

THE FIRE WITHIN

How did these famous Americans use their “fire within” to positively impact the world? Spark your students’ imaginations through these research, interview, literature and writing activities and games. Help your students discover ways they can achieve their dreams, too, by igniting their “fire within!”

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PHOTOS: Paul Robeson: © Bettman/CORBIS; James Baldwin: © Sophie Bassouls/CORBIS SYGMA; Wilma Rudolph: © Bettman/CORBIS.

PAUL ROBESON



**THROUGH MY SINGING AND ACTING AND
SPEAKING, I WANT TO MAKE FREEDOM RING.**

Paul Robeson

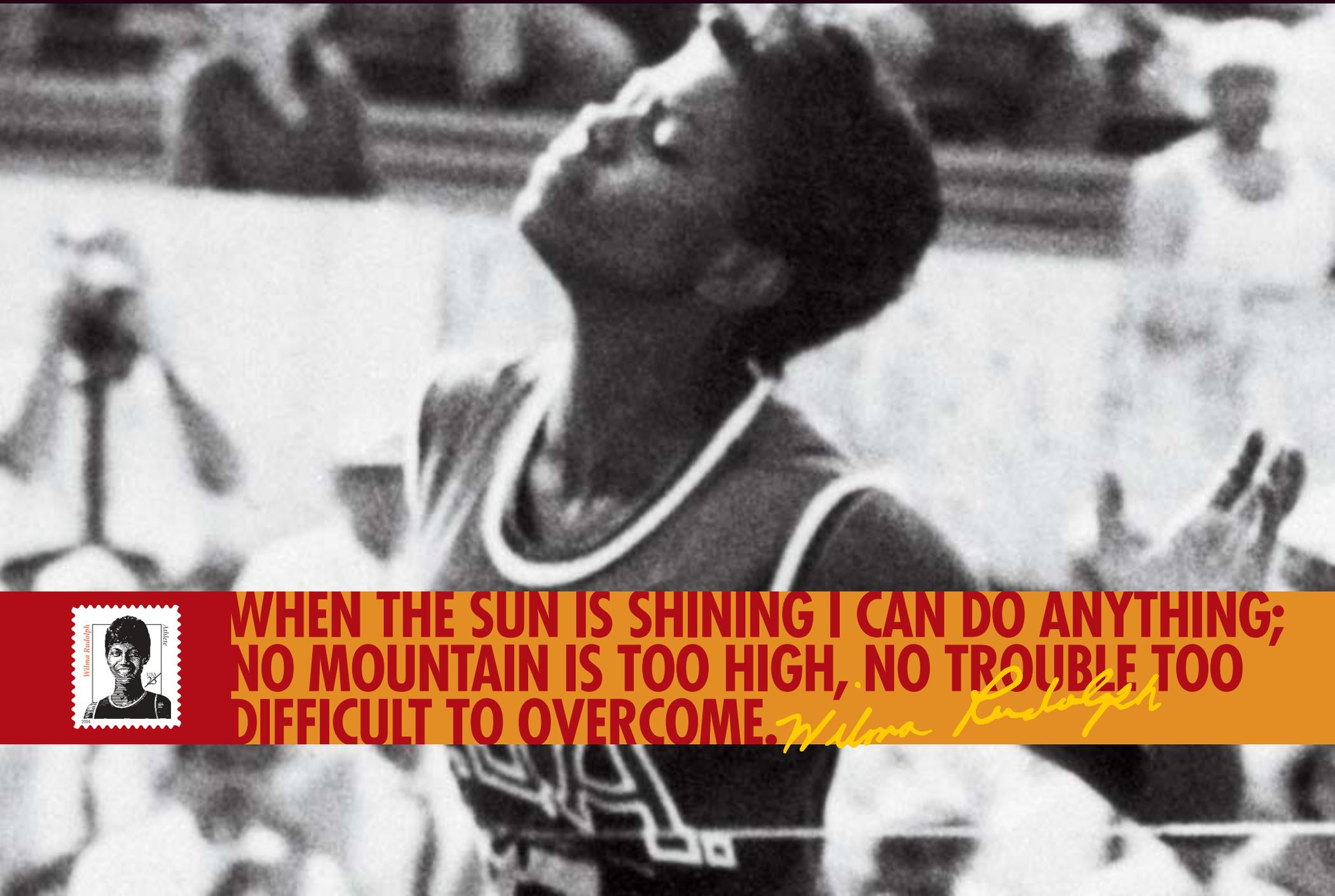
JAMES BALDWIN



FREEDOM IS NOT SOMETHING THAT ANYBODY CAN BE GIVEN, FREEDOM IS SOMETHING PEOPLE TAKE AND PEOPLE ARE AS FREE AS THEY WANT TO BE.

James Baldwin

WILMA RUDOLPH



WHEN THE SUN IS SHINING I CAN DO ANYTHING;
NO MOUNTAIN IS TOO HIGH, NO TROUBLE TOO
DIFFICULT TO OVERCOME. *Wilma Rudolph*

THE FIRE WITHIN

All of these activities are reproducible. We invite you and your colleagues to explore additional activities created by Dr. Jacqueline Hansen for the United States Postal Service at http://www.usps.com/communications/community/pdf/turgood_edkit.pdf and <http://www.usps.com/communications/community/nscm.htm>

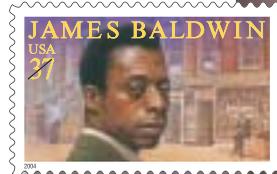
Dear Teacher,

Welcome to the most recent in a series of elementary education materials provided just for you and your students by the United States Postal Service and Dr. Jacqueline Hansen, former elementary teacher and current Assistant Professor of Education at Murray State University! By studying Americans who have overcome personal and political obstacles, your students will learn the importance of believing in their ability to achieve their dreams and positively impact the world. All unit activities support these national standards: International Reading Association/National Council of Teachers of English (IRA/NCTE) Standards for the English Language Arts (1,4,5,7,8,12); National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Curriculum Strands (I,II, IV, VI, X); and the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McRel) Standards (9,10,11,25,26,27,28). For Black History Month, the USPS has issued three special stamps honoring Paul Robeson, James Baldwin, and Wilma Rudolph.

Paul Robeson, singer, actor, scholar and athlete, was born on April 9, 1898, in Princeton, New Jersey. His father, an escaped slave, was a minister, and his mother was a schoolteacher. The third Black American to attend Rutgers College, he became an honor student and an All-American football player. Later, after graduating from Columbia University Law School in New York, he resigned from a Wall Street law firm when a white secretary refused to take dictation from him. He went on to become a world-famous concert singer, stage actor, and film star. His most famous performances were singing "Ol' Man River" in the musical *Showboat*, and playing the title role in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Robeson was also a political activist whose outspoken advocacy of civil rights, world peace, and the freedom of colonial peoples caused him to be blacklisted and targeted by the House Un-American Activities Committee. After receiving renewed popularity in the late 1950s, Robeson retired in 1961. He died in Philadelphia on January 23, 1976.



James Baldwin was born in New York City's Harlem Hospital on August 2, 1924. Although he originally planned to be a minister like his stepfather, Baldwin soon discovered his love and talent for writing. He wrote about many subjects, including race relations, love, and the arts. Baldwin published novels such as *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room*, as well as the prominent essay collection *Notes of a Native Son* and the bestselling work *The Fire Next Time*. Baldwin's work eloquently articulated the complexities of race relations during the years when the civil rights movement was at its height, and he was featured on the cover of Time magazine. He died at his home in Saint-Paul de Vence, France on November 30, 1987.



On June 23, 1940, Wilma Rudolph was born prematurely as the twentieth of twenty-two children to Ed and Blanche Rudolph in St. Bethlehem, Tennessee. As a child, Wilma suffered scarlet fever, pneumonia and polio, which crippled her left leg. Rudolph was so determined to regain her strength that she eventually became the fastest runner at her school at the age of 12. Four years later she was competing as a world-class sprinter. In 1956, Rudolph's relay team won a bronze medal in the Olympic 400-meter relay. In 1960, Rudolph became the first American woman to win three Olympic gold medals! Although she had a badly sprained ankle, she placed first in the 100- and 200-meter dashes and was the anchor runner of her gold-medal 400-meter relay team. She graduated from Tennessee University in 1963. After retiring from Olympic competition in 1962, and until her death on November 12, 1994, Rudolph dedicated herself to training and mentoring aspiring athletes. Wilma Rudolph not only broke the world record as the fastest female sprinter, she also broke through track-and-field gender and racial barriers.



We hope you and your students will enjoy this educational experience!

Murry E. Weatherall
Vice President
Diversity Development

David E. Failor
Executive Director
Stamp Services

THE FIRE WITHIN FAMOUS AMERICANS

Materials: reference books, paper, video camcorder, VCR, video tapes

SET INDUCTION

PERSONAL CONNECTION: Students quickwrite their responses to these prompts: Have you ever known or heard of somebody who did something really brave? Why do you think they did it? What happened because of their actions? Give students time to write. Share with a partner. Volunteers share with the whole class.

TRANSITION: "Sometimes when people do something brave, others say that they have a 'fire within them'. What do you think that means? This week we're going

to be talking about people who had a fire within them, a desire so strong that they were able to overcome huge obstacles to achieve their dreams and to make a difference."

DELIVER OBJECTIVES: "We'll begin by learning more about famous Americans who have a fire within them. At the end of your research project, you and your friends are going to pretend you are news reporters conducting live interviews with the famous people!"

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

- 1 Introduce the three Black Americans featured on the Black History Month stamps: James Baldwin, Paul Robeson, and Wilma Rudolph. Use information included in the introductory letter to initiate the discussion and pique students' interest. Discuss what might have sparked their "fire within". What obstacles did they have to overcome? What did they achieve and/or how did they help others?
- 2 Brainstorm a list of famous Americans who have had a fire within them; people who have persevered to make a positive impact on other's lives or to excel in what they do. Famous Americans might include public personalities such as Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall, Ellen DeGeneres, Albert Einstein, or James Baldwin; athletes such as Bruce Jenner, Kristi Yamaguchi, Greg Louganis, Magic Johnson, Jesse Owens, or Wilma Rudolph; or musicians, including Stevie Wonder, Itzhak Perlman, Loretta Lynn, Gloria Estefan, or Paul Robeson.
- 3 Generate a class list of research questions. Topics might include: demographic information, childhood, personal or social obstacles, overcoming difficulties, why they are famous today, and what we can learn from their actions.
- 4 Form research teams. Each team conducts research about ONE person. Fold a piece of writing paper into fourths. Write one research question per box on each side of the paper (8 questions total). Leave space for the answers.
- 5 Conduct research using reference materials, trade books, and the Internet. When students find the information, have them shut the book or turn away from the screen before writing the answers in their own words.

INTERVIEW ACTIVITY

Instead of writing reports, student teams will be conducting mock interviews. Ask students if they have ever seen live interviews on television. Discuss how these interviews are conducted.

- 1 Discuss interview protocol – thanking the speaker before and after the interview, having a prepared list of questions, and listening to the person's comments.
- 2 Assign roles for each team member: camera operator, reporter, director, and famous American. Students script what each person will do during the interview.
- 3 Students conduct the interviews while the camera operator videotapes them.
- 4 Share students' taped interviews with the class. After each interview, discuss how the famous Americans overcame difficulties to achieve their dreams.
- 5 Each team writes 3 facts about their famous person to use in the culminating activity.

THE FIRE WITHIN FRIENDS and FAMILY

Materials: "Brave Irene" by William Steig, large sticky notes, chart paper for a newspaper layout and collaborative article, interview form, human interest articles, graphic organizer, glue, scissors, computer with publishing program, envelopes, stamps, writing paper, newspaper, Weekly Reader, and Scholastic News

SET INDUCTION

LITERARY CONNECTION: "We've been talking about famous Americans who had the courage and conviction to make a positive difference in the world. This week we're going to talk about ordinary people who have the fire within them, too. Let's begin by reading a story about a little girl who battled a blizzard to help her mother." Read *Brave Irene* by William Steig. This is the story of a little girl, Irene, whose mother is a seamstress. Irene battles a blizzard to deliver a gown to a duchess for a royal ball. First, take a picture walk through the first half of the book, encouraging students to predict what the story is about and what will happen at the end. What gave Irene the "fire within" to make her brave? What did she do to make a positive difference in someone else's life?

TRANSITION: "People do not have to be famous to do something brave or to help others. Even people you know, your friends and family, can have a fire within them that causes them to overcome physical, social, and financial difficulties to achieve their dreams and to help other people." Give a personal example from your own life. Do any of you know someone who has had to overcome difficulties? Invite student input.

DELIVER OBJECTIVES: "You just learned how to interview famous people. Today we are going to interview a special friend or family member who has a 'fire within'. After you interview your special person, you will be writing an article for a class newspaper."

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

1 Generate a list of interview questions. Students should seek information about the person's difficulties, their motivation for being brave, what happened and when/where the event took place. Students create their own interview forms by listing the questions and leaving room for responses.

2 Remind students to thank the person before and after the interview. While the other person is talking, they

need to listen carefully and take notes. Then they should check to ensure their notes are accurate.

3 Conduct the interviews. For long-distance loved ones, mail the interview questions. Local interviews may be conducted face-to-face or by telephone.

WRITING ACTIVITY

"How many of you ever watch the news at home? Have you ever seen a news story about something special that someone did?" Invite student input. Give an example from current events. "These are called human interest stories because people are interested in hearing what special things people have done for each other. Human interest stories can also be written as articles for a local newspaper."

1 Study human interest articles in the local newspaper or a student publication such as *Weekly Reader* or *Scholastic News*. Identify these components: headline, byline, lead (5 Ws), and facts.

2 Model the writing process by writing a collaborative human interest article about *Brave Irene*.

3 Create a graphic organizer to scaffold students' writing efforts. The organizer should contain these components (along with room for writing): headline, byline, lead paragraph (who-what-when-where-how-why), and three facts.

4 Students use interview information to write human interest articles. Publish these articles in the form of a class newspaper. Students can affix large sticky notes or typed versions of their articles onto a newspaper layout or they can use a computer publishing program to generate a class newspaper.

THE FIRE WITHIN ME

Materials: chart paper for matrix and collaborative writing, construction paper, overhead projector, glue, magazines, various writing implements, scissors, envelopes, stamps, writing paper, Mariah Carey's song, "Hero," CD player

SET INDUCTION

ACADEMIC CONNECTION: "We have talked about famous people and people we love who had a fire within them, a belief that they could overcome difficulties to achieve whatever they wanted. Let's review what we've learned." Create a matrix with these headings: Person, Difficulties, and Accomplishments. As you discuss the various people children have studied, write their responses in the appropriate columns.

TRANSITION: "Do you think these people knew they had a fire within them when they were really young? Probably

not. The difficulties they encountered later in life sparked that fire and gave them the courage to overcome their difficulties. You have a fire within you, too. You just may not have discovered it yet!" Play Mariah Carey's song, *Hero*. Discuss how all people have a hero within them.

DELIVER OBJECTIVES: "Today you're going to explore different things that are important to you, issues that might spark your fire within. At the end of our activities, you'll write a letter to the newspaper editor about these issues."

ART ACTIVITY

- 1 What are some things that are very important to you? Give personal examples.
- 2 Students create collages of pictures and words depicting what's important to them. They may cut out magazine items and/or write or draw items.
- 3 Create collages on silhouettes of the students' profiles. Tape a piece of dark paper on the wall. While

students stand in front of the overhead projector, use a light crayon to trace their profiles. Cut out the silhouettes and create the collages.

- 4 Give students an opportunity to share their collages before displaying them.

WRITING ACTIVITY

- 1 "When people feel strongly about issues, they often write letters to the editor of the local paper." Read an appropriate local example.
- 2 Choose an issue that was important to your students. Brainstorm reasons why that topic is so important and ways to improve the situation. Write a collaborative letter to a fictitious newspaper editor to model correct letter format.

- 3 Students select one issue that is very important to them. They brainstorm reasons why it is important and what they could do to make the current situation better. Use the writing process to compose letters to the local newspaper editor.

- 4 With the principal's permission, address envelopes and mail these letters to the local newspaper editor for publication.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY: "FIRE WITHIN" BINGO

Create a grid (5 squares across, 5 squares down). The center square is a free square labeled "The Fire Within". Prepare a matrix of mini-cards with information about the famous leaders discussed in lesson one activities. You will need the person's name and three facts about the person (one per mini-card). Students cut and paste the mini-cards onto the 25-square grid to create their own

playing cards. Create a leader's set of cards by cutting the mini-cards apart and placing the pieces in a container. Play "The Fire Within" like a BINGO game. Draw a mini-card from the container, read the information, identify the famous American, and cover the appropriate squares.