

Would you risk your life for the right to sit down for lunch? **BY SPENCER KAYDEN**

# THE BRAVE BOYS

## CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

**\*NARRATORS 1, 2, AND 3**

(N1, N2, N3)

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**

**THE GREENSBORO FOUR,**

17-year-old college freshmen

**\*EZELL BLAIR JR.**

**\*JOE MCNEIL**

**\*DAVID RICHMOND**

**\*FRANKLIN MCCAIN**

**CASHIER**

**WAITRESS**

**MR. HARRIS:** manager of Woolworth's

**COUNTER MAID**

**CUSTOMER**

**POLICE OFFICER**

**JO SPIVEY:** a female news reporter

**BETTYE:** a black college student

*\*Starred characters are major roles.*

**DRAMATIZATION**  
a story based on  
true events

From left: Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, and two friends on day two of the lunch counter sit-ins.

# OF GREENSBORO



**AS YOU READ,  
THINK ABOUT:**

What does it mean to have strength?

## PROLOGUE

**N1:** Slavery officially ended in 1865, but nearly 100 years later, **prejudice** against African-Americans continued. Many states in the South had **Jim Crow**

laws, unfair rules that required black Americans to go to separate schools, live in separate neighborhoods, and eat in separate restaurants from white Americans.

**N2:** In the 1950s, a movement was started to change that system. Blacks and whites worked together—organizing demonstrations, marches, and other peaceful protests. But they risked their lives to do so. They were arrested and attacked. Some



had their homes burned down. Others were even murdered.

**N3:** One of the great leaders of this **civil rights movement** was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said . . .

**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.:** Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon, which cuts without wounding and ennoble the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals.

**N1:** This is the story of four teenagers who took up that sword.

## SCENE 1

**N2:** It is February 1, 1960, a Monday afternoon in Greensboro, North Carolina.

**N3:** Four African-American teenagers meet up at their college library.

**EZELL:** So, are we really going to do this?

**JOE:** Absolutely. I'm wearing my best suit.

**DAVID:** I didn't sleep at all last night.

**EZELL:** Neither did I.

**FRANKLIN:** We can't back out now.

**JOE:** Does everyone know the plan?

**DAVID:** We go in and buy something, like regular customers.

**EZELL:** This is never going to work.

**JOE:** What's the worst thing that could happen?

**DAVID:** We get arrested.

**FRANKLIN:** Or we end up with our heads split open, brought back to campus in pine boxes.

**JOE:** Let's stick to the plan, and remember, whatever happens, no violence.

**N1:** The four boys walk downtown, their gazes fixed straight ahead. They round the corner onto Elm Street and walk into Woolworth's Department Store.

**N2:** They have been to this store many times before, but this time their hearts are pounding.

**N3:** David approaches the stationery counter.

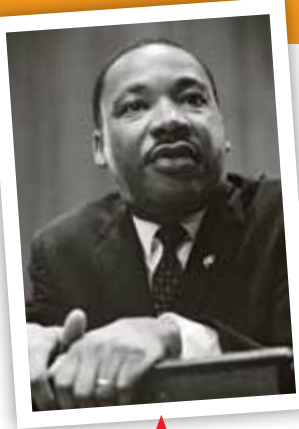
**DAVID:** I'd like to buy these pencils, please.

**CASHIER:** That will be 50¢.

**N1:** David pays and takes his receipt.

**N2:** Franklin and Joe nod at each other and silently walk to the lunch counter.

**N3:** They sit down. David and Ezell join them.



Martin Luther King Jr. believed that peaceful protest was the only way to end racial injustice in America.

**N1:** The waitress stares at them with shock and amazement.

**N2:** The room gets deadly quiet, except for the squeak of the swivel stool as Ezell sits on his hands to stop them from shaking.

## SCENE 2

**N3:** Flashback to 14 hours earlier. The boys are in their college dormitory.

**DAVID:** So Joe, how was your trip?

**JOE:** I went to New York to see my family.

Coming back South, I was OK until I got to the bus station in Greensboro. I tried to buy a sandwich, but they wouldn't serve me.

**FRANKLIN:** I am getting tired of being treated like a second-class citizen.

**DAVID:** I heard they might close the public pool rather than allow black people to swim there.

**JOE:** How have our parents lived like this for so long?

**FRANKLIN:** You know, we stay up every night talking about how we don't like the way blacks are treated. Maybe we're hypocrites.

**DAVID:** What do you mean?

**FRANKLIN:** We're all talk, talk, talk, and no action. Maybe it's time to do something.

**EZELL:** How can the four of us change the entire city of Greensboro?

**FRANKLIN:** We have to get people's attention and show them how unjust **segregation** is.

**DAVID:** Well, we can't **boycott** a store because they'll throw us in jail and say we're taking business away.

**JOE:** What if we go somewhere that's for whites only, and try to give them our business?

**EZELL:** Like where?

**JOE:** A place where the racism is obvious, like Woolworth's Department Store. We can shop there, but we aren't allowed to sit down at the lunch counter.

**EZELL:** You're suggesting we sit where no black person has ever sat before and ask to be served?

**JOE:** Exactly.

**EZELL:** They'll beat us up!

**FRANKLIN:** Not if we are quiet and respectful. We will dress nicely and we won't do anything to provoke them.

**DAVID:** Let's do it tomorrow, before I lose my nerve.

**EZELL:** They'll never serve us.

**FRANKLIN:** Then we will sit at the counter until they do.

### SCENE 3

**N1:** At the lunch counter that next afternoon, the four boys sit, waiting to see if they will be arrested or worse.

**N2:** For many minutes, nothing happens. The waitress ignores them. White patrons glare, but no one moves.

**FRANKLIN:** Excuse me, ma'am. We'd like to be served.

**WAITRESS:** I'm sorry. I can't serve you here.

**JOE:** We would just like a cup of coffee, please.

**WAITRESS:** You can go to the stand-up counter downstairs.

**N3:** She walks away. A black counter maid comes over.

**COUNTER MAID:** What are you boys doing? You're stirring up trouble.

Making it harder for the rest of us. Go back to campus. Please!

**N1:** She storms off. The manager comes over.

**MR. HARRIS:** Is there a problem?

**EZELL:** No, sir. We'd like to order some coffee, please.

**MR. HARRIS:** Boys, I can only serve you downstairs.

**DAVID:** You served me when I bought pencils a few minutes ago, just 5 feet from here.

**MR. HARRIS:** As I said, you can order whatever you want downstairs.

**DAVID:** Thank you, but we prefer to sit here with your other customers.

**MR. HARRIS:** You can't sit here.

**FRANKLIN:** Is it against the law?

**MR. HARRIS:** No. It's just the way things are.

**FRANKLIN:** Do you think "the way things are" is just?

**MR. HARRIS:** Doesn't matter what I think. It's store policy.

**JOE:** With respect, sir, we don't agree with your policy. And we're going to sit here until we're served.

**N2:** An elderly white customer finishes her doughnut and walks toward them.

**N3:** Franklin steels himself for her harsh words.

**N1:** The woman puts her hands on Franklin's shoulders.

**CUSTOMER:** Boys, I am so proud of you. I just wish you had done this 10 years ago.

**N2:** The boys swell with pride and sit a little taller knowing someone is on their side.

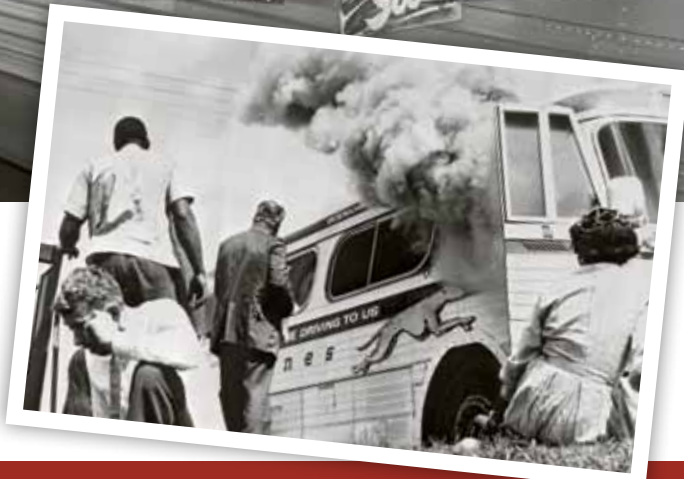
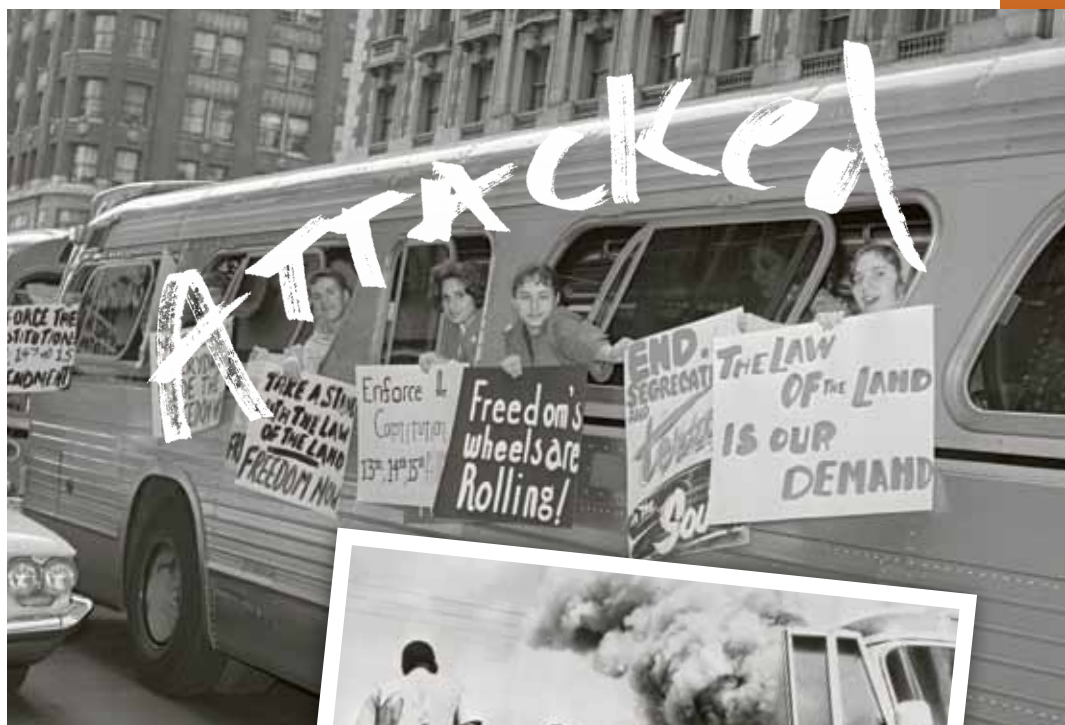
**N3:** By now a crowd has gathered, staring and pointing.

**N1:** A police officer walks in.

**EZELL** (*whispering*): We're done for.



During the civil rights movement, there were many nonviolent protests. One was called the Freedom Rides (below). From May to December in 1961, more than 400 black and white Americans risked their lives—enduring racism, beatings, mobs, and imprisonment—to simply ride together on buses through the Deep South. They refused to retaliate with violence. Their courage inspired the nation, and by the end of the year, all interstate travel had been desegregated.



## SCENE 5

**N2:** The officer stalks up and down the aisle behind them, menacingly slapping his nightstick into his palm.

**DAVID** (*whispering*): He could crack our skulls with that.

**N3:** The officer talks to Mr. Harris.

**POLICE OFFICER:** What's the situation?

**MR. HARRIS:** Everybody knows that the lunch counter is for whites only.

**POLICE OFFICER:** I can't arrest them for just sitting there. Have they started any fights or said anything inflammatory?

**MR. HARRIS:** No, they have been nothing but polite.

**POLICE OFFICER:** Then I suggest you close the store early. This will all blow over in a day or two.

**MR. HARRIS:** I wouldn't be too sure about that.

## SCENE 4

**N1:** The next morning, the boys arrive at Woolworth's with two more friends.

**N2:** They sit at the lunch counter for most of the day. No one serves them.

**N3:** Meanwhile, word quickly spreads about what the boys are doing. Newspaper reporters and TV crews show up.

**JO SPIVEY:** Boys, what brought this on?

**DAVID:** I was taught that we live in a **democracy**, that all men are created equal. But we are not treated as equals. Far from it.

**JOE:** Have you ever wondered why we can only sit in the balcony at the movie theater? Why we have to sit at the back of the bus or go to separate schools?

**N1:** Some white hecklers threaten the boys, who ignore them and continue sitting.

**JO SPIVEY:** Do you think you are accomplishing anything with this sit-in?

**EZELL:** It is time for someone to wake up and change the situation, and we decided to start here.



**N2:** On day three, several dozen students from the boys' school and other colleges come to Woolworth's.

**BETTIE:** We're here to sit with you in **solidarity**.

**FRANKLIN:** We need all the help we can get. But you will probably be abused and called nasty names.

**BETTIE:** We can handle it.

**N3:** The students take out their books, sit at the counter, and start studying.

**JO SPIVEY:** Are you compromising your schoolwork to be here?

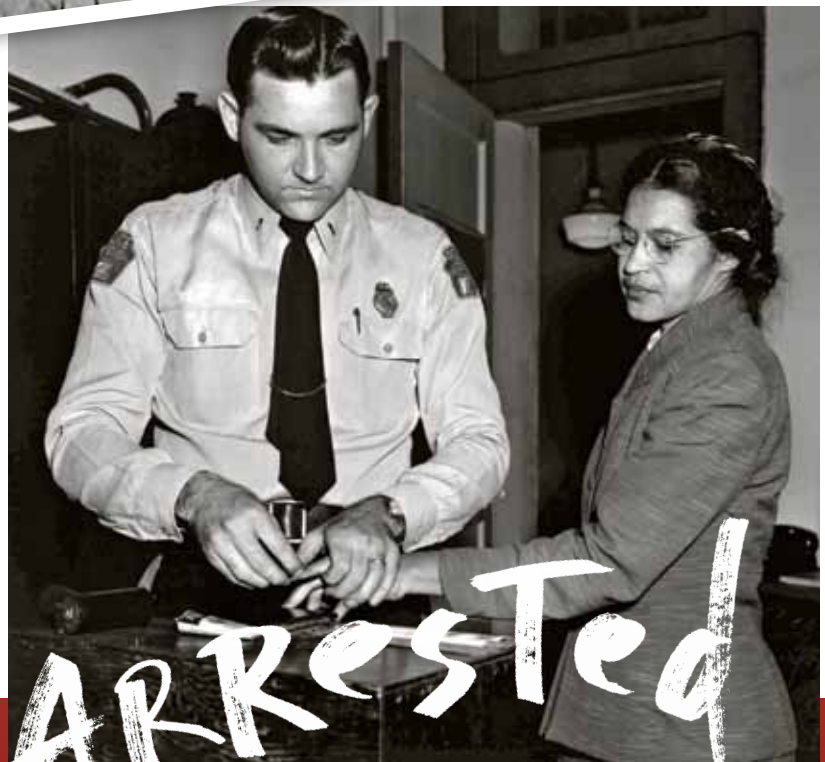
**FRANKLIN:** We promised each other a few things: not to miss classes, to behave courteously, and if punched or taunted, we turn the other cheek.

**JO SPIVEY:** Has there been any progress?

**JOE:** Woolworth's headquarters in New York issued a statement saying that their policy is to abide by local custom.

**JO SPIVEY:** So it's up to Mr. Harris?

Across the South, black Americans were not allowed to sit in the front of public buses. Rosa Parks (below) challenged this racist practice by refusing to give up her seat for a white passenger. She was arrested and would soon become a hero of the civil rights movement.



**EZELL:** It seems so. He's just waiting for us to get tired and go away. But we have no intention of doing that.

### SCENE 6

**N1:** On day four, 300 students show up at Woolworth's.

**JO SPIVEY:** Seems like people are starting to listen.

**FRANKLIN:** I've got a pal in Raleigh. He read about us in the paper and says they are planning a sit-in too.

**JO SPIVEY:** You boys sure are getting a lot of attention.

**DAVID:** Yeah, but not all of it's good. Last night I got a phone call at the dorm . . . some guy said if I came back to Woolworth's, I was a dead man.

**JOE:** But we are not going to be stopped by threats.

**N2:** By the end of the week, more than 1,000 students, black and white, converge on Woolworth's.

**N3:** By the end of the month, sit-ins are taking place in more than 30 communities in seven states.

**N1:** And by July, the lunch counter at Woolworth's is officially **desegregated**.

**N2:** Soon, every restaurant in Greensboro is serving all customers, regardless of race.

### EPILOGUE

**N3:** Today, more than 50 years later, those four teenage boys are known as the "Greensboro Four." They are remembered as heroes of the civil rights movement.

**EZELL:** Lots of people never stop to wonder why things are the way they are, no matter how bad. They just accept it.

**FRANKLIN:** It was our moral obligation to take a stand.

**JOE:** My grandchildren find it hard to believe that there was a time when a black person couldn't walk into a restaurant and order a cup of coffee.

**DAVID:** There's no better feeling in the world than standing up for what you believe is right and true. ●

### FAMOUS WORDS

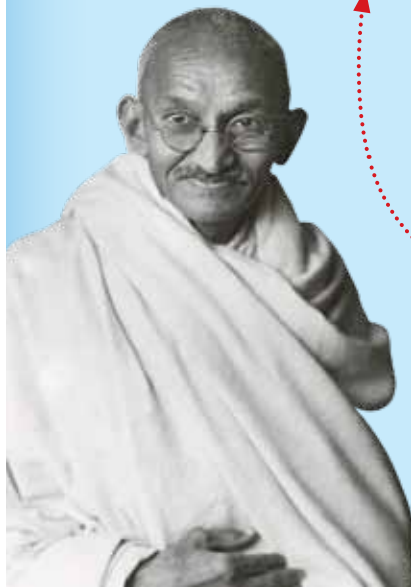
## A Hero for Peace

**H**ave you heard of Mohandas Gandhi? If not, prepare to be impressed. Gandhi (1869-1948) led a fight for India's independence from Britain. His weapon? Something called "nonviolent **civil disobedience**." He believed that the only way to change the world was through peaceful protest. Gandhi was a hero to his people and also inspired many civil rights movements—including the one in America led by Martin Luther King Jr. Below is a famous line from an article Gandhi wrote in 1919. We think it is pretty powerful!

# Strength

does not come from physical capacity.  
It comes from an indomitable will.

—Gandhi



means  
impossible  
to defeat

### CONTEST

**What Is Strength?** Think about the Gandhi quote you just read. Did the Greensboro Four have strength as Gandhi defined it? Why do you think their sit-in was so powerful and effective? Explain your answer to **BOTH** questions using details from the play (don't forget photos and captions!). Send it to **SIT-IN CONTEST**. Five winners will each get Linda Barrett Osborne's *Miles to Go for Freedom*.

**GET THIS  
ACTIVITY  
ONLINE**

