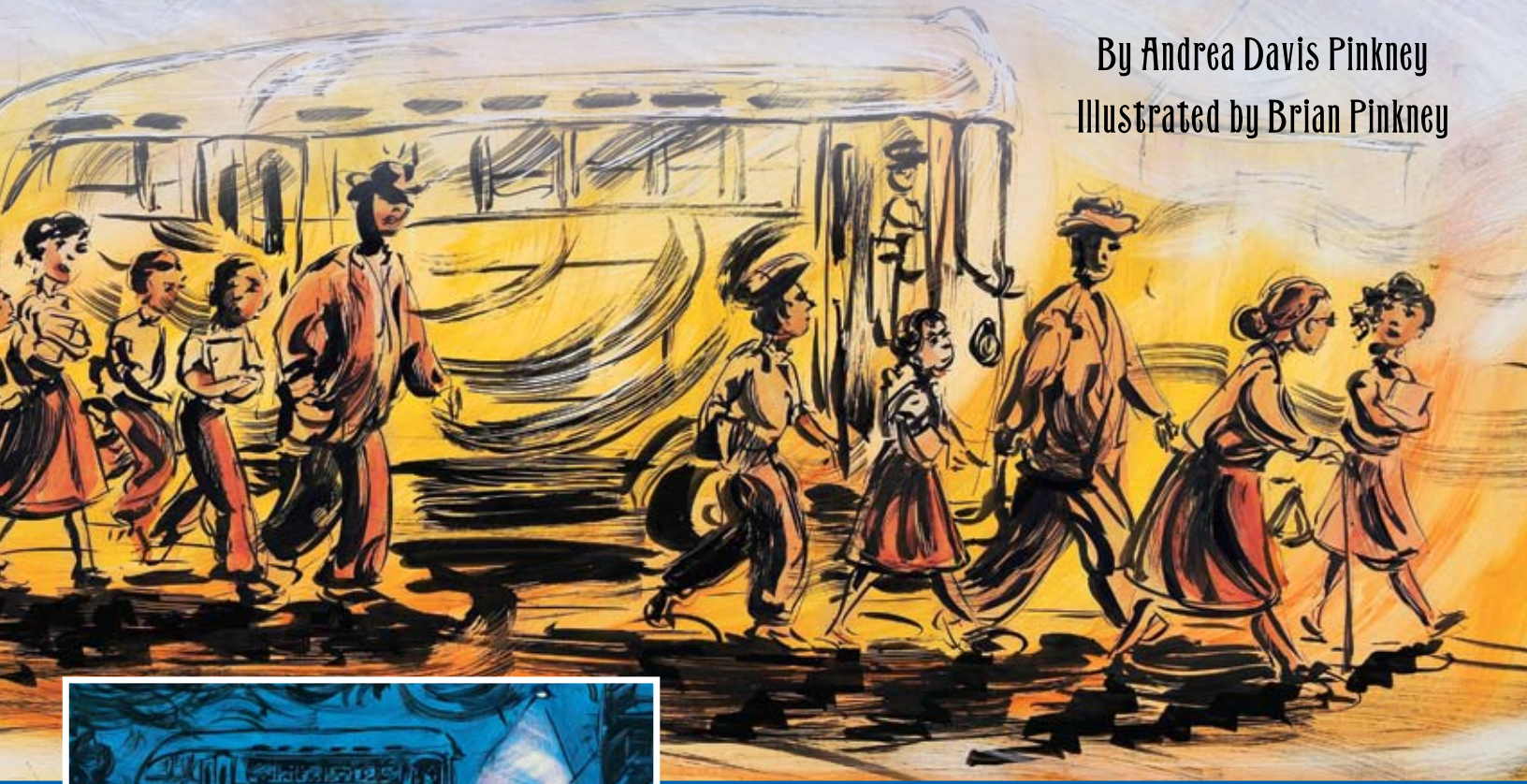


Boycott Blues

How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation

By Andrea Davis Pinkney

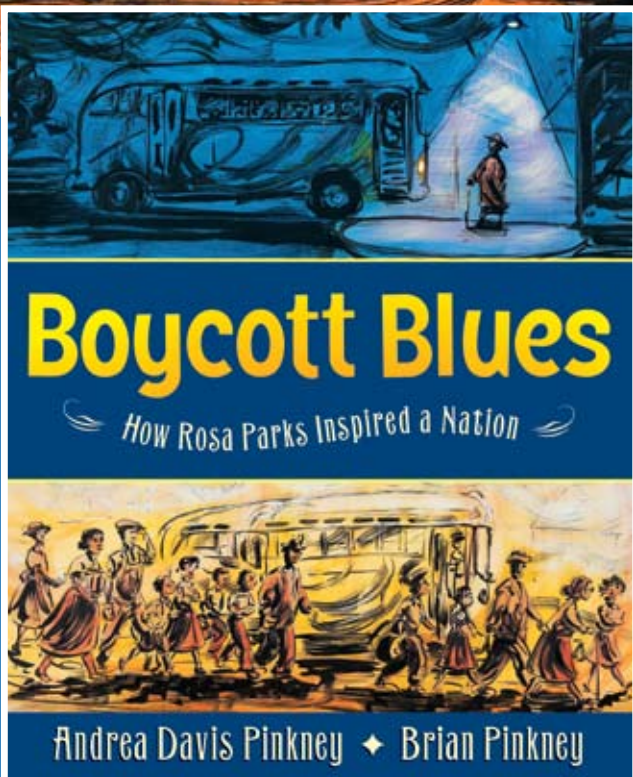
Illustrated by Brian Pinkney



Teacher's Guide

ABOUT THE BOOK

Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation walks readers back in time to the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956. A guitar-playing hound dog narrator sings life into the historical events: the arrest of Rosa Parks for refusing to give her bus seat to a white man; Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech urging black citizens to fight against segregation without violence; the days and days of walking rather than riding buses; and the protest's historic conclusion. Lyrical text and emotive illustrations convey the sounds and feelings of the blues—fitting accompaniment to this story of struggle, determination, and courage.



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Discussion Questions

1. What is a boycott? How does a boycott have power? What was the Montgomery bus boycott? Why did it work?
2. Who was Rosa Parks? How do you think she felt when she was told to give up her seat on the bus? How do you think she felt when she was arrested for not getting up from her seat? How did Rosa Parks inspire a nation?
3. What does segregation mean? What is unfair about having segregated seats on buses?
4. What are Jim Crow laws? Does segregation exist now? Do prejudice and racism still exist?
5. The author's note explains that the Montgomery bus boycott "brought Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of nonviolent resistance into America's consciousness." What is nonviolent resistance? How did the black people of Montgomery fight?
6. Why do you think some white people joined the bus boycott? Why do you think other white people didn't?
7. How would you feel if you had to rely on walking as your only source of transportation for 381 days? What do you think is worth this kind of struggle?
8. Who is the narrator of this story? Why do you think the author chose this narrator?
9. What are the blues? How does this book evoke the blues in the words and illustrations?
10. How does the art in the book affect you as a reader? What do you notice about the use of color in the illustrations? How do the words and the art work together?
11. After telling the story, Dog Tired says, "Now you see the power of won't-stop shoes." What does he mean?
12. On the first page, Dog Tired says he tells the story with his guitar "so you don't forget." Is it important to know about what happened in the past? Why or why not? Is it important today to know about the Montgomery bus boycott? Explain your opinion.



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Creative Writing and Arts Activities

- 1. Get to know the blues.** Play recordings of blues music for your students. Consider “Jim Crow” and “Freedom Road,” by Josh White, and “Bourgeois Blues,” by Leadbelly. After listening to each song, ask students what the song is about. What does the song protest? Reread *Boycott Blues*, asking students to think about how the book connects to blues music.
- 2. Put it to music.** Collaborate with your school's music teacher to make a variety of hand drums, rhythm sticks, tambourines, and other simple instruments available to your students. What kinds of instruments would best represent different parts of the story? Have the group work together to compose music to go along with reading the book.
- 3. Show emotion.** Ask students to pay attention to the emotions in the story and the emotions the story triggers in them as they listen to you read the book again. Lead a discussion about what students felt during this reading and what they thought Rosa Parks, the boycotters, or other characters might have felt at the time. Provide art materials for students to represent an emotion they feel when they listen to the story, or an emotion they think might have been experienced by someone in the book.
- 4. Making contact through letters.** Encourage students to think of people involved in the Montgomery bus boycott as the real people they were. Which people especially interest your students, and what questions would they want to ask them? Have students write their thoughts and questions in a letter. They could write to one of the well-known names or to a less well-known player, such as the bus driver or a boycotter. Ask for volunteers to share their letters with the class.



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Extension Activities

- 1. Walk the walk.** Encourage activism in your class or school by investing your students in a walkathon to raise awareness or money for a cause that they believe in. Have your group decide on a cause and a purpose for the walk. If your students aim to raise awareness, brainstorm ways they can achieve this goal. How can they publicize their walk? What do they need to know about their selected cause? What will they wear, carry, say, sing, or do while walking? If they plan to walk to raise money, contact the appropriate organization to learn about any stipulations for contributions and to gain support for your efforts. For both types of walkathons, be sure to obtain permission from your school administration. Conduct the walk on the school track, around the school basketball court or football field, or along a safe, measured route near the school. Arrange time for students to walk a certain distance daily, and post a calendar in your room or school hallway to record your students' progress. Though the Montgomery bus boycott lasted for 381 days, your walk can take place over the course of the school year, a semester, a month, or even just a week. Remember to allow periodic times for students to discuss their experiences, assess their progress, and relate their efforts back to what the boycotters went through in Montgomery.
- 2. Strength in numbers.** Turn students' interest in a cause into an e-mail campaign that raises awareness about both the cause and the Montgomery bus boycott. Provide time and resources for students to research the chosen cause. Then organize groups of students to be responsible for different tasks: writing a letter based on the researched information, e-mailing the letter to potential responders, and keeping a record of the responses. The letter should include an introduction to the effort, an explanation of how the effort was inspired by *Boycott Blues*, information about the cause, the class's opinion of the cause, and a request to reply to the e-mail to be added to the list of supporters. Students who send the e-mail should keep an address book to use at the end of the campaign for an update/thank you e-mail. In honor of the number of days that the Montgomery protesters persevered, the goal of the campaign is to get 381 people to reply to show their support. The record keepers should hang up a number line ending at 381 to maintain a running record of supporters' names. Students continue e-mailing their letter until the goal of 381 responses is reached.
- 3. Real stories.** Engage your class in collecting oral histories from the time period of the Montgomery bus boycott and the Civil Rights Movement. Brainstorm questions for interviews with grandparents, teachers, and other adults who lived during the 1950s and 1960s. Questions might include: Did they know about the Montgomery bus boycott? If so, how did they find out about it, and what do they remember hearing about it? Was there segregation in their town? If so, what was segregated and was the segregation by law or by behavior, or both? How and when did the segregation end? After everyone has shared their interviews with the group, discuss what students learned from hearing all of the responses.



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Extension Activities (continued)

- 4. *Boycott Blues* virtual walk.** To prepare for this activity, use your class or school webpage to set up a safe forum that students can access. After reading and discussing *Boycott Blues*, ask students if they have ever done something challenging over the course of many days, as the Montgomery boycotters did. Call on volunteers to share their experiences. Then invest students in participating in a webpage forum that the class will maintain for a significant period of time—perhaps even 381 days! Begin the forum with a posting on Day One, initiating the concept or theme—whether a discussion of *Boycott Blues*, the class's social studies lessons, assigned historical events, or injustices that students perceive in the community. Each student is assigned a day (or days, if you plan to cycle through the class more than once), and the first student creates the Day Two posting, with the rest of the class following in the assigned order. Depending on the grade level, students might post paragraphs on their own or they might discuss their thoughts with parents or guardians who then create the postings with them. On the final day of the virtual walk, reread *Boycott Blues* with the class and review all of the postings, seeing how far you've "walked" together. Facilitate a discussion about what your students have learned from the exercise and end the walk with a final posting about these takeaways.
- 5. *Put yourself there.*** With administrative and parental permission, conduct a social experiment with your class. Set up the classroom with a clear section of front seats for students with five letters or fewer in their first names. Set up another section of back seats for students with more than five letters in their first names, and make sure that there are fewer seats than the number of students in this group. To begin the experiment, tell your students that their day will be different and direct them to their new seating areas. During the day have the front group line up in the front of all lines and sit at a particular table or area for lunch. Have the back group line up at the back of all lines and sit at another table or area for lunch. Leave time at the end of the day to involve the students in returning the room to its typical arrangement and then hold a discussion. What did they think about the different rules for the day? How did the rules make them feel? What was the point of this exercise?
- 6. *More about Montgomery.*** Involve students in learning more about the Montgomery bus boycott by having them prepare presentations for the class. Assign partners or small groups research topics, including Rosa Parks, E. D. Nixon, Martin Luther King Jr. and his speech at Holt Street Baptist Church, Jim Crow laws, contemporary press about the boycott, the Supreme Court decision, the origin of the word *boycott*, and how the Montgomery bus boycott relates to the Civil Rights Movement.
- 7. *Boycotts beyond Montgomery.*** Have small groups research other historic boycotts, including the United Farm Workers table grapes boycott, boycotts of the Olympic Games, and corporate boycotts, such as the 1996 boycott against Texaco. Your students' work should include how each boycott was similar to and different from the Montgomery bus boycott, and whether the boycott was successful. Each group should share its findings with the class.
- 8. *Civil rights timeline.*** As a class or in groups, create a timeline of the Civil Rights Movement. Display the timeline in the classroom. What do your students notice about the role of the Montgomery bus boycott?

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A Conversation with Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney

How did you become involved in creating books for children?

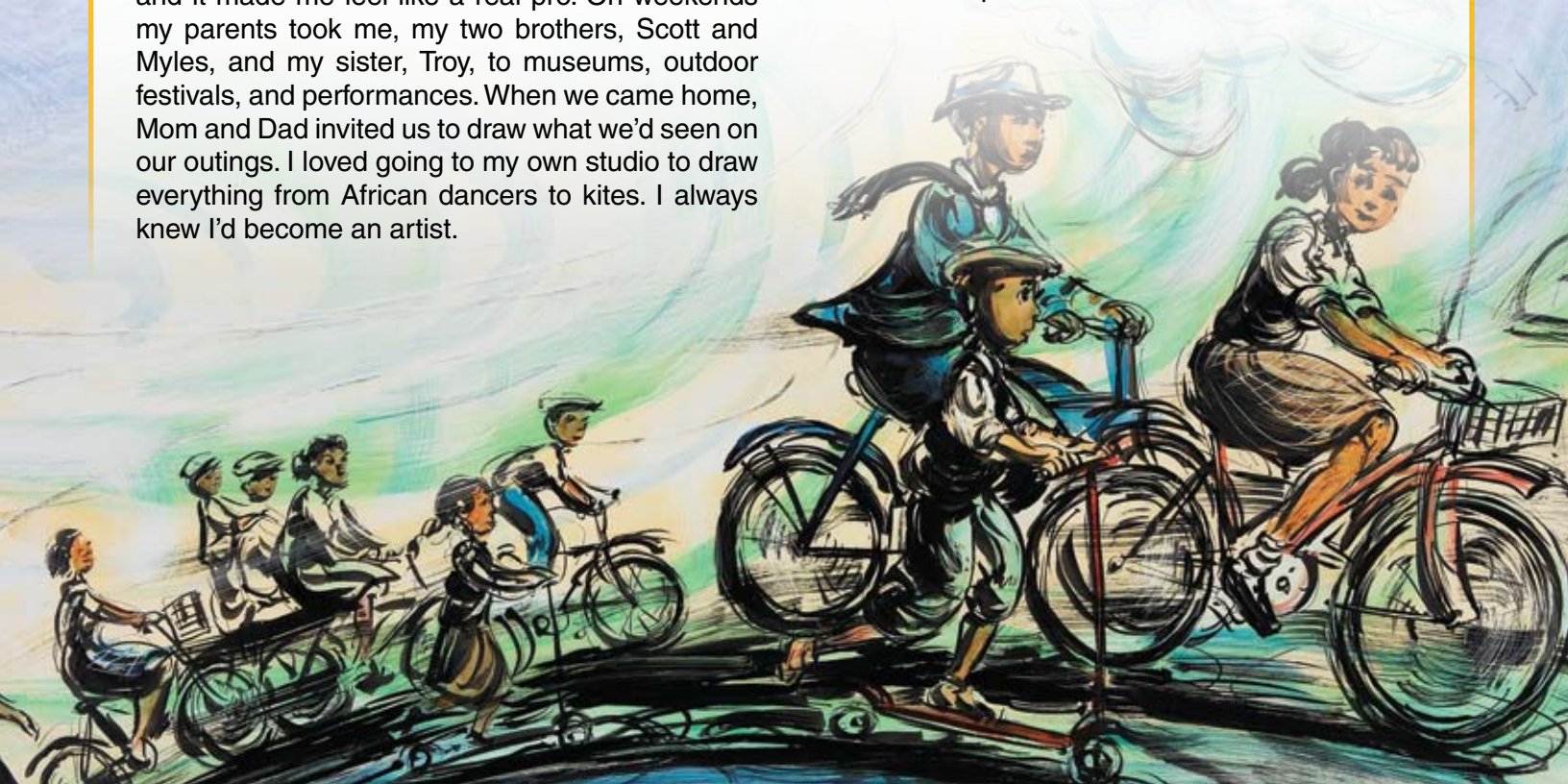
Andrea: They say life is what happens when you're busy making other plans. I became a children's book author quite by accident. When I was a kid, my one dream was to become a journalist. So I earned a journalism degree from Syracuse University, and when I graduated, I got a job at *Mechanix Illustrated* magazine, where I edited articles about carburetors and windshield safety. I later went on to work at several magazines, including *Essence*, where I wrote features and reviewed children's books. It then dawned on me that with my experience in writing nonfiction, I could maybe write a book for young people. But I wanted to put a twist on nonfiction so that it could be fun and accessible to kids. So I gave it try. My first book was a picture book about Alvin Ailey, the choreographer.

Brian: When I was growing up, I wanted to be just like my dad, Jerry Pinkney, the award-winning illustrator. So when I was six years old, my mom created my own little artist's studio in a walk-in closet. It had a miniature desk and pencils and plenty of paper, and it made me feel like a real pro. On weekends my parents took me, my two brothers, Scott and Myles, and my sister, Troy, to museums, outdoor festivals, and performances. When we came home, Mom and Dad invited us to draw what we'd seen on our outings. I loved going to my own studio to draw everything from African dancers to kites. I always knew I'd become an artist.

I earned a fine arts degree from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia (the same college my father attended) and later went on to earn a master's degree in fine arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York City. I started my career illustrating textbooks and op-ed pieces for *The New York Times*. During this period, I was showing my portfolio to art directors at children's book publishing companies. One day an art director gave me my first picture book assignment: a book entitled *The Boy and the Ghost*, by Robert D. San Souci. I had so much fun creating that book. (I later learned that my dad had also been offered the chance to illustrate *The Boy and the Ghost*, but he turned it down.)

Where do you get the ideas for your books?

Andrea: As a former magazine editor, I'm keenly aware of the importance of generating ideas. When I worked in magazines, I spent much of my day cultivating and executing ideas for each month's issue, sometimes more than a year before the articles were to appear. From this experience I learned to keep a notebook with me at all times.



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A Conversation with Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney (continued)

I'm constantly jotting down ideas that come to me, some of them wonderfully good ideas, some of them awful! For me, the important thing is to always have my brain on—even when I'm sleeping. A good idea can come from anywhere, at any moment. Ideas haunt me in the oddest places, so there's no formula for where and how ideas come. The worst thing is when someone is talking to me and a GREAT idea pops into my head, and all I want to do is ask the person to please zip the lip so I can write down my idea. It's hard to smile and be polite at times like this, because there's one thing I know about ideas—they evaporate very quickly if I don't write them down immediately!

Brian: My best ideas come to me when I'm walking. Living in New York City is a constant water fountain of ideas. Moving through the city streets, seeing so many different kinds of people, sights, lights, and buildings keeps my creative juices flowing. I also get ideas from going to the beach and hanging out in the park near our home. Like Andrea, I'm always on the prowl for ideas, and I never leave home without my sketchbook.

Describe your new book, *Boycott Blues*.

Andrea: *Boycott Blues* is the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956, as told from the point of view of a feisty hound dog named Dog Tired. It's the kind of book I love to write—nonfiction with an unexpected spin. And the story is so much more than a tale about

the boycotts. *Boycott Blues* is part poem, part history, part rhapsody—with a whole lot of doggy dialogue thrown in for fun. Readers learn about a very important moment in America's history and also about blues music, which is a vital part of the African-American experience.

Perhaps most importantly, *Boycott Blues* underscores the strength it takes to be committed to a cause you believe in—even when you may want to quit standing up for yourself. Even when the chips are down. Even when every weary muscle and bone in your body wants to give up. Although the Montgomery bus boycott happened many years ago, young readers can still learn from those people who, in the face of some great odds, said to the world, "We will!"

Brian: *Boycott Blues* was so much fun to illustrate. I took a totally new approach to the paintings—crafting them in a way I've never done for any other book. The artwork is rendered with colored inks on clay board. I used a monotone palette to create a mood on each spread. But within many of the spreads, there's one bright spot of color, which adds a focal point. For example, Rosa Parks is depicted in a red coat to highlight her against a dark background. This symbolizes the power Rosa had against the looming background of discrimination. As the illustrations in the book progress, and we get closer to the end of the boycott, the colors brighten to celebrate a new day—the bright yellow hope of equality.



Boycott Blues Teacher's Guide

A Conversation with Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney (continued)

What was it like when you collaborated on your first picture book together?

Andrea: As the old song says, “It takes two, baby!” We love working together, but it can have its challenges. Most authors and illustrators don’t collaborate. They don’t sit together and talk through the manuscript over a cup of tea or go out to dinner so they can review sketches. Some authors and illustrators never even meet each other until long after their book is published, if ever. But we have the unique pleasure of being married, so we share most things—the same box of cereal, the same tube of toothpaste, the same TV, and the same kids! So we’ve learned through trial and error what works and what doesn’t when it comes to collaborating. On our earlier books, we talked about our ideas all the time, at any moment of the day or night. One of us would be brushing our teeth, and the other would blurt out what they thought of the direction for the new book. This got us into some sticky conversations, mostly because we have such different temperaments.

Brian: Andrea is a “morning person,” who wakes up talking.

Andrea: Brian is a night owl, who does his best thinking after even the moon has gone to sleep.

Brian: So when Andrea’s head is buried in a pillow at close to midnight . . .

Andrea: Brian likes sharing his feedback on my manuscript. At five in the morning, when Brian is far away in dreamland, I like to indulge in one of my favorite pastimes—conversation!

Brian: We resolved this by establishing a time when we’re both awake and happy to be talking about our books together. Every Saturday we have a meeting from eleven in the morning until two o’clock in the afternoon. During this meeting is when we *really* collaborate. It’s when we brainstorm ideas, read through manuscripts, review sketches, and plan next steps in a book’s creation.

Andrea: At two o’clock, when the meeting is over—it’s over. Period. Time’s up. If either one of us wants to “talk shop,” it’s gotta wait until the next Saturday. This may seem very strict, but it really works. Now we have some good laughs and lots of fun when we work together. And neither one of us is snoring!

What do you like best about working on a book with your spouse?

Andrea: Brian really “gets” me and is my very best editor. When he makes a suggestion about my manuscript (usually something I don’t want to change), I sometimes say to myself, “What does *he* know? He’s the guy who makes the pictures.” Then when I go away and think about Brian’s editorial feedback, my whole outlook changes, and I’m left saying to him, “You know, you’re so right about that!”

Brian: Andrea can art direct with the best of them. She makes great suggestions about form, symmetry, and how the overall package of a book can come together visually.



Boycott Blues Teacher's Guide

A Conversation with Andrea Davis Pinkney and Brian Pinkney (continued)

What is the most challenging part about working together?

Andrea: Finding the time to do it. With two kids, two careers, keeping gas in the car, managing homework, school activities, getting to the gym, calling the plumber, making dinner, filling lunch boxes, going to the dentist every six months—it can be very tricky carving out time to sit together to *make a good book*! Even though we have our three-hour meeting on Saturdays, we're often not creating the book—we're *talking about* making the book and figuring out the book's "bigger picture."

Brian: The other challenge is this: once we find the time, then we have to actually do the work together. After we've completed all of the stuff Andrea mentions (there's also shoveling snow off the front stoop and raking leaves), the only thing we want to do with any extra ounce of time is *relax*!

What do you most admire about each other?

Andrea: Brian is the kindest person I know, and the smartest. And he keeps me laughing when the going gets tough (and the laundry piles up).

Brian: Andrea is a true visionary. When she sees something she wants, she goes after it with great gusto!

Who in your life has especially inspired or motivated you?

Andrea: It's a cliché, but true—those closest to you often provide the greatest inspiration. So my family is my best motivator. Of course that includes Brian and our children. But there's also folks like my younger sister, Lynne, who is a triathlete, and who completed the Ironman Triathlon *twice*. Lynne also helped me train for the New York City Marathon when I ran it for the first time. Whenever I start to complain about anything being too hard, I think, "Lynne swam two miles, biked one-hundred-and-twelve miles, then ran twenty-six miles—all on the same day!"

Brain: Yeah, my greatest inspiration comes from the apples on my family tree. My mother, Gloria, and my father, Jerry, keep me going. They both have so much wisdom about everything, from married life to parenthood to being true to oneself, and of course, art.

What advice would you give to aspiring authors/illustrators?

Andrea: If you want to become a published author, write every single day. Learn your craft. Work at it. Take it seriously. And read everything you can get your hands on.

Brian: Draw and make pictures of what you love. Look at lots of art, even art that's right under your nose. Have you really taken a moment to stare at the billboard you pass every day?

What is your life motto?

Andrea: Let it begin with me.

Brian: Follow your bliss.

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Questions and activities prepared by Emily Linsay, Teacher at the Bank Street School for Children, New York City.

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