



## Ugliness and Connection

*Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript*

### ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

**Doreen Rappaport** is an award-winning author of close to fifty children's books. She is known for fiction and non-fiction books that celebrate multiculturalism, the retelling of folktales and myths, history, the lives of world leaders, and the stories of those she calls "not-yet-celebrated." Her books include *BEYOND COURAGE: THE UNTOLD STORY OF JEWISH RESISTANCE DURING THE HOLOCAUST* and *MARTIN'S BIG WORDS*, as well as many other Big Word biographies. [doreenrappaport.com](http://doreenrappaport.com)

### Talk it Out

Read the following quote from Mahatma Gandhi.

*Be the change that you wish to see in the world.*

Do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer using examples from Doreen's story where applicable. Given the terrible circumstances in Mississippi in the 1960s, do you think you would have gone to McComb to live and work in the African-American community? Why or why not?

Generous and giving people make use of what they have to help others in times of crisis. Doreen used her teaching ability, and Mr. Holmes used his restaurant and pie. Brainstorm a list of gifts or talents that you have for those in need.

Sometimes a slice of pie is not just a slice of pie. What did the slice of apple pie at the end of Doreen's story mean to Mr. Holmes? What did it mean to Doreen?

### Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- During her time in McComb, Doreen saw (1) people behaving reprehensibly and (2) people behaving with generosity and goodness. Write a story that includes both as well.
- Write a scene in which Doreen explains to her friends why she is heading to McComb to help in the African-American community. Include one friend who is supportive and one friend who thinks she is not smart putting herself in danger.
- Think of three examples of a time when you would do something that frightened you, in order to help others. Write a paragraph about each.

### **TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY**

*Doreen: The sit-ins started in 1960. The sit-ins started, and people were pulled off luncheon counters, and they were pummeled. And they had coffee spilled over them, and they had spaghetti on them, and they were pulled and they were ... You learned how to roll into a ball and hold your head. They were kicked and they were beaten—this was all over the newspapers. So the national consciousness was raised by seeing photographs of these things and reading accounts.*

*So by the time I went down there, I was very knowledgeable about what life would really be like. Well, I should say, I was knowledgeable, but when confronted with the fact that the white police cars are going back and forth in McComb, Mississippi, at night, and you're walking to the restaurant to eat, and you never know—they could stop and they could question you. They could grab you; they could take you. So we always walked in groups of people. It wouldn't have saved you if they'd wanted to pull you in.*

*I went for a weekend with my boyfriend to New Orleans, and we went to relax because we were in a constant state of tension. And we went to listen to music. And it's not evil, but what I saw was ugliness. I saw white kids, college age—maybe older, drinking in the streets, and when black people would pass or whatever, I heard insults. I was on the edge of my seat constantly knowing or thinking, what might happen to them and what would the two of us do? Would we interfere and risk ourselves, our being beaten up, too? And a lot of the whites were drunk, and they were drinking, and they would zigzag around on the streets. It was such contempt, it was such dismissal of human beings. That's ugly. That's evil.*

*The most touching thing that happened to me: We ate every night in Mr. Holmes's restaurant. We ate Southern food. In the black community. There was one restaurant. It wasn't a fancy place. Mr. Holmes was just the sweetest man in the world. He always had some pie I did not want. I said, "Mr. Holmes, all I want is an apple pie. How about an apple pie?" And he didn't have it. He had custard*

*pie, he had pecan pie, he didn't have an apple pie. The last night, we almost didn't go to Mr. Holmes's restaurant to eat. Thank God I did, because Mr. Holmes had made me an apple pie. He loved the civil rights workers. He appreciated that people had come there, and he was proud of his restaurant. He was willing to give and be generous.*

© Julie Sternberg and Marcie Colleen 2016  
Illustration by Matthew Cordell