

Praise and Awards

- A 2016 Caldecott Honor Book
- A 2016 Robert F. Sibert Honor Book
- A 2016 John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award Winner
- A National Council of Teachers of English Notable Children's Book in the Language Arts
- A National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Book for Young People
- The 2016 Flora Stieglitz Straus Award Winner

★ “This majestic biography offers a detailed, intelligible overview of Hamer’s life while never losing the thread of her motivations, fears, and heroic triumphs; and places the civil rights movement in personal, local, national, and international contexts.”

—*The Horn Book* (starred review)

★ “Bold, honest, informative, and unforgettable.”

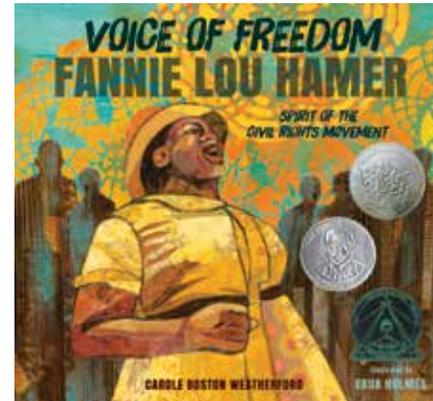
—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

★ “Bold, unapologetic, and beautiful.”

—*Booklist* (starred review)

★ “Told in the first person from Hamer’s own perspective, this lyrical text in verse emphasizes the activist’s perseverance and courage, as she let her booming voice be heard.”

—*School Library Journal* (starred review)



HC: 978-0-7636-6531-9

VOICE OF FREEDOM FANNIE LOU HAMER

SPIRIT OF THE
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

CAROLE BOSTON
WEATHERFORD

illustrated by
EKUA HOLMES

Through its poetry and illustration, *Voice of Freedom* humanizes a woman whom society tried to dehumanize. Carole Boston Weatherford’s lyrical poetry makes real the struggles and heart-wrenching events of Fannie Lou Hamer’s life. Vibrant illustrations by Ekua Holmes support the twenty-two poems elegantly, reflecting their rhythm and movement. While the book spotlights some of the specific hardships Fannie Lou Hamer faced, her individual truth evokes the experiences faced by many others and helps students better understand the conditions in which African Americans lived in the mid-twentieth century.

Because *Voice of Freedom* is told with historical accuracy, it serves well as a springboard for discussions about the civil rights movement. This guide provides ideas for helping fifth- through seventh-graders examine our nation’s recent history and raises questions about where we are now in relationship to civil rights for all. Questions and activities are included to help students explore the courage of Fannie Lou Hamer and her determined fight for the right to vote.



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Discussion Questions

“Sunflower County, Mississippi” (page 1)

- What is meant by “I am proof that the Delta birthed the blues”?
- Describe what Sunflower County was like in 1917, when Fannie Lou Hamer was born.

“Spoiled” (page 4)

- What was it like for Fannie Lou to be the baby of the family? How did her mother treat her? Her father? Her siblings?

“My Mother Taught Me” (page 5)

- Why was the black doll so important to Fannie Lou’s mother and to Fannie Lou? What did it represent to them?

“Not Everyone Could Move Up North” (page 9)

- What do you think of Fannie Lou’s decision to stay in Mississippi to take care of her mother? What do you think of her siblings’ decision to move north?

“On the Move” (page 16)

- Why did Fannie Lou have to continue to move from home to home?

“The Beating” (page 21)

- What do you think was included in the 1964 Civil Rights Bill? The bill was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. What does the poet mean when she says “The blood of freedom fighters was in his pen”?

“Running” (page 23)

- Why did Fannie Lou Hamer believe it was so important to run for office? Would you have been willing to run for Congress if you had survived the conditions she had survived?

“Freedom Summer” (page 24)

- What were the white student volunteers such as Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman trying to accomplish when they went to Mississippi?

“Africa” (page 28)

- Most people living in the United States come from families who were once immigrants, but they don’t usually feel as if they were cut off from their heritage. Why do you think Fannie Lou felt that slavery had cut the ties with her African ancestors?

“Black Power” (page 33)

- How did Fannie Lou feel about Stokely Carmichael’s requirement that SNCC staff members be black? Why?

“America’s Problem” (page 34)

- By saying that racism was “America’s problem,” Fannie Lou Hamer wanted to make it clear that racism was not just a problem in Mississippi. Do you agree? Is racism still America’s problem today? Why or why not?

“No Rest” (page 36)

- The closing line of the book is “Maybe I had won after all.” What were some of the changes in the United States that Fannie Lou Hamer could consider in her victory?

This guide was written by Ann M. Neely, professor of children’s literature at Vanderbilt University.



About the Author

Carole Boston Weatherford has written poetry, historical fiction, and nonfiction biographical works for children. In addition to a Robert F. Sibert Honor for *Voice of Freedom*, she has won numerous awards, including a Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award, a Coretta Scott King Author Honor Award, a Jane Addams Children’s Book Award Honor, a Jefferson Cup Award from the Virginia Library Association, and two NAACP Image Awards. Carole Boston Weatherford is a professor at Fayetteville State University in North Carolina.



PHOTO BY CHARLES WALKER, JR.

About the Illustrator

Ekua Holmes is a fine artist whose work explores themes of family, relationships, hope, and faith. In 2013, she was the first African-American woman to be named as a commissioner on the Boston Arts Commission, which oversees public art projects on city property. She was awarded a Caldecott Honor, a Robert F. Sibert Honor, and a John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award for *Voice of Freedom*, her first picture book. Ekua Holmes lives in Roxbury, Massachusetts, a neighborhood of Boston.