

How many songs do you know?

You’ve probably been able to sing your ABCs since you were two years old. “Jingle Bells” has been one of your favorites since you were five. You learned “Billie Jean” and “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” in first grade.

But can you sing “We Shall Overcome”? Do you know the words of “If You Miss Me From the Back of the Bus”? More importantly, do you know why those songs were sung? Learn more, and find out about the children’s choir that travels the country singing those songs in “Freedom Song” by Mary C. Turck.

Fifty years ago, the color of your skin determined where you went to school, where you ate or worked, and even where you got a drink of water. Segregation, particularly in the South, was common and even court-ordered.

In late 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for her refusal to move to another seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Just after Mrs. Parks’ arrest, black churches announced a bus boycott and African Americans in Montgomery shunned local buses for over a year. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the NAACP began working for Civil Rights.

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As the movement for Civil Rights grew, lawsuits were filed to demand integrated schools. Sit-ins were held in restaurants to protest inequality in service. Protests were organized. Peaceful marches were held to proclaim and support opposition to discrimination based on race.

And while walking, the marchers sang songs, many based on the work songs or “field hollers” of slaves.

Old spirituals that were sung for a century before became new tradition for the Civil Rights Movement. Jazz musicians contributed, as did gospel singers. Some of the music rhythms came from Africa and are still widely used in today’s music.

In 1956, the new minister of the First Unitarian Church in Chicago was “filled with the spirit of the civil rights movement” and decided to start a children’s choir. Although this church was in a black neighborhood, Chris Moore wanted an integrated choir consisting of children of all races and economic backgrounds. Over fifty years later, the Chicago Children’s Choir still performs old songs with new members, as you’ll hear by the CD included in this book.

It’s hard to describe, in a few short paragraphs, all the goodness in “Freedom Songs”. This book includes the words to many songs that are on the CD, including one that has caused minor controversy. There are interviews with “graduates” of the Chicago Children’s Choir, lots of

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photos, and an update on the CCC and its progeny, the One Voice Mixed Chorus. Author Mary C. Turck also includes a history of the Civil Rights Movement, as well as the history of music in the African American community.

While “Freedom Song” is meant for older grade-schoolers, I think that’s a bit of a reach but kids 13-and-older shouldn’t have any problem reading and understanding it. For them – or for any adult who lived during the Movement – this book is music to their eyes.

“Freedom Song” by Mary C. Turck

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