ABOUT THE BOOK

*Fast Enough* combines the fictional imagining of a pivotal moment in the childhood of African-American motorcycle legend Bessie Stringfield with additional biographical information about her adult life. In the first part of this boldly illustrated book, Bessie longs to ride her bike with the boys, despite being repeatedly told that she is not strong enough or fast enough. She asks her mother whether girls can ride bikes and ride them fast. Her mother suggests consulting the ultimate authority, “The Man Upstairs”.

That night after praying for an answer, Bessie has a revelatory dream that inspires her to join the boys’ bicycle race and to prove once and for all that she is fast enough. The final pages of the book provide information about Bessie’s later life, especially her exploits as the “Negro Motorcycle Queen” and her travels across the United States on her motorbike at a time when it was not always safe for African-Americans, especially women, to do so. This book would make an excellent addition to Black History Month curricula, as well as lessons and discussions about bullying (teasing, exclusion, gender stereotypes), persistence, and self-esteem.

LEARNING STANDARDS

*Fast Enough* can be used to address many of the K-2 Common Core standards for Reading Literacy and Informational Texts, including:

RL.K.1, RL.K.3, RL.K.4, RL.K.6, RL.K.7, RL.1.1, RL.1.2, RL.1.3, RL.1.4, RL.1.7, RL.2.1, RL.2.3, RL.2.5, RL.2.7, RI.K.1, RI.K.2, RI.K.4, RI.K.5, RI.K.6, RI.K.7, RI.1.1, RI.1.2, RI.1.4, RI.1.6, RI.1.7, RI.2.1

The book and activities in this teaching guide may also be used as a springboard for addressing some of the K-2 Common Core standards for Writing, Speaking and Listening.
Visual thinking strategy was developed by cognitive psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Phillip Yenawine in the 1980s as a tool for docents at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art to make the collection more accessible for patrons.

Using this method, the discussion of a piece can be facilitated using three basic questions:

1. What is going on in this picture?
2. What makes you say that?
3. What else can we find?

Megan Dowd Lambert of Simmons College and the Eric Carle Museum adapted this approach to picture books as a means for encouraging young children to think deeply about how a story is told through illustrations as well as words. Visual thinking strategies require students to pay close attention to detail. Rich illustrations in picture books provide background knowledge that help to scaffold reading, expand vocabulary, and improve comprehension. They also provide support for language acquisition for English Learners.

Presenting This Story

*Fast Enough* is a book that has two distinct sections with the second containing important contextualizing information that allows for a deeper reading of the story and greater opportunities for extension activities. However, the vocabulary and thematic components are more advanced. Therefore, before reading the story aloud, teachers should decide whether to present the biographical material as it is written or to paraphrase it as appropriate for the age and developmental level of the students.

Pre-Teaching Vocabulary

Pre-teaching vocabulary strengthens the ability for all students, especially English Learners, to independently construct meaning from text. When combined later with seeing the words in the context of the story and illustrations, along with visual and verbal cues from the teacher, comprehension and critical thinking can be greatly improved. Pre-teaching vocabulary may involve building Word Walls, drawing pictures, observing visuals, gestures or miming, paraphrasing, categorizing, manipulating objects, creating graphic organizers, or other strategies that engage multiple modalities.

For the first part of *Fast Enough*, key words that teachers may wish to emphasize include: comet, huffed, pathways, stomped, whoosh, yappy, and zoom.

Key idioms for English Learners: “On your mark, get set, go!” and “The Man Upstairs”.

For the second part of *Fast Enough*, key words include: civilian, contradicting, courier, improper, legend, myth, negro, nun, orphanage, pioneer, stunt, tale, and trek.

Key idioms for English Learners: “causing trouble”, “paints a different picture”, “larger than life”, and “She was something”.

**Fast Enough**

**TEACHERS GUIDE**

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EXPLORING THE COVER AND TITLE PAGE

Exploring the visual and textual information on the cover and title page helps to activate prior knowledge, pique curiosity, and encourage engagement. Moreover, familiarity with the component parts of books and their purpose can help students to independently locate information that will help them to choose and better understand books that they read for pleasure.

The front cover can be used to discuss the title, subtitle, and author and/or illustrator of the book.

The back cover will often describe the story and sometimes provide additional information about the author and/or illustrator, as may the title page.

Sample questions for students below grade level:

1. What do you see on the front cover?
2. Point to the title, subtitle, author's name.

Sample questions for students at grade level:

3. Think about the title Fast Enough: Bessie Stringfield's First Ride. Now look at the picture. What do you think the story will be about?
4. What else can we tell about Bessie by looking at the picture on the front cover?

Sample questions for students above grade level:

5. Point to the title, subtitle, author's name.
6. The subtitle refers to Bessie Stringfield's FIRST ride. Why is that word important?
READING THE STORY

Many teachers like to read stories all the way through the first time, stopping only once or twice, so as not to interrupt the flow. When to pause for questions, predictions, and comprehension checks is a personal preference. However, here are a few suggestions.

1. The story begins with a series of questions. The author wants the reader to answer those questions mentally or aloud in order to connect with the main character. Consider pausing after reading the first two pages and then ask students to think about a time when they were told that they were not enough. Students may keep their thoughts to themselves, share briefly with a partner, or the teacher may call on volunteers to share with the class.

2. When Bessie’s mom responds to her questions about whether girls can ride bikes, she refers to “The Man Upstairs”. Be sure that students understand that this is a reference to God and not literally to someone who lives above them.

3. There is no definitive statement announcing the change from reality to dreaming, only an ellipsis. Teachers may wish to add a clarifying statement, such as “This is what she dreamed.”

4. On the second to last page, Bessie hears a mysterious “ROOOAAAR”. This is an ideal moment to pause to ask students to predict what is making that noise.

5. Teachers should decide whether to immediately read the final biographical information section, paraphrase it, or save it until after additional discussion of the first part of the story.

A SECOND READING

There are many aspects of the first part of the book that can be emphasized during a second reading and used to address particular learning standards and/or foster discussion. For example:

LANGUAGE USE

Throughout the book, there are many references to the senses, especially sound. From the laughter of the boys to the yapping of the dogs, whooshing and zooming of bikes, huffing and stomping of a frustrated Bessie, and the roaring of the motorcycle at the end, the sound imagery is extensive. What sounds are referenced or evoked on each page? What other senses are directly or indirectly in evidence? What does Bessie see, smell, touch, and even taste? (RL.K.1, RL.1.4, RL.2.4)
A SECOND READING CONTINUED

VISUAL LITERACY

The pictures are bold, but subtle details often convey important meaning. For example, during the dream sequence, Bessie’s nightgown changes according to the landscape. In keeping with the title of the book, Fast Enough, the author/illustrator uses a number of visual devices to convey the notion of speed. Discuss these with your students by comparing the race on pages 5 and 6, the bikes on page 8, Bessie’s dream on pages 15 and 16, Bessie’s dream on pages 17 and 18, Bessie’s leap from bed on page 19, and Bessie’s “first ride” on pages 23 through 26, as well pages 31 and 32. (RL.K.7, RL.1.7, RL.2.7)

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Many states, districts, and schools have recognized the importance of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and have developed related standards to help students be more self-aware and self-disciplined in order to develop interpersonal skills and positive relationships, improve decision-making and life choices, and achieve greater success in school and in life.

The text of Fast Enough can be used as the basis for a class discussion (or written reflection) about bullying (teasing, exclusion). What did people say about Bessie? Did she believe them? How did she respond? How did it influence who she became in the future? Whenever possible, students should use examples from the text or illustrations to support their ideas.

The illustrations of Fast Enough can be used to help students to recognize emotional states. What do the facial expressions and body language of the characters at various points in the story convey? How do we know? Whenever possible, students should use examples from the text or illustrations to support their ideas.
BEYOND THE STORY

The second part of Fast Enough provides biographical information about Bessie Stringfield and the times in which she lived. This information can be used to add greater context to the story and can also be used to supplement lessons about segregation, civil rights, and women’s rights, which should be presented in age or developmentally appropriate ways. Older or more advanced students may also wish to explore the idea of what it means to be a legend and how popular stories about famous people may not always be completely accurate. Well known examples include George Washington chopping down a cherry tree, Albert Einstein failing math in grade school, and Betsy Ross sewing the first American flag.

SAMPLE EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

FILL IN THE GAPS

Fast Enough tells a story about Bessie Stringfield as a child and then talks about the woman that she became. What happened in the middle?

1. Provide students with a piece of paper divided into three sections or panels. In the first section, students should draw a picture of Bessie as a child, based on the story they have heard.

2. In the third section, students should use what they have learned about Bessie’s adult life to draw a picture of her based on that information.

3. With a partner, in a small group, or through a class brainstorming activity, allow students to discuss and speculate what Bessie might have been doing as a teenager or young adult.

4. Students complete the second panel with a picture based on what they imagine Bessie was doing in the middle part of her life.

5. Students may also be asked to add age or developmentally appropriate descriptive text to their drawings. (W.K.3, W.1.3, W.2.3).

PENNY TOURS

The second part of Fast Enough recounts how Bessie Stringfield would plan her adventures by tossing a penny at a map and then riding her motorcycle to that location. Arrange for students to engage in a similar activity.

1. If a large map of a familiar city, state, country, or even the world is not available, students may create an accurate or even an imaginary map using a large piece of butcher paper. For the latter, each student might contribute the name of a place to visit (Disneyland, Grand Canyon, Great Pyramids) that could be included.

2. Each student is given the opportunity to toss a penny onto the map to see where his or her adventure will lead.

3. Students then draw a picture or a series of pictures illustrating their motorcycle adventure.

4. Students may also be asked to add age or developmentally appropriate descriptive text to their drawings, including information about preparation for the journey, challenges along the way, and highlights of their destination.

5. Students orally share their completed adventures with a partner, in a small group, and/or with the entire class. (W.K.3, W.1.3, W.2.3, SL.K.1, SL.K.1.A, SL.K.4, SL.K.5, SL.K.6, SL.1.1, SL.1.1.A, SL.1.4, SL.1.5, SL.2.1, SL.2.1.A, SL.2.4, SL.2.5)
REFERENCE MATERIAL

VISUAL THINKING

PRE-TEACHING VOCABULARY

READING ALOUD

BESSIE STRINGFIELD


Meet Bessie Stringfield the Black “Motorcycle Queen” of Florida (video). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7yBQ7Oq-Ii

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