

Children's March

The date is May 2nd, 1963, and you are a Black teenager living in Birmingham, Alabama. When you wake up for school, you can hear the birds chirping outside of your window. It's going to be a beautiful spring day.

You turn on your radio and hear the voice of Shelley "The Playboy" Stewart, the most popular radio DJ in Birmingham:

"That was 'Don't Change Your Heart' by Garnett Mimms and the Enchanters. I hope all of you children stay true to your heart today, and do the right thing for the cause. Don't forget to bring a toothbrush, because you won't be home for a while."

The teenage listeners know exactly what Shelley is talking about. After weeks of planning, today is the day that the Black students of Birmingham are supposed to walk out of their schools in protest. You are excited, scared, and unsure if it will actually happen.

The police have announced they will be arresting every youth protestor and taking them to jail. This is all part of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s plan. He hopes that newspapers will print photos of children crowded into jail cells, bringing shame and embarrassment to government leaders. Dr. King and other civil rights leaders have been fighting to abolish segregation, and the Children's March could help them negotiate for a better future.

As you get dressed for school, you slip your toothbrush into your pocket, just in case. At breakfast, your mother can sense that you are not your normal self. She heard rumors about the walk out, and she tells you to "stay away from trouble today, because you know how those white folks can be." Your mother has witnessed decades of police brutality and mob violence in Birmingham, and she has good reason to be worried about any plan involving jails and white police officers.

You say, "Don't worry mama," and walk to school.

At 11:00 am, you look out the window of your classroom and see a boy with a sign that says, "It's time." The girl next to you is the first to stand up, and she bravely walks out the door. The rest of the class seems scared to move.

Now you must make a choice. Will you join your classmates in the protest, knowing that you will be arrested and sent to jail? Or will you remain in your seat?

