

Bravery in Little Rock

It's the late summer of 1957, and you are a white teenager living in Little Rock, Arkansas. Your father is a pastor at the Central Presbyterian Church, and he is also the president of the Interracial Ministerial Alliance, a group of Black and white ministers who support civil rights. Most white people in Little Rock are pro-segregation, and your father is one of the few whites who are willing to fight for Black Civil Rights.

You grew up hearing your father talk about racial harmony and civil rights, so these ideas are normal for you. In fact, you have recently moved to Arkansas from Ohio, where people still live in segregated communities, but are generally polite to one another in public. In Little Rock, you have been surprised at the boldness of the racist actions from white residents. Here it is common for white people to use racial slurs and to shout rude things in public.

Racial tensions have been particularly high recently because the Arkansas School Board has been ordered to desegregate its schools. The Superintendent has decided that among the thousands of Black students in Little Rock, only nine are permitted to attend the all-white Central High School.

One week before you go back to school, your father invites you to join him for a visit to the home of Daisy Bates, the leader of the Little Rock NAACP. This is the first time you have ever been inside a Black family's home. As you enter, you see nine teenagers sitting around the dining room table. You quickly realize that these are the nine students that will be attending Central High School in just a few days. When your father introduces you, you are so nervous, that instead of saying hello, you just pull in a sharp breath of air and look at the ground. How embarrassing. At the meeting, Bates asks your father to accompany the nine teens on the first day of school, and he agrees.

As you walk to school on September 4th, you can see crowds of angry white adults, dozens of police officers, and even troops from the National Guard. As you get closer, you see a Black girl with sunglasses being blocked from entering the school. You recognize her from the visit at the Bates' home. Why is she all alone? A mob of angry men is crowding around her, and some are shouting threats of violence.

Despite the presence of officers and guards who have sworn to protect American citizens, nobody is helping the girl with the sunglasses. You think about what your father would do if he were here, and you feel the urge to help.

What can you do to help this girl?

Bravery in Little Rock Response

A Black teenage girl is surrounded by an angry white mob. What can you do to help her?

Write your response to the dilemma in the space below.
What will you do? Why will you do it?

This student, Elizabeth Eckford, is going to be attending your school in a few weeks.

What can you do to help her and her friends feel respected at school?
