

# How Martin Climbed the Mountain!

*A Performance Guide by Reggie Harris*

This interactive story/song performance is focused on three basic goals:

1. Conveying important information about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his mission in civil rights history
2. Identifying other historical persons and cultural connections for curriculum study regarding the African American quest for freedom and justice in America from 1619 to 1963
3. Providing context for students to apply the inspiration of Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech and his work to their study of civil rights past and present

## BACKGROUND

All too often, we hear the words “I Have a Dream!” in the context of a past African American history. It rings as a finished product that happened long ago. That phrase is too often presented as if Dr. Martin Luther King plucked it out of thin air without the benefit of the 200-plus years of struggle that he learned about as he grew. His having a dream is part of a greater story and a long effort by many others who preceded him and from whose lives he gained.

Reggie Harris highlights and connects students to some of the people and events that young Martin used to build his dream that came into focus on that afternoon in August 1963, as 250,000 people came together to celebrate the cause of freedom in Washington D.C.

Along the way, Reggie teaches the songs and gets the audience involved in discovering that having a dream is only the first step—that it takes work, study and commitment to make a dream come true.

## ABOUT THE PERFORMER

Reggie Harris is a songwriter, storyteller, and lecturer who has traveled the world for more than 40 years performing for audiences of all ages. He has appeared at thousands of schools, concert halls, and universities in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, using music and story to bring history alive.

Regie is one of the foremost presenters of the songs of the Underground Railroad and of the Modern Civil Rights Movement. He is a teaching artist in the John F. Kennedy Center’s CETA program, a Woodrow Wilson Scholar, and the Director of Music Education for the UU Living Legacy Project. Reggie leads civil rights pilgrimages throughout the Southern U.S. and is a 2018 recipient of the Children’s Music Network’s “Magic Penny Award” in recognition for a lifetime of excellence in performance and education.

## Key Aspects of Reggie’s Performance

### *The Use of Song and Story to Build Community*

As practiced in the African American cultural tradition, Reggie will use songs and stories to create an atmosphere for your learning community. By alternating his flow between monologue, audience participation, and active listening, the lesson develops as an interactive sharing. Students will be encouraged to listen, respond and follow simple directions as they would in a community setting. Singing together creates a bond that allows information to flow back and forth as the conversation unfolds. Each audience and situation is unique, and Reggie is a master at finding the right tempo and the level of engagement both in age and context.

Note Reggie’s role as the song-leader or a “Griot” who would be a resource in the African village life. The use of **Call and Response** as a song form makes songs easier to learn and sing.

Here is an example of **Call and Response** in action:

#### **Reggie will lead this song!**

Call: I’m on my way            Response: I’m on my way

Call: To freedom land        Response: To freedom land

Call: I’m on my way            Response: I’m on my way

Call: To freedom land        Response: To freedom land

Call: I’m on my way            Response: I’m on my way

ALL: I’m on my way, Oh yes, I’m on my way!

Other verses: I’m on my way, I won’t turn back!

I asked my mother . . . father . . . sister . . . brother . . . etc.

If you won’t go don’t stop me now!

#### ***How This Song Inspired Dr. King***

Young Martin experienced the power of song growing up in his community and church in Atlanta, Georgia, and he was aware that “spirituals” (rural songs in the 1800s based on biblical sources) were used as songs of faith and practical songs of freedom. In African villages, singing was used to pass important information, ease work and play, keep the history, and build relationships. During and after slavery, they continued in that use while also pointing people toward building a dream of freedom. Songs like “I’m On My Way!” “Go Down Moses,” “Wade in the Water,” and “Free At Last”—as he grew, those songs filled Martin’s head and heart with hope.

The Modern Civil Rights Movement was fueled by the use of song. It is embedded in the culture of the African American community from the time of slavery.

As the movement grew, people adapted existing songs and created new ones that were sung at rallies, community mass meetings, and events like the March on Washington in 1963.

In 1961, Martin Luther King, Jr. named the singer Odetta “The Queen of American folk music.” Not too many Americans can remember Odetta’s performance at the 1963 civil rights movement’s March on Washington, where she sang “I’m On My Way” (to freedom land.) Here is a short video clip that can be used to introduce this event to students: <https://youtu.be/0wDZVfQVvGo>

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## **Hold Fast to Dreams**

A poem by Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.  
Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go life is a barren field frozen with snow.

(James Mercer Langston Hughes was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. He was a large part of the Harlem Renaissance.)

### ***Performance Follow Up:***

Discuss this poem with your students.

What does the poem mean? Then? Now?

Ask them share their dreams about what they hope to do in life.

Do they know the difference between “dreams” and “goals?”

Is Dr. King’s dream alive today, or did it die with him?

How can we use his dream to help our dreams come true?

## **Other Poems to Explore**

*Essay on Children’s Poetry* by Jacqueline Woodson  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/70271/lift-every-voice>

*Harlem* by Langston Hughes  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem>

*Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise>

## The Use of Stories Inspire Action

The message of Reggie’s performance is that the lives and accomplishments of others can provide a great foundation for inspiring our dreams and goals. Martin was the son of the Reverend and Mrs. Martin Luther King, Sr. He graduated from Booker T. Washington High School and Morehouse College at age 15. Then he went to Crozer Theological Seminary and earned his Doctorate from Boston College.

Reggie will touch on this and on how the lives of some of these African American historical figures helped pave the way for the civil rights accomplishments shaping Martin’s dream.

**Crispus Attucks**—an escaped slave who was the first person killed in the Boston Massacre

**Benjamin Banneker**—an educated free citizen who was an astronomer, inventor, and surveyor

**Phyllis Wheatley**—slave who learned to read/write and gained fame as the first Black female poet

**Richard Allen**—founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church who bought his own freedom for \$1500

**Harriet Tubman**—the most famous Underground Railroad conductor and civil war hero who led more than 100 people to freedom and inspired millions more

**Frederick Douglas**—an escaped Maryland slave who became a great orator, abolitionist, and writer

**Jackie Robinson**—the first African American to integrate Major League Baseball in 1947

**Satchel Paige**—a ground-breaking baseball player who was the first African American pitcher in the World Series

## IN THE CLASSROOM

### THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON—August 28, 1963

Following a day of songs and speeches, Dr King addressed the crowd of 200,000 people in Washington, D.C. and gave his “I Have a Dream” message that spoke to the need for unity in justice and for giving civil rights to all people. Here is a short segment of that speech.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpqeTK19tUI>

### Song: Free At Last

**Background:** Once over the border in Canada or in a free state, people would often sing, “Free at Last” in celebration. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used a quote from the song to close his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. He said, “Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I’m free at last!”

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Discuss the term “freedom” with students. What freedoms did slaves not have? (choice in where they lived, payment for their labor, stable family relationships, schooling, enough food, etc.)
2. What would it be like to gain these freedoms after not having them? Would any aspects of becoming “free” be scary? Why are personal choices important?
3. Discuss Dr. King and his importance to American history with your students.
4. Sing the song “Free At Last” together with your class and teach them the words and music to this song of joy. (see words and music below)

*Free At Last*



free at last, free at last, I thank God I'm free at last; free at last,

free at last,..... I thank God I'm free at last. O free at last.

1. 'Nary down vander in the grave-yard walk, I thank God I'm  
2. On a my knees when the light pass'd by, I thank God I'm  
3. Some of these morn- ings, bright and fair, I thank God I'm

free at last,.... Me and my re. sus gain' to  
free at last,.... Tho't... my soul... would...  
free at last, Gonn' meet... King Je... sus.....

met and talk,.... I thank God I'm free at last, O  
rise and fir,.... I thank God I'm free at last, O  
in the air,.... I thank God I'm free at last, O

-6-

## IN THE CLASSROOM

### Writing the Rhythm of History

#### **Goals:**

- To help students to remember famous personalities in African-American History
- To teach students the value of song in remembering information
- To work on creative writing skills related to structure, rhythm, and rhyme
- Rap songs, hip hop, and spoken-word pieces all carry narrative value that can compile and spread information in an easy-to-remember form. This chorus was written

by Reggie to help a group of students remember the names and some details about people they studied in a residency.

*One to one in the land of the free  
We're talking about our history  
One to one for liberty  
We're talking about our history!!*

The result was a song that was eventually performed and recorded as a CD.

### **The Black History Wrap-Up Rap**

<https://soundcloud.com/kimandreggiesing/the-black-history-rap-up>

Using the Black History Rap, have students discover how to perform a rap using research about historical figures.

1. Have your students research the people in the song (lyrics are below) and discover their contributions to the American history narrative.
2. Select a topic or person
  - Brainstorm words/ideas that relate to the subject/people/event.
  - Using a simple drum beat, compose a simple verse detailing a person or event in history.
  - Have students write on a rap or musical poem as an entire classroom or in small groups.
  - Help students to get the words into rhymical sections so that it ‘scans’ or matches the tempo and phrasing.
  - It’s useful to compose a simple chorus that serves as the focus of your theme.
  - Repeat the lines to check the rhythms as students begin to learn the rap.
  - Have students perform their work and discuss the final versions with the class to see what new details have been learned in the process.

### **Black History Rap**

One to one in the land of the free  
We're talking about our history  
One to on for liberty  
We're talking about our history

In 1619 on the Eastern Shore  
The first African landed, there would soon be more  
Many came as slaves or indentured ones  
With dreams of freedom for their daughters and sons

In Boston, this got a little rough  
The British came and said, “Show us your stuff!”

So Crispus Attucks and several more  
Put their lives on the line and started a war

Revolutionary War - you know the names  
Washington, Adams, they all got the fame  
But 5,000 blacks fought too, you see, and they're a part of our history

#### CHORUS

There was Richard Allen, a preacher man  
He bought his own freedom, a man with a plan  
Benjamin Banneker was a scientist,  
A mathematician who's high on our list

Phyllis Wheatley, she was good with words  
Her poetry dazzled the world!!!  
While Jean Du Sable was on the go  
He settled the place we call Chicago

Update! Update! The Civil War,  
people were dying - this time . . .  
for an end for to slavery, for equal rights  
Sojourner Truth would help with that fight.

Now Frederick Douglas was an educator, advisor  
to Lincoln, a liberator  
Like Harriet Tubman, she set people free  
They call her Moses in history

#### CHORUS

Sometimes the names just pass you by.  
How many can you identify?  
Let's take a trip for young and old  
Down the lane of a history honor roll

- A. Phillip Randolph, Roland Hayes
- B. Langston Hughes and Willie Mayes  
Barbara Jordan, Nat King Cole, Ellen Craft  
and Lawrence Joel
- 1. Bessie Coleman, Louis Wright, Garrett  
Morgan, Gladys Knight  
Booker T. Washington, William Still, Louis  
Armstrong, and Florence Mills  
Matthew A. Henson, Dr. Charles Drew, Jesse  
Owens, Maya Angelou
- 2. You might not know them so easily  
But they're all a part of our history



CHORUS

One to one in the land of the free  
We're talking about our history  
One to on for liberty  
We're talking about our history

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### **Other important African American History Makers who inspired Dr. King for students to research**

**Frederick McKinley Jones (1892-1961):** Developed first practical refrigeration system for long-term travel and unit to keep blood serum fresh

**Lewis Howard Latimer (1841-1928):** Worked with Alexander Graham Bell on drawing up the blueprints for the telephone and with Thomas Edison on perfecting the light bulb

**Mary Edmonia Lewis (1846-1890):** Sculptor/graduate of Oberlin College

**Elijah J. McCoy (1843-1929):** Mechanical engineer and inventor

**Garret A. Morgan (1875-1963):** Inventor of automated traffic signal and perfected a gas mask, which saved many people from death in World War 1

**Bill Pickett (1870-1932):** Great black rodeo cowboy now in the Cowboy Hall of Fame

**Mary Ellen Pleasant (1814-1904):** Financial broker of John Brown and mother of the civil rights movement in California

**Florence Beatrice Smith Prince (1888-1933):** Award-winning composer of symphonies

**Paul Robeson (1898-1976):** Actor, singer, lawyer, and international activist

**Mary Church Terrell (1862-1954):** Civil rights activist

**Sojourner Truth (1797-1883):** Escaped slave, orator, abolitionist, and worker for women's rights

**Madam C. J. Walker (1867-1919):** Millionaire and inventor who invented a line of African-American hair care products in 1905

**Maggie Lena Walker (1867-1934):** Millionaire and bank president

**Fats Waller (1904-1943):** Fabulous pianist, entertainer and composer

**Mary Edmonia Lewis (1844-1908):** American sculptor who was the first woman of African-American and Native American heritage to achieve international fame as a sculptor in fine arts

**W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963):** an American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, author, and writer

What others can you identify?



## POEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Have a discussion with your students about poems like this one and others to compare and contrast the “I Have a Dream” speech with other notable documents of access in the America history canon:

### **Let America Be America Again (edited)**

*Langston Hughes*

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of the free.")

*Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?  
And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?*

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,  
I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.  
I am the red man driven from the land,  
I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—  
And finding only the same old stupid plan  
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
I am the worker sold to the machine.  
I am the Negro, servant to you all...  
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—  
Hungry yet today despite the dream.  
Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!  
I am the man who never got ahead,

The poorest worker bartered through the years....  
Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,  
Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,  
That even yet its mighty daring sings  
In every brick and stone in every furrow turned  
That's made America the land it has become.

O, let America be America again—  
The land that never has been yet—  
And yet must be—the land where every man is free.  
Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—  
The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
We must take back our land again,  
America!

O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath—  
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain—  
All, all the stretch of these great green states—  
And make America again!

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## **Lesson Activity: Civil Right Tree of Rights**

### **Goals:**

- To define and discuss the notion of rights, responsibilities, and accountability
- To become familiar with the Bill of Rights and other amendments to the Constitution that influenced the Civil Rights Movement

**Background:** From the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution to the Bill of Rights to the Voting Rights Act to today, the idea of rights continues to be debated, challenged, and redefined. The idea of rights and the promise of American documents of law are part of the backbone in the Civil Rights Movement, from the Underground Railroad to today.

13th Amendment—Abolish Slavery in 1865

14th Amendment—Granted citizenship to all born or naturalized in the United States 1868

15th Amendment—Granted voting rights for all men in 1870

19th Amendment—Women’s voting rights 1920

***Lesson Activity:***

Create a bulletin board or a graphic of a Tree of Life. Picture a tree with individual leaves. On each leaf, have students write an individual right that they would consider part of the Bill of Rights.

Have the students brainstorm suggested rights that they feel must be part of our nation: Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, food, clothing, shelter, a home, a job, privacy, the right to vote, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to gather peacefully, freedom of religion, the right to a lawyer, trial by jury, the right to move from place to place, the right to get married or to stay single, and the right not to testify in case of self-incrimination, environmental rights, others. etc.

***Questions for Discussion:***

1. Define and discuss what it means to have the right to something.
2. What is the difference between a right and a privilege?  
Right: (Adj.) In accordance with justice and law. Correct, sound, or normal.  
(Noun) Legal, fitting or proper. That which is due to anyone by law or nature  
Privilege: (noun) a special right or advantage that a particular person or group of people enjoy granted or allowed because of status, wealth or unusual favor.

*Education should be a universal right and not a privilege.*

*In America, white people enjoy the favor or privilege of having favorable laws, treatment, or customs in place because they were designed, created, or regularly practiced by other whites in power.*

*Try not to abuse the privilege of being allowed more freedom.*

3. What is a responsibility?
4. How do rights and responsibilities complement each other?
5. Are rights, privileges, and responsibilities ever in conflict?
6. What rights do you need or want?

7. Why do people try to take away rights from other people?
8. Is this situation ever fair, legal, or proper? Take an opinion and poll the class.
9. Learn about the Bill of Rights. Why is the document important?
10. Why do people need to know what their rights are?
11. Does the Bill of Rights give any special protection to minorities or women?
12. Does the Bill of Rights apply to children or foreigners?
13. What rights do adults have that children do not have?
14. Compose a new Bill of Rights for children, for the planet, and/or for students in a school.

### **Activity: Current Events**

***Goal:***

To promote the idea that the struggle for civil rights is a present-day, ongoing event

***Activities:***

1. Using a student newspaper, local/national paper, magazine, or other news source, have students find stories relating to the present-day struggle for civil rights.
  - Voting rights
  - Peace issues
  - Ethnic fighting
  - Ecology
  - Women's issues
  - Issues of the differently abled
  - Human Trafficking
2. Students may work in small groups of 2 to 3 people.
3. A person from each group may relate the story to the entire class.
4. Take an opinion poll for 1 or 2 issues. How do students feel about the issue?  
For/Against/Not Sure (more research needed)
5. Have a spokesperson for each side attempt to relate their opinion and the reasons for their feelings.
6. Take another opinion poll.
7. Have students discuss present-day strategies and new ideas for working for freedom. Hint: This discussion may include issues on the use of force or non-violent civil disobedience.

### ***Questions for Discussion:***

1. What are some current issues that continue to cause people to work for freedom?
2. What issues continue to create tension and unrest in our society?
3. Can you name 3 groups that work to protect rights in the world?
4. Rights groups and what they attempt to do in America or in the world, i.e., the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
5. What do students know about rights issues around the world?

### ***Closing Song:***

#### **“From There To Here” (for Rep. John Lewis)**

It's a mighty long way from over yonder  
It's a might long way from there to here  
We're gonna take it one step at a time  
So that we can make that walk from there to here

What can a man see outside his window  
It's a whole lifetime from there to here  
And all those people who gave their sweat and their blood  
so that he could make that walk from there to here

Every child born is a revolution,  
a revolution with a song inside  
Some won't hear it,  
some hear nothing else they'll sing night and day  
just to keep that song alive.

When you've got a dream,  
You've got to stand up stand up and shout it, shout it loud and clear.  
What's that I'm hearing?  
It's the voice of the people singing  
that we will make that walk from there to here.

Words and music by Greg Greenway ©2015, Sheen of Heat Music

## **USEFUL REFERENCES AND LINKS**

The ACLU: <https://www.aclu.org>

The Equal Justice Initiative: <https://eji.org>

The History Channel—MLK, Jr.  
<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr>

Lesson Plans & Teacher Guides  
<https://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/lessonplansandteacherguides.htm>

Songs and the Civil Rights Movement

<https://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/lessonplansandteacherguides.htm>

*Let the Children March* by Monica Clark-Robinson

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/books/let-the-children-march-by-monica-clark-robinson/>

National Civil Rights Museum | At the Lorraine Motel

<https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org>

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