

ELPL Lit Kits



***March: Book One* by John Lewis**

'March' is a vivid, first-hand account of John Lewis' lifelong struggle for civil and human rights (including his key roles in the historic 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 Selma-Montgomery March), meditating in the modern age on the distance travelled since the days of Jim Crow and segregation.

About the Author: Lewis has been the Representative for the 5th U.S. Congressional District of Georgia since 1986.

Discussion Questions:

- Why might this trilogy be entitled “March”? How many marches can you find depicted or mentioned in *March: Book One*? Analyze the multiple meanings, and connotations, of the word march with respect to the “how far we’ve come” theme that runs throughout the frame story. Specifically, how do the actions of Lewis and his comrades exemplify the defining characteristics of marching, such as being resolute, unified, and steady? If the word is usually used to describe the movement of an army, what is the significance of nonviolent groups doing the same? Finally, how might John Lewis’ line “We have to march,” in response to the bombing of the Loobys’ house, signal the climax of the book?
- How does nonviolent resistance as espoused by Gandhi, King, and Lawson work to bring about social change, and how does it compare to other methods? Contrast the violence which opens the book with the emphasis on the “peaceful transition to power” in the 2009 television’s broadcast and the similarly peaceful, largely silent pages that precede it. What is the historical message implied by this contrast?
- In what ways do Lewis’s religious background and values influence his approach to the struggle for civil rights as well as the movement as a whole? Do you feel that love of one’s attacker is a requirement for effective nonviolent resistance, and are there any signs of it in the book?
- History is often considered to be made up of recorded facts. In contrast, what important role might subjective factors such “dreams” and “fate” play in history, according to *March*? Trace the theme of wishes, dreams, and the “spirit of history” during the course of the book. When the alarm clock on page 13 goes off, in what ways might it signify the end of a nightmare, or the transition from a dream to a reality, in terms of national race relations? Does the inauguration of Barack Obama represent the complete fulfillment of Dr. King’s dream, or merely a step?

- The phrase “law and order” seems to imply that maintaining social order is an important function of police and other law enforcement authorities. But what happens when preserving the existing status quo makes such authorities the instigators of violence rather than those who protect citizens from it? How should individuals and groups respond when the justice system itself is bent to serve certain positions and interests?
- What is the relationship between geography, community, and politics in *March*? As just one example, how does the isolation of the chickens in their henhouse reflect the isolation of Lewis’s family on their farm? What visual elements help convey these ideas? Similarly, how does the trip to Buffalo, with its bright lights and vertical heights that mirror the scale of Lewis’s aspirations for himself and society, illustrate his dawning sense of possibilities both figuratively and literally (as a Northern city free of the everyday prejudices of the South)? On the other hand, in what ways does the rural community of Alabama exemplify the notion of a tight-knit community despite being spread out geographically?
- What does the book’s portrayal of various media tell us about their relationship to social and political change? As a youth, Lewis himself supplements firsthand accounts of the Montgomery Bus Boycott with those communicated via radio and newspaper, and a comic book turns out to be an important way to learn of Martin Luther King’s ideas. What conclusions might we draw from such examples? To be more specific, how would you disseminate new ideas and coordinate political actions if you did not have access to tools such as email, mobile phones, and the Internet?
- What role did economic factors play in the process of desegregation? Specifically, if African Americans had represented a far smaller part of the buying public, do you think tactics such as boycotts and sit-ins would have been as effective? What example of economic freedom early in *March* may have inspired Lewis by providing a model of what racially integrated commerce looks like in practice?
- How do the events depicted in *March* connect to your life personally? Discuss with an older family member or friend their memories of the early 1960s and the civil rights movement. Alternatively, is there a modern-day issue for which you might be willing to take a stand? Would you use the same techniques as the Nashville Student Movement, or a different strategy? Has reading *March* changed your perspective, and if so, how?