

TEACHERS GUIDE



THE GRACE OF SILENCE

A Family Memoir

*Michele
Norris*

CO-HOST OF NPR'S
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED



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“A powerful plea to readers to doggedly pursue their families’ story lines. She reminds us that speaking candidly about race in America starts not at the president’s teleprompter but at our own dinner tables.” —*The Washington Post*

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MICHELE NORRIS WEBSITE



About the Book

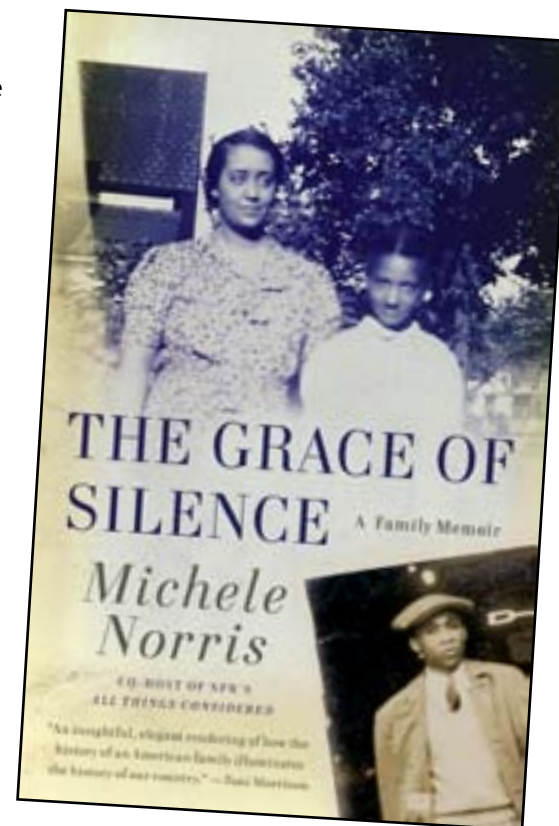
“An insightful, elegant rendering of how the history of an American family illuminates the history of our country.” —**Toni Morrison**



In many ways, *The Grace of Silence* is an “accidental” memoir. Michele Norris, co-host of National Public Radio’s flagship program *All Things Considered*, set out to research and write a book about “the hidden conversation” on race unfolding throughout America. She planned to base her book on the frank disclosures of others but she realized that “the conversation” in her own family had not been forthright. When she listened to the hidden conversation about race in her own family she learned that her seemingly ordinary postal worker parents had been sitting on secrets that placed her family smack in the middle of some little known chapters of American History.

Norris unearthed painful family secrets that compelled her to question her own self-understanding: from her father’s shooting by a Birmingham police officer weeks after his discharge from the U.S. Navy in 1946 to her maternal grandmother’s job as an itinerant Aunt Jemima peddling pancake mix to white farm women in the Midwest. In what became a profoundly personal and bracing journey into her family’s past, Norris traveled from her childhood home in Minneapolis to her ancestral roots in the Deep South to explore the reasons for the “things left unsaid” by her father and mother when she was growing up. In the process she came to terms with her own identity, understanding in new ways how her character was forged by both revelation and silence. She discovered more about underexamined chapters of American History and the challenges of chasing the American Dream when America is going through such rapid change.

Extraordinary for Norris’s candor in examining her own racial legacy, *The Grace of Silence* is also informed by rigorous research, a strong evocation of time and place, scores of interviews with ordinary folk, and wise observations about evolving attitudes about race in America today that are at once encouraging and disturbing. *The Grace of Silence* is a powerful and haunting book that prompts readers to think about their own histories and how they too may have been shaped by the weight of silence and the things that for various reasons have been left unsaid. The book is a powerful teaching tool for its candor and its role in shedding a glowing light on little known chapters of American History.



About the Author

“Jaw-dropping. Can’t put down. . . Riveting. . . [Norris] uses her signature calm and steady voice to open up about her complicated relatives.” —**Essence**



Michele Norris is one of the most trusted voices in American journalism. Her voice informs, engages and enlightens listeners with thoughtful interviews and in-depth reporting as one of the hosts of NPR’s flagship afternoon broadcast, *All Things Considered*. Norris uses an approachable interviewing style that is at once relaxed and rigorous. She’s interviewed world leaders, nobel laureates, oscar winners, American presidents, military leaders, influential newsmakers and even astronauts traveling in outer space.

Before joining NPR in 2002, Norris spent almost ten years as a reporter for ABC News in the Washington Bureau. She has also worked as a staff writer for *The Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Norris has received numerous awards for her work. In 2009, she was named “Journalist of the Year” by the National Association of Black Journalists. NABJ recognized Norris for her body of work, in addition to her coverage of the 2008 presidential campaign — when she co-hosted NPR’s Democratic presidential candidates debate, covered both conventions, anchored multihour election and inauguration live broadcasts, and moderated a series of candid conversations with voters on the intersection of race and politics. That series earned Norris and Morning Edition host Steve Inskeep an Alfred I. duPont —Columbia

University Award for excellence in broadcasting. A four-time Pulitzer Prize entrant, Norris has also been honored with NABJ’s 2006 Salute to Excellence Award, for her coverage of Hurricane Katrina; the University of Minnesota’s Outstanding Achievement Award; and the 1990 Livingston Award for a series about a six-year-old who lived in a crack house. That series was reprinted in the book, *Ourselves Among Others*, along with essays by Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela, Annie Dillard, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. She was named one of *Essence* Magazine’s 25 Most Influential Black Americans in 2009; elected to *Ebony* Magazine’s Power 150 list in 2009; and honored with *Ebony*’s 8th Outstanding Women in Marketing & Communications Award, in 2007.

Norris also earned both an Emmy Award and Peabody Award for her contribution to ABC News coverage of 9/11. She is on the judging committee for both the John Chancellor Award for Excellence in Journalism, and the Livingston Awards. Norris is also a frequent guest on *Meet the Press* and *The Chris Matthews Show* on NBC. She attended the University of Wisconsin, where she majored in electrical engineering and graduated from the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where she studied journalism. She lives in Washington D.C. with her husband Broderick Johnson, an attorney with their two young children and an adult step-son.



Pre-Reading

ACTIVITIES AND TOOLS

How to Use this Guide:

The Grace of Silence Teaching Guide allows readers to connect with Michele Norris's research and discoveries as she tried to better understand her family's complex racial legacy. This family memoir takes readers on a journey through American history spanning several decades. The book's content effortlessly connects all disciplines of language arts and history. The guide is designed to enable readers to navigate *The Grace of Silence* through sequential chapters, using the guided questions and extended activities. All are designed to elicit deeper thinking and lively group discussions. Teachers can also easily pluck out individual chapters in any sequence, and use them as a stand-alone exercise to enrich the curriculum. Additional resources and interactive materials are available at [the author's website](#).

Guided Reading Questions:

Follow along with the guided reading questions for each chapter. Questions are taken directly out of the chapters, allowing comprehension to be easily assessed.

Floating Pull-Outs:

You will notice floating vocabulary and questions in the left-hand column of the reading guide. These pull-outs are designed to help guide discussion and clarify new vocabulary.

Extension:

The extension exercises are designed to help readers delve deeper into key concepts and subject matter broached in this memoir. Some extensions are merely extended discussion questions, while others are interactive activities that can be used as assessment tools.

Activity: Daily Reading Journal

Before and after reading each chapter, create a daily journal. Have readers reflect on questions they have brainstormed ahead of time. For example:

What is going on at this point in world history?

What is the main character thinking and feeling?

Why? What do you think will happen next?

What characters might appear in the next chapter?

Have I made any personal connections to the author or characters in this memoir?

What is one new thing I learned after reading this chapter?

Activity: Timeline

Have readers create a timeline to help benchmark the events in Mrs. Norris's memoir.

For example: Using register tape, have students keep track of the events in the book, making sure to jot down crucial dates, places, and events. After each chapter, have them research that time period and mark three key historical events that happened during that time. Record Ms. Norris's events on the top of the timeline and the historical dates on the bottom.

Timelines can be folded up and housed in a clear plastic bag and stapled into that daily reading journal or kept in the classroom. Have students create a multimedia timeline. Include hyperlinks, pictures, and music of that time period. Students should add to the timeline after each chapter. Use any word processing software to complete.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

THE INTRODUCTION: Before reading the introduction, have readers discuss and participate in a questioning exercise to prime the conversation.

Activity: Filter

Michele Norris uses the word "filter" in her memoir. A "filter" can be used in multiple occasions and for multiple reasons. Ask your readers to think about this word. Use the tiered questions below to elicit connections:

What is a filter, especially as used in this context?

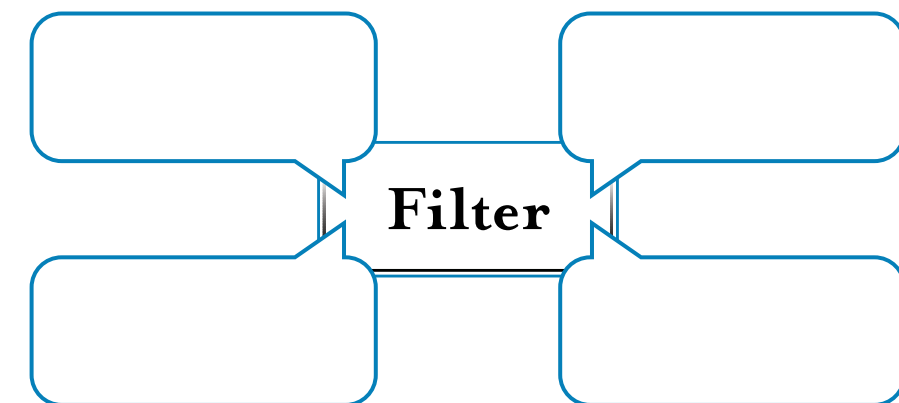
What are they used for?

In what type of situation might someone use a filter?

Do people that you know filter?

Why do people filter?

Record Responses on This Chart



Extension:

What does "uneasy" look like? Sound like?

What does the word "rise" mean to you in your life?

In the book, Michele Norris writes, "...if you ever feel like you're at the end of your rope, tie a knot and hold on until you can start climbing again." What does she mean by this?

What are the occasions, if any, that you become aware of your race?

What has forged your racial identity?

What have your parents armed you with?

What does it mean to be shaped by the weight of silence?

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 1: DADDY

QUESTIONS:

What is an eternal optimist?

Belvin Norris, Jr., was a fixer. List reasons why Michele Norris has labeled his personality this way.

How does Michele Norris's father lighten the mood while waiting in the emergency room at the hospital?

What is the difference between "race" and "racism"?

What is the name of Belvin Norris's brother? What town does he live in when Belvin Norris first takes ill?

Why is it especially hard to become ill and go to the hospital so far away from home?

What does Norris mean when she says, "she sensed a fake cheer?"

What meal did she make for her father when he came to visit her in Chicago?

What was Michele Norris's "sofa fund"? What did the "sofa fund" and the reaction to the old chair in the living room say about Michele's father and his outlook on life? (p.5)

Who are the "satin dolls" and why does Michele Norris use that term to describe them? (p.8)

What prompted the "satin dolls" to make a judgment about Belvin Norris at the airport? Was it just his speech?

What does it mean to be a "model minority" and how did that guide Michele Norris's actions at the airport with her ailing father? (p.7)

Who agrees to watch over Michele's "pa" on his flight back to the Twin Cities?

What message might Michele's father have been trying to impart before he got on his last flight home?

EXTENSION:

What do you think a "model minority" is? What does it mean to be a "model minority" in today's world?

Michele Norris writes: "Here is the conundrum of racism. You know it's there, but you can't prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, how it colors a particular situation." (p.7) What does she mean by that?

As a final exercise, ask participants to list the attributes associated with "race" and those associated with "racism."

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 2: BLOCK BUSTERS

QUESTIONS:

Do "please and thank-you" children exist?

What is the Norris family "golden hour?"

On a typical Minnesota winter morning what makes the "twack, swiish, thud" sound? (p.11)

Describe Minnesotan shoveling etiquette.

Why did Belvin and Betty Norris choose the South Side of Minneapolis to purchase their first home?

How did Belvin and Betty sidestep realtors? Why?

What might have helped "seal the deal" with the Fuller family when they decided to sell their home to Belvin and Betty Norris?

What did "showtime" mean for Betty Norris?

How long did it take the Oakland Avenue neighbors to put out their for sale signs?

What is a DP? (p.16)

Why were the neighbors uncomfortable with a black family moving into the neighborhood?

How did those kinds of barriers change over time?

What was Betty's adoptive phrase and coda?

Michele describes her mother as stately and epic. List characteristics of Betty's personality that would create this persona.

Why did Oakland Avenue look like a movie set one afternoon? How did Michele's mother play the leading role?

Why did Betty Norris tell her sister that she was glad the burglar was not black?

EXTENSION:

Belvin and Betty Norris advise Michele to "Wake up and smell the opportunity." Discuss what these words of wisdom might mean to a young black girl growing up in the midwest. What do they mean to you?

How did Fair Housing Laws change housing patterns in America?

Research "white flight". Create a map to illustrate areas where "white flight" was prevalent. See the resource guide for more information on this topic.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 3: AUNT JEMIMAS

QUESTIONS:

Was the Aunt Jemima campaign a success?

What does lone mean by she “decided to be happy?” (p.23)

Who is Bad News Brown? Where did he get that nickname?

lone Brown is dubbed the “Queen Mother.” List three reasons for this prestigious nickname.

What did it mean if a “TOURIST” sign was hanging in a midwestern home window?

What secret did Michele’s uncle Jimmy reveal about his mother, lone?

Why does Jimmy describe lone as a “small-town girl who never got to shine”?

How does the Aunt Jemima that appears on the logo today differ from the image used decades ago?

Why does Betty not want to discuss her mother’s secret profession with Michele?

Who discovered lone Brown and hired her to become a traveling Aunt Jemima? How was she discovered?

Who are Chris Rutt and Charles Underwood?

Who popularized the phrase “I’se in town, honey,” and when did it become popular?

Who were the “pinch hitters?”

Linda Moore and Horace Huntley have very different views of Aunt Jemima. Why?

Why is Michele Norris reluctant to answer the little boy who asks, “Who is Aunt Jemima?”

How did lone Brown use her work to improve the image of black people?

Who IS Aunt Jemima? What did she represent decades ago? What does she represent now?

EXTENSION:

Create a timeline to illustrate the lifespan of the Aunt Jemima advertising campaigns.

Michele Norris describes the Aunt Jemima on the Quaker Oats package as having a “tortured history behind that smile.” What do you think she is referring to? Discuss the link between advertising and stereotyping.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 4: THE GARDEN

QUESTIONS:

“Don’t you know we have to undo what Hollywood does?”

How did the Norris family try and “top” the all-American white families in the Coca-Cola commercials?

What did Belvin and Betty Norris do for a living?

What are “glad rags” and why were they so important to Michele’s parents? (p.42)

The author said her parents spoke loudly in other ways, beyond the way they dressed or carried themselves. What does that mean?

“It is the trying that counted.”

Describe Belvin Norris’s childhood home in Alabama.

What special name does Belvin Norris give to his roses?

Michele Norris says her parents seemed to “glide to the finish”. Describe the family dynamic after the separation. (p.45)

What story does Betty Norris finally divulge to her daughter, which explains “the beginning of the end” of her marriage?

After Betty Norris moved eight blocks away, how did Belvin Norris try to pick up the slack?

Michele Norris said she learned the importance of grace from her parents’ relationship after the divorce. To what was she referring?

EXTENSION:

Develop a “victory garden” of your own. Include things that make you proud, awards and achievements, fond memories and inspiring moments. Make this a timed activity or a long term-project. Students can create quick sketches with labels, multimedia presentations, or artistic mosaics.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 5: ALABAMA

QUESTIONS:

What was Belvin Norris's nickname when he lived in Birmingham?

Why do Belvin Norris and his brothers say "we all get a cut and we all get cut?"

What do Belvin Norris, Sr., and his wife, Fannie, do for a living? What do they do to make extra money?

What ritual do the Orthodox Jews and the author's grandparents have in common?

Describe the journey Michele would endure to get to Ensley every summer.

When the author explains that a part of Alabama lives inside her, what does she mean?

Belvin Norris, Sr., said, to "dress for where you're going." How did he dress the part? What did he wear? (p. 56)

What does riding "jitney" mean? (p. 57)

How and why was Michele Norris used as a kind of armor while traveling with her grandfather in Birmingham?

How do people signify today?

What is the importance of armor?

EXTENSION:

Michele says that if there were a sign in front of the Norris's Ensley home, it would read, Great food. Good people. No Dummies." What would the sign outside your grandparents or ancestral home say? Create your own sign. Discuss.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 6: A SECRET

QUESTIONS:

Who calls himself "the Last of the Mohicans?" (p. 61)

Where is Pill Hill? How did it get its name?

How did Uncle Joe turn criminals into readers?

What issues get Uncle Joe worked up? List three.

What secret does Uncle Joe let slip over oatmeal? What is Mickey's reaction?

What does putting a little English in your walk mean?

What song from the author's youth did Belvin Norris detest the most? Why?

Who is Governor George Wallace? What group vocalized his stance on integration?

Why does Michele Norris describe her father as "Zen?"

List the "mysteries" Michele Norris discovers about her father.

Why did Belvin Norris keep the shooting a secret?

Why were family members who knew about the shooting reluctant to talk about?

Think of a "you know" story of your own.

EXTENSION:

Research the sacrifices minorities made to earn their precious voting right. Use a graphic organizer to record your findings. Printable organizer available in the Resources section of the guide.

Discuss the repercussions of keeping secrets. Use the cause-and-effect activity to help facilitate discussion. Printable organizer available in the Resources section of this guide.

Music plays a crucial role in this chapter. What role does music play in history? When has it united, divided or caused an uproar in society?

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 7: THE DOCKETT

QUESTIONS:

Who is Jim Baggett?

Is it better to confront, or look the other way?

What disheartening advice does he give Michele Norris at the beginning of her quest for the truth?

What does Michele Norris mean when she says that her, "her fate had been a matter of serendipity?"

Michele Norris receives an email from Jim. What does he find out about Belvin and Woody and the night of February 7, 1946?

Why does this information not sound right to Michele?

Describe the three main books you could find in every working-class black home.

How did the Ensley lending and purchasing system work? Why was it founded? Can you think of a case where someone you know had to be resourceful to get around an obstacle?

List 2 reasons the Birmingham Public library was off limits to the author as a child?

Describe what Michele Norris felt like scanning the docket, looking for her father's name.

Describe in chronological order the arrests of Woodrow, Belvin and John. Who were the arresting officers?

What were the charges and why did they change over the course of the night?

EXTENSION:

Read the story *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes. Discuss the issues the girls face in the story. Look at the scene below, taken from the Chicago Children's theatre adaption of the book. Fill in the quote bubbles for each character.



What would be the right thing for the characters to say? What would happen in today's society? See printable activity in the Resources section of this guide.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 8: SERVICE

QUESTIONS:

What type of hobby was popular in the South Side of Minneapolis in the late 1970s?

What does it mean to compartmentalize?

Michele says of one of her father's friends: "an essential part of his manhood was trapped in that frame." What role do military portraits play in the lives of WWII veterans? Why did Belvin Norris treat his military photos in a different fashion? Why did he shove relics from his past in a box buried in the basement closet, next to the Christmas ornaments?

How were the black soldiers the physical backbone of the armed forces?

What piece of memorabilia does Michele find while cleaning out her father's bureau?

What happened on August 6, 1943?

Why did Belvin Norris choose the navy?

In 1942 how many black men were serving in the navy? What did the number increase to by February 1942?

Explain how a soldier could feel "patriotic and frustrated"?

How did the navy go about finding and enlisting "physically fit" black men?

What was so special about the teachers at A. H. Parker High School?

Why was the naval station at Great Lakes created? (p. 89)

List three noncombative roles to which black enlistees were typically assigned in the Navy.

Why did Belvin Norris wear a crescent-shaped insignia on his uniform? Explain.

When was Belvin Norris discharged? Why?

What sentiment, from a black soldier, is expressed in the March 1944 issue of *New Republic*?

Why did the navy adopt new attitudes toward men of color and their abilities over the course of WWII?

EXTENSION:

Explain how a soldier could feel "patriotic and frustrated?"

Research the role of men of color in the armed forces during World War II in the navy and the army. What were their contributions? How did they serve?

Prior to October 1944, black women were barred from the Waves. The efforts of Mildred McAfee and Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune helped the secretary of the navy push through the admittance of African American women into military service. Research the role of women of color in the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, better known as the Waves.

Research the famous graduates of A. H. Parker High School. Create a yearbook to showcase their accomplishments. This project can be turned into a multimedia presentation.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 9: THE SHOOTING

QUESTIONS:

- Why was there a clothing shortage in Birmingham in the mid -1940s?
- What were the components to the Truman belt-tightening initiative?
- What was daily life like for a black person in Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1940s?
- What effect did Birmingham's strict segregation laws have on black-owned businesses? Describe Fourth Avenue.
- What is unique about the tenants of the seven-story Masonic Temple and the Pythian Temple?
- Who is Johnnie Perkins?
- How did Betty Norris hear of her husband's shooting? What advice does she give her daughter regarding that event?
- Why does Julia Beaton not trust American white people? Discuss the incidents that created her mistrust in white America. Why does she carry so much anger when others do not?
- In Morris's recollection of the shooting, how did Woody instinctively try to save his brother's life?
- What would provoke a man, such as Belvin Norris to "let his spirit fly" and confront a white police officer who tried to block his path in a city under strict segregation? (p. 112)
- The author said she came to understand how a man can break from character "when he concludes that his dignity and self-worth are more important to him than anything else in life." What does this mean?(p. 111)

What is a Boom Town?

Is race something that affects all people?

EXTENSION:

Discuss the portrayal of segregation in American Film. Use a graphic organizer to display your findings. See printable organizer in the Resource section of this guide.

There are several films and documentaries that explore the civil rights movement. How have filmmakers explored the pre-civil rights era?

Michele Norris discusses the advice many black parents give their children regarding white police officers. She says that although it is "corrective" it is also "corrosive". Think about the differences between corrective and corrosive. Describe how advice, passed down stories, and even urban legends can be corrective and corrosive at the same time. List examples.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 10: THE WAR AT HOME

QUESTIONS:

- Who had begun descending on City Hall, "ready eager to embrace their civic duty to vote?" (p. 115)
- List two crucial events that happened on January 12, 1946, involving WWII veterans.
- What does the SNYC stand for? What were its two main requirements of voters?
- Why did Birmingham's black veterans gather on January 23, 1946?
- What is inscribed in stone atop the Birmingham courthouse?
- What objects did Belvin Norris keep in his back pocket?
- What important message was housed in every issue of Birmingham World?
- Summarize the Boswell Amendment of 1945. Why was it created?
- List three main points of Eugene "Bull" Connor's letter to the president.
- What stigma was the state of Alabama forming domestically and abroad?
- Describe the two types of justice Anne Braden writes about.
- Who is Timothy Hood?
- Who is Isaac Woodard? What role did Orson Welles play in his story?
- What role did Isaac Woodard play in President Harry Truman's decision to integrate the armed forces?

Why are collections so important to a person's history?

What would you do to ensure your right to vote?

EXTENSION:



Look at the photograph to the left. Create a one-paragraph caption for this historical picture. Make sure to include all features of a good caption. Group option: Display blown-up version of this picture. Have students groups write an appropriate caption on Post-it notes. Each group will present their ideas to the class and adhere their Post-it to the picture.

Research Harry Truman's decision to integrate the armed forces. What were prevailing attitudes at that time? What kind of resistance did he face? What role did the NAACP play? How was Truman informed of the Isaac Woodard case? What kind of campaign was there to promote the integration of the armed forces? Research the treatment of returning black World War II veterans.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 11: A DATE WITH JUSTICE

QUESTIONS:

What's the difference between proud and highfalutin?

Summarize the reactions of Patsy Quarles, Hugh Shull and Davis Schull upon hearing their family history's affiliation with the affidavit of Isaac Woodard.

Name the five officers involved in the shooting of Belvin Norris.

How was Carl Baggett's lifestyle similar to the Norris family's?

Why was Birmingham dubbed "Bombingham in the 60's"?

What was the starting pay for a Birmingham police officer? By the standards of post-WWII, was that a high-paying occupation?

What was the reputation of the Birmingham police department in the 1940s and why?

Did integration work as planned?

Describe Macon Espy's career as a policeman. List three facts about Macon that Betty Koonce reveals.

Betty Koonce talks about the "old school" in Birmingham. When she speaks of progress, what does she mean?

Who are Crook and Justice?

What does Aubrey Justice reveal about working with Bull Connor?

What would it have been like working for the Birmingham Police Department if you did not agree with the policies of Bull Connor?

Why is the clock at the 16th Street Baptist church stuck on 10:22 a.m.? What were the casualties that day? How was the bombing a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement? (p. 155)

The author says she hears the voices of both her parents at different times when she rents a bright red mustang. What advice or admonitions did she "hear"?

The author notes that, much to her surprise, Belvin Norris and Aubrey Justice had similarities. List five of those similarities.

To whom does Belvin Norris refer when he talks about "that Atlanta crowd"?

How has Parker High school changed since integration?

The author talks about the ironies of integration. What does she mean?

EXTENSION:

Michele says that the people that resided around Parker High were always poor, but rich with social capital. What does she mean by social capital? Think about the repercussions of a community lacking social capital. Make a list of the problems facing that type of community. Make a short-term list and a long-term list.

Guided Reading

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER 12: HOME

QUESTIONS:

"You just crossed a river on your own two feet, now you can do anything."

Why did Belvin decide to leave his hometown?

What story does Horace Huntley recall about his bus ride in Canada? Why was he scared to death?

Who was nicknamed "Clark Gable's black brother"? Why did he befriend Belvin Norris?

What is wanderlust?

How did Jimmy, Woody, and Belvin end up in Minnesota? Why were they so amazed at the dance hall?

How did Belvin meet Elizabeth? Why was he so taken with her?

Why does Michele's mom take her to the barbershop? What is Michele's reaction to this outing?

Why was there always an unspoken tension between Norris and his brother Simpson?

Belvin Norris loved to travel. Why does he pick "ordinary" destinations as vacation spots? How do his vacations connect to his history?

What was *Julia*? Why was it so popular?

How did guidance counselors try and stifle Michele, James, and Sophia?

What was the reason for Michele's visit to the *Intrepid*? Why would Belvin Norris be smiling down on the children after their visit?

EXTENSION:

What family legacy has been handed down to you? Create a coat of arms, banner or flag to display the components of your community legacy, your family legacy, your school legacy, and your racial legacy.

Mini Lesson

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

PLAY THE RACE CARD!

MATERIALS

For this activity you will need:

- A RACE CARD by Michele Norris for each participant.

Request a set for your group by email to graceofsilence@gmail.com.

PROCEDURES

1. **Choose** 6-8 Race Card Essays to share with the group. [<Download here>](#) Read the selected essays aloud and ask participants to react to the readings. For example: "I'm going to share with you a collection of essays. I want you to think about the thoughts, feelings and history behind these essays." Probing questions: -Who do you think wrote these essays? -What time period do you think these come from? -What part of the world do the authors come from? -How do you think the authors were feeling when they were writing? -What ethnicity do you think the authors are?

2. **Share** the following excerpt from Michele Norris :

"My idea was to use the postcards to get the conversation started but I quickly realized once I hit the road on book tour that I didn't really need that kind of incentive. All over the country people who came to hear about my story wound up telling me theirs."

"Despite all the talk about America's consternation or cowardice when it comes to talking about race, I seemed to have found auditorium after auditorium full of people who were more than willing to unburden themselves on this prickly topic."

"So the postcards that were supposed to serve as a conversation starter wound up instead serving as an epilogue. People took the cards with them and mulled over the assignment. I hoped that a few might send them back to me via email or through the U.S. Postal Service. I tried to be realistic, set low expectations and then held my breath. Well, much to my surprise an awful lot of people took the bait. Dozens of those little postcards started arriving in the mail every week and bit by bit more and more of those little six-word "essays" piled up in my inbox from all over the country, and them amazingly from all over the world. Just this week, I heard from people in Australia, London, Chile and Abu Dhabi."

"They are thoughtful, funny, heartbreaking, brave, teeming with anger and shimmering with hope. Some will with make you smile. Others might make you squirm. And there are a few that might make you wonder why they deserve a place on my [website's Race Card Wall](#)."

"Here's the answer. If the intention is to use these cards to get a peek at America's honest views about Race, then I must try to honor those people who offer up candor, even if what they share is unsavory or unacceptable in some people's eyes."

3. **Question:** Why does Michele Norris say "talking about race is like cooking with onions." Discuss. "Talking about race is like cooking with onions. Sometimes it makes you cry. Sometimes it deepens the flavor. Sometimes it just gives you a wicked case of indigestion. Sometimes, all of the above and more."

Chart the group's responses.

4. **Pass out** The Race Card to each member of the group.

5. **Post** responses.

OPTION 1:


Log on to: <http://michele-norris.com/the-race-card-2/>
Have group members post responses electronically.

OPTION 2:

Collect and email responses to graceofsilence@gmail.com and we will post for your group.

-OPTION 3:

Mail Postcard via United States Postal Service. (mailing address is posted on The Race Card)



TEACHERS GUIDE

THE GRACE OF SILENCE

A Family Memoir

*Michele
Norris*

CO-HOST OF NPR'S
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

