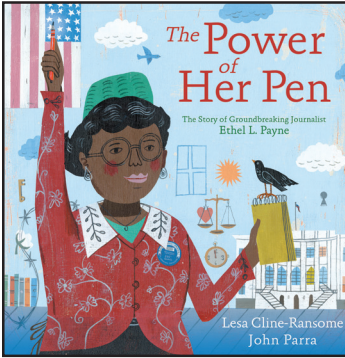


# A Common Core Curriculum Guide to **The Power of Her Pen:** The Story of Groundbreaking Journalist **Ethel L. Payne**

By Lesa Cline-Ransome, Illustrated by John Parra



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Ages 4–8

## BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

Ever since she was a little girl living on the South Side of Chicago, Ethel Payne loved to listen to and to write stories. These stories weren't your average fairy tales either; they were the truths and experiences, joys and inequities of Black people's lives. When Ethel grew up, she traveled the world collecting and writing stories for all of America to hear. She eventually became a White House press correspondent. For nearly five decades, she fought for justice to be carried out by American presidents and policy makers. Known today as the First Lady of the Black Press, Ethel Payne is a welcome reminder that asking the tough questions is the first step toward justice for all.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

### Key Ideas and Details

When considering informational texts such as biographies, the Common Core State Standards encourage students to ask and answer questions as to *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details (RI K.1–3.1). Additionally, students should be able to identify the main topic or focus of specific paragraphs within an informational text (RI K.2–3.2). Finally, CCSS asks students to describe the connection between a series of historical events that take place in a text (RI K.3–3.3). The following questions and activities engage these standards.

1. Who was Ethel Payne? What is she known for?
2. When did Ethel realize that she loved to listen to and to write down people's stories? How did she turn that into a career?
3. Ethel's talent as a writer and journalist took her all around the world. Where were some of the places that she lived and worked? How did this impact the type of stories she could cover?
4. There were a lot of very important historical events and movements that happened during Ethel's life. These events needed journalists, people who write news stories, to share with everyday people what was going on in the world.
  - a. Can you name some of these events? Why were they important?
  - b. How did Ethel's writing help others during these times?

## Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure in informational texts, the Common Core State Standards asks students to determine the meaning of grade-appropriate words and phrases in context (RI K.4–3.4) and to identify the main purpose of a text including what the author wants to answer, explain, or describe (RI K.6–3.6). The following questions and activities engage these standards.

### Biographies

*The Power of Her Pen* is nonfiction, which makes it a real story about Ethel Payne's life. When we tell the story of someone's life, it is called a *biography*. Think about this writing style and format as you answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think the author wrote this biography?
  - a. Why did she call the story *The Power of Her Pen*?
2. Why do you think Ethel Payne is an important person to know?
3. Does Ethel's ambition or perseverance remind you of anyone else you know or have learned about in school? Explain your answer. Who else would you like to read a biography about?

### Using Context for New Vocabulary

When reading, we might come across words that we don't yet know. Context clues, or surrounding words and images, can help us to understand new words. Listen to your teacher or classmate read a few sentences from *The Power of Her Pen*. Are there a few words that you don't recognize? See if you can use context clues to help you define the following words:

1. *Tuition*. "During the Great Depression, with money even tighter than before, Ethel attended a local college with free *tuition* and took writing classes."



2. *Debated*. "After one year, Ethel and her notebook headed to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, where politicians *debated* civil rights."



3. *Demanded*. "Always with an ear for stories, Ethel asked the questions and *demanded* the answers for people whose paths were paved with dreams."



## Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

To learn about the integration of knowledge and ideas, the Common Core State Standards ask students to explain how images help in understanding a text (RI K.8–3.8), and describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text (RI K.7–3.7)

1. Why was Ethel's work so important to her and to her community? Support your answers with examples from the text.
2. What were some of the challenges Ethel may have faced as a journalist writing during the Civil Rights Movement?
3. Why do you think it's important to celebrate Ethel Payne today as a groundbreaking journalist?

### Breaking Color Barriers

In the book's subtitle, Ethel Payne is described as a "groundbreaking journalist." A groundbreaker is a person who does something that hasn't been done before.

Carefully examine the words and illustrations on each of the double-page spreads below to explore how the author and illustrator shared developments of Ethel's groundbreaking work.



The picture to the left shows Ethel's home community in Chicago and her career as a journalist in Washington, DC.

What do you notice in this illustration?

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What do you learn from the text?

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How do the words and illustrations work together?

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What do you notice in this illustration?

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What do you learn from the text?

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How do the words and illustrations work together?

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How does this illustration differ from the one above?

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## Writing

The Common Core State Standards emphasize informative and explanatory writing in the primary grades. The activities below provide opportunities for children to write and supply facts about a topic (W K.2–3.2), research and present knowledge (W K.7–3.7), and gather information from provided sources in order to answer a question (W K.8–3.8).

1. Imagine you are writing a letter to a friend sharing a summary of what you have learned about Ethel Payne. Be sure to include the following information:

- A description of who you are writing about
- Ethel's important life accomplishments
- Her struggles and challenges faced
- How she overcame these struggles and challenges
- What she went on to do afterward

2. Ethel was always drawn to the stories of others, ever since she was a little girl. This interest eventually turned into a talent and then a career. Write about one of your interests. How do you think this interest might blossom into a lifelong talent or career?

## EXTENDING THE EXPERIENCE

### 1. Read other books similar to *The Power of Her Pen*:

- *The Literary Ladies' Guide to the Writing Life: Inspiration and Advice from Celebrated Women Authors Who Paved the Way* by Nava Atlas
- *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark* by Debbie Levy, illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley
- *The Daring Nellie Bly: America's Star Reporter* by Bonnie Christensen
- *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* by Vashti Harrison
- *Miss Mary Reporting: The True Story of Sportswriter Mary Garber* by Sue Macy, illustrated by C. F. Payne
- *Ida B. Wells: Let the Truth Be Told* by Walter Dean Myers, illustrated by Bonnie Christensen
- *Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters* Andrea Davis Pinkney and Stephen Alcorn
- *Voices of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer: The Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement* by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Ekua Holmes
- *Malala's Magic Pencil* by Malala Yousafzai, illustrated by Kerascoet

### 2. Read other books by Lesa Cline-Ransome:

- *Game Changers: The Story of Venus and Serena Williams*
- *Before She Was Harriet*
- *Finding Langston*
- *My Story, My Dance: Robert Battle's Journey to Alvin Ailey*

### 3. Read other books illustrated by John Parra:

- *Frida Kahlo and Her Animalitos* by Monica Brown
- *Green Is a Chile Pepper: A Book of Colors* by Roseanne Thong
- *Marvelous Cornelius: Hurricane Katrina and the Spirit of New Orleans* by Paul Bildner
- *Hey, Wall: A Story of Art and Community* by Susan Verde

Guide written by Melanie Kirkwood Marshall, who holds a BA in Secondary English Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a M.Ed in Reading Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has taught in many learning contexts from High School ELA teacher to Primary Literacy Interventionist. Currently, Melanie is completing her doctoral studies in Multicultural Children's Literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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