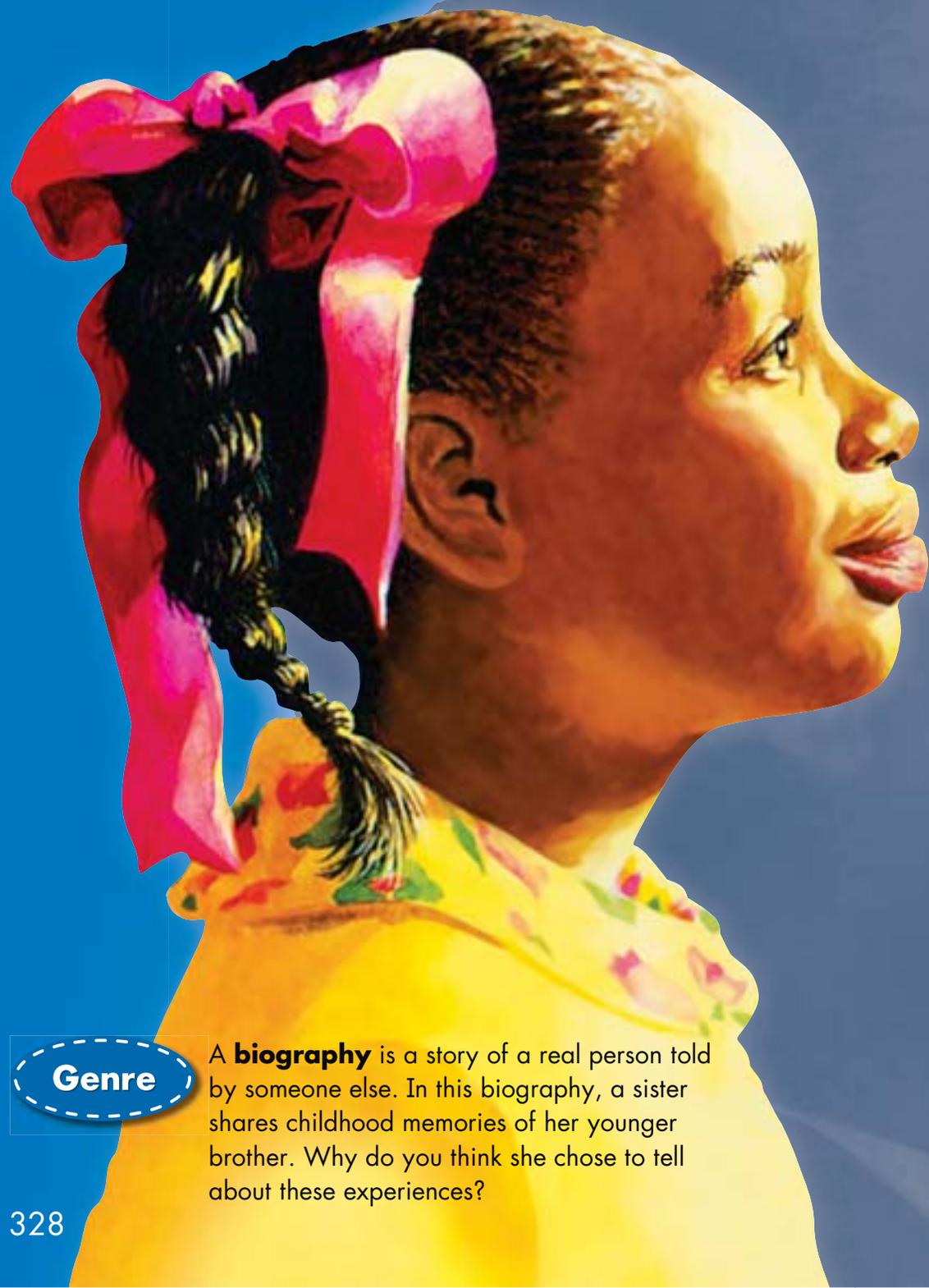


MY BROTHER MARTIN

*A Sister Remembers Growing Up with
the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

by Christine King Farris
illustrated by Chris Soentpiet



Genre

A **biography** is a story of a real person told by someone else. In this biography, a sister shares childhood memories of her younger brother. Why do you think she chose to tell about these experiences?



Question of the Week

**How can words change
people's lives?**

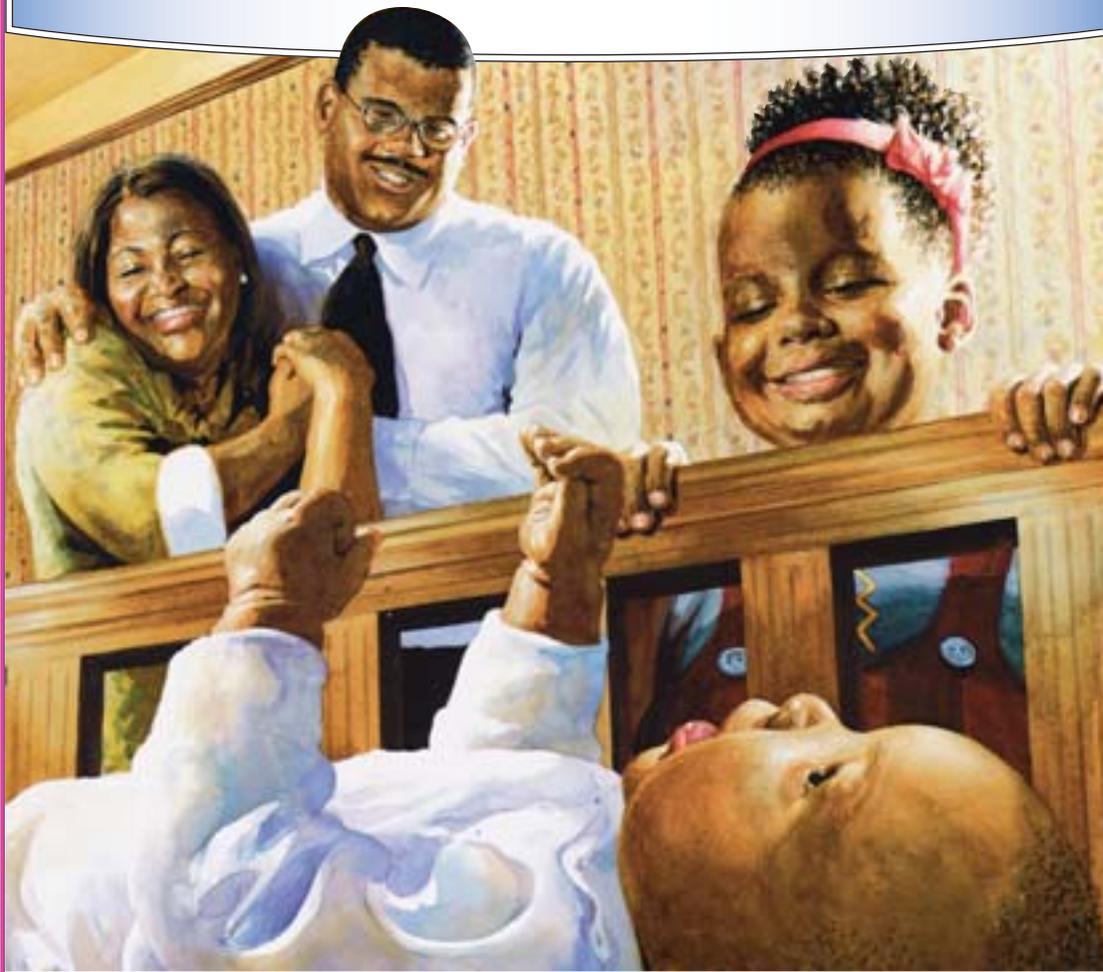
Let's
Think
About
Reading!

Let's **Think** About...

Can you predict whether you will find out what the dream was by the end of this biography? **Predict**

Gather around and listen as I share the childhood memories of my brother, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I am his older sister, and I've known him longer than anyone else. I knew him long before the speeches he gave and the marches he led and the prizes he won. I even knew him before he first dreamed the dream that would change the world.

We were born in the same room, my brother Martin and I. I was an early baby, born sooner than expected. Mother Dear and Daddy placed me in the chifforobe drawer that stood in the corner of their upstairs bedroom. I got a crib a few days afterward. A year and a half later, Martin spent his first night in that hand-me-down crib in the very same room.



The house where we were born belonged to Mother Dear's parents, our grandparents, the Reverend and Mrs. A. D. Williams. We lived there with them and our Aunt Ida, our grandmother's sister. And not long after my brother Martin—who we called M. L. because he and Daddy had the same name—our baby brother was born. His name was Alfred Daniel, but we called him A. D., after our grandfather.



They called me Christine, and like three peas in one pod, we grew together. Our days and rooms were filled with adventure stories and Tinkertoys, with dolls and Monopoly and Chinese checkers.

And although Daddy, who was an important **minister**, and Mother Dear, who was known far and wide as a musician, often had work that took them away from home, our grandmother was always there to take care of us. I remember days sitting at her feet, as she and Aunt Ida filled us with grand memories of their childhood and read to us about all the wonderful places in the world.

Let's **Think** About...

What kind of family were the Kings? What details tell you they lived in a happy home?

Inferring

Let's **Think** About...

Identify the similarities and differences between the actual events and experiences described in this biography and the events and characters' experiences in a fictional work. **Inferring**

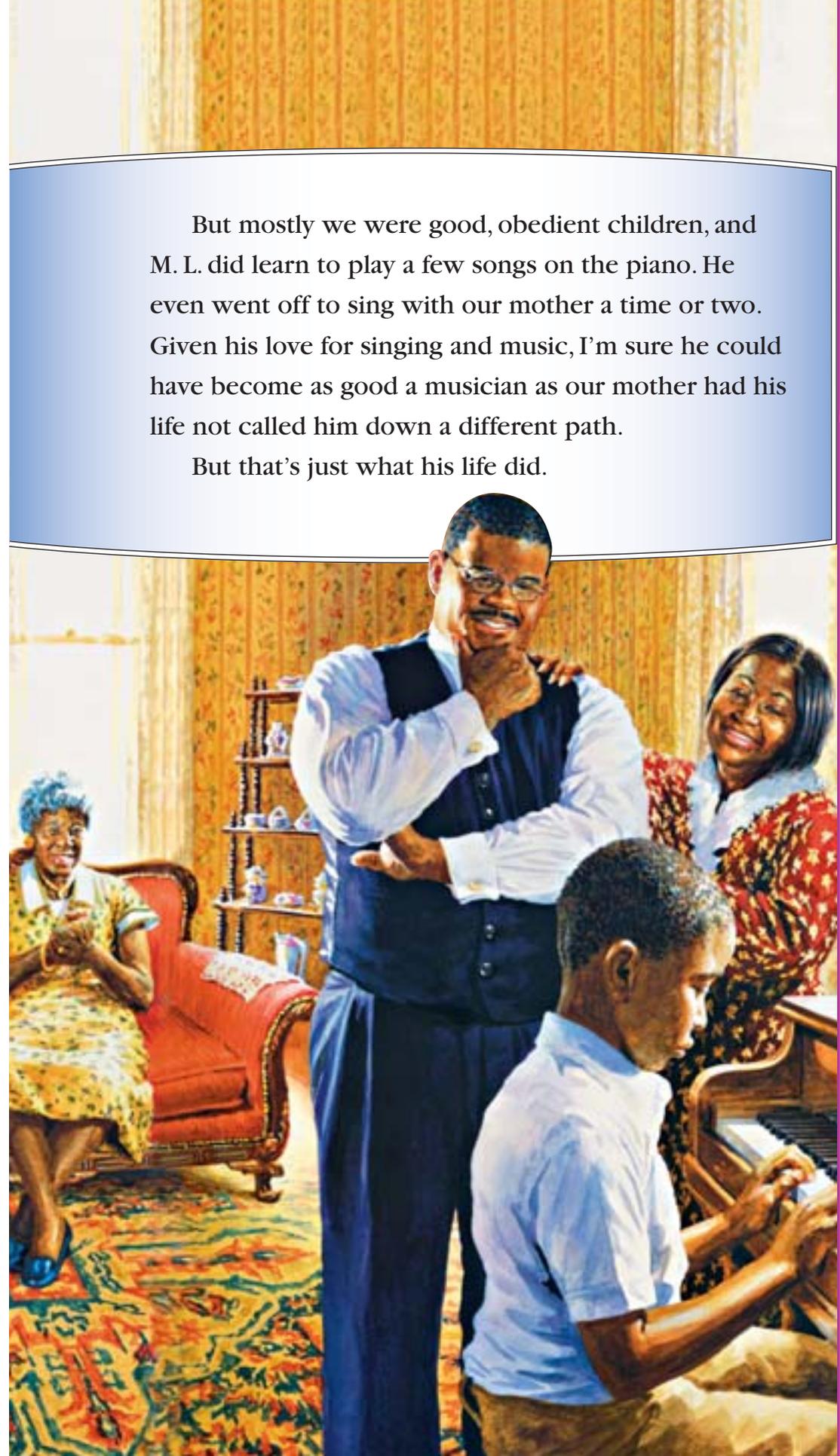
Let's **Think** About...

What can you do to help you understand what a "fur piece" is? **Monitor and Clarify**

And of course, my brothers and I had each other. We three stuck together like the pages in a brand-new book. And being normal young children, we were almost *always* up to something.

Our best prank involved a fur piece that belonged to our grandmother. It looked almost alive, with its tiny feet and little head and gleaming glass eyes. So, every once in a while, in the waning light of evening, we'd tie that fur piece to a stick, and, hiding behind the hedge in front of our house, we would dangle it in front of unsuspecting passersby. Boy! You could hear the screams of fright all across the neighborhood!

Then there was the time Mother Dear decided that her children should all learn to play piano. I didn't mind too much, but M. L. and A. D. preferred being outside to being stuck inside with our piano teacher, Mr. Mann, who would rap your knuckles with a ruler just for playing the wrong notes. Well, one morning, M. L. and A. D. decided to loosen the legs on the piano bench so we wouldn't have to practice. We didn't tell Mr. Mann, and when he sat . . . *CRASH!* down he went.



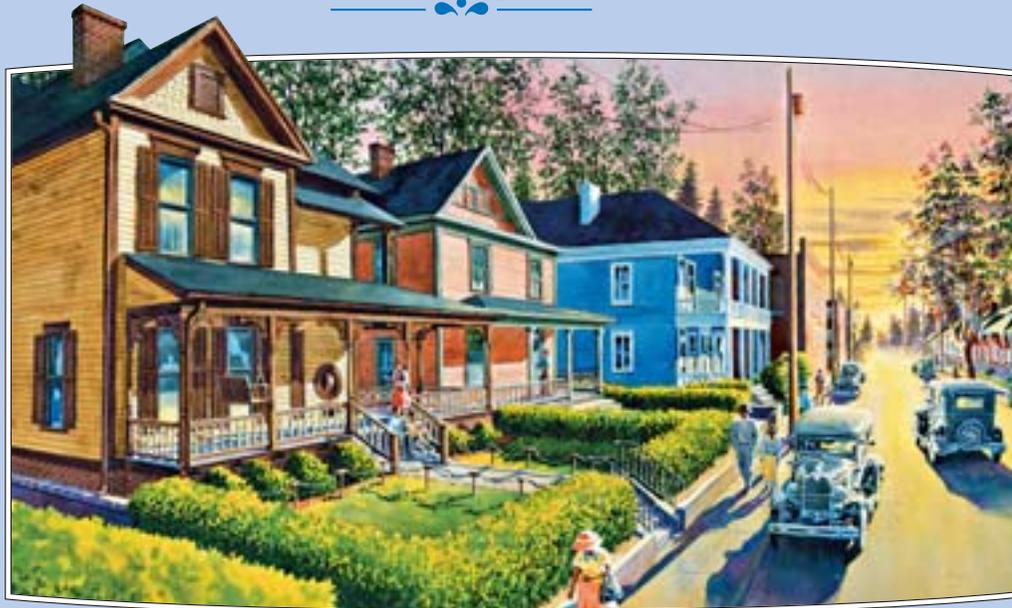
But mostly we were good, obedient children, and M. L. did learn to play a few songs on the piano. He even went off to sing with our mother a time or two. Given his love for singing and music, I'm sure he could have become as good a musician as our mother had his life not called him down a different path.

But that's just what his life did.

Let's **Think** About...

What different path was M. L. called on to take?

Questioning



My brothers and I grew up a long time ago. Back in a time when certain places in our country had unfair laws that said it was right to keep black people separate because our skin was darker and our **ancestors** had been captured in far-off Africa and brought to America as slaves.

Atlanta, Georgia, the city in which we were growing up, had those laws. Because of those laws, my family rarely went to the picture shows or visited Grant Park with its famous Cyclorama. In fact, to this very day I don't recall ever seeing my father on a streetcar. Because of those laws, and the indignity that went with them, Daddy preferred keeping M. L., A. D., and me close to home, where we'd be protected.

We lived in a neighborhood in Atlanta that's now called Sweet Auburn. It was named for Auburn Avenue, the street that ran in front of our house. On our side of the street stood two-story frame houses similar to the one we lived in. Across it crouched a line of one-story row houses and a store owned by a white family.

Let's **Think** About...

Can you use clues in the text to infer that Christine, M. L., and A. D. would not be safe if they rode on a streetcar?

Inferring



When we were young all the children along Auburn Avenue played together, even the two boys whose parents owned the store.

And since our house was a favorite gathering place, those boys played with us in our backyard . . .

. . . and ran with M. L. and A. D. to the firehouse on the corner where they watched the engines and the firemen.

The thought of *not* playing with those kids because they were different, because they were white and we were black, never entered our minds.

Let's **Think** About...

Describe one or two implicit cause-and-effect relationships in this text. **Inferring**

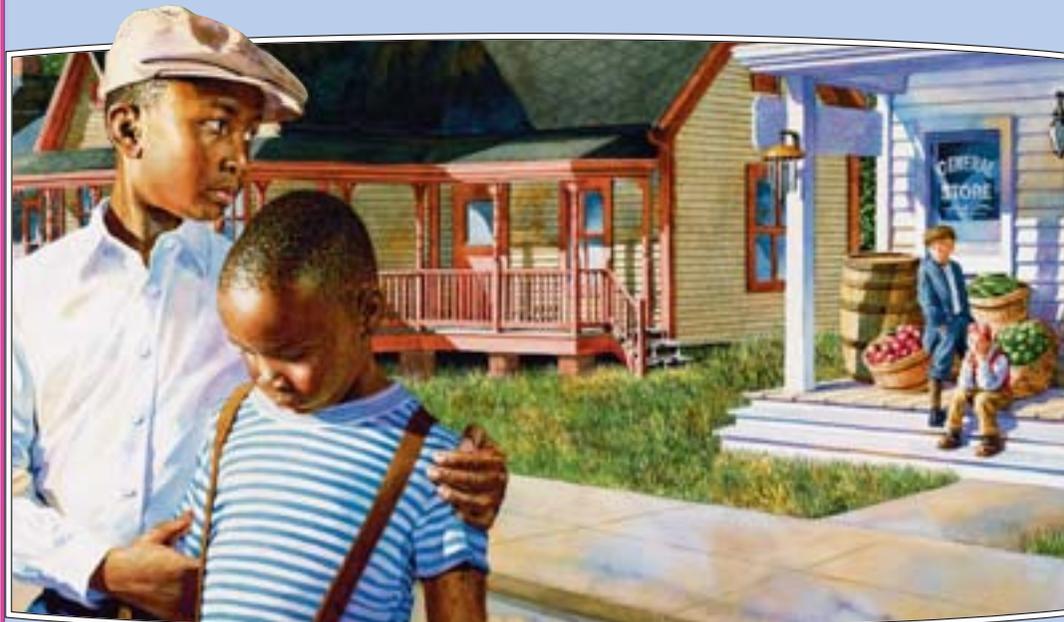
Let's **Think** About...

Why did the author mention the idea that the kids might not play together?

Questioning

Well, one day, M. L. and A. D. went to get their playmates from across the street just as they had done a hundred times before. But they came home alone. The boys had told my brothers that they couldn't play together anymore because A. D. and M. L. were Negroes.

And that was it. Shortly afterward the family sold the store and moved away. We never saw or heard from them again.



Looking back, I realize that it was only a matter of time before the **generations** of cruelty and injustice that Daddy and Mother Dear and Mama and Aunt Ida had been **shielding** us from finally broke through. But back then it was a crushing blow that seemed to come out of nowhere.

“Why do white people treat colored people so mean?” M. L. asked Mother Dear afterward. And with me and M. L. and A. D. standing in front of her trying our best to understand, Mother Dear gave the reason behind it all.

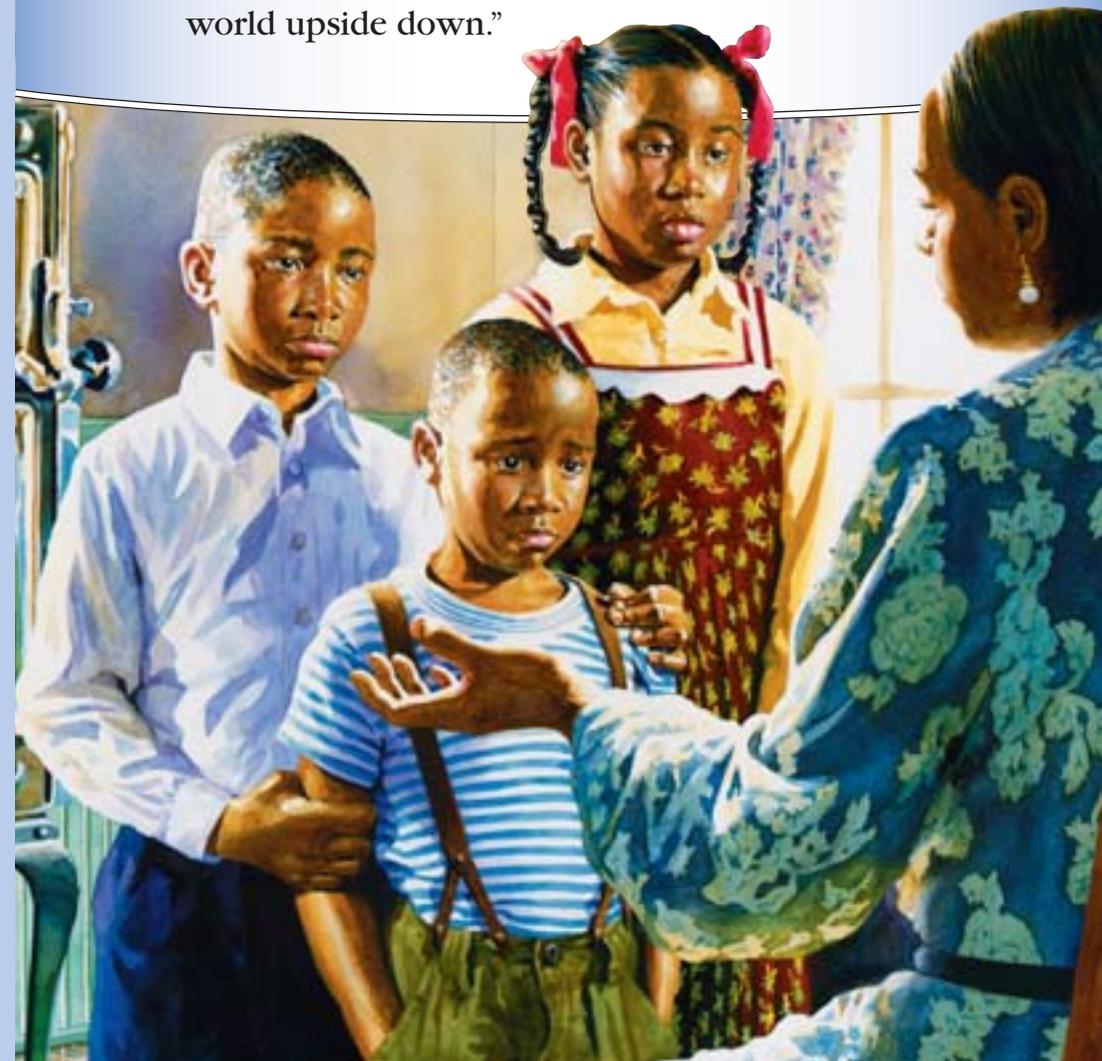
Her words explained the streetcars our family **avoided** and the WHITES ONLY sign that kept us off the elevator at City Hall. Her words told why there were parks and museums that black people could not visit and why some restaurants refused to serve us and why hotels wouldn't give us rooms and why theaters would only allow us to watch their picture shows from the balcony.

But her words also gave us hope.

She answered simply, “Because they just don't understand that everyone is the same, but someday, it will be better.”

And my brother M. L. looked up into our mother's face and said the words I remember to this day.

He said, “Mother Dear, one day I'm going to turn this world upside down.”



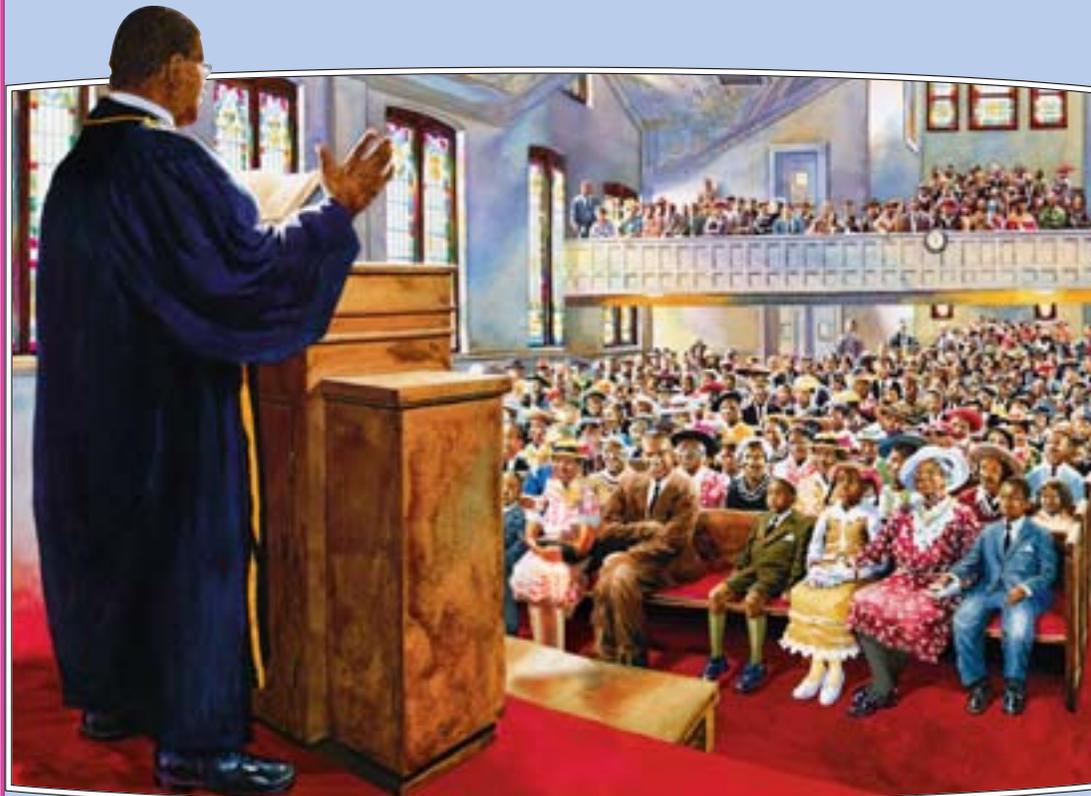
Let's **Think** About...

How do the illustration on this page and M. L.'s question to his mother help you understand how M. L. and A. D. felt? **Inferring**

In the coming years there would be other reminders of the cruel system called segregation that sought to keep black people down. But it was Daddy who showed M. L. and A. D. and me how to speak out against hatred and bigotry and stand up for what's right. Daddy was the minister at Ebenezer Baptist Church. And after losing our playmates, when M. L., A. D., and I heard our father speak from his pulpit, his words held new meaning.

And Daddy practiced what he preached. He always stood up for himself when confronted with hatred and bigotry, and each day he shared his encounters at the dinner table.

When a shoe salesman told Daddy and M. L. that he'd only serve them in the back of the store because they were black, Daddy took M. L. somewhere else to buy new shoes.



Another time, a police officer pulled Daddy over and called him "boy." Daddy pointed to M. L. sitting next to him in the car and said, "This is a boy. I am a man, and until you call me one, I will not listen to you."

These stories were as nourishing as the food that was set before us.

Years would pass, and many new lessons would be learned. There would be numerous speeches and marches and prizes. But my brother never forgot the example of our father, or the promise he had made to our mother on the day his friends turned him away.

And when he was much older, my brother M. L. dreamed a dream. . . .



Let's **Think** About...

Can you figure out what segregation is? What can you do to help you understand what the word means?

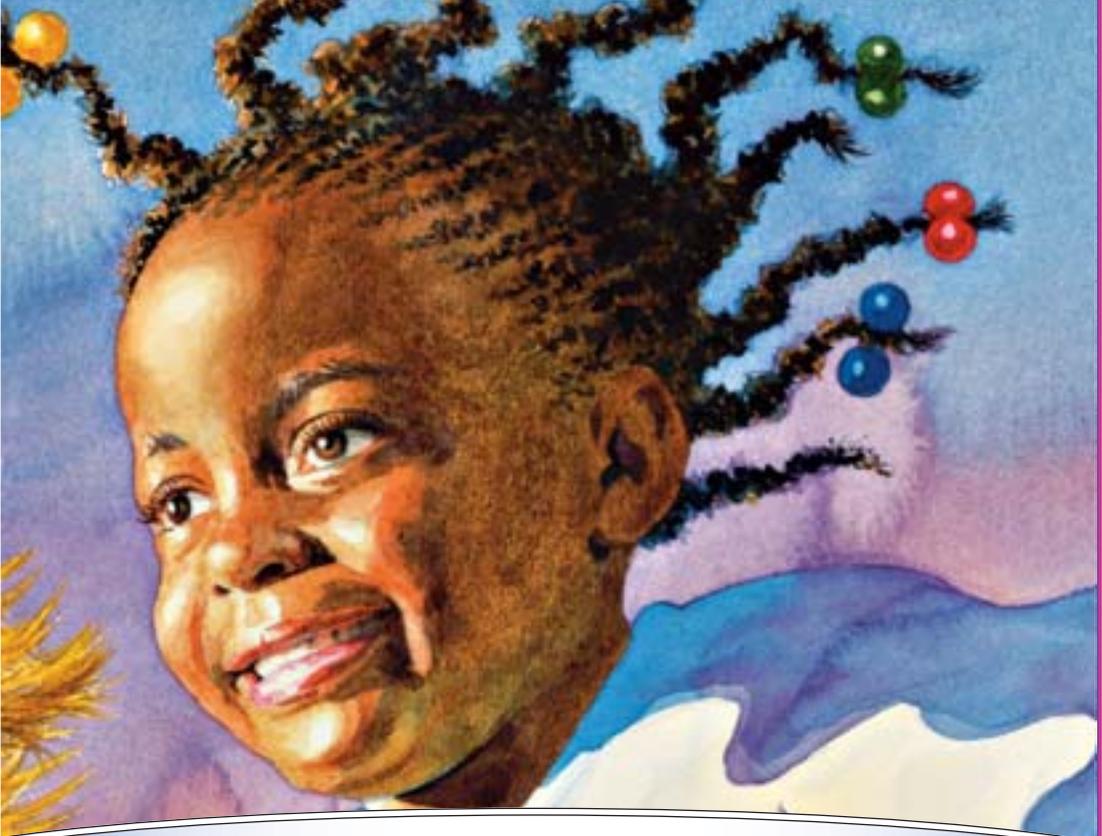
Monitor and Clarify

Let's **Think** About...

Does the illustration help you answer the question about how Dr. Martin Luther King would change the world?

Questioning

. . . that turned the world
upside down.



I Have a Dream

Speech delivered by Martin Luther King Jr.

28 August 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.

. . . And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.
And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.
Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.
Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.
Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.
Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.
But not only that:
Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.
From every mountainside, let freedom ring. . . .