



People of Color Who Inspire: Additional Stories from the Communion of Saints

The Center for the Theology of Childhood

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An imaginative method for nurturing the spiritual lives of children

John Lewis

Extension Lesson



Introduction

People of Color Who Inspire is a collection of stories written to supplement the collection of stories about the saints in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*. In the collection of lessons on the saints found in Volume 7, there is a lesson called, “The Child’s Own Saint.” The lesson invites the children and Godly Play mentors in a Godly Play room to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. This story, and the others in this collection, serves as an example of this—a Christian person who inspires us all to strive for justice and respect the dignity of every human being.

These stories are for children, so they try to minimize the distance between the child and the adult we are talking about. Some of the ways this is done is to keep the relationship informal, such as calling the person by their first name and emphasizing things about the person’s childhood. This means that the stories are somewhat open and very personal to engage the child’s intimacy and wonder with these amazing people who inspire.

We are intentionally spare with the details of these stories so as not to obscure the core reality. However, we encourage Godly Play mentors to include children’s books on the shelves nearby, just as we do with the other heroes of the church.

Beautifully crafted materials for telling Godly Play stories, including this lesson, are available from Godly Play Resources. A link to the store is found at www.godlyplayfoundation.org.

Godly Play is an interpretation of Montessori religious education developed by Jerome Berryman. It is an imaginative approach for working with children that supports, challenges, nourishes, and guides their spiritual quest. It is more akin to spiritual guidance than what we generally think of as children’s education. It involves children and adults, as mentors, moving together toward fluency in the art of knowing how to use Christian language to nourish their spiritual lives.

Godly Play assumes that children have some experience of the mystery of the presence of God in their lives, but that they lack the language, permission, and understanding to express and fully enjoy that in our culture. In Godly Play, we show how to enter into parables, silence, sacred stories, and liturgical action in order to discover the depths of God, ourselves, one another, and the world around us.

If you are not an experienced Godly Play mentor, we strongly encourage you to first download and read *How to Lead Godly Play Lessons*, available at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. This will explain the background of Godly Play, its methodology, and clear guidelines for its use. You will need this grounding before attempting to lead a Godly Play presentation, such as this one, or establishing a Godly Play program in your church or school. We also recommend attending a Godly Play Foundation training. A schedule of training can be found at www.godlyplayfoundation.org.

There are additional Godly Play resources available from Church Publishing Incorporated at the website from which this lesson was downloaded. You will find these at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplaydigital. All of the stories can also be found within the printed eight volumes of *The Complete Guide to Godly Play*, found at www.churchpublishing.org/godlyplayprint. You will also find a number of books by Jerome Berryman about the spirituality of children, as well as the Godly Play method, at www.churchpublishing.org.

Enjoy the wonder of Godly Play, and blessings on you and the ones you lead in this transformative experience!

Extension Lesson

The Story of John Lewis

(Born February 21, 1940–Died July 17, 2020)

John Lewis was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968) who inspired people all across our country “to get in good trouble” to end segregation, attain civil rights, and advance racial equality.

How to Use This Lesson

- Extension Lesson—to be used after the children are fluent in the Core Lesson called “Introduction to the Saints” (*The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7, Lesson 1*)
- Afterwards Lesson—stories about things and events that took place after the biblical era
- This lesson is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together, the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

The Material

- Location: The Mystery of Pentecost shelf, next to St. Elizabeth of Portugal (whom we also remember in July)
- Pieces: Saint tray, chicken, “Whites Only” sign, replica of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, replica of the Presidential Medal of Freedom
- Underlay: Green

Background

John Lewis was the third of ten children and grew up near Troy, Alabama. His family were sharecroppers. Most of Pike County, Alabama, was Black, so by the time he was six John had only seen two White people in his life.

The family worked on a White man’s land in return for a place to live and a share of the crops they produced. Everyone had to work, even the children. John’s mother used to say, “Work and put your trust in God.” John was put in charge of taking care of the chickens. He took the responsibility very seriously and loved “his” chickens.

John also loved going to church. The whole family dressed up in their Sunday clothes and walked to church. The church people prayed for each other and sang the old gospel songs, clapping and swaying. John said he felt the Holy Spirit rocking the room. He also loved listening to the preacher and decided that he, too, wanted to be a preacher when he grew up. He began to preach to the chickens he cared for. He wanted them to be good and he had a special message for each hen. His family called him “Preacher.”

As John grew older, he became aware of how segregation was affecting his family. It made him angry, but his parents warned him to stay quiet. “Don’t get in trouble,” they said. “Don’t get in the way.”

In 1955, at the age of fifteen, John heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaking on the radio. He was talking about the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. John said he felt like Dr. King was speaking directly to him, and from that moment decided to join the Civil Rights Movement. He said he was also inspired by evangelist Billy Graham to become a preacher. That same year he preached his first public sermon.

When John graduated from high school, he wanted to go to Troy University near his home, but they refused him because he was Black. He wrote to Dr. King, who called him “the boy from Troy,” and sent him a bus ticket to come see him. He urged him to study Gandhi’s nonviolent approach to affect change. John was now eighteen.

John went to Nashville and graduated from American Baptist College in 1961. He was ordained a Baptist minister while engaged in desegregation action. John was the one who formulated the rules of conduct for nonviolent protests across the South. He also enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville, a small, historically Black college, where he finished his bachelor’s degree in 1967 in religion and philosophy.

John organized sit-ins at lunch counters in Nashville, where Black people were not allowed to eat with White people. He set up freedom rides, involving both Black and White people, to challenge segregation on buses and at interstate bus terminals. He urged people to get involved in “good trouble” and “necessary trouble.”

John was often beaten and arrested. Senator John McCain said, “I’ve seen courage in action on many occasions. I can’t say I’ve seen anyone possess more of it and use it for any better purpose and to any greater effect, than John Lewis.”

Why did he do this? Congressman Lewis said it was his faith. He wrote:

Faith is being so sure of what the spirit has whispered in your heart that your belief in its eventuality is unshakable. Nothing can make you doubt that what you have heard will become a reality. Even if you do not live to see it come to pass, you know without one doubt that it will be (Lewis, *Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America*, p. 20).

At the age of twenty-three, John Lewis was the youngest of the “Big Six” who organized the March on Washington in 1963. He spoke just before Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his “I Have a Dream” speech, standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Imagine their joy when the next year President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, making racial discrimination in restaurants, bus stations, and other public places illegal, and requiring equal employment opportunities for all citizens.

John didn’t stop. After the Civil Rights Act was passed, he began to fight for voting rights. He and others thought voting was the way to ensure the gains they had made. He fought tirelessly for Black people to have the freedom to vote, especially in the southern states, where they were often afraid to even register as voters, because they could be injured or even killed by people who didn’t want them to vote.

John started his fight for the right to vote in Selma, Alabama, but one night during a protest a young man named Jimmie Lee Jackson was killed. Mourners organized a march from Selma to Montgomery, the capitol of Alabama. The march began on March 7, 1965. The Alabama State Police were called in and the marchers were ordered to disperse on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. The marchers began to pray. Before they were finished, the state police discharged tear gas and mounted police charged the demonstrators. They beat the marchers with nightsticks. Lewis’s skull was fractured. This was called “Bloody Sunday” and was seen on television by people across the United States. This changed public opinion to favor the cause of voting rights.

Dr. King helped John organize a new march, this time under the protection of federal troops, and five months later President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which protected the rights of all Americans to vote.

Twenty-one years after the Voting Rights Act was passed, John Lewis was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he continued to fight for justice and equality. He continued fighting until the day he died. Atlanta had reelected him sixteen times to the House of Representatives.

In 2011 Congressman Lewis was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, our country's highest civilian honor. At the time Lewis said in an interview with National Public Radio:

It's hard to believe that in a short time, that we have come so far as a nation and as a people. When you look back, the year that Barack Obama was born fifty years ago, black people and white people in the American South couldn't sit together on a bus or on a train or in a waiting room. And we changed that.

He died July 17, 2020, during another time of great racial strife in our country. One of the very last things he did was travel to Washington D.C. to visit newly named Black Lives Matter Plaza near the White House to show his support.

Lewis wrote in his book, *Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America* (2017):

Why do we struggle? Why participate in the work of justice at all? Why risk beating, or torture? Each of us must answer those questions according to the dictates of our conscience and the principles of our faith. I believe that we are all a spark of the divine, and if that spark is nurtured it can become a burning flame, an eternal force of light. (Lewis, p. 199)

Notes on the Material

Congressman John Lewis's story sits on a small, shallow tray about six inches square, with sides about two inches deep. It has a groove in the front to slide the "saint booklet" in so the children can see it when they approach the Mystery of Pentecost Shelf.

The booklet is 5" × 4.25". The cover has an image of Congressman John Lewis on it. The second page has a map of the world with the United States highlighted as John Lewis's home. It also has an image of the flag of the United States. The third page has a time line beginning with the year 1 CE and ending with the year 2500 CE. It has an arrow indicating when John Lewis lived. The rest of the book contains the story of his life.

Objects are placed behind the booklet to help us remember his story. The objects are a chicken, a "Whites Only" sign, a replica of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and a replica of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The underlay is a 12-inch square piece of green felt and is folded on top of the objects.

We remember John Lewis on, or near the date of his death, in July, so we recommend you place the materials for this lesson on the Saint shelves next to the story of St. Elizabeth of Portugal, whom we also remember in July.

Special Notes

In the collection of lessons on the saints found in *The Complete Guide to Godly Play, Volume 7*, there is a lesson called, “The Child’s Own Saint.” The lesson invites the children in a Godly Play Room to add to the lessons on the saints by writing the story of one of their own heroes. Congressman John Lewis is one such hero—not an official saint of the church, but a Christian person who inspires us all to strive for justice and respect the dignity of every human being.

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Movements

Go and get the material for John Lewis's story.

Unfold the green underlay in front of you and say:

Take the booklet from the tray and place it in the center of the underlay with John Lewis's image facing up and toward the children.

*Place a **chicken** on the underlay.*

*Place the **"Whites Only" sign** on the underlay.*

Words

Watch where I go to get the lesson for today.

This is the story of Congressman John Lewis.

We remember him during the green and growing season after Pentecost.

John's family lived on a farm near Troy, Alabama. All the children helped with the work.

When John turned five, his mom and dad put him in charge of the chickens. He had to feed them, clean their house, and collect the eggs. John loved "his" chickens and knew each one. He wanted them all to be good, so he preached to them.

John learned about preaching at church. On Sunday everyone dressed up in their best clothes and walked to church together as a family. They sang the old gospel songs, clapping and swaying. John said later that he could feel the Holy Spirit rocking the room.

What John liked best was the preaching and decided he wanted to be a preacher when he grew up. He practiced by preaching to his chickens.

As John grew older, he became angry that Black people could not go to all the places and do the things that White people could. His parents told him to keep quiet. They didn't want him to get in trouble, but John thought that not all trouble was the same. Some trouble, like pushing back against bad laws, was "good trouble."

Movements

Place the replica of the Edmund Pettus Bridge on the underlay.

Words

One day when he was about fifteen years old, John heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. talking on the radio. He wrote to Dr. King, who sent him a bus ticket to come see him. He called John “the boy from Troy.” Right away John knew he wanted to help Dr. King push back against bad laws, but this was dangerous.

John and his friends were often hurt and put in jail, but they kept going. They knew that God had created everyone, so everyone should be treated the same.

Soon laws were passed to allow Black and White people to eat, sit, and travel together. Still, Black people had trouble voting, so John began to push back about that.

During a protest in Selma, Alabama, a young Black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, was killed. This broke John’s heart, but it made him more determined. He helped organize a march from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery, to protest the killing.

When the marchers tried to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge that led out of Selma, they were met by the Alabama State Police. The police attacked the peaceful marchers by riding horses into the crowd and beating them. That day is still called “Bloody Sunday,” because so many Black people were hurt, including John. A policeman cracked his skull.

When people all over the country saw this attack on television, it changed many of their minds. Soon new laws were made to make voting possible for everyone.

Movements

Put the replica of the Presidential Medal of Freedom on the underlay.

Guide the wondering about John Lewis's life by using these wondering questions.

Show the children the booklet. Point out the map of the world showing where John Lewis lived, the flag of the country, the time line showing when he lived, and the story printed in the booklet to help the children remember John Lewis.

Model how to place the lesson back on the tray and then carry it back to its spot on the shelf.

Words

Many years later in Atlanta, Black and White people elected John to represent them in the U.S. House of Representatives and he became known as Congressman Lewis. Now he could help pass laws so everyone could be treated the same.

Before John died, President Obama gave him an important medal called the Presidential Medal of Freedom. It is the highest award given to people in our country. John had made a real difference by making "good trouble," pushing back against bad laws, and preaching for people to be good. He kept doing what he learned to do when he was five years old, and wound up helping everyone.

I wonder what parts of John Lewis's story you like the best?

I wonder what part is most important?

I wonder what part is about you or where you might be in the story?

I wonder what part of the story we could leave out and still have all the story we need?

Let me show you what is inside this booklet and how you can use it to remember Congressman John Lewis.

Now let me show you how to put the story away.

Movements

Return to your spot on the circle and begin to dismiss the children to their work.

Words

Here is the Presidential Medal of Freedom Congressman Lewis was given for all the things he did. Here is the Edmund Pettus Bridge where John led the march for voting rights. Here is the “Whites Only” sign that reminds us how John worked to change the laws so Black and White people can go to all the same places and do the same things. And here is a chicken to help us remember how it all started with John preaching to the chickens to be good.

Now I wonder what your work is today? It might be something about this story, or another story you have heard, or something else. Only you know what is right for you.

Instructions for Printing Booklet

Print booklet on photo paper (8.5 × 14).

Print in booklet mode, portrait.

Fold both pages in half.

Trim to fit in stand.

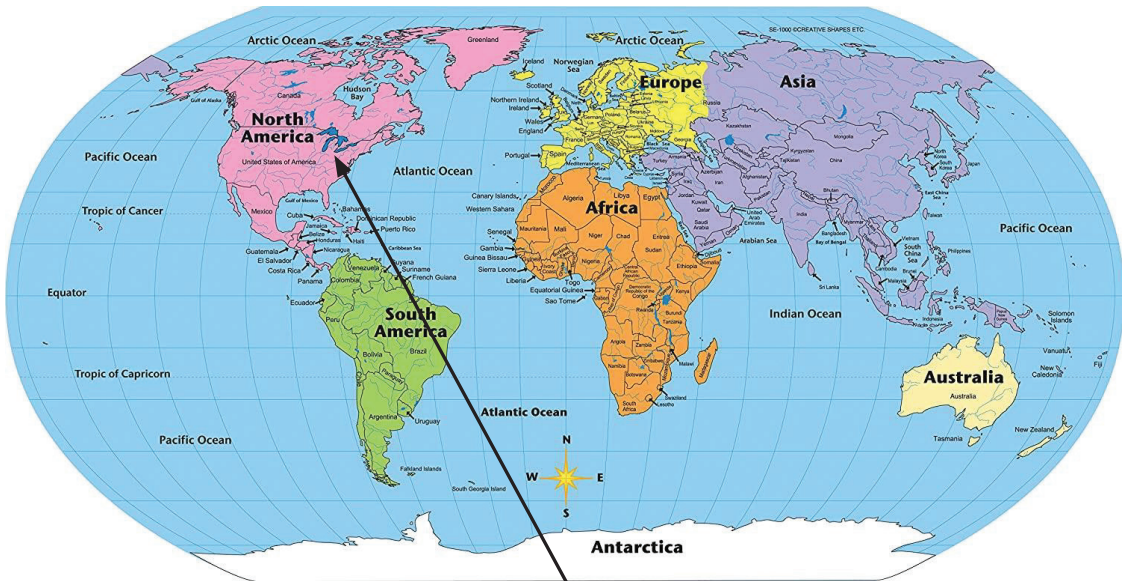
- 1.5" off the bottom
- 1" off the top
- ½" off the right side

Staple on the fold in two places.

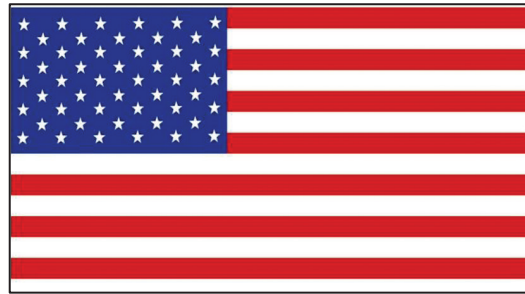


CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS

John

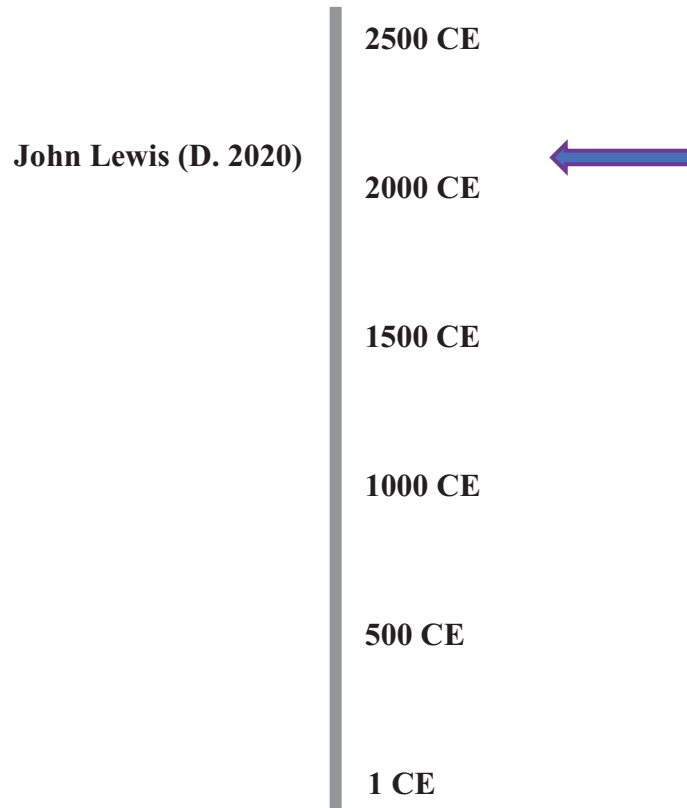


The United States, John Lewis's Country



The Flag of the United States

Lewis



John Lewis

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