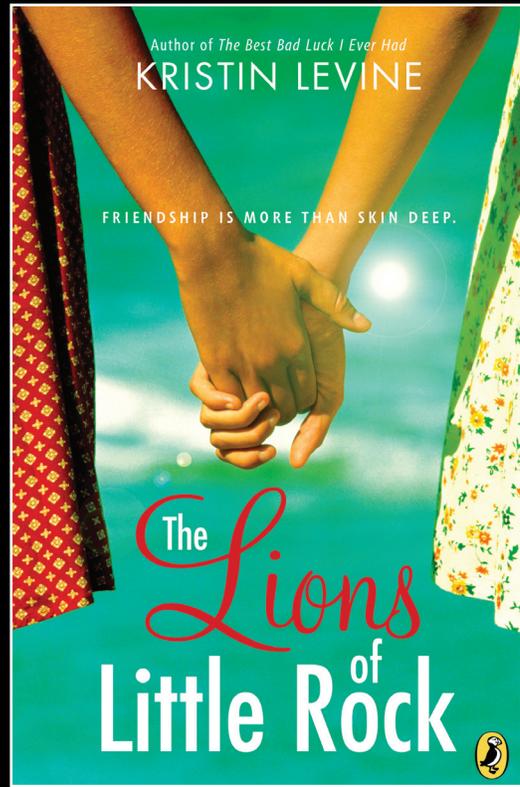




Penguin Young Readers Group



Core Curriculum
Lesson Plans for
**THE LIONS
OF LITTLE
ROCK**

by *Kristin Levine*

Lesson plans meet
Common Core State Standards
for grades 5–7

Dear Educator:

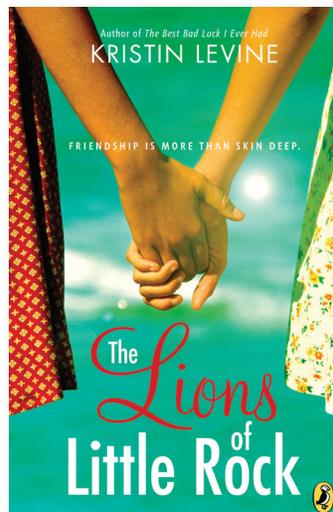
The Lions of Little Rock is a layered novel that presents **multiple themes** such as **racial discrimination, social justice, bravery, friendship, family, and acceptance**. Set in Little Rock, Arkansas, during the politically charged 1958 attempt to integrate high schools, the novel inspires discussion about standing up for what is right and how young people can be agents of change in the political process. These Core Curriculum Lesson Plans present discussion questions, activities, and writing prompts that align with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and History and Social Studies for grades 5 to 7. This guide is broken up into three parts. The lessons can be used as part of a comprehensive English and/or History unit that lasts for three to four weeks, or you might choose to use the lessons as enrichment activities to deepen student thinking as you conduct a whole class or small group novel study. The novel provides many options for further research and exploration about the civil rights era and the Little Rock Nine.

About the Book:

The Lions of Little Rock takes place the year after the milestone events of 1957 in which nine African American students, known as the Little Rock Nine, integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

It is 1958, and twelve-year-old Marlee doesn't have many friends until she meets Liz, the new girl at school. Liz is bold and brave and always knows the right thing to say, especially to Sally, the resident mean girl. Liz even helps Marlee overcome her greatest fear—speaking, which Marlee never does outside her family.

But then Liz is gone, replaced by the rumor that she was a Negro girl passing as white. But Marlee decides that doesn't matter. Liz is her best friend. And to stay friends, Marlee and Liz are willing to take on integration and the dangers their friendship could bring to both their families.



Content of these Core Curriculum Lesson Plans was created by Jennifer M. Bogard, who has taught elementary school for more than ten years. She is a literacy coach for the Maine School Administrative District 35 and a PhD candidate at Lesley University. Her research focuses on transitional readers, specifically the sociology of families, reading pedagogy, and family and school engagement. Jennifer is also an adjunct professor in the Language and Literacy Division of the Graduate School of Education at Lesley University. Her work is published in *The Reading Teacher*, and she has presented for the Center for Reading Recovery and Literacy Collaborative.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Teachers: Using the interactive white board, explore the website:

<http://www.nps.gov/chsc/planyourvisit/index.htm>

- View photos of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas
- View the primary sources and multimedia sources
- Have students record the questions that come to mind and search the website for answers.

Have students use an online dictionary to find definitions for the following vocabulary words: *segregation, integration, segregationist, integrationist, and racist.*

- Do some word work and examine the roots words
- Hold an important class discussion about words they will encounter such as *Negroes, nigger, and colored.*

****Correlates to Common Core Standards: RI 5.4, L5.4, RF 5.3, RH 6-7.4, RH 6-7.7**

Week 1: (p. 1–102)

Marlee uses metaphor to sum up the way she views others. For example, her brother, David, is a “glass of sweet iced tea on a hot summer day” (p. 5). As students continue to read the novel, ask them to:

- Record the metaphors that Marlee uses to describe others.
- Discuss: Is it fair for Marlee to categorize people as types of drinks? Why or why not?
- Record the moments when Marlee comes to understand Billy Jean, mother, JT, Liz, and others on a deeper level.

As they read the story, have students trace how and when the author presents the lions. For example, Marlee tells Judy the roar of the lions make her feel safe (p.57), she practices speaking in front of the lions, and at the end of the book, Marlee’s mother says, “Marlee listens to lions,” Have students locate the many references to lions as they read. Ask students to discuss:

- What do the lions represent?
- What do lions typically represent in other stories?
- What is the relationship between the lions and Marlee finding her voice?

Marlee is fascinated by magic squares. Have students:

- Use the Internet to find examples of magic squares
- Start a character map that shows Marlee’s interests and character traits

Marlee says, “And for the first time, I understood what Judy was saying about finding someone who shared interests with you. Someone you can sit quietly with. For the first time, I thought I might understand what it was like to have a real friend” (p. 41). Have students:

- Write a personal narrative or memoir to tell the story of a time in their own lives when they realized they had a real friend. This person might be a peer, a family member, a community member, etc.

Have students locate and discuss specific references to support the main idea of courage and finding one’s voice such as the following:

- “We are not *just* a town of racists, but those of us who believe in integration...” He shook his head. “We can’t seem to find our voice” (p. 75).
- [Daddy] said that things could be different in Little Rock, if only the right people could find their voice. I wanted to be one of those people” (p. 164).

Invite students to conduct a simile hunt and discover similes such as the following:

- “Judy’s green suitcase sat by the door like a wart” (p. 81).
- “He took it like it was the tail of a dead mouse” (p. 84).
- “I didn’t want to hear them argue, but like a moth near a candle, I couldn’t pull myself away, either” (p. 86).
- “Thoughts were bouncing around my head like the balls in a pinball machine” (p. 89).
- “I nursed my anger like a jawbreaker that grew hotter and hotter as I rolled it around on my tongue” (p. 91).

Marlee really wants to ask Liz questions such as “Did you like me at all, or was our friendship a story, too” (p. 92), yet she asks the question that everyone else is asking: “Are you really colored?” (p. 92). Have students discuss:

- What is important to Marlee? Why does she ask a different question?

Marlee’s brother, David, and teacher, Mr. Harding, instill the message that Marlee can be an inventor of satellites, a scientist, and a mathematician. Marlee learns that Liz’s mother is also good in math but that she had to quit school when she “should have been a scientist” (p. 93) to be a housekeeper for a white lady. Have students:

- Research woman pioneers on the Internet and by viewing the website: <http://www.nwhp.org>
- Choose a woman and/or African American pioneer, conduct research, and write a biography.

****Correlates to Common Core Standards: RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, W 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.10, L 5.4, SL 5.1 5.6, RH 6-7.1 WHST 6-7.4, 6-7.5, 6-7.7, 6-7.10**

Week 2: (p. 103–203)

Before calling Liz on the party line, Marlee writes down what she wants to say on note cards. Have students:

- Research ways of communicating during the time period such as the party line and the telegraph.
- Choose a turning point in the story, decide on an audience, and create a podcast to serve as a telegram. Students should write the message on note card's and practice reading it just as Marlee does.

Have students create a timeline to show the major events of the 1950s and 1960s and the milestones of the civil rights era such as the Brown vs. Board of Education lawsuit.

- Use the following resource as needed: www.tolerance.org
- On more than one occasion, the author mentions satellites, going to the moon, and the Soviets and Sputnik. Provide students with a context for this and add these world events to the timeline.

Direct students to the following quotation: “How had Liz ever concentrated at school? How had she done math problems and written essays when she was surrounded by people who might hurt her if they found out who she really was?” (p. 110).

- Have students write in their reading or writing journals to explore the significance of Marlee’s experience at the movie theater. What did Marlee experience? What did Marlee come to understand?

Discuss Marlee’s innocence using the following quotations to spark discussion:

- “I tried to...imagine that there was danger lurking around every corner. But it was hard when everything seemed normal, the movie and the soda in my hands” (p. 111).
- “It was hard to believe that someone would really try to hurt us, when the sun was shining and we were at the zoo, and everything seemed so normal” (p. 95).

Marlee draws upon her strength in math to calm her down when she is nervous or worried. She counts by prime numbers, thinks of square roots and more. Marlee encourages Liz to draw on her strength in words by writing down the words she’d like to say when she is angry. Ask students to:

- Create a visual, podcast, or written piece to share their own personal strengths
- Discuss in small groups: How might strengths help us overcome challenges?

Judy sends postcards to her “Little Sis” (p. 132). Have students:

- Write as Marlee and create a postcard using the website: <http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/postcard/> Who would Marlee write to? What would Marlee want to say?

Betty Jean calls Mrs. Bates an “activist” (p. 147). Have students:

- Use the context and resources to determine the meaning of the word activist.
- Research Daisy Bates and the organizations mentioned in the story such as the NAACP (p. 147), WEC (p. 101) and STOP (p. 224).
- Discuss how Marlee took action in the story.
- Research issues in today’s world, and how they might become activists and enact change as young people. What are local organizations that promote change?

Facing one’s fears is a major theme throughout the story. Marlee says, “‘I was really scared of flying, and it turned out okay. No, not okay. Great.’ For the first time, I was thinking out loud. And it was fun.’ I think it might be time to try some other things I’m afraid of,” (p. 163). Have students:

- Choose a main character and find evidence in the text that shows an instance when the character faces his or her fears
- Discuss facing fears such as holding a crawdad help’s us face even greater fears.

Classroom Lesson Plans for *The Lions of Little Rock*

- Discuss the specific people and things that inspired the character to grow.
- Create a visual representation to show the instances in which the character faced his or her fears (poster, painting, collection of items).

Troy's roller rink has a quotation painted on the wall, "The more you skate, the more you learn. The more you learn, the more you skate" (p. 188).

- Hold a class discussion to explore what this quotation means in Marlee's life and within our own lives.

****Correlates to Common Core Standards: RF 5.4, RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 RF 5.3, W 5.2, 5.4, 5.7, 5.9, L 5.4, L 5.5, L 5.1 RH 6-7.1 WHST 6-7.7, 6-7.8, 6-7.10**

Week 3: (p. 204–298)

Friendship is a major theme in the novel. The friendship between Marlee and Liz withstands threats of violence to them and to their families. Ask students to:

- Discuss the risks and rewards of their friendship.
- In what ways did their friendship inspire others?
- Use a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the two characters.

Marlee's mother makes a speech in the Forest Park Auditorium that serves as a turning point for their relationship. Direct students back to the following quotation: "The lions started to roar, and I had a new thought. Maybe mother wasn't selfish or uncaring, Maybe she was scared. Maybe she masked it like David did, not with a grin, but with a frown" (p. 128). Ask students to:

- Reread Chapter 42, looking for evidence of a turning point.
- Discuss how Marlee and her mother's relationship has grown.
- Write a dialogue poem or a poem for two voices in which Marlee and her mother present their inner thoughts and points of view. Consider how their relationship grows and the events that lead them to grow closer.

On page 269, Mr. Harding tells Marlee that "the world is much more like an algebraic equation" and not an addition problem. He also says, on page 270, "But usually, if we take things step by step we can figure things out. You just have to remember to factor the equation, break it down into smaller parts." Have small groups:

- Discuss: How has Marlee come to realize this.
- Write about an example of a time in your own life when you had to take it step by step.

Discuss in small groups:

- How does Marlee come to realize that "Summing people up as a cola or a coffee wasn't really fair" (P. 271-272)?
- Why is it important for Marlee to see that people are a "whole refrigerator full of different drinks" (P. 272)?

Chapter 56 ends with a discussion about the number of students who had integrated the schools and the statement, "We still had a long, long way to go."

- Ask students to discuss the meaning of this statement in small groups.
- Have students research the history of civil rights and integration in their own town.
- In what ways does this quotation apply to present day issues of equality?

The novel begins and ends with Marlee standing on a diving board. Ask students to write an essay to explore the following: Have students include evidence from the text to support their discussions.

- How has the Marlee changed over the course of the story?
- What specific experiences and people led to her growth?
- In what ways was Marlee a role model for others?

Classroom Lesson Plans for *The Lions of Little Rock*

Ask students to consider the theme of courage and standing up for what is right as it pertains to their everyday lives.

Have students:

- Choose a situation that requires courage, such as joining a new group at recess, inviting a person to join a project, saying no to someone who is pressuring, or passing a quotation or note of inspiration as Marlee did for her mother.
- Have students reflect in their writing journals: How did finding their voice impact them and others around them? Has anyone stood up for them?
- Ask students to conduct an interview to ask a family member or a senior in the community about their experiences with courage throughout their lifetime. Did they stand up for others? Did others stand up for them?

****Correlates to Common Core Standards: RL 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, W 5.1, W 5.3, W 5.4, W 5.5, 5.10, L 5.5, SL 5.1, RH 6-7.2, 6-7.8, WHST 6-7.1, WHST 6-7.4, 6-7.6, 6-7.7**

Post-reading Activities

As a class, view the suggested films in the Author's Note and choose one or more texts from author's suggested list of books. Ask students to:

- Compare and contrast how the authors approach the topic and how information is presented through different points of view.
- Combine information from each source and create one of the following: a digital movie, an informative essay, or a radio show.

****Correlates to Common Core Standards: RI 5.5 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, SL 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, WHST 6-7.7, 6-7.8, 6-7.9**

Additional Websites for Research

<http://littlerock9.com>

Read the biographies of the members of the Little Rock Nine and view their photographs

<http://www.facinghistory.org/explore/exhibit/stories/little-rock>

Hear firsthand accounts from members of the Little Rock Nine

<http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-32-fall-2007/school-year-changed-nation>

Read an interview with Minnijean Brown Trickery, member of the Little Rock Nine

<http://www.centralhigh57.org>

View historic videos and read about the history of Little Rock, Arkansas

<http://www.history.com/videos/little-rock-9#little-rock-9>

View a video of the Little Rock Nine

<http://www.kristinlevine.com/index.html>

Author Kristin Levine's website

Awards, Praise, and Honors for Lions of Little Rock

2012-2013 Connecticut Nutmeg Book Award (Teens)

2012-2013 Washington, D.C. Capitol Choices (Ages 10-14)

★ “[A] quietly powerful page-turner.” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “[A] stunning piece of historical fiction” —*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “A riveting, frequently tense portrait of 1958 Little Rock.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

About the Author:

Kristin Levine, author of the critically acclaimed *The Best Bad Luck I Ever Had*, received her BA in German from Swarthmore College and a MFA in film from American University. She spent a year in Vienna, Austria, working as an au pair and has taught screenwriting at American University. Currently, she lives in Alexandria, Virginia, with her husband and two daughters. *The Lions of Little Rock* is her second novel. Visit her at www.kristinlevine.com

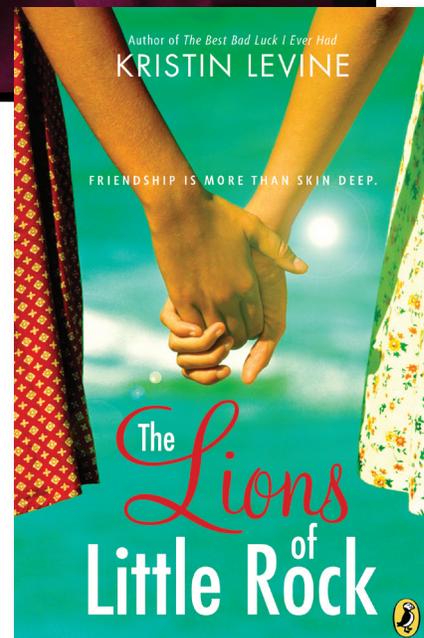
A Q & A with author Kristin Levine

Q: What influences your writing, and what specifically inspired you to write *The Lions of Little Rock*?

My mother was born in Little Rock. When I talked to her about her childhood, she mentioned going to the pool, riding in a plane, and listening to the lions roar at night. They were just little details, but somehow they caught my imagination. *The Lions of Little Rock* was also influenced by the fact that as a child my mainly white elementary school was paired with a mainly black school. I loved getting to know so many different types of people, and since then, I've always been interested in school integration.

Q: What is the greatest challenge of writing a fictional work inspired by true events?

For me, the hardest part is deciding what to leave out. How do I set the scene without making it read like a textbook? How do I describe a conflict without oversimplifying, or bogging the reader down with too many details? How much background is needed about the Little Rock Nine or Buddy Holly or Sputnik, and how do I insert it without being too obvious? My goal is to help the reader learn something new, without losing the flow of a good read.



Read more about Kristin Levine and invite her to visit your school at penguinclassroom.com/authorappearances.