

Read Aloud *for* Democracy

A planning guide for
hosting an early voting
event that centers children



This resource was prepared by Children's Defense Fund
for use by Children's Defense Fund Action as part of its
"Voting Rights Are Children's Rights" campaign.

Overview

This guide is meant to support parents, educators, faith leaders, child advocates, and community members in creating meaningful Read Aloud for Democracy (RAD) experiences that help children and young people see themselves as active participants in their communities and our democracy. Rooted in the CDF Freedom Schools® belief that children and young people have the power to make a difference, RAD uses the shared experience of reading aloud to spark curiosity, encourage critical thinking, elevate the issues that matter to children, and inspire hope, education, and action. Through stories and conversation, we invite children not only to listen, but to question, reflect, speak up, and imagine how they can help make their families, schools, communities, country, and world better.

According to Scholastic's 2014 report, Kids & Family Reading Report The Rise Of Read-Aloud, 85% of children ask questions during read-alouds by the time they're eight years old. This shows that reading aloud is a highly interactive partnership experience between themselves and an adult.

This toolkit will help you plan and host a Read Aloud for Democracy (RAD) *CDF Freedom Schools* event in your community! If you are a parent, faith leader, or child advocate interested in facilitating a RAD event in your community, this guide is for you.

Details

Date

Your event should coincide with other RAD events taking place on **October 17, 2026**.

Location

Your event should be hosted at an early voting center, inviting parents and children to accompany their parent(s) to the voting center to vote following the read aloud activity. If walking distance to an early voting center is not available, consider hosting RAD during Children's Church or Sunday School, or a designated location that matters in your community.



RAD Tip from CDF Freedom Schools®: Check your state and county's local laws for guidelines on if, when, and how to host events at a polling location. Call the election protection hotline at 1-866-OUR-VOTE (8683) if you desire legal assistance in confirming this information.

Event Set-Up

When it comes to conducting your RAD, consider the following tips:

1. **Consider accessibility.** If you are reading in a public space, ensure you have the proper AV or bass in your voice to make sure the story can be heard.



RAD Tip from CDF Freedom Schools: Consider having your group form a reading circle. Conducting a read aloud in a circle helps ensure the reader can move around and show the pictures to all those involved. It also ensures all listeners are on a level field and no one is more or less likely to hear the words or see the pictures over anyone else.

2. **Ask the audience questions** throughout the story. Avoid asking questions that lead to “yes or no” answers. Instead, engage the young audience in higher-order thinking questions which require deep analysis, evaluation, and creation rather than simple recall. This will help connect the text to their lives and situations.

Example: Instead of asking “did the character do the right thing”, ask “how would you have handled the situation” or “what may have made the character react in that way”?



RAD Tip from CDF Freedom Schools®: Use sticky notes to list out questions in relevant sections ahead of your read aloud.

3. **Allow the audience to ask questions** as you read. There should be natural pauses when reading aloud. Before reading, encourage the audience to ask questions in those pauses. Look up from the book and make eye contact to invite questions.



RAD Tip from CDF Freedom Schools®: Allow the audience to converse in the pauses. If a question turns into a conversation, it is okay to entertain that curiosity and journey that you all are embarking on as a group. Once a reasonable amount of time has passed, commence your reading.

Event Schedule

Opening: Cheer, Chant, and Introduction

Lead your community in a “Read Aloud” cheer and chant. View [Read Aloud: CDF Freedom Schools® Harambee](#), minutes 01:06-01:40 for an example. Conducting this chant and introducing your guest are essential in modeling how the village shows up for young people.



Main Activity: Read Aloud Facilitation



All RAD partners should visit their local library or Black-owned bookstore to acquire a copy of ***The Walk* by Winsome Bingham**. This is the book that we will read across the nation as a community.

Questions for Consideration:

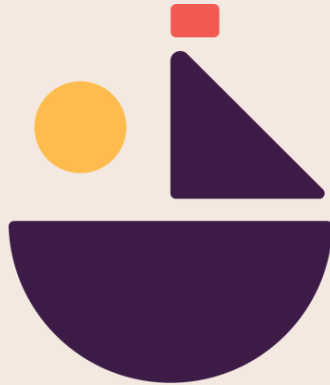
1. What does the author mean when they say leaders are made through molding and modeling, not born?
2. What kind of conversations do you have with your families during meals? How is this similar or different from the main character?
3. Explain why the characters in the book may have held hands as they walked.
4. Share a time you had to make a choice. Based on that experience, what advice would you share with voters faced with a choice?
5. Express how you feel about the walk. What makes you feel the way you do?
6. What kind of issues might people have been speaking up and standing up for or against?
7. What issues should an elected official in your community speak up or stand up for?
8. What issue impacts children and should be on voters' minds as they vote this election?

Follow-Up Activities (select at least one):

1. Use construction paper and markers to create signs highlighting issues that matter to children and young people in your community. Consider laminating for weather. Use rulers or stakes to attach your signs and line “the walk” to the early voting center (or other event location) with issues that matter to children and young people. Examples: Vote for Children’s Mental Health. Vote for the Environment. Vote for School Safety. Vote for Playground Improvements. Vote for Youth Programming. Vote for Kids.
2. Use sidewalk chalk to highlight issues impacting children along “the walk” to the early voting center or location of your event.

The RAD guide was written by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) Freedom Schools® program team. The CDF Freedom Schools program is a research-based, multicultural literacy program that supports K-12 children and young people (known as “scholars” in the program) to excel and believe in their ability to make a difference in themselves as well as their families, schools, communities, country, and world with hope, education, and action. For more information on becoming a program sponsors, visit their website.

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