



# Classroom Guide

Title: **Uncle Jed's Barbershop**

Author: **Margaree King Mitchell**

Illustrator: **James Ransome**

**Theme:** Through persistence and belief in one's self, dreams will often come true.

**Program Summary:** Sara Jean's Uncle Jed, the only black barber in the county, overcomes many setbacks, including the Great Depression of the 1930s, as he works to save enough money to open his own barbershop. LeVar finds out about making dreams come true with determination and faith, as he talks with The Persuasions, an a cappella quartet. These friends pursued their dream in spite of being told that a singing group without musical instruments didn't have a chance for success.

## **Topics for Discussion:**

Discuss with students the people who help them in their lives. This discussion might include people who are in helping professions, such as firefighters and nurses, but also people who help them on a personal level.

Discuss different kinds of dreams — nighttime dreams that can be good or bad, daydreams, and dreams that are aspirations. Discuss what might influence dreams and actions that people might take as a result of having a dream. Discuss dreams as hopes for the future.

Two aspects of American history are important to understanding the story: the Great Depression and segregation. Supply some background on both topics. As a follow-up to this discussion, students might question older family members and friends about their recollections of either topic and share information as a class.

## **Curriculum Extension Activities:**

Discuss different careers students would like to have when they “grow up.” As a class, brainstorm a short list of questions they have about their chosen careers. Have them research their chosen careers by using print and media resources. Encourage them to think of creative ways in which they can share what they learned with the class, such as presenting that information dressed as a member of a profession, partnering with another child and being interviewed, writing and illustrating a book, or other ideas.

Explore the concept of “heroes.” Brainstorm ways to complete the sentence, “A hero is ....” Make this list the center of a bulletin board, and have students search for pictures and make drawings of their heroes to place around the list. Discuss the concept of



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“fame” in relation to heroes, so that students realize that heroes need not be well known in order to be admired for their accomplishments.

Using Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s phrase, “I have a dream...,” ask students to think of a dream they have for the future of the world and its people. Have them draw self-portraits of their faces. Display their faces with a thought “bubble” above their heads, in which they have drawn and captioned their “dream.”

Uncle Jed is a fictional character, but many people who have lived in the past or are now living have undergone sacrifices and have shown tremendous determination in order to make their dreams come true. Tie the program into a study of biographies as a form of literature. To introduce biographies, brainstorm with students the types of information they expect to find in a biography. Read a biography to the students. (The review book for this program, Alvin Ailey, is a possibility.) Have students compare what they learned from hearing the biography to their brainstormed expectations.

Plan a lesson with the music teacher on singing a cappella.

Uncle Jed was not always paid for his services with money. Have students research bartering and the payment of services with all different types of items. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of such a system.

Invite a barber/hairstylist into the classroom to demonstrate a haircut.

## **Book Review:**

*Alvin Ailey* by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illus. by Brian Pinkney

## **Supplementary Booklist:**

*Saturday at the New You* by Barbara E. Barber, illus. by Anna Rich

*More Than Anything Else* by Marie Bradby, illus. by Chris K. Soentpiet

*The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, illus. by George Ford

*Hats Off to Hair!* by Virginia Kroll



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*Frederick Douglass: The Last Day of Slavery* by William Miller, illus. by Cedric Lucas

## Related Themes:

- families
- heroes
- careers

## Related Reading Rainbow Programs:

- Program #91 — Amazing Grace
- Program #110 — Ruth Law Thrills a Nation
- Program #78 — The Lady with the Ship on Her Head
- Program #111 — The Wonderful Towers of Watts

**About the Author:** Margaree King Mitchell was born and raised in Mississippi. She is the author of several books and plays. *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* was her first children's book.

**About the Illustrator:** James Ransome has illustrated several books for children, including Reading Rainbow review books, *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* and *How Many Stars in the Sky?* He won the Coretta Scott King Award for illustrations in *The Creation* by James Weldon Johnson, and *Uncle Jed's Barbershop*. Ransome's father has worked as a barber for over 25 years and recently opened his own barbershop.