

Expert Group #2: Teachers of the Freedom Schools



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NOTE: Most of the following sources are primary documents from the 1964 Freedom Schools, provided by [Education & Democracy](#), [Civil Rights Movement Veterans](#), and the [University of Southern Mississippi Digital Collections](#).

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS - Teachers Expert Group

- 1) The Freedom School teachers - who were they? Why did they want to go to Mississippi? What were some of the risks they faced?
- 2) According to the various memos and notes for teacher training, what were the main characteristics needed to be a successful Freedom Schools teacher? How does that compare with current ideas on the traditional role of teachers?
- 3) One of the key recommendations to teachers was to relate topics to student interests. Why do you think that was emphasized in the Freedom Schools? Does your school encourage students to talk about their interests and experiences - why/why not?
- 4) What were some other pieces of advice given to volunteers who would be teaching in Freedom Schools?
- 5) How do you think teaching in the Freedom Schools impacted the volunteers? What did the teachers learn as a result of volunteering during the summer of 1964?

WHO THEY WERE: "The House of Liberty" poem by Joyce Brown (1964)

[After the building housing the McComb, MS, Freedom School was bombed during [Freedom Summer](#) of 1964, no one was willing to provide another place so the teachers and students conducted classes on the scorched earth of the burned building. The poem below by 16-year-old Joyce Brown, a Freedom School teacher/student, inspired community adults to rise above their fear and reopen the doors of churches to Movement activity, begin donating money and food to freedom fighters, and participate in voter registration.]

THE HOUSE OF LIBERTY

I came not for fortune, nor for fame,
I seek not to add glory to an unknown name;
I did not come under the shadow of night,
I came by day to fight for what's right.
I shan't let fear, my monstrous foe,
Conquer my soul with threat and woe.
Here I have come and Here I shall stay,
And no amount of fear, my determination can sway.

I asked for your churches, and you turned me down,
But I'll do my work if I have to do it on the ground;
You will not speak for fear of being heard,
So you crawl in your shell and say, "Do not disturb."
You think because you've turned me away,
You've protected yourself for another day.

But tomorrow surely must come,
And your enemy will still be there with the rising sun;
He'll be there tomorrow as all tomorrows in the past,
And he'll follow you into the future if you let him pass.
You've turned me down to humor him,
Ah! Your fate is sad and grim,
For even tho' your help I ask,
Even without it, I'll finish my task.

In a bombed house I have to teach my school,
Because I believe all men should live by the Golden Rule.
To a bombed house your children must come,
Because of your fear of a bomb,
And because you've let your fear conquer your soul,
In this bombed house these minds I must try to mold;
I must try to teach them to stand tall and be a man
When you their parents have cowered down and refused to take a stand.

Joyce Brown
McComb Freedom School

WHO THEY WERE: Letter by Freedom Schools teacher Mary Sue (1964)

P. O. Box 547
Shaw, Mississippi 38773
February 1, 1965.

Dear Friends,

There have been many changes here since I last wrote. I'll try to tell you what things are like now.

There are three of us on the staff now; a fellow who lives here in Shaw, a fellow from California, and myself. But we're not really the ones doing all the work. The local people, especially the adults, are really working hard and participating consistently.

The freedom school for adults is really booming. An average of thirty men and women have been meeting each morning -- all in the living room of a small house. Now we have rented a small building to be used for this purpose. The group started out by discussing what freedom means, what it was they wanted, how they might go about trying to get it, and going on to discussions of the U. S. and Mississippi government (which are not the same), science and religion. Now they are reading a book about life following the Civil War. Several of them can't read, because they had to work in the cotton fields and couldn't go to school. But on the first day of reading they decided to pair up so that those who couldn't read would look on with those who could, and in the evenings they would get together and re-read and discuss further the things they had read. Everyone participates, when the chapter of the previous day is discussed.

In the afternoons there is a freedom school for grade-school-age children. They learn to write sentences, tell stories, sing, do various art work, write letters, and to do many other things that interest them. One of the things which make the freedom school different from the regular schools is that the interests of those who come to them determine what shall be taught.

In addition, there are three mass meetings held each week. At a recent one the people decided to have another Freedom Day. This means that on that day a large number of people will go to the county courthouse to register to vote. Many will carry signs to show what they want, and probably some will hand out leaflets explaining in more detail. Many tried to register to vote in the last few weeks, but because of fear, many others have not done so. It is felt that these too will have the courage to go up if they know that many others will be with them. In the last three weeks three Shaw Negroes have passed the test and of course we're elated. But that brings to only six the total having passed the test in the last five months.

Some of the people on plantations want to have meetings in their areas, since they live far from town and have no cars. But it's just not wise to meet in their homes and it's hard to get the use of churches because of fear of bombing. But they're still trying.

Danger still exists all over the state. A girl here in Shaw was cut by flying glass the other day when two rifle shots were fired into a full classroom of a Negro elementary school in the part of town which is most

active in the movement. We don't know who fired them, but a car carrying two white men was seen about the same time on that street. It is this kind of thing that makes people afraid to register to vote, come to meetings, etc. Yet at the same time they are just plain tired of being treated this way and they're tired enough to do something about it. Today seven more tried to register.

Last week we painted the inside of the community center and it really looks nice and cheerful now. Soon we'll be fixing up the building we rented for the freedom school.

There are citizenship classes in two parts of Shaw now and three freedom movement libraries. One library is in the community center and the other two are in homes. The most popular books are the ones about Negro life and history by Negro writers. Few of these are available in Mississippi -- even in the schools, yet these are among the most important books to be read these days. Mississippi robs Negroes of their history, their heritage, and the knowledge that many Negroes have done outstanding things.

Lawyers in various parts of the state are gathering depositions to prove that there has been discrimination, harassment and intimidation, all interfering with voter registration of Negroes. The evidence is easy to find, but since it must be presented in a public hearing, much of it will never enter the case because people are afraid (I think justifiably so) that if they tell what has happened something worse will occur. This evidence is being collected in connection with the challenge of the right of Mississippi's five congressmen to represent the state in the United States Congress. The challenge is being made because they were elected illegally. The basis for this claim is that Negroes have been and are being systematically excluded from voting and other participation in the political life of the state. Even those few who have been able to register, have in several counties been barred from attending precinct meetings or voting in them. Lawyers for Mrs. Annie Devine, Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer and Mrs. Victoria Gray, who are actually making the challenge, have 40 days in which to take testimony; then the returning congressmen have 40 days, after which the contestants have another 10 days to prepare their rebuttal. After this 90 day period, all the testimony will be printed and presented to Congress. Some time in the summer the House will vote on whether or not the five men will remain seated. If they are unseated there would probably be a new election in Mississippi. Elections have been illegal for years, but they haven't been challenged (with the exception of Bilbo). The main reason has been danger. But now that there's a mass movement, the danger to any one individual is less.

More and more people are participating in the movement, making it increasingly effective.

It's hard to tell you what our work is really like because it's just working with people to help improve their situation. The things with the most meaning -- like seeing certain people take the step to register to vote, or others starting to come to meetings or citizenship classes -- these things just don't seem to have the meaning when I try to put them in writing. But there is progress and we are encouraged.

With love,

Mary Sue

TEACHER ORIENTATION: Notes on Teaching in Mississippi (Part 1 - 1964)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUMMER—Jane Stenbridge

This is the situation: You will be teaching young people who have lived in Mississippi all their lives. That means that they have been deprived of decent education, from the first grade through high school. It means that they have been denied free expression and free thought. Most of all—it means that they have been denied the right to question. The purpose of the Freedom Schools is to help them begin to question.

What will they be like? They will all be different—but they will have in common the scars of the system. Some will be cynical. Some will be distrustful. All of them will have a serious lack of preparation both with regard to academic subjects and contemporary issues—but all of them will have knowledge far beyond their years. This knowledge is the knowledge of how to survive in a society that is out to destroy you . . . and the knowledge of the extent of evil in the world.

Because these young people possess such knowledge, they will be ahead of you in many ways. But this knowledge is purely negative; it is only *half* of the picture and, so far as the Negro is concerned, it is the first half. It has, in a sense, already been lived through. The old institutions are crumbling and there is great reason to hope for the first time. You will help them to see there is hope and inspire them to go after it.

What will they demand of you? They will demand that you be honest. Honesty is an attitude toward life which is communicated by everything you do. Since you, too, will be in a learning situation—honesty means that you will *ask* questions as well as answer them. It means that if you don't know something you will say so. It means that you will not “act” a part in the attempt to compensate for all they've endured in Mississippi. You can't compensate for that, and they don't want you to try. It would not be *real*, and the greatest contribution that you can make to them is to be real.

Remember this: These young people have been taught by the system not to trust. You have to be trust-worthy. It's that simple. Secondly, there is very little if anything that you can teach them about prejudice and segregation. They know. What you can and must do is help them develop ideas and associations and tools with which they can do something *about* segregation and prejudice.

How? We can say that the key to your teaching will be honesty and creativity. We can prepare materials for you and suggest teaching methods. Beyond that, it is your classroom. We will be happy to assist whenever we can. How? You will discover the way—because that is why you have come.

THIS IS THE SITUATION—Charlie Cobb

Repression is the law; oppression, a way of life—regimented by the judicial and executive branches of the state government, rigidly enforced by state police machinery, with veering from the path of “our way of life” not tolerated at all. Here, an idea of your own is a subversion that must be squelched; for each bit of intellectual initiative represents the threat of a probe into the why of denial. Learning here means only learning to stay in your place. Your place is to be satisfied—a “good nigger.”

They have learned the learning necessary for immediate survival: that silence is safest, so volunteer nothing; that the teacher is the state, and tell them only what they want to hear; that the law and learning are white man's law and learning.

There is hope and there is dissatisfaction—feebly articulated—both born out of the desperation of needed alternatives not given. This is the generation that has silently made the vow of no more raped mothers—no more castrated fathers; that looks for an alternative to a lifetime of bent, burnt and broken backs, minds, and souls. Where creativity must be molded from the rhythm of a muttered “white son-of-a-bitch”; from the roar of hunger-bloated belly; and from the stench of rain and mud washed shacks.

There is the waiting, not to be taught, but to reach out and meet and join together, and to change. The tiredness of being told it must be, ‘cause that's white folks' business, must be met with the insistence that it's their

business. They know that anyway. It's because their parents didn't make it their business that they're being so systematically destroyed. What they must see is the link between a rotting shack and a rotting America.

PROBLEMS OF FREEDOM SCHOOL TEACHING—Mendy Samstein

The Freedom Schools will not operate out of schoolhouses. There will rarely be classrooms, certainly no bells, and blackboards only if they can be scrounged. Freedom Schools in Mississippi will be a low-cost operation since funds will be very limited. Furthermore, the community will have little to offer in the way of resources. In many places, particularly in rural towns, there are no really suitable facilities available either in the white or in the Negro communities. As a result, most Freedom Schools will have to be held in church basements, homes, back yards, etc.

In some towns in the state, the students are waiting with great excitement in anticipation of the Freedom Schools. In other areas, however, special interest will have to be created—the teachers themselves will have to recruit students before the Freedom Schools begin. In these places, you will find that you are almost the first civil rights worker to be there, and if you are white, you will almost certainly be the first white civil rights workers to come to the town to stay. You will need to deal with the problem of your novelty as well as with the educational challenge.

There will be some advantages which will, we hope, overcome some of the material shortcomings. If you go to a town where COFO has had an active project for some time, you will probably be greeted warmly because there is a great deal of support for the Freedom School program. However, even if you go to a relatively new place, you can count on some things: In no community will there be a Freedom School unless the people of that community have expressed a desire for one, have shown their support by finding housing for staff at low cost (typically \$10 a week for room and board), and have scouted out a place for a Freedom School.

The greatest advantage, however, will be the students and, we hope, your approach. In the final analysis, the effectiveness of the Freedom Schools this summer will depend upon the resourcefulness and honesty of the individual teachers—on their ability to relate sympathetically to the students, to discover their needs, and to create an exciting “learning” atmosphere. The informal surroundings, the lack of formal “school” trappings, will probably benefit the creation of this atmosphere more than the shortage of expensive equipment will discourage it. Attendance will not be required, so if the teacher is to have regular attendance from his students, he must offer them a program which continues to attract; this means that he must be a human and interesting person.

It is important to recognize that these communities are in the process of rapid social change and our Freedom School program, along with the rest of the summer activities, will be in the middle of this ferment. The students will be involved in a number of political activities which will be relatively new in Negro communities in Mississippi. They will be encouraging people to register to vote, organizing political rallies, campaigning for Negro candidates for high public offices, and preparing to challenge the Mississippi Democratic Party. These activities will be a large part of the experience which the students will bring to your classes. In most instances, we believe that this will help the Freedom School program and you should capitalize on these experiences by relating it to classroom work. You will need to know something about these experiences, so you will have the opportunity to share them by canvassing, campaigning, distributing leaflets, etc., with the students. You will define your role more precisely when you arrive by consulting with COFO voter registration people in the area. It will probably be important to the students that you show willingness to work with them but you will have to balance this against your own need to prepare for classes, recreation and tutoring.

In some communities, however, the situation may go beyond this. The community may embark upon more direct kinds of protest, resulting in mass demonstrations, jail, and any number of eventualities. We have no specific suggestions to make if this situation arises. You will have to play it by ear. We can only say that if you are teaching in a Freedom School in Mississippi, you *must* keep a sensitive ear to the ground so that if this should happen, you will be aware of what is happening in the community. You will have to decide if a continuing educational program is possible, and, if it is not, what modification of the program you can arrange to make this summer as constructive a period for the community as possible.

TEACHER ORIENTATION: Notes on Teaching in Mississippi (Part 2 - 1964)

REMARKS TO THE FREEDOM SCHOOL TEACHERS ABOUT METHOD— Noel Day

TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND METHOD: The curriculum is flexible enough to provide for the use of a wide range of methods in transmitting the material. The basic suggested method is discussion (both as a class and in small groups) because of the opportunities this method provides for:

1. Encouraging expression.
2. Exposing feelings (bringing them into the open where they may be dealt with productively).
3. Permitting the participation of students on various levels.
4. Developing group loyalties and responsibility.
5. Permitting the sharing of strengths and weaknesses of individual group members.

However, presentation lectures, reading aloud (by students), the use of drama, art, and singing can be utilized in many sections of the curriculum. We recommend, however, that discussion be used as a follow up in each instance in order to make certain that the material has been learned.

TEACHING HINTS:

1. Material should be related whenever possible to the experience of students.
2. No expression of feelings (hostility, aggression, submission, etc.) should ever be passed over, no matter how uncomfortable the subject or the situation is. Both the students and the teacher can learn something about themselves and each other if it is dealt with honestly and with compassion.
3. The classroom atmosphere should not be formal (it is not a public school). Ways of accomplishing an informal atmosphere might be arrangement of seats in a circle, discussions with individuals or small groups before and after sessions, use of first names between teachers and students, shared field-work experiences, letting students lead occasionally, etc.
4. Prepare ahead of time for each session.
5. When using visual materials, make certain they are easily visible to all students and large enough to be seen. (When smaller materials must be used, pass them around after pointing out significant details.)
6. Let students help develop visual materials wherever possible (perhaps after class for the next session).
7. At the end of each session, summarize what has been covered and indicate briefly what will be done in the next session.
8. At the beginning of each session, summarize the material that was covered the day before (or ask a student to do it).
9. Keep language simple.
10. Don't be too critical at first; hold criticism until a sound rapport has been established. Praise accomplishments wherever possible.
11. Give individual help to small groups, or when students are reading aloud or drawing.
12. A limit of one hour (an hour and a half at most) is probably desirable for any one session. This limit can be extended, however, by changing activities and methods within a session.

DISCUSSION-LEADING TECHNIQUES

1. The leader must always be aware of his role: that he is, on the one hand, only the leader and not the dominant participant, and, on the other hand, that he is in fact the leader and responsible for providing direction and keeping the discussion going.
2. The use of questions is probably the best way to start and keep a discussion going. The questions should be:
 - a. simple and clearly phrased

- b. in language understood by the discussants.
 - c. not answerable by “yes” or “no”.
3. The best types of questions fall into three categories:
 - a. Those investigating emotional response (e.g., how did you feel when? Or how would you feel if?)
 - b. Those investigating motivation (e.g., why did you feel that way? Why would you do that? Why do you think that?, etc.)
 - c. Those in response to others’ reactions (e.g., what do you think about what Bob said?)
 4. The physical arrangements can affect the quality of discussion. The best arrangement has everyone in view of everyone else. The leader then stands to introduce a visual aid so that it is visible to all.
 5. The leader should be careful to be adroit at keeping the discussion on the track.
 6. The leader should occasionally summarize what has been said:
 - a. to provide continued direction.
 - b. to provide smooth transitions from one major topic to another.
 - c. to emphasize important points (and by exclusion to de-emphasize irrelevant points).
 - d. to re-stimulate the group if discussion has lagged.
 7. The leader should encourage participation by everyone. Some techniques for this are:
 - a. direct question to silent participants (do not press if they continue to be reticent).
 - b. use of small groups with the usually silent members as reporters.
 - c. praise when the usually silent members participate.
 - d. relating topics to their personal interests and experiences.
 - e. re-stating inarticulate statements for them (e.g., Do you mean? etc.)
 8. The leader should be sensitive to lagging interests and overextended attention spans. (The form of activity can be changed after a brief summary of the discussion to that point. A change of activity form is often restful—particularly when it requires some physical movement, such as breaking one large group into smaller groups scattered throughout the room, or putting review in the form of a TV quiz game, or asking that a particular point be dramatized, or a picture drawn, etc.)
 9. The leader should have all resource materials, visual aids, etc., at hand.
 10. The leader should always leave time for the students to ask him questions.
 11. The leader should be willing to share his experiences and feelings, too.
 12. The leader should not insist that words be pronounced in any particular way. Respect regional variations (e.g., Southern pronunciation of “bomb” is typically “bum”). The basic point is communication—if it gets the idea across it is good.
 13. The leader should not be critical—particularly at the start. For many of the students, **JUST BEING ABLE TO VERBALIZE IN THIS SITUATION IS PROGRESS** that can easily be inhibited by a disapproving remark or facial expression.
 14. Learn the students’ slang. It can often be used to ease tensions or to express tones of feeling and certain meanings more succinctly than more academic language.
 15. Protect students from each other’s verbal attacks and downgrading (ranking, etc.)—particularly the slower or less articulate students.

USING DRAMA: Probably the best way of using the dramatic method is the extemporaneous approach. In this approach, learning lines in a formal way is avoided. A story is told, or a “let us suppose that” or a “Pretend that...” situation is structured, and then parts assigned. The actors are encouraged to use their own language to interpret the story or situation and some participants are assigned to act the part of nonhuman objects as well (e.g., trees, a table, a mirror, the wind, the sun, etc.). Each actor is asked to demonstrate how he thinks the character he is portraying looks, what expression, what kind of voice, how he walks, what body posture, etc. As soon as each actor has determined the characteristics of his part, the story outlined is reviewed again, and then dramatized. This method can permit the expression of a wide range of feelings by the students, involve their total selves, stimulate creativity, provide the teacher with insights about the students, and, at the same time get across the content material.

TEACHER ORIENTATION: Memo to Freedom School Teachers (1964)

To: MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SCHOOL TEACHERS
FROM: Miss. Summer Project Staff
RE: SUBJECT: Overview of the Freedom Schools

The purpose of the Freedom schools is to provide an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives, and ultimately, new directions for action.

Just what forms this educational experience will take will vary from school to school and from teacher to teacher. We will not be able to provide all the facilities, materials and personnel we would like. This is a fact of our whole operation, and we are used to it. But we hope the curriculum will be flexible enough to overcome them.

The Freedom Schools will consist of from 5 to 15 teachers and 25 to 50 students. It does not now appear that we will be able to secure buildings for residential schools, so you will be working in day churches, store fronts, homes, etc.

The kinds of activities you will be developing will fall into three general areas: 1) academic work, 2) recreation and cultural activities, 3) leadership development. It is our hope that these three will be integrated into one learning experience, rather than being the kind of fragmented learning and living that characterizes much of contemporary education. How this integration can occur will be suggested by the materials we will be sending you and by the orientation period.

Since the students' academic experiences should relate directly to their real life in Mississippi, and since learning that involved real life experiences is, we think, most meaningful, we hope that the students will be involved in the political life of the communities. As the day's schedule below indicates, the students will work in various kinds of political activity in the evenings. The way students can participate in local voter registration should be worked out by the teachers and local COFO voter registration staff at a meeting before the opening of school. The teachers will be free to participate in these activities with the students, although you may need the time to prepare lessons, etc., and thus will want the local staff to supervise the students' canvassing, etc. It may also be the case that on some evenings the teachers or students will plan a special event and thus the students will not do political work that night. Or it may happen that the need for canvassing for a special event will cause local staff to ask for part of the students' day for this purpose. It is important that voter registration staff and teachers stay in close touch with each other so these things can be worked out. An average day's schedule might look like this: Early morning (7-9): Concentrated individual work on areas of the students' particular interest or need. Morning (9-12 or 1): Academic curriculum. Afternoon (2-4 or 5): Non-academic curriculum (recreation, cultural activities and some tutoring.) You will have to bear in mind that it is too hot in the afternoon for much concentrated work. Evening (7-9 or so): Work with voter registration activities, or special events (like a visiting folk singer) on evenings when no political work is needed.

The development of a weekly schedule and a daily lesson plan will be left to the teachers and students of the school. All teachers will be at their school's site at least a week before the schools open July 7. This week should be used primarily for planning by the teaching group, as well as recruiting students and making community contacts. We will try to balance the schools' personnel so that various skills will be represented by different members of the teaching team.

The fact that you will do the actual development of a plan for each day means that you will have to be creative, resourceful and flexible. To aid you in your task, we will be supplying you with the following material, either in the mail or at orientation:

1. Curriculum Guide for Freedom Schools, by Noel Day. This document will be your basic teaching material. It contains six units of study centered around values and social change. Each unit contains suggested content materials and teaching methods. It will be possible for you to center some of the writing and reading teaching around the subject matter of the units, and discussion will help students grow in public speaking ability.

2. Case studies are being prepared by various people. Some of these will relate directly to the curriculum suggested by the Curriculum Guide, some can be used as supplementary material. The Case Study Outline will explain how to use these studies of various problems related to civil rights and political change.

3. Papers on the teaching of science, math and remedial reading and writing (also short papers on teaching arts and crafts, dramatics, etc.)

Science will not relate directly to the subject matter of the curriculum guide, but it is important that students receive both a feeling for what real science is (which they do not receive in school) and tutorial help in specific scientific areas of study if they show interest. Any teacher who know this area should come prepared to do some special work with a few students and to handle a class session or two on a general "Wonders of Science" theme. The paper you will receive will give you further ideas.

Math is an area of real difficulty for many students. Try to secure 11th and 12th (and earlier) math texts for use in tutoring. It will be difficult to develop class sessions around this subject, since students' abilities will vary greatly. The paper on teaching this subject will help you see an approach for a classroom situation.

Remedial reading and writing work will be needed by nearly all students. Reading aloud is suggested in the Curriculum Guide as are some theme topics. Students should be encouraged and guided in doing outside reading. Writing should be discussed with students individually with tutorial help directed toward writing improvement.

4. A paper on Leadership Development by Charlie Cobb will contain suggestions of the kinds of skills students should develop and suggest how these can be integrated into daily activities.

5. A paper suggesting recreational and cultural activities for students will be available.

IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL THAT YOU STUDY THESE MATERIALS CAREFULLY AND BRING THEM SOUTH WITH YOU. THEY WILL BE YOUR GUIDE FOR THE SUMMER. YOUR TIME HERE IS LIMITED AND YOU MUST PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. We will NOT be able to replace curriculum materials if you fail to bring them with you.

We are glad you will be with the Mississippi movement and hope that you share our excitement about the possibilities that the summer holds for real growth for you and Mississippi's young people.

TEACHER ORIENTATION: Freedom Schools Volunteer Mark Levy's Notes during Teacher Orientation in Oxford, OH

[Notes: Original hand written notes are on file In the Mark Levy collection at the Queens College/CUNY Rosenthal Library Civil Rights Archive. Levy noted: "My notes do not indicate who the teacher-training orientation speaker or speakers were in Oxford, OH. A 2012 email to me from the 1964 Statewide Freedom School Coordinator Staughton Lynd says he thinks he was probably the speaker - and I think that he is the likely source.]"

Freedom school not to educate to move north and get job - but to form and motivate leadership.

Most important thing to teach is that students -- must think, ask questions, respect themselves.

Not impose way we have been taught, but way we would have liked to have been taught. Also, Mississippi students will be coming expecting something different.

We will start building schools from the moment we get off the bus and get into the homes and meet the families.

There are a lot of people in the community who want the freedom schools. Get them to help recruit.

You will be often the first white person the students know well. Must be honest - explain why there. Watch out for "Yes sir's." Students must question and talk back to teachers.

Learn "un-freedom" before you can teach "freedom." Learn from students how to survive in a totalitarian state.

Certain basic shared emotion is "FEAR." Good starting point.

Don't teach what's in your mind - but find out what is in student's.

Develop on-going programs. (Find and) train people who can take over later.

Must encounter people as people - not as "students" and "teachers."

Once a student learns to ask "Why?" - the system is starting to change.

Get an understanding of the students' own schools.

Compile history of Negro in the county and on the history of the movement in the area.

Not black and white but "people" coming down. No insider and outsider. Eastland makes laws for all.

Dual responsibility of teachers to prepare for school - but also to be close to students and their activities.

If afraid of the unknown, should back out now - can't predict. Can't play game by their rules.

Everything going on in the community is a subject for discussion.

Curriculum becomes a crutch for a frightened teacher who runs out of words - but (aim is to) deal with students' desires.

Examine words often used:
"The system"
"The man"
"Mr. Charlie"

Get to know the needs of the community: Its general issues and the function of the freedom school in relation to those issues (and the ability of people to attend).

Handicraft co-ops growing out of community centers.

Let teachers teach out of own strengths - both in content and in style.

Medger was not killed just because he was leader of NAACP - what was he doing was the challenge.

When the press does a story, the story is not about you -- but about the community, the project, and the local people.

Far easier for northern whites to work in Negro community where we feel accepted -- than to step out of shell and go where we are also needed.

Q: "Would you marry a Negro?"

A: "Which one?"

[Emphasis on point is that it is a person, a human being, that we are concerned about - not a stereotype.]

Instead of tests for the pupils, there should be evaluations of the teachers by the students and discussions to see if they are getting what they want because the teachers are down there to help. The most important experience this summer for the students will be their relationships with their teachers.

TEACHER ORIENTATION: Non-material Teaching Suggestions by Ruth Emerson

My preference is for de-emphasizing the teaching of reading (spelling and grammar) as a separate skill unless a student, of his own volition, specially requests it. In general, a high school student will probably learn more from speaking, reading, and writing about his own thoughts or a particular subject he himself is interested in. Two students working together can often teach and learn more from each other than you can teach either of them separately. But you should always be available to answer questions (if you can) or act as umpire if needed. Specifically, a student or students might be asked to do any of the following:

1. Write up reactions to, or a summary of, a class discussion.
2. Report to the class on something he, or they, have studied on their own or worked on specially with you or a specialist (e.g. in math, science, art or politics).
3. teach games or reading, or anything needed, to younger children in a Community Center and report this in detail for the class.
4. Report for, and edit, a newspaper to exchange with other Freedom Schools.
5. Report or exchange information in any form on any subject that may occur to you or them (e.g. their work on Voter Reg.)

You will want to fit the form of the presentation to the particular student—a written report for him to read to the class, or which you or another student might read to the class, or an oral report to the class, with or without demonstration (or a scientific experiment, an artistic creation or anything else.)

I would suggest not correcting grammar or spelling for the first few days unless a student asks you to (and means it). Students will probably criticize each other on these mechanics, and this is better. You will have to judge which students need to be protected, by you, from too much fellow-student criticism too soon. Some students will not be able to bring themselves to read aloud or speak before the class. You should judge when, if ever, it is time to push them a little to make a try at it. Try never to embarrass a student before his fellows.

Some students will be unable to express their thoughts adequately in writing if you insist upon proper spelling. Others will be uncomfortable if you do not enable them to spell everything properly as they write it down. For these students, you should be ever-present to furnish them with the words they need. Such a student might have a notebook in which he could copy and keep track of any word you furnished for him. (You could write it on a slip of paper as he asked for it.) Generally speaking, I would not say “Go look it up in the dictionary” if a student asks how to spell a word. (Try looking up a word like colossal? calosel? collasol? if you don’t know its spelling, and you’ll see what I mean.)

We are really more concerned with content and clarity of thought (in the student’s own meaningful language) than with grammar and spelling. I think this point has a particular importance in areas where the public school teachers have been hesitant to deal in ideas—because then there is a tendency for the teacher to fall back on stressing mechanics. (By the same token, if you are fresh from the halls of ivy, watch to keep yourself from falling back on jargon or vague, abstract terms when the ideas get hot or you’re not sure exactly what you want to say.)

If you feel that a particular student is free enough in expressing his ideas that you can afford to push him in the areas of spelling and grammar, the newspaper might be a good place for him to practice it. I think the newspaper would be one place where you can require precision in spelling and grammar, and perhaps (?) a more formal style of writing. Students who were not up to this could write newspaper stories which could be edited by other students. I think the rule of thumb for this whole area of written (and oral) expression might be: Help your student to use his language for clear communication, but hesitate to change matters of style—unless it’s your student who’s working on style.

READING MATERIALS AT VARIOUS LEVELS:

If you do not have reading material which matches your (each) student—and content is at least as important as reading level—I would suggest your having the students write their own material. Your labor is likely to bear more fruit if they, rather than you, do the writing. If you want to study a difficult novel, read it aloud to them, or have a student who enjoys reading aloud and does it well do part of the reading. As you read, encourage interruptions for questions and discussion. Then you can have a, some, or all students write summaries or critiques or whatever you want. Read then aloud in class (each his own, perhaps) and discuss content. If it turns out to be something great, you can have the students edit the material and perhaps exchange a volume with another freedom school. (It doesn't have to be mimeographed, it could be a single handwritten and illustrated volume.)

For non-literary subjects, it is usually much better if you study the material in advance and tell it rather than reading it to the students. Then go on with the writing and discussion, as above, if you want to. Your telling, with your own comments and asides, is a thousand times more captivating to a student than reading the material aloud.

You can modify the above for math as well as history, science, etc. Students making up math problems for other students to solve will often make up more difficult ones than you or the book would have dared—and if the problem-maker has gotten too fancy, you can always pull the dirty trick of making him solve his own! (But do it friendly-like!) These things need to be done by the whole class. Two or three students might do them separately or together—and if it turned out well they might present the results to the class.

All of this working over and over on the same material (talk, write, read, discuss, etc.) may seem hard to you at first, but I think you will not find it a waste of time. One of the very important parts of the process of learning is to approach the same material from many angles and in many media. You may not (will not, I should say) get through the whole of the citizenship curriculum if you work this way, but you'll leave your students with something real to hang onto when you're gone.

HOMEWORK: I'm against it—unless a student asks for it. These kids may be working at home or at a job or on voter registration. What they can't do in school hours is probably better left undone. And your own time is better spent in preparing particular material for a particular student, or for all your students, than in correcting old, dead homework. The beauty of in school work is that you can work over it with a student as he goes along and guide him or support him so he won't make mistakes.

TESTING: I'm against it—even if the students ask for it!! Naturally, nothing can be a flat rule, but testing, generally, is at best, a waste of time. At worst it is likely to discourage the very student who needs most to be encouraged. It is rarely a teaching device. In a class of 30 children, a teacher may be forced to resort to testing to find out how the students are progressing. But why use a second-class crutch when you have two good legs? With only five students, you will be able to work closely enough with each, that you will be able to know where he stands and what the next steps should be. And you will know it with much more accuracy and detail than any written test can reveal.

IN GENERAL:

Try to give your students as much a feeling of power as you can—not the phony class-meeting type but power over materials, words, songs, thoughts. If you really let them choose what they want to learn, it will be a much more important lesson in freedom than the Civil Rights Bill or the Mississippi Power Structure. And your attitude of genuine respect for your students and their ideas will give them much more courage to stand up to a policeman, than any words you can say.

Cultivate this attitude of respect and real listening and honest answering right down to the bone. It's very hard to listen—practice it over the lunch table. But listen actively, not passively.

My Turn

Fighting for Freedom In the Mississippi Sun

In 1964 I was a 'freedom teacher' for one brief summer. I came home; others were not so lucky.

BY KAROL NELSON MCMAHAN

WHEN I LOOKED AT THE elderly face of Edgar Ray Killen on the news a few weeks ago, the events of 1964 flooded my memory.

After 41 years, Killen was convicted in the murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner. These young men were volunteers during Mississippi Freedom Summer, as I was. I came home safely; their lives were stolen by a hate-filled mob.

"Baby Face Nelson," I heard the black woman working the registration table at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, say under her breath as I signed up to be a "freedom school teacher" and voting-rights worker. The idea was that if white youth worked alongside the black civil-rights workers who were already risking their lives, Congress, the FBI and the president would pay attention. It was during our training session that we learned the three young men were missing. In spite of our apprehensions, we boarded the bus for the long ride to Mississippi.

The people of Pilgrim's Rest Church in Madison County had requested volunteers to teach civics and black history. When Kay, Natalie and I got off in Canton, we were met by a sea of humidity and the local law. The white officers who fingerprinted us said it would help if anything happened to us. An elderly black man was waiting to take us to neighboring farms, where we'd live with African-American families who owned their land and couldn't be evicted for associating with us.

Mr. and Mrs. Wiggins and their two small grandsons lived on an acreage with a

Readers interested in submitting a back-to-school essay should send entries to myturn@newsweek.com. One entry will appear in the magazine in early September; selected others will be offered online.

house, barn, chicken coop, pasture, pond and garden. The bungalow had electricity but no running water or phone. Kay and I slept in a double bed in the front bedroom, where we were alert to every night noise.

Our summer days developed a reassuring rhythm. In the mornings we ate Mrs.



GO HOME: We were cursed by people in passing pickups, and once a burly man got out of his car and followed us

Wiggins's fluffy biscuits. Then we did some work in the house and garden, followed by the noonday meal, which included okra that had been simmering in the steamy kitchen all morning. We were a temporary but real family who laughed and talked around the table and went to church together. Sometimes we went fishing with the little boys, who trapped crickets for bait.

Every afternoon, we'd all rest a while in front of the fan. Then Natalie would walk over from the Harris farm and we would plan our lessons, wash our clothes on a washboard and walk the country

roads, canvassing our black neighbors.

We invited people to attend freedom school or sign up for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, an alternative to the regular voting process which had shut out black citizens. We approached men in the fields, many still farming with mules, and women resting on sagging porches. They'd listen politely, but look nervously over their shoulders to see if their white bosses were watching. At times we were cursed by white people in passing pickups, and once a burly man got out of his car, followed us down the dusty road and called us "whores." I was scared that day.

In the evenings we met at the church, where classes were divided by age: little kids, teens and adults, each group meeting in a corner of the room. I wonder now at our audacity—thinking we had something to teach grown-ups who had worked in the heat all day and were risking their lives to be there.

The windows were open, squares of yellow light that exposed us to the dangers of the night. We'd stand in a circle, arms linked, singing "We Shall Overcome." Anyone could have shot at us, but those with cruel intentions bided their time, waiting until fall to burn down a nearby (empty) church.

Kay and I were already gone, having left on separate buses at the end of summer, each carrying a mason jar of soup stock that Mrs. Wiggins was sending home to our mothers. I waited in the "white" section of the Jackson bus station, feeling that I had learned much more than I had taught. Living with people of another race convinced me that we were not different, even if society treated us that way.

During my 35-year teaching career, I spoke often about that summer. Once, when we read a novel set in Mississippi, I sang for my seventh graders, "If you miss me at the back of the bus and you can't find me nowhere; come on up to the front of the bus; I'll be riding up there." The kids seemed surprised that their middle-aged teacher had done a brave thing, but 1964 must have seemed as remote as the Civil War.

I have often thought about my motives for volunteering. I hate injustice, but the adventure, even the risk, had an appeal. Or was it that a remedy was called for, and I became—for one brief, hot summer—just one atom of that remedy?

MCMAHAN lives in Austin, Texas.

RISKS & REWARDS: Faith and Activism by Fran O'Brien (2004)

Have you ever been challenged to "put your money where your mouth is"? That happened to me in 1964 in the most unlikely of places — a movie theater.

I went with some friends to see *Judgment at Nuremberg*. In one scene the American judge asks his German housekeeper what it was like to live under Nazism. She replies very defensively: "We didn't know...We are not political... We are just little people." All at once I thought of racial segregation in America. Yes, I had spoken out against it- in the safety of a college classroom. But just a few days earlier I had been challenged to do more.

A recruiter for Freedom Summer spoke at the Northwest Conference of United Campus Christian Fellowship. I was attending as a delegate, representing Pacific University. All weekend I had been very vocal about the necessity of ACTING on Christian principles, not just talking about them. Now this man was giving my own words a new meaning. At first he told about enabling all adult citizens of Mississippi to vote, regardless of color. That meant teaching black people to answer purposely difficult questions about the state constitution. (The same questions were not asked of white applicants.)

"That lets ME out," I thought with some relief. I had only the barest knowledge of my own state's constitution. I'd look like a fool trying to teach anyone else's. Then the recruiter told about Freedom Schools and community centers. "If adults come to voting classes and teen-agers come to the Freedom School, someone will have to look after the younger children." He went on to explain how this was to be not merely babysitting" but a real learning experience. As he elaborated, describing exactly the type of activities I had been doing with children for years, I felt my comfortable excuse crumbling out from under me like a badly warped stepladder.

After the presentation, I picked up an application form and filled it out. While I was still dithering about whether to mail it or not, I saw *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Sending the application was an act of faith; I had no idea how I would proceed if I were accepted. Traveling to Oxford, Ohio, a place of which I had never heard, was another. It involved an arduous bus trip five nights and four days, including one night in a bus station. I was alone until transferring to a local bus in a small town in Indiana. There I met a few other volunteers on their way to Oxford.

The training sessions at Western College for Women made me feel like a kindergartner thrust into the sixth grade. I could define "participatory democracy" for a test but I never had written to a Congressman, much less taken part in a demonstration. I didn't even know the songs.

The first morning we learned that three of our men were missing in Neshoba County. Not mincing words, Bob Moses informed us that when people disappeared at night in Mississippi, "missing" meant "dead." The same thing could happen to any one of us.

Yet at no time did I doubt I should be there. Sometimes I wondered why; often I wondered what I would do and how on earth I could possibly be useful; but never did I use the *question word* "IF." It did not occur to me I might have made a mistake in coming. I KNEW I was meant to be exactly where I was. That is faith. In my case, it led to a unique type of activism.

There is a saying, "*God doesn't call the qualified; He qualifies the called.*" I discovered the truth of that during training. By the end of the week I felt a part of the group. I even helped with a drama workshop.

Many times in the years since Mississippi I have caught myself thinking, "I can't do this!" only to find out that I can. Not everyone can do the same things — and how boring it would be if we did! But everyone can do something. God planned it that way.

RISKS & REWARDS: Remembering Freedom Summer by Gail Falk (2013)

**Address to state-wide conference of Mississippi Young Professionals, Meridian Mississippi, 2013*

Forty-nine years ago, in 1964, I was a junior in college up in Cambridge, Massachusetts. One evening, just about this time of year, my boyfriend and I decided to go hear a talk by a man named Al Lowenstein, who had come up to the Boston area from Mississippi, where he had been working in a statewide voter registration campaign. That evening Lowenstein described to us how black people all over Mississippi who attempted to register to vote were being put in jail, fired from their jobs, beaten up, having their houses or businesses burned, or, in some cases, shot at and murdered. At that time, not one white person had been convicted in Mississippi for any of these acts of violence. Lowenstein told us the situation was, if anything, getting worse and more violent. Registering to vote had become next to impossible for black Mississippians.

I was astonished to hear what he had witnessed and experienced. I knew that racial discrimination was a problem all over the United States, including in my home state of Pennsylvania. I could remember my astonishment the first time I saw black and white water fountains and restrooms when my family took a drive down to Virginia when I was a girl. I wasn't naive: I knew about discrimination and Jim Crow. But I had no idea that there were places in my country where a man or a woman could be shot for trying to register to vote or for helping someone else to register. I wasn't alone in being unaware. The violence against civil rights workers and blacks attempting to register to vote had received very little notice in the national media (or in the Mississippi media, for that matter).

Al Lowenstein was in Cambridge on a mission. The civil rights organizations working in Mississippi had decided that the way to get national attention on the situation in Mississippi, and thus hopefully to stop the violence, was to bring hundreds of northern college students into the state for the summer. Their thinking was that every student who came would have family, friends, churches, teachers, newspapers back home who would pay attention to what was happening. I had been planning to be a camp counselor that summer at a camp in Vermont, but I decided on the spot that I couldn't go be a camp counselor now that I knew what was happening in Mississippi, and I decided then and there I would be one of those students.

So it was that about two months later, at the end of June, after driving all night, a car-full of northern students, including me, arrived at the COFO office at the corner of 5th Street and 25th Avenue, just about four blocks up the street from here. If you know anything at all about the events of the summer of 1964, you probably know that three Meridian civil rights workers (Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman) were murdered by the Klan. The murders occurred up in Neshoba County, but the office the three of them had been working out of was that office up there on 5th Street.

On the day we arrive, the three had been missing for nearly a week. Mickey Schwerner had been the civil rights project director here in Meridian, and now he was gone. We had no idea what to expect. I was going to be a teacher at a Freedom School. Would any students dare to attend now? Would we be able to find a place to stay? Would we be shunned as too dangerous to associate with by the black community we had come to support? — The unexpected answers to those questions are to me the most vital aspect of the history of those weeks and months.

What did happen was that we were welcomed by the black community. Not every single person. Naturally there were plenty of people who were intimidated and afraid. But by the end of the day all of us (and there were about 25 of us in all) had a place to stay with a black family in town. Later on, we who were civil rights workers from the North were called brave, but we knew then, and I know all the more clearly now, that the true bravery was shown by those families that opened their homes to us out of a belief that blacks and white could and had to work together to end racism. The families who opened their homes were so vulnerable — they were cooks and

janitors and maids and laborers — so much more vulnerable than we who had families and homes up north. They knew that they might be fired or shot at. Yet they stepped forward and took huge risks out of a commitment to make Mississippi a better place to live.

I lived with a wonderful couple, Sarah and Timothy Graham and their daughter Edna up on 46th Avenue. Two other civil rights workers lived next door with Mrs. Graham's father. One night the father's house was shot into, narrowly missing Freeman Cocroft, who slept under the window that faced the street. But the Grahams just patched up the window and continued to make us feel as welcome as if nothing had happened.

History remembers the summer of 1964 in Meridian for the murders of the three civil rights workers, but what those of us who were here that summer remember it for is the Freedom School. Unlike most of the other freedom schools around the state we had a real school building — the old Baptist Seminary up on 31st Street and 16th Avenue — a two-story beige brick building with classrooms and desks and blackboards. We spent our first few days cleaning it up and, as I said, wondering if any kids would dare to come. Or for that matter, if any children would want to come. None of us had ever wanted to go to school during summer vacation.

Well, from the first day, that building was full of children. More than 300 students were registered. Not all of them came every day. That was a huge part of the magic of it — children came because they wanted to and not because someone was making them. Like most Freedom School teachers, I was not an experienced teacher, but I never had a problem all summer with discipline or attention.

Students told us then how different the Freedom School was from their regular schools. There were used to double hand-me-down books — books that had first been used in the white school and then passed over to the black school. We gave them new books by African American authors, such as *Black Boy* by Mississippi native son Richard Wright. We taught African/American history. I unexpectedly taught French (although I agree with Mr. Peavey that it would have been more practical for me to teach Spanish). I hadn't come expecting to teach French. But when we arrived, the families asked us to include a foreign language. No black public school in Meridian taught a foreign language. The kids and their families knew that the white schools taught foreign language, and they were keen to try it out.

We taught by asking questions, not by giving answers. Over and over the students told us they had never had a class where the teacher said there could be more than one right answer, or where the teacher wanted to know that the students thought, or was pleased, not angry, when the students asked the teacher challenging questions. Those of us who had the good fortune to be part of one of the Freedom Schools that summer — as students or as teachers — learned that a school in Mississippi that accepts all students who want to come can be an exciting, respectful, serious, creative place.

1964 was a watershed year in Mississippi. The stranglehold of the Klan and White Citizens Council was broken. Violence against civil rights activists continued sporadically into the latter part of the 1960s, but the black citizens of the state had learned they didn't have to react to intimidation with fear and paralysis. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 opened up restaurants and hotels that year. In 1965 the Voting Rights Act provided the legal tools needed to achieve statewide access to voting for all citizens. Hospitals and schools were desegregated. I remained to witness and participate in these changes for three more years. In my last month in Mississippi before going north to law school, I sat in a federal courtroom of the Southern District of Mississippi just two or three blocks from here and heard with my own ears a white jury foreman read an unprecedented verdict of guilty against some of the Klansmen who had murdered Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman three and a half years earlier.

As we approach the 50th anniversary next year of Freedom Summer, I've been thinking a lot about its legacy. What should we remember? What should we honor of that part of Mississippi history?