



# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

**About the Book of the Month:** 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 educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

## Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre

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

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.

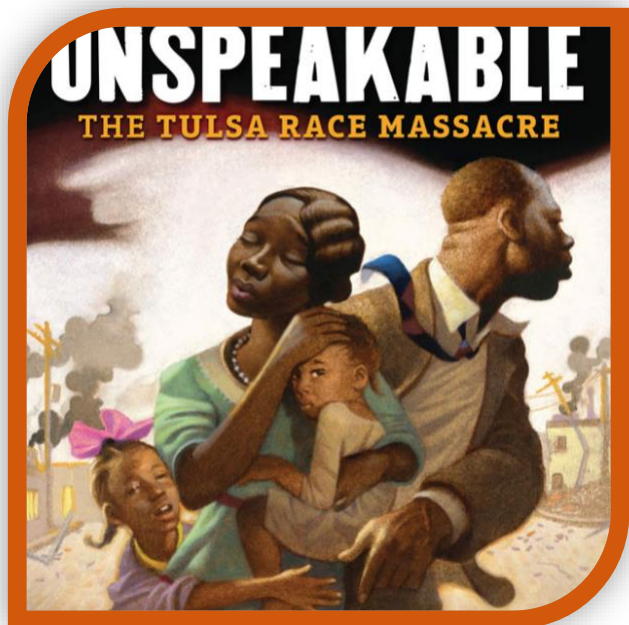
ISBN: 978-1541581203

Publisher: Carolrhoda Books

Year Published: 2021

Age Range: 8–12\*

*\*Ages 8-12 is the focus age group for the book. However, also included in this guide are activities for younger students (ages 5–7) and older students (13 and up), stated where applicable.*



## Book Themes

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

## Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind children of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out to students when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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| <input type="checkbox"/> achieve           | <input type="checkbox"/> establishments | <input type="checkbox"/> outnumbered    | <input type="checkbox"/> skirmish        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> accused           | <input type="checkbox"/> furrier        | <input type="checkbox"/> prominent      | <input type="checkbox"/> suspect         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> assault           | <input type="checkbox"/> investigation  | <input type="checkbox"/> prospectors    | <input type="checkbox"/> systemic racism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> barred            | <input type="checkbox"/> Jim Crow       | <input type="checkbox"/> Racism         | <input type="checkbox"/> terror          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black-owned       | <input type="checkbox"/> looting        | <input type="checkbox"/> reconciliation | <input type="checkbox"/> thriving        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black Wall Street | <input type="checkbox"/> lynched        | <input type="checkbox"/> residents      | <input type="checkbox"/> undeniable      |
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## Discussion Questions

As students read the book as a class or individually, ask discussion questions throughout their reading to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. When students (ages 8–12) have finished the book, choose from the questions below to guide a group discussion. (Modify questions as needed for younger and older students.) Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts.

- What do you see on the cover? What do you think the book might be about?
- What is the title of the book and what do you think it means?
- What is the book about?
- Before reading the book, had you ever heard of the Tulsa Race Massacre? What did you hear about it?
- Where is Tulsa? Who lived in the Greenwood District of Tulsa? What is important about the Greenwood District?
- What are some examples of segregation between the white and Black communities in Tulsa?
- Why was the Greenwood District known as “Black Wall Street?” What does it mean that the neighborhood “kept thriving?”
- What kind of businesses existed in Black Wall Street?
- How was the Greenwood District different than other Black communities in the South during this time period?
- Why do you think some white people in Tulsa were not happy about Black success and wealth in the Greenwood District?

- What happened during the Tulsa Massacre? What was the impact of the massacre on the Greenwood District?
- What did the white mob do to the Greenwood community?
- Why do you think that for decades, “survivors did not speak of the terror?”
- What does reconciliation mean? Why do you think they eventually built Reconciliation Park in Tulsa?
- Why is it important to remember the past?
- While reading the book, what did you notice? What did you wonder?
- What did you learn that you didn't know before? What questions do you still have about the Tulsa Race Massacre?
- Why do you think the book is called *The Unspeakable*?
- What is the overall message of the book?

## Extension Activities

Below are activities for students, specified by age/grade level, that can extend learning from the book. Modify language for younger children.

### 1. Learn More about the Tulsa Massacre (ages 5 & up/grades 3–12)

After reading and discussing the book, read aloud (or have students read on their own) the Author's Note on pages 32–33, explaining that it was one of the worst incidents of racial violence in U.S. history. If time permits, watch the video, [The massacre of Tulsa's "Black Wall Street"](#) (or use for your own background knowledge).

Based on what students already know, share some or all of the below information about the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. Then, engage students in a process of identifying what they already knew, what they learned from reading the book, and what they still want to know. There are opportunities later for more research and exploration.

- 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 (public killings by a mob, often public hanging of a person) 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.

## 2. Racism throughout History (ages 8–12)

Reflect on other issues of anti-Black racism and systemic racism throughout history and currently. First, elicit and explain a definition of **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. Then, brainstorm a list of incidents and time periods in U.S. history that included and/or perpetuated racism. To add to the list, have students go home and interview their parents, families and friends, and do some additional online research. Add those ideas to the list. The final list may look something like this:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| □ Enslavement   | □ Redlining   |
| □ Jim Crow  | □ Tuskegee Experiment   |
| □ Disenfranchisement of Black voters                          | □ Rosewood Massacre of 1923   |
| □ Red Summer of 1919  | □ Lynching  |
| □ Segregation   | □ Emmett Till   |
| □ Civil War, Succession and the Confederate States of America | □ Racial Profiling and Police Excessive Use of Force (including murder) |
| □ Ku Klux Klan  | □ School-to-Prison Pipeline   |
| □ Birmingham Church Bombing                                   | □ Voter Suppression Laws  |
| □ Mississippi Burning Murders                                 |   |

Have students work alone or in pairs, choose one of the incidents or time periods, learn more about it, describe how it is an example of systemic racism, and what was done about it (activism, court cases, legislation, etc.). Students can then share what they learned by creating a PowerPoint presentation, timeline, essay or video.

### 3. Create Your Own Reconciliation Memorial (ages 8–12)

Re-read pages 30–31 about Reconciliation Park, 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. Ask students how reconciliation applies to their own lives and ask if they know about other times in history we have engaged in “reconciliation.” Invite students to explore the [John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation](#) website to learn more about it.

Have students think about examples in history of racism (see above) or other examples of bias and injustice in society. Have students consider one example that is important to them and then design their own memorial for reconciliation. They should consider the following elements: (1) the overall structure for the memorial, (2) what words and videos to include, (3) what sculptures or other imagery to create, (4) what mood they want to convey, (5) what people and events are being memorialized, (6) how the messages of truth, justice and forgiveness will be conveyed. Have them work alone or with others to create a sketch or model of their memorial and share it with the class.

### 4. Reader's Response Writing Activities (ages 8–12)

**Author Study.** Have students get to know Carole Boston Weatherford, the author of *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre*. Explain to students that they will conduct research about her that will culminate in a project. First, as a class, discuss what students want to know about the author such as: where she grew up, her inspiration for writing the book, aspects of her identity and their relevance to the book, other books she's written, her interests and hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Possible sources for their research can include: (1) Weatherford's website (<https://cbweatherford.com/>), (2) her social media posts on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (3) interviews she has conducted and (4) online research. The culmination of their research may include one of the following project ideas: an extended “author bio” contact page, a timeline of Carole Boston Weatherford's life, or a video (or audio) simulated interview between the author and a journalist (one student plays the author and another plays the interviewer).

**Annotated Timeline.** Have students create a timeline of the events leading up to the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 and what happened in the years afterwards. The timeline can include images, photographs, and written descriptions for each of the events before, during and after the Tulsa Race Massacre.

**Research Project.** Have students conduct research using books, articles and internet research (including the “Additional Tulsa Race Massacre Resources” below) to learn more about one of the following topics: (1) Black Wall Street, (2) Tulsa Race Massacre and its aftermath, (3) Red Summer of 1919 and (4) Jim Crow. As a culmination, create a timeline, PowerPoint presentation, or research essay on the topic.

### 5. Write a Letter or Make a Speech about Injustice (ages 5–7/grades K–2)

Elicit and define **injustice** as a situation in which the rights of a person or a group of people are ignored, disrespected or discriminated against. Ask students what happened in the book that showed injustice. Explain that the Black people in Tulsa was targeted because of their race, which led to the Tulsa Race Massacre described in the book. Ask: *What are other examples of places, spaces and situations where there is injustice?* These examples can be in school, their neighborhood or

community, their country or the world. Brainstorm a list of examples of injustice. Then have each student select one and write a persuasive letter (to their parents, school, Mayor, congressperson or President) or speech about that issue. In the letter or speech, they should include what the issue is, why they think it is unjust, what evidence or facts they have, and what they think should be done about it (their “call to action”). Have students engage in the writing process to complete their letters or speeches and then have them either send them to the person or deliver the speech and record it and share with others.

## 6. Pyramid of Hate/Pyramid of Action (ages 13 & up/grades 8–12)

Show the [Pyramid of Hate](#) to students or show them the [Pyramid of Hate student mini-lesson](#). Explain that the Pyramid of Hate is a tool to help explore the prevalence of bias and how incidents of bias, discrimination and oppression work together to create and perpetuate systems of hate and injustice. Explain systemic racism as follows:

**Systemic racism:** A combination of systems, institutions and factors that advantage white people and for people of color, cause widespread harm and disadvantages in access and opportunity. One person or even one group of people did not create systemic racism, rather it: (1) is grounded in the history of our laws and institutions which were created on a foundation of white supremacy; (2) exists in the institutions and policies that advantage white people and disadvantage people of color; and (3) takes place in interpersonal communication and behavior (e.g., slurs, bullying, offensive language) that maintains and supports systemic inequities and systemic racism.

Explain how bias and hate can intensify when they are accepted and “normalized” instead of challenged and interrupted. Discuss the different levels of the pyramid, share examples and elicit other examples from them, and then talk about the Tulsa Race Massacre in relation to the Pyramid of Hate. Identify where on the pyramid the Massacre is and where other incidents surrounding it are placed on the pyramid. Have students reflect on what actions can be taken on each level of the pyramid to challenge and interrupt bias and hate. Have students create a Pyramid of Action where they will identify those actions and place them in this new pyramid. They can use the Tulsa Race Massacre as an example or not.

### 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)

## ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on race and racism, Black history, social justice and civil rights.

### Curriculum Resources

10 Ideas for Teaching Black History Month, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/10-ideas-for-teaching-black-history-month](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/10-ideas-for-teaching-black-history-month).

Confederate Monuments and Their Removal, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/confederate-monuments-and-their-removal](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/confederate-monuments-and-their-removal).

Experiences with Race and Racism, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/experiences-with-race-and-racism](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/experiences-with-race-and-racism).

Noose Incidents and Their Historical Context, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/noose-incidents-and-their-historical-context](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/noose-incidents-and-their-historical-context).

Pyramid of Hate Student Mini-Lesson, [www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/the-pyramid-of-hate-student-edition](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/the-pyramid-of-hate-student-edition).

What are Reparations and Should We Enact Them?, [www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-are-reparations-and-should-we-enact-them](http://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/what-are-reparations-and-should-we-enact-them).

### Websites

10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/10-ways-youth-can-engage-in-activism](http://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](http://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.

Civil Rights Movement

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/civil-rights-movement.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/civil-rights-movement.html)

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

How Should I Talk about Race in My Mostly White Classroom?

[www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/how-should-i-talk-about-race-in-my-mostly-white-classroom](http://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/how-should-i-talk-about-race-in-my-mostly-white-classroom)

Strategies for discussing race and racism in classrooms of predominately white students.

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

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/race-talk.html](http://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.

### 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)

Social Justice, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-10=1&tid\[231\]=231&tid\[232\]=232&tid\[233\]=233&tid\[234\]=234&tid\[235\]=235&tid\[236\]=236&tid\[237\]=237](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-10=1&tid[231]=231&tid[232]=232&tid[233]=233&tid[234]=234&tid[235]=235&tid[236]=236&tid[237]=237)