

Educator Activities
Grades 2-5
**Lizzie Demands a Seat:
Elizabeth Jennings Fights for
Streetcar Rights**

Written by Beth Anderson
Illustrated by E.B. Lewis

Calkins Creek
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OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

In 1854, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Jennings, an African American schoolteacher, fought back when she was unjustly denied entry to a New York City streetcar, sparking the beginnings of the long struggle to gain equal rights on public transportation.

One hundred years before Rosa Parks took her stand, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Jennings tried to board a streetcar in New York City on her way to church. Though there were plenty of empty seats, she was denied entry, assaulted, and threatened, all because of her race—even though New York was a free state at that time. Lizzie decided to fight back. She told her story, took her case to court where future president Chester Arthur represented her—and won! Her victory was the first recorded in the fight for equal rights on public transportation, and Lizzie’s case set a precedent.

About the author:

Beth Anderson has always been fascinated with words and language - from sound and meaning, to figurative language and point of view, to cultural and scientific aspects of language. After earning a B.A. in linguistics and a M. Ed. in reading, she taught English as a Second Language for more than 20 years. Surrounded by young people from all over the world, with literature as her favorite tool, Beth experienced the power of books to teach, connect, and inspire.

From the start, with poems, plays, and puppet shows, Beth’s elementary teachers encouraged her itch to write. With stories, memoir pieces, and research papers, she continued to mold words into text. Through Illinois, Wisconsin, Ohio, Connecticut, Georgia, Texas, and into Colorado, that itch to write followed her. In 2013, she began writing for children. Combining her love of writing with the joys of discovery and learning, she found her niche with narrative nonfiction and historical fiction picture books.

To Beth, writing is mining. It’s digging deep inside for special memories, emotions, and meaning. It’s burrowing into history for inspiring characters and moments that change the course of events. It’s delving into the *how* and *why* and *what if* and seeing the past through the lens of the present. Then the search for just the right words begins—words that will create voice, bring characters to life, and reveal the heart of the story.

When she's not writing, Beth might be weaving, gardening, exploring nature, or playing with her grandkids. Born and raised in Illinois, she now lives near the mountains in Colorado. Beth believes in laughter, learning, and...though we can't change history, history can change us.
WEBSITE: <https://bethandersonwriter.com>

About the illustrator:

Inspired by two artist uncles, as early as the third grade, Lewis displayed artistic promise. Beginning in the sixth grade, he attended the Saturday Morning Art League and studied with Clarence Wood. Lewis attended the Temple University Tyler School of Art, where, he discovered his medium of preference was watercolor.

During his four years at Temple, Lewis majored in Graphic Design, Illustration and Art Education. After graduating, he taught art in public schools for twelve years. Presently, E.B. teaches at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He is also a member of The Society of Illustrators in New York City, and an artist member of Salamagundi Art Club of New York.

In 2003, the Kerlan Collection at the University of Minnesota purchased a collection of original watercolors from E.B.'s first fifty children's books. Today, his works are displayed in museums, owned by private collectors, and sold by art galleries throughout the United States and Europe. E. B. Lewis has illustrated more than seventy children's books.

WEBSITE: <http://eblewis.com>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

NOTE: Questions and activities cover a range of ages and abilities. Please use them as appropriate for your students.

Vocabulary Preview

Preview and discuss any vocabulary words that might be new to students.

Pre-reading

1. Look at the cover and read the title of the book.
 - What interesting details do you notice?
 - What clues help you understand the setting?
 - What do you think the story is about?
 - What do you think "rights" means?
 - What are some examples of "rights"?

2. What questions do you have?

Post-reading

Return to your predictions. Were you correct?
Have your questions been answered by the story?
What would you like to know more about?

Key Ideas and Details

1. The story opens with:

“Lizzie was in a hurry. A big hurry. The kind of hurry she couldn’t hold back.”

What does “hurry” mean on the first page of the story?

How does the meaning change when she tries to get a seat on the streetcar?

Why do you think it was a “hurry she couldn’t hold back”?

What does this show about Lizzie?

2. When the police officer forced Lizzie off the car, he said,

“Make your complaint. You’ll not get far.”

What do you think he meant?

Why did he think she wouldn’t get far?

3. Did any white passengers object to Lizzie riding the streetcar?

What did their silence mean?

4. The story occurs in 1854, seven years before the beginning of the Civil War and almost nine years before Abraham Lincoln freed the southern slaves with the Emancipation Proclamation. African Americans in the North were free, but they faced discrimination and disrespect, such as not being allowed in public places, such as restaurants, schools, theaters, and streetcars, with whites. Lizzie’s parents were abolitionists, fighting to free the slaves in the south. Her family was also fighting for the rights of blacks in the North to be equal to whites. Lizzie attended meetings, signed petitions, and dedicated herself to educating black children. How were those actions different than what she does in this story?

What do her actions show about her?

5. Why did Lizzie’s community decide to support her in taking her case to court? [Older students can use the primary source document dated July 19, 1854 for a more in-depth look.]

Do you think it was important for her to have community support? Why?

6. The judge instructs the jurors that:

“Streetcars were required to carry all respectable, well-behaved people.”

From Lizzie’s point of view, this sounds encouraging. She sees herself as respectable and well-behaved. But, Lizzie is worried. She understands how different points of view see the world differently.

“Lizzie understood how words could be twisted. Was it ‘respectable’ to demand her rights? Was it ‘well-behaved’ to fight back?”

What do you think she means by “twisting words?”

How might the jurors’ point of view be different?

What do you think would have happened if Lizzie had lost her temper when she confronted the conductor?

Are there right ways and wrong ways to demand your rights or fight back? What are some examples?

What do Lizzie's choices show about her?

7. Using the text and information in the Author's Note, make a T-chart to compare traditions of behavior with rules or laws. Use a dictionary to help define the meanings.

What were the traditions for riding streetcars?

What were the rules?

How did the law differ from tradition for juries? (see Author's Note) Why?

Which is harder to change? Explain your opinion.

What are some examples of rules and traditions today?

What do you think we need to change? What would be the best way to do it?

traditions	rules

8. What is the most important idea or theme you found in the story? Support your choice with textual evidence.

9. Cause and Effect: Fold a sentence strip or long strip of paper in half twice and label the boxes as in the example below. Choose one of Lizzie's actions and fill in the ACTION box. Then, using the text, determine the CAUSE and EFFECT of her action. Finally, make a PREDICTION of another effect her action had.

Then explore cause and effect from the conductor's point of view. Use one of his actions in the ACTION box, determine the CAUSE, EFFECT, and make a PREDICTION.

Cause	Action	Effect	Prediction

10. Characterization: Use the character trait organizer to identify 3 traits for Lizzie. Use textual evidence to support your ideas.

Craft and Structure

1. The conductor uses common words but gives them a special meaning when he refers to "your people." What does he mean? What does it show about him?
2. The author uses footsteps several times in the story. How are they important?
3. Choose one double-page spread to discuss: What do the words in the text tell you? What do the pictures tell you? How do words and pictures work together?

4. Author's word choice:

- a. The author uses alliteration, the repetition of initial sounds, in the story.
"She'd been rejected, restricted, and refused by schools, restaurants, and theaters."

What effect does alliteration have?

What other examples can you find? Choose one spread to discuss. How do the sounds affect the story?

["stiff and sore," "steeled herself with a silent prayer," "Lizzie weighed every word," "Lizzie's pulse pounded," "right to ride," "stepped onto streetcars, trains, and buses"]

- b. Sensory language, words connected to the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, touch), also appears in the story. What examples can you find? Choose one spread to discuss. What effect do these words have?

5. Author's note: Read the information in the author's note about the two groups of students who took action to honor Elizabeth Jennings in 1991 and 2007. Compare and contrast the students' actions with those of Elizabeth Jennings.

6. Art Connection: Read the illustrator's note, then use one of E.B. Lewis' earlier picture books to compare the art with the illustrations in *Lizzie Demands a Seat*.

Some titles to use: [more at <http://eblewis.com/books/>]

- *Preaching to the Chickens: The Story of Young John Lewis* by Asim
- *Coming on Home Soon* by Woodson
- *The First Step: How One Girl Put Segregation on Trial* by Goodman.

What similarities and differences do you notice in his art?

Why do you think he chose different colors for this story?

Try your own hand with watercolors!

7. From what you know and have read about the author (see also author's website), what do you think the author's purpose and point of view is?

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

1. Compare and Contrast:

Elizabeth Jennings is often compared to Rosa Parks. In 1955, Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus for a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama. Her actions put in motion the Montgomery Bus Boycott which forced transportation companies to change their unfair practices.

Read more about Rosa Parks. Then use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast Rosa Parks and Elizabeth Jennings. What conclusions can you draw?

[Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation by Pinkney; variety of bios available]

2. Use primary sources.

- Photograph of Elizabeth Jennings, 1895
- 2 prints of photographs of New York City near where Lizzie boarded the streetcar. (1861, 1858)
- Newspaper article - New York Tribune, July 19, 1854 (reports ejection from streetcar, contains Elizabeth Jennings' written statement)
- Newspaper article - Frederick Douglass' Paper, March 2, 1855 (after court ruling, contains commentary and report on court proceedings from New York Tribune)

Analyze the photographs.

Model the process as a class. Then work as a class or in smaller groups. Use the links below for student organizers.

1. Meet the photo. What do you see? Is there a caption?
2. Observe its parts. What do you notice?
3. Try to make sense of it. Why do you think this photo was taken? How does it compare to modern times?
4. Use it as historical evidence. How does it help us understand the setting, Elizabeth Jennings, and her story?

OR

Analyze the documents.

Model the process as a class, then work as a class or in small groups. Use the links below for student organizers.

1. Meet the document. What kind of document is it? What do you notice about it?
2. Observe its parts. Who wrote this? What is the date? Who read it?
3. Try to make sense of it. What is the main idea? List 2 quotes that support the main idea. Why was this written? (both were abolitionist papers) What words in the articles support abolitionist ideas?
4. Use it as historical evidence. How does it help us understand the times, Elizabeth Jennings, and her story?

Student organizers from the National Archives and Records Administration

For younger students:

Photograph Analysis:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet_novice.pdf

Document Analysis:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet_novice.pdf

For older students:

Photograph Analysis:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf

Document Analysis:

https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf

3. Extend and Connect: Text to Text, Text to Self

Here are a few quotes from other civil rights leaders. Put each one on a poster in a different area of the room. Students choose one, gather in a small group, and discuss how the quote connects to the story. Then students explain or write how it connects to their own life.

“Memories of our lives, our works and our deeds will continue in others.” -Rosa Parks

“We are not makers of history; we are made by history.” -Martin Luther King, Jr.

“If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way.” -Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.” -Mahatma Gandhi

[Here’s an additional resource for quotes to connect to the story and self: *We Are the Change: Words of Inspiration from Civil Rights Leaders*, Chronicle Books 2019.]

Write in Response to Reading

1. Journal: Write a journal entry for Lizzie for one day in her life during the story. Consider what it feels like to be her.

2. Make Connections: Text to Self

The last line of the story reads: *“Inspired by the strength of those who came before them.”*

Using the story and Author’s Note, look at life before and after the streetcar incident.

Find evidence for who might have inspired Lizzie.

Then—how do you think she inspired others?

Draw or write: Who inspires you and your actions now or in the past? Who helps you be strong? Then consider who might be inspired by you now or in the future. How do you or how would you like to show your inner strength? What would you like to leave in your “footsteps” for others to follow?

3. Connect and Act:

Letter writing: Do you see a problem in your community? Do you have an idea for change?

Who could help you? Write a letter to work for change.

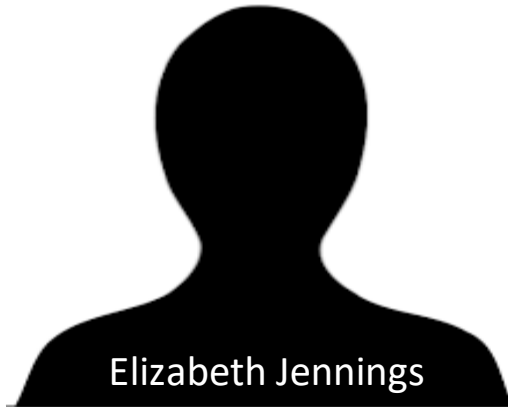
OR

Is there an “unsung hero” in your community that deserves to be honored? Do you have an idea for how to do that? Write a letter.

This guide has been provided by Beth Anderson, M.Ed., Reading Specialist. It may be copied or excerpted for classroom, library, and reading group use.

LIZZIE DEMANDS A SEAT!

Character Trait Organizer



TRAIT	TRAIT	TRAIT
EVIDENCE:	EVIDENCE:	EVIDENCE:



Elizabeth Jennings Graham. From *The American Woman's Journal* (July, 1895)
Image courtesy of Kansas State Historical Society.



OUTRAGE UPON COLORED PERSONS.

At a public meeting held in pursuance of due notice given of the colored citizens of the City and County of New-York, in the First Colored American Congregational Church, in Sixth-st., near the Bowery, for the purpose of making an expression of public sentiment condemnatory of the outrage committed upon the person of Miss Elizabeth Jennings, a highly respectable female, (who is employed as a teacher in the male department of one of the public schools in this City; also organist in the above-named church, in Sixth-st.,) while on her way to church on Sabbath afternoon, July 16, when she was most brutally outraged and insulted by a conductor of one of the Third-av. City cars.

The meeting was called to order, whereupon the Rev. LEVIN TILMON was appointed Chairman and P. S. Ewell, Secretary.

The Chairman stated the object of the assembly, after which the Rev. James Vickers of New-York addressed the meeting, and made a very elaborate speech appropriate to the occasion.

The Secretary then read a statement from Miss E. Jennings, which was presented in writing, she being unable to attend the meeting, owing to the injuries received at the hands of the railroad conductor and his abetors. The statement is as follows:

Sarah E. Adams and myself walked down to the corner of Pearl and Chatham sts. to take the Third-av. cars; I held up my hand to the driver and he stopped the cars; we got on the platform, when the conductor told us to wait for the next car; I told him I could not wait, as I was in a hurry to go to church, (the other car was about a block off;) he then told me that the other car had my people in it, that it was appropriated for that purpose; I then told him I had no people; it was no particular occasion; I wished to go to church, as I had been going for the last six months, and I did not wish to be detained: he insisted upon my getting off the car; I told him I would wait on the car until the other car came up; he again insisted on my waiting in the street, but I did not get off the car; by this time the other car came up, and I asked the driver if there was any room in his car; he told me very distinctly, "No, that there was more room in my car than there was in his;" yet this did not satisfy the conductor; he still kept driving me out or off of the car; said he had as much time as I had and could wait just as long; I replied, "Very well, we'll see;" he waited some few minutes, when the drivers becoming impatient, he said to me, "Well, you may go in, but remember, if the passengers raise any objections you shall go out, whether or no, or I'll put you out;" I answered again and told him I was a respectable person, born and raised in New-York, did not know where he was born, that I had never been insulted before while going to church, and that he was a good for nothing impudent fellow for insulting decent persons while on their way to church; he then said I should come out and he would put me out; I told him not to lay his hands on me; he took hold of me and I took hold of the window sash and held on; he pulled me until he broke my grasp and I took hold of his coat and held on

to that, he also broke my grasp from that, (but previously he had dragged my companion out, she all the while screaming for him to let go;) he then ordered the driver to fasten his horses, which he did, and come and help him put me out of the car; they then both seized hold of me by the arms and pulled and dragged me flat down on the bottom of the platform, so that my feet hung one way and my head the other, nearly on the ground. I screamed murder with all my voice, and my companion screamed out "you'll kill her; don't kill her;" the driver then let go of me and went to his horses; I went again in the car, and the conductor said you shall sweat for this; then told the driver to drive as fast as he could and not take another passenger in the car; to drive until he saw an officer or a Station House; they got an officer on the corner of Walker and Bowery, whom the conductor told that his orders from the agent were to admit colored persons if the passengers did not object, but if they did, not to let them ride; when the officer took me there were some eight or ten persons in the car; when the officer, without listening to anything I had to say, thrust me out, and then pushed me, and tauntingly told me to get redress if I could; this the conductor also told me, and gave me some name and number of his car; he wrote his name Moss and the car No. 7, but I looked and saw No. 6 on the back of the car; after dragging me off the car he drove me away like a dog, saying, not to be talking there and raising a mob or fight; I came home down Walker-st., and a German gentleman followed, who told me he saw the whole transaction in the street as he was passing; his address is Latour, No. 148 Pearl-st., bookseller; when I told the conductor I did not know where he was born, he answered, "I was born in Ireland;" I made answer it made no difference where a man was born, that he was none the worse or better for that, provided he behaved himself and did not insult genteel persons.

I would have come up myself, but am quite sore and stiff from the treatment I received from those monsters in human form yesterday afternoon. This statement I believe to be correct, and it is respectfully submitted.

ELIZABETH JENNINGS.

Mr. JEREMIAH POWERS next addressed the meeting. Remarks were then made by the Rev. L. TILMON and others, after which the following resolutions were unanimously adopted:

1. *Resolved*, That we regard such conduct as intolerant, in a civil and religious point of view, and that it calls for the reprehension of the respectable portion of the community.

2. *Resolved*, That there be a committee of five appointed to ascertain all the facts in the case, and if possible bring the whole affair before the legal authorities; and that we demand at the hands of the proprietors, as colored citizens, the equal right to the accommodation of "transit" in the cars, so long as we possess the regular qualifications.

3. *Resolved*, That the above resolutions be forwarded and printed in THE NEW-YORK TRIBUNE and Frederick Douglass's paper.

The meeting then adjourned, subject to call of Committee.

Frederick Douglass' Paper.

"ALL RIGHTS FOR ALL!"

ROCHESTER, MARCH 2, 1855.

Legal Rights Vindicated.

Our readers will rejoice with us in the righteous verdict given in the following case. Miss Elizabeth Jennings, whose courageous conduct in the premises, is beyond all praise, comes of a good old New York stock. Her grandfather, Jacob Cartwright, a native African, was a soldier in the Revolutionary War, and took active part in city politics until the time of his death in 1824; her father, Mr. Thomas L. Jennings, was mentioned in our paper of the 16th inst., as having delivered an oration on the Emancipation of the slaves in this State in 1827; and he was a founder of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, and of other institutions for the best and elevation of the colored people. In this suit he has broken new ground, which he proposes to follow up by the formation of a "Legal Rights League."

We hold our New York city gentlemen responsible for the carrying out of this decision into practice, by putting an end to their exclusion from cars and omnibuses; they

must be craven indeed if they fail to follow the lead of a woman; we hope to present our readers with a full report of the charge of Judge Rockwell; it was equal to the occasion.

"A WHOLESOME VERDICT.—The case of Elizabeth Jennings vs. the Third av. Railroad Company, was tried yesterday in the Brooklyn Circuit, before Judge Rockwell.—The plaintiff is a colored lady, a teacher in one of the public schools, and the organizer in one of the churches in this city. She got upon one of the Company's cars last summer, on the Sabbath, to ride to church. The conductor finally undertook to get her off, first alleging the car was full, and when that was shown to be false, he pretended the other passengers were displeased at her presence; but as she saw nothing of that, and insisted on her rights, he took hold of her by force to expel her. She resisted, they got her down on the platform, jammed her bunnet, soiled her dress, and injured her person. Quite a crowd gathered around, but she eventually resisted, and they were not able to get her off. Finally, after the car had gone on further, they got the aid of a policeman, and succeeded in getting her from the car. She instructed her attorneys, Messrs. Culver, Parker and Arthur, to prosecute the Com. pany, together with the driver and conductor. The two latter interposed no defense.

the Company took issue, and the cause was yesterday brought to trial. Judge Rockwell gave a very clear and able charge, instructing the Jury that the Company were liable for the acts of their agents, whether committed carelessly and negligently, or wilfully and maliciously. That they were common carriers, and as such bound to carry all respectable persons; that colored persons, if sober, well behaved, and free from disease, had the same rights as others; and could neither be excluded by any rules of the Company, nor by force or violence; and in case of such exclusion or exclusion, the Company was liable.

"The plaintiff claimed \$500 in her complaint, and a majority of the Jury were for giving her the full amount; but others maintained some peculiar notions as to colored people's rights, and they finally agreed on \$225, on which the Court added ten per cent. besides the costs.

"Railroads, steamboats, omnibuses, and ferry-boats will be admonished from this, as to the rights of respectable colored people. It is high time the rights of this class of citizens were ascertained, and that it should be known whether they are to be thrust from our public conveyances, while German or Irish women, with a quarter of mutton or a load of codfish, can be admitted."—*N. Y. Tribune.*