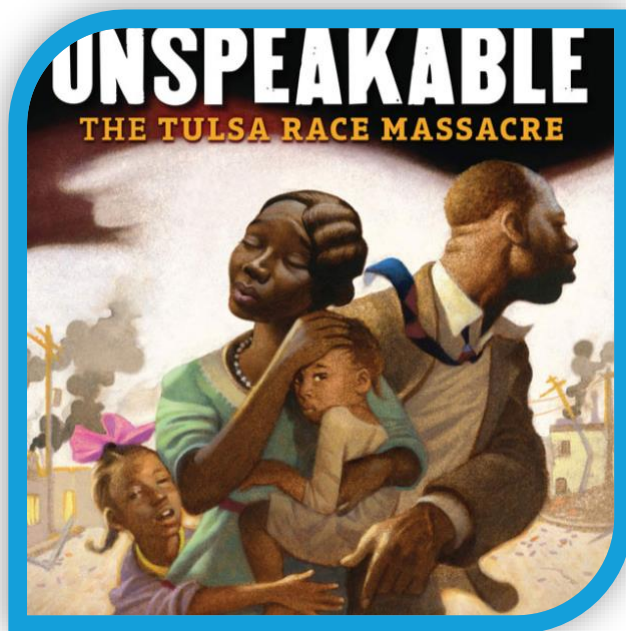




Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month Parent/Family Discussion Guide: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre

Carole Boston Weatherford (Author), Floyd Cooper (Illustrator)

ISBN: 978-1541581203

Publisher: Carolrhoda Books

Year Published: 2021

Age Range: 8–12

Book Themes

Race and Racism, Injustice, Social Justice, Civil Rights, Black History

About the Book

A powerful look at the Tulsa Race Massacre, one of the worst incidents of racial violence in our nation's history. The book traces the history of the Black community in Tulsa's Greenwood district and chronicles the devastation that occurred in 1921 when a white mob attacked the Black community. News of what happened was largely suppressed, and no official investigation occurred for seventy-five years. This picture book sensitively introduces young readers to this tragedy and concludes with a call for a better future.

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book along with your child or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their

responses and to listen thoughtfully and engage in a conversation that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What is the book about?
- What did you learn that you didn't know before?
- Who lived in the Greenwood District of Tulsa? Why was it known as "Black Wall Street?"
- Why do you think some white people in Tulsa were not happy about Black success and wealth in the Greenwood District?
- Why do you think the Tulsa Race Massacre was not talked about for so long?
- What does "reconciliation" mean and why do you think they built a Reconciliation Park in Tulsa?
- What do you think people should know about what happened?
- Why is it important to learn history, even if it painful and disturbing?
- How did you feel while reading the book and learning about the Tulsa Race Massacre?
- Why do you think the book is called *The Unspeakable*?
- What is the message you took away from the book?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations that will make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

1. Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921

Talk with your child about the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921, one of the worst incidents of racial violence in U.S. history. You can do this by (1) eliciting what they learned from reading the book, (2) reading or re-reading the Author's Note on pages 32-33, or (3) watching the video, [The massacre of Tulsa's "Black Wall Street."](#) Find out if your child knows anything about it and what questions they have. Based on what they already know and their questions, share some or all of the following information:

- During the years following World War I (which ended in 1918), much of the U.S. saw an increase in racial tensions, threats and violence. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had a resurgence, and they were very active. There were lynchings and a general spike in racial violence. "Red Summer of 1919" included racial riots in more than three dozen cities across the U.S. and one rural county in Arkansas.
- During the early 1900's Tulsa, Oklahoma became a booming oil town and many Black people saw it as a place to settle and prosper. Tulsa's Greenwood District (named after the mile-stretch of Greenwood Avenue) became known as "Black Wall Street." It included a thriving business district with many Black-owned businesses and a surrounding residential area where most of the 10,000 Black Tulsa residents lived. Tulsa was racially segregated and many of the white residents resented the Black community's prosperity and success.
- On the morning of May 30, 1921, a young Black teenager named Dick Rowland entered an elevator at a downtown office building. Rowland was in the elevator with Sarah Page, a young white woman who was the elevator operator. At some point, Page screamed. The police were called and the next day, May 31, they arrested Rowland. Sarah Page never pressed charges.

- Rumors began circulating among the white community. A front-page story in the Tulsa Tribune reported that the police had arrested Dick Rowland for assaulting Sarah Page. This stoked racial tensions, inciting a white mob who came to the courthouse and wanted to lynch Rowland. The Sheriff refused.
- That evening, a group of Black men, including many World War I veterans, went to the courthouse to offer help to guard Rowland and protect him from the white people who wanted to lynch him. After the sheriff turned them away, some of the white mob tried unsuccessfully to break into the National Guard armory nearby. With rumors still flying of a possible lynching, a group of around 75 armed Black men returned to the courthouse where they were met by some 1,500 white men, some of whom also carried weapons.
- In the early morning hours of June 1, 1921, white rioters looted and burned the Greenwood District. The Governor declared martial law and the National Guard was brought in. Twelve hundred homes were destroyed, 35 city blocks were burned, 8000 people left without a home, and more than 800 people were treated for injuries. Historians now believe as many as 300 people died.
- To understand the Tulsa Race Massacre, it is important to understand the complexities of the times. Jim Crow (state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the South during the late 1800's and early 1900's), played a role in what happened in Tulsa, as did white supremacy and jealousy about the Black community in Tulsa being successful and prosperous.
- In its aftermath, the incident did not receive any widespread attention and the massacre was left out of history books. In 2001, an official Race Riot Commission was organized to review the details of the event.
- Much of the visual history of the aftermath from the Tulsa Massacre is known only through deplorable anti-Black postcards printed and circulated by white racists.
- Almost a hundred years later in 2018, the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park was dedicated as a literary landmark, memorializing the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. It was the result of the 2001 Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.

If students want to know more about what happened, use the “Additional Tulsa Race Massacre Resources” below to learn more together.

2. History of Racism

Explain and elicit from your child that the Tulsa Race Massacre is an example of racism in the U.S. Define **racism** as the disrespect, harm and mistreatment of people of color based on made up ideas that white people deserve to be in charge and treated better. Talk about how the Tulsa Race Massacre is an example of racism and talk about incidents in the book that illustrate this (e.g., the arrest and imprisonment of Dick Rowland, the anger and jealousy white people had about “Black Wall Street,” the violence and terror that happened in Tulsa that night and the fact that it wasn’t discussed openly for decades).

Talk about other time periods and incidents in U.S. history and today in which racism was included or perpetuated, including enslavement, Jim Crow, segregation, the Ku Klux Klan, Tuskegee Experiment, Emmett Till, lynchings (public killings by a mob, often public hanging of a person), excessive use of police force and Black Lives matter, voter suppression laws, and others.

Do some research together to come up with a list of examples or add to the items you have. Choose one of the examples to learn more about or do a longer and deeper dive into the history of racism in

the U.S. Discuss the ways in which each is an example of racism and importantly, what people did to challenge and overcome it.

3. What is Reconciliation?

Talk with your child about Reconciliation Park (referenced in the book on pages 30–31), which was created to remember the victims of the Tulsa Race Massacre, acknowledge responsibility and provide healing. Elicit and explain that **reconciliation** is a process to search for truth, justice and forgiveness.

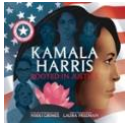
First talk with your child about what reconciliation (truth, justice and forgiveness) means on a personal level and share experiences you've had with reconciling a wrong or mistake—and ask if they have had any experiences like this. Then talk with them about the importance of the reconciliation and memorial of the Tulsa Race Massacre.

Together look at the [John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation](https://www.johnhopefranklincenter.org/) website to explore how they are memorializing and reconciling what happened. Discuss the mood and tone of the memorial, what words and images are used and what the overall message is. Talk with them about what components they would include in a reconciliation memorial, either for what happened in Tulsa or another important event in history. Imagine together what that might look like.

Additional Tulsa Race Massacre Resources

- [1921 Tulsa Race Massacre](#) (Tulsa Historical Society and Museum)
- [1921 Tulsa Race Massacre Centennial Commission](#)
- [Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921](#) (Britannica Kids, for younger students)
- [Tulsa Race Massacre](#) (History)
- [“What happened 99 years ago in the Tulsa Race Massacre”](#) (PBS News Hour, June 19, 2020)
- [“What to Know About the Tulsa Greenwood Massacre”](#) (*The New York Times*, June 20, 2020)

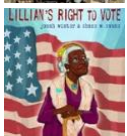
Other Books You May Like



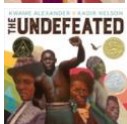
Kamala Harris: Rooted in Justice by Nikki Grimes, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/kamala-harris-rooted-in-justice



*March: Book One** by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/march-book-one
(*There are also Books Two and Three)



Lillian's Right to Vote by Jonah Winter, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/lillians-right-to-vote



The Undefeated by Kwame Alexander, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-undefeated

ADL Additional Resources

The following are resources on Black history, civil rights, and race and racism.

Websites

10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/10-ways-youth-can-engage-in-activism

A list of ideas for bringing social activism into the classroom and outside of the school walls. These strategies can be acted upon individually, organized together as a group and young people can join with a larger effort that is taking place locally or nationally.

12 Exceptional Kid Lit Books to Read for Black History Month

www.adl.org/blog/12-exceptional-kid-lit-books-to-read-for-black-history-month

A blog of recommended children's and young adult books to read for Black History Month.

Black History Month

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/black-history-month

A list of lesson plans and resources to help you teach about black history in your classroom.

Civil Rights Movement

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/civil-rights-movement.html

Provides historical background information, resources and pictures about the Civil Rights Movement.

Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/parent-family-and-caregiver-resources

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.

Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/race-talk.html

Suggestions and strategies for having classroom conversations with young people about race and racism.

The Question Corner: Early Childhood FAQs

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner

A collection of answers to frequently asked questions about anti-bias issues faced by early childhood professionals and family members interested in promoting respect for diversity among young children. See "[How Do Children Learn Prejudice?](#)"

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk

Provides the tools parents and family members need to engage their families in conversations about important news stories and other timely discussions about societal and world events. Includes discussion guides containing a topic summary, questions to start the conversation and dig deeper, ideas for taking action and additional resources. See "[Lonnie Chavis of 'This Is Us' Reflects on His Experiences with Racism.](#)"

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

People, Identity & Culture: Black, African American, Caribbean, [https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[205\]=205](https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[205]=205)

Race & Racism, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-8=1&tid\[217\]=217&tid\[218\]=218&tid\[219\]=219&tid\[220\]=220&tid\[221\]=221](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-8=1&tid[217]=217&tid[218]=218&tid[219]=219&tid[220]=220&tid[221]=221)