



Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Monthly Featured Book: 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.

Ruth and the Green Book

Calvin Alexander Ramsey and Gwen Strauss (Authors) and Floyd Cooper (Illustrator)

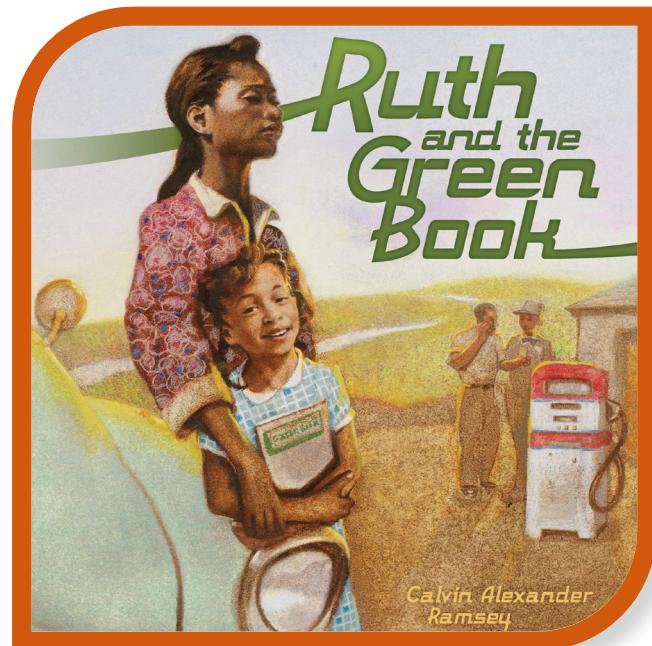
Ruth was so excited to take a trip in her family's new car! In the early 1950s, few Black people could afford to buy cars, so this would be an adventure. She soon found out that Black travelers weren't treated very well in some towns. Many hotels and gas stations refused service to Black people. Daddy was upset about something called Jim Crow laws. Finally, a friendly attendant at a gas station showed Ruth's family *The Green Book*. It listed all of the places that would welcome Black travelers. With this guidebook—and the kindness of strangers—Ruth could finally make a safe journey from Chicago to her grandma's house in Alabama. Ruth's story is fiction, but *The Green Book* and its role in helping a generation of Black travelers avoid some of the indignities of Jim Crow are historical fact.

ISBN: 978-0761352556

Publisher: Carolrhoda Books

Year Published: 2010

Age Range: 6-10



Book Themes

Black History, Civil Rights, Race and Racism, Activism

Key Words

Discuss and define the words below with students prior to reading the book. Rather than focus on students' retention of all the words, make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind students of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|--------------|----------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------|
| ■ ashamed | ■ dangerous | ■ forbidding | ■ laws | ■ travel |
| ■ attendant | ■ discriminate | ■ homesick | ■ neighborhood | ■ unwelcome |
| ■ automobile | ■ embarrassed | ■ inn | ■ service station | ■ worry |
| ■ business | ■ expected | ■ Jim Crow | ■ tourist | |

Note to Teacher:

In the book, the word “Negro” is used several times. Explain to students that before the 1960’s the term “Negro” was commonly used to refer to people who are Black/African American. Use of this term began to decline in the mid 1960’s. While the term is used in the book for historical context, the term “Negro” is now considered outdated, unacceptable and offensive. It is important to explain this distinction to students and emphasize that they should not use the word.

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- Describe the cover of the book. Who do you see?
- What do you think the title means? What do you think the “green book” is?
- What do you think the book will be about?
- Have you ever been on a long car ride? What was that like?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers:

- Where did Ruth’s Daddy grow up? (Page 5)
- What does Daddy say about the Jim Crow laws? How does Ruth feel when she learns about them? (Page 15)
- What does Ruth learn about Jason? (Page 22)

After reading the book aloud, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- At the beginning of the story, how do Ruth and her family feel about going on a road trip to visit Grandma in Alabama? What happens to them along the way?
- What happens when Ruth and Mama try to use the bathroom at the first service (gas) station where they stop? How do they feel when they are told they can’t use it?
- Where does the family see “White Only” signs? What do those signs mean? How do you think Ruth and her parents feel when they see those signs as they drive to Alabama?
- What does Daddy tell Ruth about the Jim Crow laws? When Ruth learns that the laws that separate Black and white people and prevent Black people from going to certain places, how does Ruth feel?
- Have you heard about Jim Crow laws before? How do you feel learning about them and what more do you want to know?

- What happens when Ruth and her family stop at an Esso (gas) station near the Georgia border? What do they find out about the *Negro Motorist Green Book* and how they can use it?
- When they arrive at the home of Mrs. Melody to stay for the night, Ruth reflects, "It was like coming home." What does Ruth mean by this? How does she feel? Have you ever had a similar feeling of something feeling "like coming home" even though it is not your home? Please explain.
- Why does Ruth decide to give her Brown Bear to the little boy she meets at the last inn where they stay overnight? Do you think it was hard for Ruth to give Brown Bear away? Why or why not?
- When Ruth thinks about the trip before she goes to bed, what different feelings about the trip does she have? How do you know?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next? What do you think will happen on their trip back home to Chicago?
- What do you think the author and illustrator want us to learn by reading this book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. What is The Green Book?

Ask students: *What is the Green Book? Who used the Green Book and why did they need it?* Read the back of the book on page 30 ("The History of the Negro Motorist Green Book") aloud or have students read on it their own to learn more. Elicit/explain that the Green Book was a guidebook used by Black people as they traveled by car across the U.S. Share the following information:

The Green Book provided a list of hotels, boarding houses, taverns, restaurants, gas service stations and other businesses throughout the U.S. that served Black customers. A mail carrier named Victor H. Green published it every year from 1936 to 1966 when segregation (separating people based on race) and discrimination against Black people was legal and widespread. During this period, Black people faced white-owned businesses who refused to serve them, repair their cars, serve them food or provide hotel/housing accommodation; price gouging (when a seller increases the prices of goods or services to a much higher amount than is fair or reasonable); and threats of physical violence while traveling around the U.S. The information included in *The Negro Motorist Green Book* helped Black people get the services they needed, be treated with respect and stay safe. Victor Green stopped publishing the Green Book in 1964 when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, which made it illegal for hotels, restaurants and gas stations to discriminate against customers.

Project images of some of the pages of the Green Book using the [Smithsonian](#) or [Library of Congress](#) websites. As you show students the pages, ask: *What kind of businesses do you see?* If time permits, have students identify one town and one business from the Green Book and create a short story around it. Invite students to draw a picture of what they think the business looks like and then either create some dialogue between the owner and a customer or a short story about a customer finding and using the business, as Ruth and her family did throughout the book. (For younger students, you might identify the businesses and have them just create a drawing with a caption.) When completed, have students share their illustrations and dialogue/stories with the class.

2. Segregation and the Civil Rights Movement in Photos

Remind students about the bias, segregation and unfairness that Black people faced in the book and that the Green Book helped them have access to services and to be safe. During this time period, other people found ways to fight against this unfairness. Ask students: *What is the Civil Rights Movement? What do you know about it? What more do you want to know about it?* Briefly explain/elicit some or all of the following information about the Civil Rights Movement:

- The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's came about because of the need for equality, justice and freedom for Black people and other people of color.
- Nearly one hundred years after slavery was abolished, there continued to be widespread segregation, discrimination, and racially motivated violence that took place in all aspects of life for Black people. "Jim Crow" laws barred Black people from classrooms and bathrooms, from theaters and train cars, from juries and legislatures and from goods and services like the services Ruth and her family in the book needed.
- During that time, there was a great deal of activism taking place as a result of the injustice, segregation and inequality. Activists worked together and used non-violent protest and acts of targeted civil disobedience, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Greensboro Woolworth Sit-Ins, in order to bring about change.
- Much of this organizing and activism took place in the Southern part of the U.S. However, people from all over the country—of all races and religions—joined activists to proclaim their support and commitment to freedom and equality.

Explain that we are going to look at photos about the Civil Rights Movement to learn more. Project a few images using ADL's [Civil Rights Movement in Pictures](#) website. As you display the photos, ask some or all of the following questions to get students to analyze and reflect on the photos.

Direct Observation Questions (choose 1-2 from this group):

- What's happening here?
- Describe what you see. What do you first notice?
- Look at the people in the photo. What are the people doing? What can you tell about them from what you observe?
- How do the people feel? How can you tell?
- What objects do you see? Why are they in the photo and what do they tell you?
- What, if any, words do you see? What do they mean? What do they tell you?

Interpretive Questions (choose 1-2 from this group):

- What is the place or environment like? What would it be like to live here? What sounds would you hear? What would you smell?
- What may have happened before this scene? What might happen after?
- What does the photograph tell you about the life of these people?
- If you could ask the people in the photo questions, what would you ask them?
- Why do you think this is an important historical photo? What can we and others learn by looking at it?

- What do you wonder about the people, place and objects in the photo?

Then have students identify 2-3 photos of their choosing about the Civil Rights Movement from online sources. There are many online sources for photos; here are a few: [The civil rights era in photos](#), [Reliving The Civil Rights Movement In 55 Powerful Photos](#) and [The civil rights movement in photos](#). After selecting their photos, invite students to write a short description based on what they learned about the photo and reflecting on some of the questions outlined above. As a class, create a slide show of all the different photos and their descriptions and have students take turns describing their selected photos. Consider sharing them with the whole school and inviting parents in to take part in this experience.

3. Get to Know the Author or Illustrator

Share information with students about authors Calvin Alexander Ramsey and illustrator Floyd Cooper (who died in 2021). You can read aloud the short blurbs about them on the back cover of the book. Ask students: *What more do you want to know about Calvin Alexander Ramsey and Floyd Cooper and their work?* Create a list of student's questions, which could include where they grew up, why they wrote and illustrated *Ruth and the Green Book* and the book's meaning to them, other books they wrote and illustrated, important moments and milestones in their lives, awards they have won, their interests, hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Then have students choose either Calvin Alexander Ramsey or Floyd Cooper to research in more detail, using their website and other online resources, interview and print sources. The students' research can culminate in one of the following projects: an illustration/portrait of Calvin Alexander Ramsey or Floyd Cooper with a short blurb describing them, a timeline about the important milestones and moments in their lives, a PowerPoint/Google slide presentation about them or a collage of artifacts that you might find at one of their homes or offices/workspaces.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and other educational resources on transgender people, identity and topics, acting as an ally, and acceptance.

Curriculum Resources

10 Idea for Teaching about Black History Month <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/10-ideas-for-teaching-black-history-month>

Civil Rights Act of 1964: 7 Ways to Commemorate the Anniversary <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/civil-rights-act-of-1964-7-ways-to-commemorate-the>

Experiences with Race and Racism <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/experiences-with-race-and-racism>

Lonnie Chavis of 'This is Us' Writes about Racism <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/lonnie-chavis-of-this-is-us-writes-about-racism>

Websites

10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/10-ways-youth-can-engage-activism>

13 Exceptional Kid Lit Books to Read for Black History Month <https://www.adl.org/blog/13-exceptional-kid-lit-books-to-read-for-black-history-month>

Black History Month <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/black-history-month>

Civil Rights Movement <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/civil-rights-movement>

Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/race-talk-engaging-young-people-conversations-about-race-and-racism>

Children's Books

Books about Civil Rights <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1653>

Books about Race and Racism <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=attachments%3A0&f%5B1%5D=topic%3A1580>