tidy process, but it sort of worked.

E.B. Lewis’s illustrations are uniformly powerful. There is so much emotion in his depiction of a girl at the shoe store holding a tracing of her feet because blacks were not permitted to try on shoes before buying them, in the determination of black students sitting in at a lunch counter, and in other illustrations.

A three-page author’s note follows the story. In part, it serves as a reality check. The author explains that the Huntsville schools still operate today under that federal desegregation order and writes, “These schools are officially integrated, but often neighborhoods retain traditional racial boundaries, meaning that some schools still serve mostly white children and others mostly black children.” The author then concludes with a note of hope, saying that sometimes it just takes one person to start something good and that one person could be you.

Richie Partington, MLIS
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