

# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO **THESE HANDS**

BY MARGARET H. MASON



## About the Book

Joseph's grandpa could do almost anything with his hands. He could play the piano, throw a curve ball, and tie a triple bowline in three seconds flat. But, as he tells his grandson, there used to be things his hands couldn't do.

## Pre-Reading Activity

Ask students to write down ten things they do with their hands and then share some of them with the rest of the class.

## Discussion Questions

What are some things you can remember your grandparents teaching you to do with your hands?

Why do you think white people would not want to eat bread touched by black people?

What inferences can you make about the images and details of people signing petitions, marching and carrying signs, and gathering and singing? What do you think is the motivation for these activities?

On the page spread showing people carrying signs, you cannot see words on them. What are some slogans you would put on those signs?

On the page spread showing people gathered together singing, what is the building in the background? Where are the people gathered?

What can you infer from the pages in which the boy is alone, but telling his grandfather what he can do with his hands? Why do you think his grandfather is not with him?

What do you think is significant about Joseph holding a pan of bread he baked as the last image of the book?

Why do you think the phrase "Yes I can" is repeated throughout the story?

Discuss with students the concepts of simile and personification. Ask them to identify examples of these in the text.

Explain to students parallel structure and share examples with them. Ask them to identify examples



of parallelism in the story.

### Post-Reading Activities

Most students will be unfamiliar with the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Share with them images from these pictorial books to give them a sense of the times: *A Dream of Freedom* by Diane McWhorter (Scholastic, 2004), *Freedom Walkers* by Russell Freedman (Holiday House, 2006), and *Marching for Freedom* by Elizabeth Partridge (Viking, 2009). You can also read aloud picture book stories to your class listed under recommendations for further reading.

Invite students to present to the class something unique they can do with their hands.

Ask students to write about four things they can do with their hands using the same parallel structure, beginning with “Look at the hands ...” and ending with “—yes I can.”

In her author’s note, Margaret Mason says that a lot of what is known about “how people were treated in the past comes through the retelling of stories ..., or ‘oral history.’” Ask students to interview a family member or family friend who lived during the civil rights movement and can recall events of those times. Invite students to share with the class what they learned from their interviews.

### Recommendations for Further Reading

Coleman, Evelyn. *White Socks Only*. Illus. Tyrone Geter. Albert Whitman, 1996.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Rosa*. Illus. Bryan Collier. Henry Holt, 2005.

McKissack, Patricia C. *Goin’ Someplace Special*. Illus. Jerry Pinkney. Atheneum, 2001.

Pinkney, Andrea Davis. *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*. Illus. Bryan Collier. Little Brown, 2010.

Ramsey, Calvin A. *Ruth and the Green Book*. Illus. Floyd Cooper. Carolrhoda, 2010.

Rappaport, Doreen. *Martin’s Big Words*. Illus. Bryan Collier. Hyperion, 2001

Guide written by Edward T. Sullivan.

Ed Sullivan is a librarian and writer in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. He is the author of many articles, books, and reviews about children’s and young adult literature.