

WHY TEACH *WE'VE GOT A JOB?*

Natalie Lorenzi interviewed Christa Armantrout, gifted and talented specialist at Sommer Elementary School in Austin, Texas. Arnetta, Audrey, James and Wash marched right out the pages of *We've Got a Job* and into Mrs. Armantrout's classroom, bringing the Civil Rights Movement alive for her students.

Natalie asked Mrs. Armantrout, with the plethora of Civil Rights books available for teachers to use in the classroom, why should teachers share *We've Got a Job* with their students?

Here's what she and her students had to say:

Cynthia Levinson has brought the real struggles, frustrations, and fears of the civil rights movement into my classroom! By introducing the four children involved in the Children's March, my students saw from four different perspectives the challenges the families, the children, and the Civil Rights leaders faced during this awful time of hate and violence. In WE'VE GOT A JOB, Levinson's perfect selection of pictures brought to life the issues the blacks and whites faced in Birmingham, Alabama. My students were moved by the pictures of the children in the paddy wagon, the dog attacking the boy, the use of the fire hoses, the attack at the bus station, the bombed-out church, and many other pictures that spoke more than words could describe.

Though there are many books about the civil rights movement, none compare to Levinson's WE'VE GOT A JOB. She weaves in the many factors that played into the troubles and triumphs of the civil rights movement in Birmingham: the

disagreements within the civil rights leadership, the city politics that played a crucial role in Birmingham's problems, the parents who had too much to lose, and the children who stepped up proudly to fill the jails. As my student, Sonia, said when asked what she especially liked about the book, "[learning about] All the things going on behind the mass meetings and demonstrations."

Though the pictures were painful to see, each of my students was emphatic that the book would not have been complete without the visual proof that things were that bad! As my student, Claire, said, "All of the other civil rights books hide what the police did and what the whites did. It's better [to show the pictures] because it showed what really happened." Another student, Andy, said, "Some of the pictures pop out and show you the devastating past, like the dog and the boy and the Freedom Riders' bus." Keertana added, "I like how Cynthia Levinson mentions the KKK. It's scary and most [authors of children's books] don't mention it. It's hard to mention it in a kids' book. It helped me understand how the whites were actually treating [the blacks] secretly. Sometimes the police were in the KKK or protecting the KKK."

As a teacher of 4th grade gifted and talented children, I know that my students can reach far beyond their peers when it comes to high-level connections, inferencing, and general divergent thinking skills. I struggle to find literature that can challenge their thinking of historical events and social issues in a way that is appropriate for their level and age. WE'VE GOT A JOB stimulates my students' thinking and encourages them to connect with children close to their own ages who are real people with really big problems.

As Cynthia introduced Audrey, Arnetta, James, and Wash in the beginning of

the book, my students were interested in understanding the problems and the variety of ways each person faced their challenges. When my students read the last chapter that tells about the children as adults, it hit home that these people are real! Now they could see this book was about real people, not just characters in a fictional story.