



P.S. Be Eleven

by Rita Williams-Garcia

EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Activity and Lesson Unit Suggestions

This Education Resource Guide includes activities regarding the following three topics related to *P.S. Be Eleven*, followed by discussion questions, and a list of books for further reading:

- Motown
- Vietnam War and PTSD
- Senator Robert F. Kennedy

MOTOWN

Collaborate with your librarian and research the “movers and shakers” of the Motown era: Diana Ross, The Jackson Five, Stevie Wonder, The Temptations, etc. As a part of this research, visit the website [Motown Museum](http://www.motownmuseum.org).

Next, create your own classroom Motown Museum. As a class or group, create a “store front” similar to the one found at online visitor gallery on the [Motown Museum website](https://www.motownmuseum.org/visit/visitor-gallery) (<https://www.motownmuseum.org/visit/visitor-gallery>) Take your picture before it for display (similar to the museum gallery), after you have researched and selected a specific artist and chosen a show costume (each student will dress differently).

At a specific day set aside for presentations, each student (or group of students if a group such as the Temptations or Jackson Five are selected by several students) will dress the part of the artist, and, before the faux Museum, do the following:

- 1) Perform a song.
- 2) Tell the “story” of the artist or group (how he/she/they started or broke into Motown, their major hits, etc.).
- 3) Provide a scenario revealing how the artist served as a heroine or hero.
- 4) Explain the impact of the artist’s or group’s music on both society and R&B music itself.

VIETNAM WAR AND PTSD

Ask students to read (or listen to) these two articles at home or in the school/public library:

- “The Drugs That Built a Super Soldier” on *The Atlantic* website:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/04/the-drugs-that-built-a-super-soldier/477183/>
- “A Growing Number of Veterans Struggle to Quit Powerful Painkillers” on the NPR Health News website:
<http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/07/10/329904066/veterans-face-another-battle-fighting-prescription-drug-addiction>

Next, use this article for projection and a read-aloud:

“[Addicted to Life](http://www.voicesofyouth.org/en/posts/addicted-to-life)” on the Voices of Youth website:
<http://www.voicesofyouth.org/en/posts/addicted-to-life>

Divide the class or group into three groups. Each group will choose a topic:

- Nature
- Relationships
- Art

In groups, the young people will envision ways in which they would like to become “addicted to life.” They will first brainstorm ideas, then narrow it down to two that the group would like to participate in. They will gather again as one class or group and ask for a vote of the “top three” from these six ideas still in contention.

The class will next conduct the activities associated with the top three, either personally, as a whole, or both. After an allotted time, the group will discuss their feelings and response to these moments of “life addiction.” They will choose (vote upon) the most effective “addicted to life” activity, and, as a group, write a letter to the nearest female director of a Veterans’ Administration Chapter, providing information as to:

- 1) Their process associated with these activities.
- 2) How the activity effected the quality of life of both individuals and the group.
- 3) How participation in the activity could potentially be implemented for those veterans who struggle with drug addiction as a result of emotional wounds received in combat.

They should also specifically elicit a reply from the VA “heroine” (Director) in the body of the letter.

SENATOR ROBERT F. KENNEDY

Read the article “[Star Power, Still Shining 40 Years On](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/01/nyregion/thecity/01disp.html)” in *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/01/nyregion/thecity/01disp.html>) that chronicles how Senator Robert F. Kennedy’s visit to Herkimer Square continues to impact this neighborhood.

Next, research major state or “star power” visits by dignitaries within the past year, specifically targeting visits by today’s heroines when possible. As a class or group, decide which of these visits will make the largest impact, 40 years on, much the same as Bobby Kennedy’s visit to the Bedford-Stuyvesant district of Brooklyn.

Some possibilities include (but there are many more to find):

- Angela Merkel’s visit to Russia/Putin
- Justin Trudeau’s visit to Women in the World Movement
- Hillary Clinton’s million miles traveled as Secretary of State
- Barack Obama’s visit to Cuba
- Pope Francis’ visit to Mexico
- Mark Zuckerberg’s visit to each state
- Leonardo di Caprio’s address to the UN regarding climate change

Discussion Questions

Pose the following questions to young people:

- What are several universal (experienced by everyone) emotions associated with personal loss? How should people deal with personal loss in a healthy way? How do you deal with personal loss in a healthy way (if you would like to share)?
- How does music and writing help Delphine overcome personal loss? What are some ways you also “go wishing?” Why is Delphine considered a “heroine?”
- Who was Huey Newton? How could the girls in *P.S. Be Eleven* have known about him? Why is his legacy virtually lost, while Martin Luther King’s and Rosa Parks’ contributions live on?
- How might society itself cope with traumatic events, such as a misplaced/inappropriate war, or the oppression associated with the inability to speak one’s mind?
- How might Delphine serve as a heroine and role model to someone who cannot speak their mind?

Read and Learn More

Read the precursor to *P.S. Be Eleven*, Rita Williams-Garcia's award-winning *One Crazy Summer*.

Learn more about the presidents and events of the 1960s and 70s in "Part VI. The People's House" of the NCBLA's history anthology *Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out* (Candlewick Press).

Delve into the events surrounding the Civil Rights Movement by reading the award-winning title *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer: The Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement*, written by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Ekua Holmes (Candlewick Press).

Experience a soldier's life in Walter Dean Myers' picture book *Patrol: An American Soldier in Vietnam*, illustrated by Ann Grifalconi (HarperCollins).

Two other books involving personal loss include: Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (HarperCollins) and Kate DiCamillo's *Raymie Nightingale* (Candlewick Press). Be sure to read both!

About the Education Resource Guide Contributor

Renée Critcher Lyons is an assistant professor in the School Library Media Program at East Tennessee State University, teaching children's and young adult literature to future librarians. Prior to her appointment at ETSU, she served as both a school (elementary, middle, and high school) and instructional (community college) librarian. Reneé is the author of three books: *Teaching Civics in the Library: An Instructional and Historical Guide for School and Public Librarians* (McFarland, 2015); *Foreign-Born American Patriots: Sixteen Volunteer Leaders in the Revolutionary War* (2013); and *The Revival of Banned Dances: A Worldwide Study* (2012). She is a graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts (MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults) and Appalachian State University (Master of Library Science).

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