
TEACHER GUIDE
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Season of Rage
Hugh Burnett and the Struggle for Civil Rights
Written by John Cooper

Category: Juvenile Nonfiction - Social Situations - Prejudice & Racism; Juvenile Nonfiction - History - Canada; Juvenile Nonfiction - People & Places

Imprint: Tundra Books

Format: Trade Paperback

Pub Date: January 2005

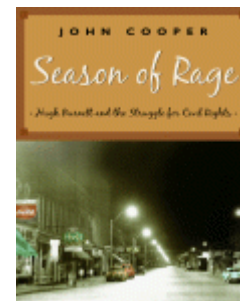
Age: 10 UP

Trim Size: 7 x 9

of Pages: 80 pages

ISBN: 978-0-88776-700-5 (0-88776-700-1)

CDN Price: \$14.99 / **US Price:** \$9.95



ABOUT THIS BOOK

In the quiet southwestern Ontario town of Dresden in the 1940s and 1950s, townsfolk liked life the way it had been for more than a century: farmers came in from the surrounding countryside to sell their produce, the post office was open for business, the local police chief made his rounds, and restaurants and barber shops catered to a regular clientele. But under the surface, things were not right. If you were black and living in Dresden, or just visiting, you couldn't obtain service at many of the town's businesses. This in a country that had abolished slavery decades before the American Civil War and that saw itself as a proud and welcoming destination for thousands of slaves who had escaped bondage through the Underground Railroad in the 1850s. But change was coming. In the late 1940s, a tall, quiet African-Canadian named Hugh Burnett decided to challenge Dresden's — indeed, the country's — attitudes. He became the leader of a group of like-minded Canadians, the National Unity Association. Joining with civil rights groups from Toronto and pursuing the cause of social justice in the courts, the association spurred the creation of new laws in the Province of Ontario. Hugh Burnett, in pushing to outlaw discrimination, created moments in Canadian history equivalent to the civil rights work of American leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. Hugh Burnett's brave efforts to fight for the rights of all citizens changed the face of race relations in Canada.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

John Cooper has been writing for more than 25 years. He has worked as a reporter, a freelance writer, a corporate communications specialist, and a manager with the Ontario Government.

He has also taught corporate communications and public relations writing at community college. An author and co-author of several books on African-Canadian history, he has contributed to *Maclean's* magazine and to several specialty publications. He is a graduate of York University and Centennial College and lives in Whitby with his wife and three children.

DISCUSSION AND WRITING

Discussion Questions

1. If Canada is a country where slaves from the southern United States came to be free, why do you think their descendants continued to suffer from discrimination in Canada? Why do you think people in Canada engaged in the practice of discrimination against people who were different from them?
2. Are we born with a set of attitudes toward other people, or are those attitudes shaped by experiences in our environment? What do you think shaped the attitudes of people in Dresden?
3. Is there a difference between what is legally right and what is morally right? Can we break the law and still be right about something? Why was it important for Hugh Burnett to fight to have laws that made discrimination illegal?
4. Do we still discriminate against people today? In what ways do we discriminate? How does that make people feel?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Activities and Discussion

1. Ask your students to think and write about what it would be like if their best friends weren't allowed into the same restaurants or stores as them — what would they do? What would it be like to be the one barred from certain establishments?
2. Uncle Tom's Cabin is an important landmark in the town of Dresden. Have students research the history of Josiah Henson and his journey to freedom to Canada. What was his greatest hope? Was it fulfilled? How important is Josiah Henson's story today? Do we know of examples where people today are trying to escape from slavery?
3. Ask your class to look at the history of civil rights in Canada and compare it to the civil rights history of the United States. How were those histories similar? How were they different?
4. Why were the media important in the fight for civil rights in Dresden? What role did the newspapers play in everyday life? Have students follow a current events story through various media (newspapers, television, radio) and discuss the impact such coverage may or may not have on the issue.

5. Reenact the sit-ins at Kay's Restaurant. Have students 'get into the role' and then have a discussion panel afterward. How did it feel to be 'sitting in for your rights?' What was it like being on 'the other side?'
6. "I am Hugh Burnett" — What motivated Hugh Burnett to take a stand against discrimination in Dresden? Ask your class to put themselves in Hugh Burnett's shoes and write a letter to the Premier of Ontario, Leslie Frost, about discrimination in the town of Dresden.

BEYOND THE BOOK

Starting Points

Uncle Tom's Cabin

In 1830 Josiah Henson, a fugitive slave, escaped to Canada from Maryland via the Underground Railroad. Just outside of Dresden, Ontario, he founded the Dawn Settlement and a school for former slaves. He was a preacher and wrote an autobiography called *Truth Is Stranger than Fiction*. The American author Harriet Beecher Stowe read his book and also interviewed him, and it is believed that Josiah Henson inspired Stowe to write *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, an anti-slavery story that was published in 1852. It is also believed that the popularity of Stowe's book helped to convince the northern American states to wage war on the southern US, which resulted in the American Civil War.

The Civil Rights Movement

At the time that Hugh Burnett and the National Unity Association were pressing the Ontario Government to enact laws making discrimination illegal, the civil rights era was already well underway in the United States. Blacks had been fighting for their rights for more than 50 years when laws allowing discrimination came into effect. These laws, often called Jim Crow laws, were designed to 'separate the races.' Anger over the mistreatment of blacks peaked after World War II. During the economic boom that followed the war, African-American soldiers who had fought for their country, and black workers who had held down higher-paying jobs during that time, were angry at being given second-class treatment, including fewer opportunities for jobs and education. Blacks everywhere pushed for better treatment in society, especially when the country was growing and there were a lot of good jobs to go around. In the United States, leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X drew people to the cause of civil rights. But while there were no deaths in Canada during the civil rights struggle, the American civil rights movement was marked by violence and death.

Dresden

Hugh Burnett grew up in a time and place where people inherited attitudes from the previous generation. Like many in the community, he grew up on a farm and was descended from escaped slaves. He served briefly in the army and worked as a carpenter. Hugh Burnett had encountered racism in his life and had seen others encounter it. But he also grew up in a community where African-Canadians had worked

hard to create opportunities and had built schools, churches, and businesses. By the time Hugh Burnett was born, African-Canadians had already been in the Dresden area for three generations. Despite discrimination, the black community in the Dresden area had some economic clout — they were farmers, trades people, teachers, and church ministers. They weren't about to move away from the community where their families had lived for generations.

OTHER TITLES OF INTEREST

Suggested Reading

Bromley, Tireless Champion for Just Causes: Memoirs of Bromley L. Armstrong.
by Bromley L. Armstrong
ISBN 10968779808

I Came as a Stranger: The Underground Railroad
by Bryan Prince
ISBN 0887766676

The Kids Book of Black Canadian History
by Rosemary Sadlier, illustrated by Wang Qijun
ISBN 1550748920

My Name's Not George: The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Reminiscences of Stanley G. Grizzle
by Stanley G. Grizzle with John Cooper
ISBN 189564223X

Shadow Running: The Ray Lewis Story
by John Cooper
ISBN 1895642477

Trials and Triumphs:
The Story of African-Canadians
by Lawrence Hill
ISBN 1895642094 (pb), 1895642019 (hc)

Underground to Canada
by Barbara Smucker, illustrated by Tom McNeely.
ISBN 0772011117

More Books for Black History Month

Rapid Ray:
The Story of Ray Lewis

also by John Cooper
ISBN 0887766129

I Came As a Stranger:
The Underground Railroad
By Bryan Prince
ISBN 0887766676

Amazing Grace:
The Story of the Hymn
By Linda Granfield
Illustrated by Janet Wilson
ISBN 0887763901

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.achievement.org>
<http://www.yorku.ca/aconline/culture/pioneers.html>
<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/BHM/index.html>
<http://www.blackfacts.com>
<http://www.blackquest.com/link.htm>
<http://www.blackhistorysociety.ca>