Teaching Notes for THE UNDEFEATED

By Kwame Alexander & Kadir Nelson

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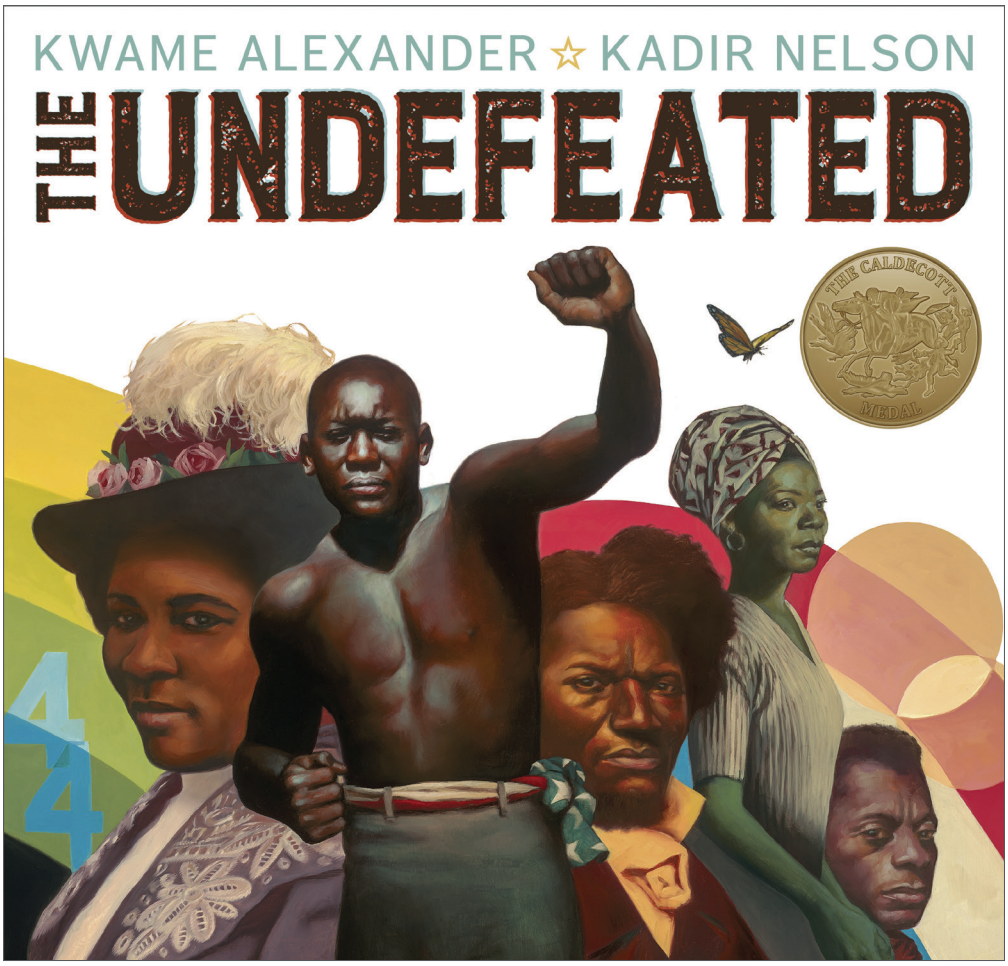


These notes have been written by the teachers at CLPE to provide schools with sessions which focus on the importance of illustration in building a narrative and supporting children's response. They build on our work supporting teachers to use picture books to enhance critical thinking and develop creative approaches in art and writing. The teaching notes show how picture books can be used in schools to enhance children's reading comprehension and composition of their own creative writing. We hope you find them useful.

CLPE
CENTRE FOR LITERACY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Before beginning this sequence of activities:

Collect together a range of art materials that will allow the children to engage in the activities exploring illustration, for example: cartridge paper, sketching pencils 2B–4B, oil pastels, acrylic paints and a variety of brushes.

In order to engage fully with the layers of meaning and the details within the illustrations, it is advisable to ensure that you have access to a visualiser or similar device to enable you to share images from the text with the pupils on a large scale.

Suggested Activities:

N.B. The activities suggested are planned with children at Upper Primary and Secondary aged pupils in mind. If you are using this sequence of activities with children younger than this, you will need to carefully consider and modify the content to suit their age and emotional maturity.

Capturing and profiling a subject

Begin by appreciating the book as an object: share the front cover with the children opening it out fully to show the range of figures depicted on the front and back covers. *Are any of these figures familiar to you? What do you know about them from the ways in which they have been depicted by the illustrator? What can you tell from the way they are dressed, the props they have been given? Do you think the people depicted all represent the same period in history? What suggests this to you?*

Read the title, ***'The Undefeated'*** and the quote on the back of the book: ***'This is for the unforgettable. The unafraid. The undefeated.'*** *How do you think the words on the cover relate to the cover art? What do you think the author and illustrator are trying to convey about these people?*

Now turn to the Afterword, and read the letter written to the reader by author Kwame Alexander. *What more do you learn about the book and those that will feature in it from this letter? Have you heard of any of the people or events mentioned before? What do you learn about the author's personal connection to the text and why he wrote it?*

Re-read the sentence: ***I wanted to establish from the very beginning that much of what I'm talking about in this poem, so much of American history, has been forgotten, left out of the textbooks, and that to truly know who we are as a country, we have to accept and embrace all of our woes and wonders.*** *What do you think the author is saying here? What do you know about the kind of history that the author is referencing here? What do you know about Black History in the US or in the UK? What do you think he might be referring to in the phrase* ***all of our woes and wonders?*** Take time to explore the prior knowledge that the children already have about this subject. They may talk about events like the mass enslavement of Africans and their transportation by slave traders to the US and UK, the Civil Rights movement, prominent historical figures celebrated for their achievements in politics, music, poetry, literature or sport, the continued fight for equality faced by Black citizens across the globe, that they may be aware of through the Black Lives Matter movement.

Now think back to the title, ***'The Undefeated'*** and the quote the author references from Maya Angelou. You may wish to look at a fuller quote below:

You see, we may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated. It may even be necessary to encounter the defeat, so that we can know who we are. So that we can see, oh, that happened, and I rose. I did get knocked down flat in front of the whole world, and I rose. I didn't run away - I rose right where I'd been knocked down. And then that's how you get to know yourself. You say, hmm, I can get up! I have enough of life in me to make somebody jealous enough to want to knock me down. I have so much courage in me that I have the effrontery, the incredible gall to stand up. That's it. That's how you get to know who you are.

Think about this quote in reference to all the other events mentioned in the Afterword. *What do you expect from the book you are about to read? What and/or who do you think the book will focus on? How do you think it aims to make impact on the reader?*

Now turn to the front endpapers. *What is the impact of seeing the title repeated here with no accompanying imagery? Where is our attention focussed?* Turn over to the inside title page, where the title is spread large across two pages. *What is the impact of now seeing the title repeated three times? What effect does this create?* Look at the images of the cranes chosen to accompany the text, consider the way they are captured in flight, travelling from left to right across the page. *What does this make you think about or feel? Why do you think the illustrator chose this as the imagery to accompany the text here?*

Turn the page and compare this with the illustration of Jesse Owens depicted here. Look again at the sense of movement conveyed, at the scale used on the page so that Owens is bursting out of the boundaries of the page, how he is positioned on the right hand side, moving forward in the same direction as the book. Look at how he is bathed in light from above, as if leaping from the shadows below. *What does this make you think and feel about the person portrayed? Look at the hyper-realistic style used by Kadir Nelson, rendering the subjects as if they are photographs. How does this style help you to engage with the fact that this is a real figure from history?*

Read aloud the accompanying text from the page. *How does the text work with the illustration to show respect and reverence for the figure portrayed and their achievements?* Look at the way that certain words and phrases are emphasised through their increased size. Why do you think these words have been chosen?

Using the comprehensive notes in the back of the book, read more about Jesse Owens. You could also engage in some additional research around this incredible athlete. The book *Jesse Owens: Little People, Big Dreams* by Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara and Anna Katherina Jansen (Frances Lincoln Children's Books) provides more information about this inspirational figure. Explore the alliteration used in the phrase ***hurdled history***. *What do you think this phrase means, now you know more about him? What do you think the author is saying when he writes that figures like Owens* ***opened a world of possible****? What other prominent Black Olympians do you know that have followed in the footsteps of Owens, achieving great things on the world stage?* Take some additional time to research and collect examples of prominent black athletes from the US, UK

and across the globe, summarising their achievements in the same way as in the back of the book.

Collect photographs of them engaged in their sport and look at which images you feel best capture their athleticism and strength. Take a sheet of A3 drawing paper, fold it in half and look at how to translate the image on the photograph to the page, thinking about how the scale and position on the page can be used to further highlight their athleticism and power. Encourage the children to start by making pencil sketches, learning how to sketch lightly to enable you to roughly plan and develop ideas as you work, as Kadir Nelson does in his own work, before deciding on a final composition and producing a finished sketch.

Display the sketches prominently and reflect on what the children have managed to convey in their own work about the athletes they have chosen. As observers, what do we think about and how do we feel as we look at each sketch?

Representing historical events

Read the next section of the book, from ***The ones who survived America by any means necessary*** to ***The ones who scored with chains on one hand and faith in the other*** and take time to look at the accompanying illustrations. *What period in history do you think is being represented here? What clues do you gain from the words and in the illustrations?*

To expand children's knowledge of events, read the section on slavery at the back of the book. Look particularly at the timespan that slavery existed for. Reading the first three chapters of Kadir Nelson's *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans* (HarperCollins) will provide children with a broad, rounded and well-researched account of this period and the events highlighted in *The Undefeated*.

Turn back and re-read this section. Look at the choice by the illustrator, Kadir Nelson, not to include an illustration on the spread ***And the ones who didn't***. *Why do you think he chose to leave this spread as white space? What is the impact on you as a reader? What does this decision encourage you to do here? Why might this be more impactful than providing an illustration?*

Look at the judicious choice of words used by the author, and those that are highlighted in the changes in font. You should also look more widely at the italicised phrase ***by any means necessary***, sharing this expanded quote from Malcolm X's speech at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in 1964:

We want freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary. We don't feel that in 1964, living in a country that is supposedly based upon freedom, and supposedly the leader of the free world, we don't think that we should have to sit around and wait for some segregationist congressmen and senators and a President from Texas in Washington, D. C., to make up their minds that our people are due now some degree of civil rights. No, we want it now or we don't think anybody should have it.

What do all these things tell you about the struggle, strength and will of those who have ***survived America*** *and continue to survive? What have they survived and what gave them strength? How does this section and the people highlighted within it connect to the title* The Undefeated *and the message in Maya Angelou's quote?*

Now, think back to the line in the Malcolm X speech: ***We want equality by any means necessary.*** *Do you think that his vision has been achieved? What do you know about the continuing inequality faced by the Black community?* Gauge from the children how aware they are about the Black Lives Matter protests. It will be important when broaching this discussion that clear parameters are set to ensure that children feel safe, valued and respected. Share the Blue Peter video: https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/watch/bp-advice-for-helping-to-stop-racisim (duration: 2.05 minutes) that discusses the reasons behind the Black Lives Matter protests and movement. *Does the video raise any thoughts, questions or feelings? What do you think still needs to be done for Malcom X's vision to be achieved?*

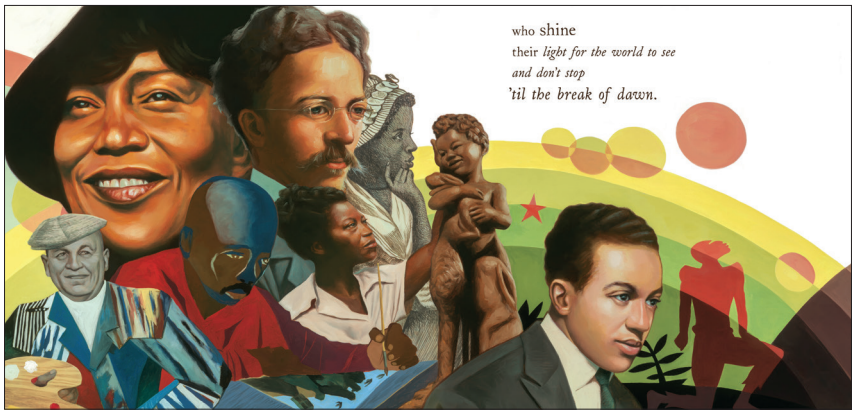
Now take time to revisit the two illustrations in this section. Look at the way Nelson has chosen to have the figures look directly at you. *Why do you think he has chosen to do this? What do you think he is trying to convey here?*

Look at the attention to detail in the images produced, the light continuing to shine down on the figures contrasted against the shadows below, the choice of clothing to represent the period, the expressions created for each of the different figures, the props they have been given. Watch this video of Kadir Nelson sharing the research he does and his process for creating historical imagery like this, in *Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans:* https://vimeo.com/28949907 It would be beneficial to continue to read this text alongside *The Undefeated* to broaden children's understanding of the history and experiences of African Americans.

You might also want to read other titles written and/or illustrated by Kadir Nelson, such as *Nelson Mandela* (Katherine Tegen Books), *We are the Ship* (Little, Brown), *I Have a Dream* (Random House), *Henry's Freedom Box* (Scholastic), *Coretta Scott* (HarperCollins), *Blue Sky, White Stars* (Dial Books). *What insights do reading Kadir Nelson's other books give you about his personal connections with this text and why he may have wanted to illustrate it?*

Come back to thinking about Kadir Nelson's process, how he poses for each of the paintings in the book to help him capture the images he wants to create. Allow children to pose for their own photographs to create images that represent them now, at this time in history. *What would they want to wear? What props would they have to reflect who they are or their lives? What expression do they want to capture?* Give time for the children to pose for photos, taken at waist

level height like you have seen in the book, then print these out and give children appropriate materials to create their own portraits. Model the process of how to go about this. They could sketch their compositions in pencil first, then go on to mix shades and colours of paint that reflect their skin tones, hair colours and clothing. Acrylic paints would give a good effect here. Show children how to mix colours to create different tones and shades that accurately reflect what they want to capture. Explore how the light is captured in their own photographs and how to reflect this in their own paintings with the shades and tones they choose to use.



Creating contrast

Read aloud the next section of the book, from ***This is for the unflappable*** to ***...don't stop till the break of dawn.***

Before turning to the appendix at the back; *what do you think you know about the people celebrated in these spreads from the combination of words and illustration? What clues can we get from the words the author has chosen? What do we see in the illustrations that confirms our thinking?*

Now read the section of the Appendix at the back of the book to find out more about the figures referenced. *Were your predictions correct? Have you heard of any of these artists before? What other prominent Black poets or artists do you know?*

Look at the contrast between these two spreads. Jack Johnson, the boxer, is positioned alone against the white page, the next page opens out into a page filled with figures and colour. *What effect does the page turn have on you? What does it make you think about? How does it make you feel? What makes you feel this way? What do you think Kadir Nelson is trying to represent in this second spread?*

Look carefully at the style of the artwork across these two spreads. *What do you notice about the difference in Kadir Nelson's style in this illustration from the previous spreads? Why might he have chosen to do this? What do you think he is capturing here?*

Explore the artwork of Jacob Lawrence. Look particularly at his Self-Portrait: https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/self-portrait-jacob-lawrence/uwEzl42gnIvhRA?hl=en. Look at the art of Romare Bearden, Henry Ossawa Tanner, Augusta Savage and Aaron Douglas. *How has Kadir Neslon reflected their art in this illustration?* You might also look at how Phillis Wheatley is

represented in the front of her book *Poems on various subjects, religious and moral:* https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/phillis-wheatleys-poems, published in 1773. *Why do you think Kadir Nelson has chosen to replicate the style of the artwork here? What does this bring to our understanding of the history of Black creatives in America?*

Look at the words that are italicised in this spread. These are both lines from songs; *Umi* by Mos Def; an American rapper, singer, actor, and activist and *Rapper's Delight* by The Sugarhill Gang, the first rap single to become a Top 40 hit on the Billboard Hot 100. *What does this page aim to celebrate? How does the spread imbue and celebrate the music and art referenced and the creativity of the producers?* Read the Langston Hughes poem *I, Too*: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too *How do Hughes' words resonate with what you have read in* The Undefeated?

Watch Kadir Nelson talk about this spread specifically in this video on the Carnegie Greenaway website (from 5:43-7:53): https://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/books/the-undefeated/. Compare what he says about the spread to your own thoughts. *Do you think his techniques achieved the effect he desired?*

Spend time exploring the work of the African American artists referenced in this spread. Explore their work and try out ways of replicating their style as Kadir Nelson has done in this spread. Use appropriate materials, including clay to sculpt, to make your creations.

Extend the children's knowledge of influential Black artists and poets by looking at the work of prominent Black British figures such as (Artists): Sonia Boyce OBE, Lubaina Himid CBE, Donald Rodney, Frank Bowling, Chris Ofili, Uzo Egonu, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Keith Piper, Tam Joseph, Winston Branch and Ronald Moody; (Poets): Benjamin Zephanaiah, Grace Nichols, Valerie Bloom, John Agard, James Berry, Karl Nova, Ruth Awolola, Victoria Adukwei-Bulley, Amina Jama. Many of the poets have videos and poems on CLPE's poetryline website: https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets

Exploring Perspective

Read on from ***This is for the unafraid...*** to ***This is for the unspeakable***. ***This is for the unspeakable. This is for the unspeakable.*** What does this section of the book highlight? What greater understanding do you now have of the woes Kwame Alexander talked about in his

letter in the *Afterword?*

Turn back and look at the illustrations from this section and how they combine with the words to increase the reader's empathy for the injustices and atrocities Black people in America have experienced over time and provide insight into their continued strength in striving for equality.

Look at the first spread, where we see a black soldier portrayed in Civil War uniform. Read the relevant section of the appendix to broaden the children's knowledge of this historical event and Black soldiers' role. It would also be useful to deepen children's understanding about this significant historical event by conducting further research and reading. You should read the chapter *Lincoln's War* in Nelson's *Heart and Soul* and could use websites such as:
https://www.dkfindout.com/us/history/american-civil-war/
https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/black-civil-war-soldiers

Consider the soldier's posture and his gaze. Compare this image with the two other historical spreads you have seen so far, where the subjects are also looking straight at us. Come back to these three images and move the book around and look at how the direct gaze of the figures follows you around, no matter where you are in relation to the book. *What effect does this have on you? Why do you think Kadir Nelson has chosen this technique for these particular images?*

Look at how a shadow is cast over the American flag that the soldier is holding and put this together with the words Kwame Alexander has chosen to describe the flag on the page ***the red, white and Weary Blues.*** *What insights does this page give you about this particular period of American History?* Look at the fact that the words ***Weary Blues*** are capitalised. *Why might this be?* Depending on the age and experience of the children, you could go on to look at Langston Hughes' acclaimed poem *The Weary Blues:* https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47347/the-weary-blues, and consider its relevance in terms of the themes of *The Undefeated* and why Kwame Alexander may have chosen to highlight it in this way.

Look again at the next spread, ***The righteous marching ones...*** Read the appendix at the back of the book, to gain an understanding about the event being captured here; the Civil Rights Movement and the specific reference to John Lewis, politician and prominent Civil Rights Leader. Think about the way we are positioned here as readers of this spread. We, as readers, are looking up at the line of people. *How does this make us feel about them?* Look again at the way Nelson has chosen to capture this image with the subjects linking arms or holding hands, as would have happened at the actual events referenced. Look at the range of people captured in the image and how they are captured mid-song. Link the illustration with the words on the page. Discuss the children's understanding of the word ***righteous***, highlighted in a larger font, and its theological links, and the italicisation of ***we shall not be moved***, the spiritual that gained popularity as a union song of the Civil Rights movement. You can watch the Freedom Singers perform this at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington D.C. on August 28, 1963 here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=duvoETGVvYU There have been many different recordings of the song over time, you may want to explore and listen to different versions, such as this one by African American country blues singer and guitarist Mississippi John Hurt: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdF63_M-Hjw or this version by rhythm and blues and gospel singer, actress, and Civil

Rights activist Mavis Staples: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcDpmzQh3YU *What do all these things suggest to us about the people and the event portrayed?*

Consider the way in which the text on the page has been separated to leave ***because black lives matter*** as a phrase on its own on the second half of the spread. *Why do you think this decision was made? What impact does this have on the reader?* Discuss what insights the children already have into the Black Lives Matter movement. As an educator, to prepare yourself for this discussion, you should read the Black Lives Matter 4-year Anniversary Report, available on the Black Lives Matter website: https://blacklivesmatter.com/resources/.

For an introduction to the most recent worldwide focus on the Black Lives Matter movement, watch the recent Newsround special programme, available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52978346

John Lewis, the prominent politician and Civil Rights campaigner highlighted in this spread, sadly lost his battle with pancreatic cancer on 17th July 2020. He wrote an essay, to be published on the day of his funeral. The full text can be seen on the New York Times website here: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html This section would be beneficial to share with the students:

You must also study and learn the lessons of history because humanity has been involved in this soul-wrenching, existential struggle for a very long time. People on every continent have stood in your shoes, through decades and centuries before you. The truth does not change, and that is why the answers worked out long ago can help you find solutions to the challenges of our time. Continue to build union between movements stretching across the globe because we must put away our willingness to profit from the exploitation of others.

Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.

When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression and war. So I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters, and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide.

What connections are there between the words of Lewis and those of Malcom X?

Look back on and re-read the next section of the book. ***This is for the unspeakable. This is for the unspeakable. This is for the unspeakable*** with Lewis' words in mind. *How does this section of the text highlight the oppression and injustice faced by African Americans over time that Lewis strove to eradicate and urges the next generation to continue to speak out against?* Look at the way Alexander has chosen to repeat this phrase three times, and how Nelson has picked key events across African American History to highlight alongside the words. Read the appendix at

the back of the book to gain insights into the events portrayed and look at the techniques that Kadir Nelson has used to engage the reader in confronting these events.

On the first spread in this section, we, as readers, look down from above to witness the full scale of the atrocity of how enslaved Africans were transported across the middle passage to America. No space has been left on the page. From afar, this may look like one huge mass of bodies, but if you take the time to look in closer detail, perhaps using a magnifying glass, you will notice that no two figures look the same. *Why might Nelson have wanted to showcase the individuality of every figure in this image? What effect does this have on us as observers?*

In the next spread, we are faced directly with the framed photos of the four victims of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombings. *What do you notice about the scale used here and the space taken up on the page in this particular composition? What effect does presenting their images as framed photographs have? Why do we frame photographs? Who may have framed these images? What is the impact of seeing the glass smashed? What might this seek to represent? What do we think about and how do we feel as we look on at these images?* Again, Nelson chooses to have these as images where the figures portrayed gaze directly at us. *Why might he have chosen to repeat this technique here?*

In the final spread, we are placed directly in the scene, as if the memorials are at our feet. Look at the objects Nelson has chosen to include in the scene, the soft toys, the photographs, the messages of protest and the American flags, amongst the flowers and candles. *What do you think and feel as you look on at this image? What do the objects placed in the scene tell you about the individuals whose stories are portrayed and about the continued movement to secure equality for Black Americans?*

Depending on the age and emotional maturity of the children, you may wish to go on to investigate the parallels in the inequalities faced by Black people in the UK and as John Lewis highlighted, draw attention to the issues being profiled ***between movements stretching across the globe.***

This special programme from CBBC's Newsround on racism in the UK highlights some of the issues faced by Black British people: https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/53075349. Compare the issues highlighted in this programme with the programme on racism in the US that they watched already. Why do you think Lewis encourages a unity between ***movements stretching across the globe? What do we gain from a global unity in highlighting and rallying against inequality?***

To broaden the children's understanding of the movement and the issues concerning racial injustice that the movement aims to highlight here in the UK as well as in America, you may find other videos produced by Newsround beneficial. You should watch these yourself first to determine the suitability for the age and emotional maturity of the children you are working with:

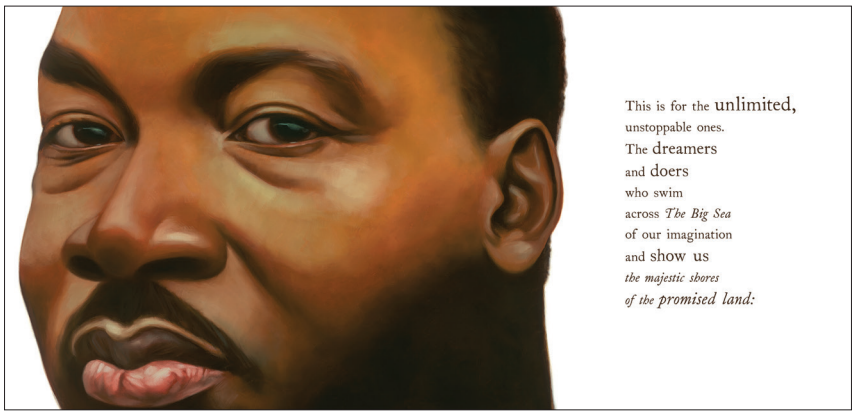
Everyone needs an equal chance in this country: https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52963918
What inequalities do black people face in the UK? https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/53070882
What is systemic racism? https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/53345649

What is white privilege?: https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/53013961
George the Poet: We need to 'learn as much as we can about each other': https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/53083132

Encourage the children to think back to John Lewis' words: ***Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.*** *What do these words mean to you? What do you think we can all do to tackle the inequality still faced by Black people across the globe? How could you express this in words and images?*

Look at some of the recent artwork produced by Kadir Nelson, such as the June cover of The New Yorker magazine: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cover-story/cover-story-2020-06-22, the July cover of Rolling Stone magazine: https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/kadir-nelson-cover-artwork-july-2020-1014011/, the February 2017 cover of Ebony magazine: https://www.culturetype.com/2017/02/12/ebony-cover-by-illustrator-kadir-nelson-projects-american-ideals-african-american-patriotism-and-love-of-family/ and the January 2017 cover of The New Yorker magazine: https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/cover-story-2017-01-16. Explore the messages that are contained within the images and consider how he is using his art for activism and the emotional impact these pieces have. Explore how to create your own imagery that could highlight prominent issues faced by Black British people or a significant historical figure or event. You could mock up a front cover for a prominent British magazine such as *The Week*, *Time Out* magazine or *The Observer* magazine.

You could also look at how Kwame Alexander uses his art for activism in poems such as 'Take a Knee': https://theundefeated.com/videos/kwame-alexander-take-a-knee/ and 'American Bullet Points': https://theundefeated.com/features/american-bullet-points/ (N.B. you will need to watch these performances for yourself prior to sharing with children to ensure the suitability for their age and emotional maturity). As with Kadir Nelson's art, you can go on to explore the emotional impact the creative power of the art form has and why this might be such an affective experience.



Exploring Symbolism

Read from ***This is for the unlimited...*** to the end of the book. *What does this final section of the*

book make you think about? How does it make you feel? What makes you feel this way?

Look back over this final section again. Start from the page ***This is for the unlimited...*** *Who is represented on this page? What do you already know or think you know about them?* The children may already recognise Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's iconic image, but if they don't, turn to the appendix at the back of the book and read about him. *Does this summary confirm anything you knew or thought you knew or does it teach you any new information about this celebrated figure in Black History?* It would also be advisable to read Kadir Nelson's illustrated picture book of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's *I Have a Dream* speech to expand the children's knowledge of this iconic figure and the role he played in the Civil Rights movement.

Think about the composition of the illustration on this page. *What does the scale of the image convey? Why do you think Kadir Nelson has chosen to show just the main features of his face? Why might he have chosen to have him facing to the left, but looking directly at the reader?* Look at the way his face is fully bathed in light, the shadow is behind him; what might this convey?

Re-read the words and consider these alongside the illustration. Look again at the words that have been highlighted. ***The Big Sea*** is the title of Langston Hughes' biography. *Why might the author be making repeated references to Hughes' work in particular?*

The second italicised phrase, ***the majestic shores of the promised land***, comes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's Nobel Prize Lecture, *The quest for peace and justice*, delivered on December 11, 1964, the day after he received the Nobel Peace Prize – the youngest man to have ever received the award – for his nonviolent resistance to racial prejudice in America.

Turn the page to look at the spread full of figures. *What impact does this page turn have? What do you notice about the composition of the spread? Do you know who these people are?* Read the text aloud and ask the children if the names are familiar and if they know anything about any of these sporting legends. Read the relevant section in the appendix to provide further information about these iconic figures. *Why do you think these particular people have been highlighted?* Now, look back at the illustration. *How has Nelson chosen to place and capture the figures? What do you notice about the directionality of the movement? What might be the significance of the butterfly placed in this composition, first seen on the front cover, and of the cranes, also seen on the back cover and the inside title page? What do all these things make you think about? What mood do you think is captured on this page? How does it compare or contrast to other images in the book?*

Consider the choice of line break at the end of the text on the page, so that the last words seen and read are ***and the undiscovered.*** What is the impact of seeing and hearing these words last? Who are ***the undiscovered***?

Turn on to reflect on the next page showcasing iconic figures in the field of music. Use the appendix to name and learn more about these prominent figures and the genre of music they are connected with. Listen to examples of the works created by these musicians. Encourage the children to describe and give opinions on the music heard. You could go on to look at the wider influence this particular group of musicians and this style of music has had on music such as pop, rock and hip-hop and which contemporary artists have been influenced by the musicians portrayed in this

spread.

Re-read the text on the page and look at the words that have been emphasised in the text. ***We Real Cool***, references the poem of the same name by Gwendolyn Brooks, the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize, honouring excellence in Journalism and the Arts. You can read the full poem and listen to it being read here: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/28112/we-real-cool *How does the poem connect to the focus of this spread? How does the rhythm of the poem reflect the music that you heard?*

In the final sentence, ***the night is beautiful*** references the opening line to another Langston Hughes poem, My People. Read the full poem, shown below and consider why Kwame Alexander may have chosen to reference this poem in particular.

My People

The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.

The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.

Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.

Langston Hughes

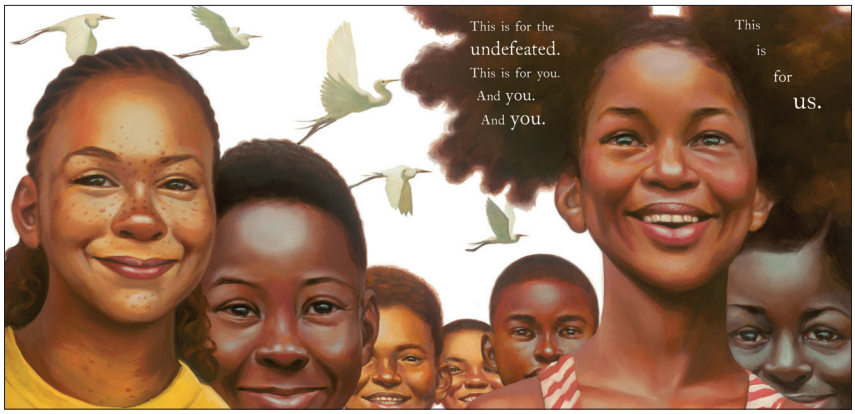
Consider the poem in the light of the illustrations you have seen throughout the book. *Do you think Kadir Nelson has been able to capture the sentiment of this poem in his artwork? What makes you think this?*

Look again at the cranes, swooping across the page and compare them to those shown on the previous spread. *What has changed about them? What might this signify? Follow their journey on to the next spread. Why do you think they are the only things shown on this spread? How does this fit with the words on the pages?*

Now follow the cranes again and turn to the final spread, re-reading the text and looking closely at the illustration. *What do you notice about the cranes in this spread compared to the previous spreads? What do you think these birds symbolise? What mood is evoked in this final image? Who is depicted here? Why do you think the illustrator has chosen children as the subject for this closing spread?* Look carefully at the depictions of the children. Like the adults across the text, they are incredibly carefully observed. Each has their own individual identity and personality. Compare the range of skin tones, hair colours, textures and styles that have been portrayed. Encourage the children to consider how this quality of representation is reflected in other literature available to them. *Do prominent and positive portrayals of black characters feature regularly in the books that you have in your school?* Watch this video, again produced by CBBC Newsround: https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/51826298 and think about why texts such as *The Undefeated* are important for all readers.

As the BookTrust Represents report summarises: *Inclusive children's literature is vital. Children's books can act as mirrors, to reflect the readers' own lives, but also as windows so readers can learn about, understand and appreciate the lives of others. They can shape how young readers from minority backgrounds see themselves as well as how readers from the more dominant culture see and understand diversity.*

The 'windows and mirrors' analogy that is based on the work of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop is helpful in supporting our considerations when sourcing and recommending books for young readers. Discuss the value of inclusive and representative literature with the children. *Why is it important to see yourself reflected in what you read? Why is it important to have books which feature a diverse cast of characters? And to have books that are produced by a representative range of creative role models, such as Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson?*



Look at the composition of this final spread. The children's faces take up the full bleed and the frame of the page cannot contain them. They are layered, reaching back as far as our eye can see. The children are all bathed in light. Most gaze at us, but the girl at the front looks up and out, and they are all smiling. *What do you think the illustrator is trying to convey with this image? What does it leave you thinking or feeling as you end the book?* Look at how the cranes continue to fly through the appendix and the publication details at the back of the book. *Why do you think Kadir Nelson decided to carry these images on until the last possible page?*

Look back through all the images in the book and explore how Kadir Nelson has used light and shadow in the book. Listen to Kadir Nelson talk about the book in this interview with npr (National Public Radio) https://www.npr.org/2020/01/27/800158197/encore-the-undefeated-a-new-picture-book-celebrates-black-brilliance (quote at 0.40), where he explains: ***"I think the visual mantra that I use for this book, was to see all of the figures emerging from the shadows, so you'll see it begins with Jesse Owens literally jumping out of the darkness into the light... By the time we get to toward the middle and end of the book those shadows have disappeared and the brilliance and excellence of the subjects have completely emerged into the bright light."*** *What effect does this have? What do you think he wants to convey through this technique?*

After reading, discuss the book as a whole. *Do you think Kwame Alexander achieved the aims he set out for himself in the afterword? What have you learnt about Black History that you didn't*

know before? How did the book reflect the woes and wonders of American history? How does the narrative inspire the readers to never, ever give up? Does the book inspire anything else within you? If so, what? And how does it do this?

Investigate a range of influential Black British figures from the fields of politics, sport, music, art and poetry, as you have seen reflected in *The Undefeated*. These could include, but are not limited to:

Politics: Olaudah Equiano, John Archer, Henry Sylvester Williams, John Stewart, Peter McLagan, Diane Abbott, David Lammy, Bernie Grant, Paul Boateng, Baroness Amos, Dame Jocelyn Barrow, Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon, OBE, Abena Oppong-Asare, Baroness Osamor.

Sports: Jack London, Kelly Holmes, Linford Christie, Tessa Sanderson, Denise Lewis, Mo Farrah, Christine Ohuruogu, Lutalo Muhammad, Arthur Wharton, Emma Clarke, Tony Collins, Viv Anderson, John Barnes, Hope Powell, Raheem Sterling, Marcus Rashford, Alex Scott, Demi Stokes, Nikita Parris, Angela Buxton, Jay Clarke, James Peters, Clive Sullivan, Maggie Alphonsi, Billy Boston, Bill Richmond, Frank Bruno, Lennox Lewis, Michael Watson, David Haye, Anthony Joshua, Nicola Adams, Roland Orlando Butcher, Alex Tudor, Lewis Hamilton.

Art: Sonia Boyce OBE, Lubaina Himid CBE, Donald Rodney, Frank Bowling, Chris Ofili, Uzo Egonu, Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, Keith Piper, Tam Joseph, Winston Branch and Ronald Moody.

Poetry: Benjamin Zephaniah, Grace Nichols, Valerie Bloom, John Agard, James Berry, Karl Nova, Ruth Awolola, Victoria Adukwei-Bulley, Amina Jama.

Music: Ignatius Sancho, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Amanda Aldridge, Lord Kitchener, Harry Beckett, Chi-chi Nwanoku, Eddy Grant, Pato Banton, Courtney Pine, Billy Ocean, Aswad, Joan Armatrading, Musical Youth, Sade, Monie Love, Jazzie B, Soul II Soul, Roni Size, Rizzle Kicks, Estelle, Moses Boyd, Nubya Garcia, Dizzee Rascal, Stormzy, Lady Leshuur, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Karim Kamar.

Select a person that stands out as influential to you, and find photographs that capture these people in a way you find inspiring. Look at how to accurately depict them in a piece of art work, carefully considering how to represent their skin tone, hair colour, texture and style in the way that Kadir Nelson does across the book. His hyper-realistic style is the result of years of practice, but do not let this put children off embarking on the task and developing their own skills in the process. Give the children access to art equipment that allows them to do this effectively. Nelson himself makes preliminary sketches, then paints in oils on board, but, in a school context, soft pencils for preliminary sketching, heavyweight painting paper and acrylic paint would be ideal for this. Model techniques that share with children how to progress in their knowledge of observing, composing, sketching, colour mixing, application of paint and use of brushes.

After reading the text:

The Undefeated is a sophisticated picture book for older readers. Its themes and concepts, its rich language and evocative illustrations reward multiple re-readings, and it is important to offer children the opportunity to revisit and reflect at leisure.

Time should be dedicated to exploring and broadening children's knowledge of Black History; from both the African American perspective in *The Undefeated* and the Black British perspective. Share further titles with the children that support further exploration, such as:

- *Empire's End: A Roman Story* by Leila Rasheed (Scholastic)
- *Diver's Daughter: A Tudor Stor*y by Patrice Lawrence (Scholastic)
- *Freedom* by Catherine Johnson (Scholastic)
- *Son of the Circus: A Victorian Story* by E.L. Norry
- *The Story of the Windrush* by K.N. Chimbiri (Golden Destiny)
- *Coming to England* by Floella Benjamin (Macmillan)
- *The Life of Stephen Lawrence* by Verna Allette Wilkins (Tamarind)
- *Young, Gifted and Black* by Jamia Wilson and Andrea Pippins (Wide Eyed)
- *Let it Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters*, Andrea Davis Pinkney and Stephen Alcorn (Gulliver Books)
- *Ella Fitzgerald: Little People, Big Dreams*, Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara and Barbara Alca (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)
- *Wilma Rudolph: Little People, Big Dreams*, Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara and Amelia Flower (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)
- *Jesse Owens: Little People, Big Dreams*, Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara and Anna Katherina Jansen (Frances Lincoln Children's Books)
- *I'm A Global Citizen: Culture and Diversit*y, Georgia Amson-Bradshaw and David Broadbent (Franklin Watts)
- *I'm A Global Citizen: We're All Equal*, Georgia Amson-Bradshaw and David Broadbent (Franklin Watts)
- *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* by Vashti Harrison (Penguin)
- *Little Leaders: Exceptional Men in Black History* by Vashti Harrison (Penguin)
- *What is Race? Who are Racists? Why Does Skin Colour Matter? and Other Big Questions* by Claire Heuchan and Nikesh Shukla (Wayland)
- *What is Right & Wrong? Who Decides? Where Do Values Come From? and Other Big Questions* by Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young (Wayland)

Work with the children to put together ideas for a Black British equivalent of The Undefeated. What and who would they want to include if their motivation, like Kwame Alexander's, is to highlight the ***forgotten*** history of Black people in Britain that, as in America, is often ***left out of the textbooks*** and the curriculum. What would they include to call attention to and spotlight the

woes and wonders of Black British history and to inspire young Black British people to ***never give up?***

With time and focus on this as a full project, the children could follow an authentic writing experience, researching the history of Black British people in the UK, storyboarding ideas for content, drafting text and sketching illustrations, exploring and experimenting with layout and producing a final picture book or a video for a spoken word poem, which was the origin of the book. Watch Kwame Alexander perform this here for inspiration: https://theundefeated.com/videos/this-one-is-for-us/. Prior to your performance, draft, work up and finalise your poem and consider the images you would select as a backdrop for your performance to illustrate key people and events.

Give the children opportunities to share their work with a wider audience by displaying made books in the school library or another public place in the school and by sharing video performances of poetry on school websites, blogs or social media accounts.

Watch a video of Kadir Nelson speaking about the book and his work on the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Children's Book Awards website: https://carnegiegreenaway.org.uk/books/the-undefeated/

Watch Kwame Alexander read the book on BookTrust's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cHIWtl8PNk

This sequence of activities was originally designed by CLPE to celebrate the CILIP Kate Greenaway medal shortlisting of *The Undefeated* in 2020. To access more free resources from CLPE, visit: www.clpe.org.uk/freeresources.

Find out more about extent and quality of ethnic representation and diversity in children's literature in CLPE's Reflecting Realities reports: https://clpe.org.uk/publications-and-bookpacks/reflecting-realities

Further resources to support children's understanding of picturebooks for all ages and research on the importance of using picturebooks across the primary years can be found at: https://www.clpe.org.uk/powerofpictures.

CLPE
CENTRE FOR LITERACY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

This sequence of activities was created in partnership with CLPE.
CLPE is a charity working to improve literacy in primary schools.
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