



Ark Pioneer Learning at Home

Core Curriculum

English Literature 12 – Additional Support Booklet

Work to be completed

This booklet is designed as an alternative to the main English Department booklet. This booklet explores a powerful poem by American poet Dudley Randall: 'The Ballad of Birmingham'. We will continue to explore the theme of racism* in poetry.

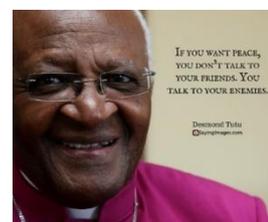
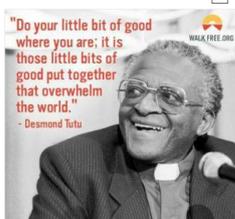
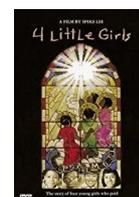
**Racism is the belief that some races of people are superior to (more important than) others based solely on the colour of their skin.*

For hundreds of years people in Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities have been, and continue to be, subjected to illegal racist treatment by some, not all, white people. This is a shameful part of our society and we must work together to eradicate (get rid of) it fully.

Once you have completed the work in *this* booklet you can return to the main English booklet and attempt the other poems if you want to. One option would be to attempt the 'Do Nows' on each poem.

Resources/Links to help with this work:

- [This](#) is a link to Google Earth – look for Birmingham, Alabama.
- [This](#) is a link to history.com, [this](#) to Wikipedia and [this](#) to the Encyclopaedia Britannica with details of the bombing in 1963 of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.
- [This](#) is a link to a BBC Bitesize 2 minute video interviewing two survivors from the attack
- [This](#) is a link to a 2 ½ minute trailer for a live dance performance called '4 Little Girls which uses dance to remember and interpret the Birmingham bombing.
- [This](#) is a link to a 1997 Spike Lee PG documentary called 4 Little Girls. (1 ½ hours long)
- [This](#) is a link to the poem we will be studying – the poem is being sung.
- [This](#) is a BBC Sounds link to a 9 minute interview and a two minute Guardian [interview](#) with Sarah Collins who was badly injured in the Birmingham bombing.
- [This](#) is a link to a teacher leading an online lesson on the poem.
- [This](#) is a link to Dr Martin Luther King Jr giving the eulogy at the funeral of three of the girls killed in the bombing.
- [This](#) is the text of the eulogy (sermon/speech given at a funeral)





Do Now:

Look at the images on this page.

What do they make you think?



How do they make you feel?



You can use some words from the bank at the bottom if you need to.



damage explosion sorrow grief death funeral bodies injuries
weeping shocking stretchers mourners injustice memorials children
community anger sadness

What happened in Birmingham, Alabama (USA) in 1963?



Task 1



Read the text below and answer the questions that follow:

During the civil rights movement* the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama was a central hub to support the movement – demonstrators would meet there before marches, and activists would use the church to hold meetings. This activity made it a target for white supremacists** who would regularly call the church with threats in an attempt to intimidate (frighten) them.

* a movement seeking to end segregation and give black and white people equal rights

** white people who believe they are a superior race because of their skin colour

On 15th September 1963 the 16th Street African American Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama (USA) was bombed by members of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK - a white supremacist organisation). The attack was racially motivated and caused huge destruction to the church and devastation to the community. The bomb was timed to explode during Sunday morning at 10:22am when the church would contain many people – 200 people were present either waiting for the main service to begin or helping with Sunday school. Sunday school took place in the church basement while the main service took place in the church upstairs. The children had just finished Sunday school and five girls were in the bathroom putting on their choir robes to go and join the main service when the bomb exploded.

Four of those five girls were killed:



Addie Mae Collins was 14



Cynthia Wesley was 14



Carole Robertson was 14



Carol Denise McNair was 11



Denise, loved dolls and piggy banks—and all living things. She once stopped a neighbourhood baseball game because a dead bird was on the field; she insisted they not only bury it but hold a funeral for the bird.

Carole was a budding academic star: a Girl Scout in Troop 264, a straight-A student at Parker High School, a member of the science club and the marching band. She had recently taken up the clarinet and was going to play in public for the first time on Monday, Sept. 16, 1963.

Addie Mae and her two sisters had taken 20 minutes to get to church that morning because Junie's purse, shaped like a football, proved an irresistible toy—and they passed it back and forth as they walked.

Cynthia Wesley, the daughter of a high school principal, had a knack for bucking up the spirits of her classmates.



Sarah Collins was 12 at the time of the bombing

Sarah Collins, sister to Addie, was 12 at the time of the attack and survived with terrible injuries and lost her right eye in the blast. Twenty other people were badly injured.

This devastating act was a turning point during the civil rights movement and ultimately led to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, one and two years later. This act was a crucial leap forward for the civil rights movement. These acts made it illegal to discriminate (treat unfairly) against anybody based on their race, colour, sex, religion or national origin. It became illegal to segregate (forced separation by skin colour) schools, places of work and public places. It became illegal to make it harder for black people to vote.

However, justice for the families of the deceased (those who died) took a long time to be served, and to this day the case was never fully resolved. In 1965, the FBI concluded that they knew the five men who planted the bomb. The men were KKK members who were known to the FBI but they did nothing to convict them. It was not until 1977, 14 years after the bombing, that Robert E Chambliss was convicted of murder. The case was reopened in the 1980s and 1990s and Thomas Blanton and Bobby Frank Cherry were finally convicted in 2001 and 2002 – nearly four decades after the bombing. A fourth suspect, Herman Frank Cash, died in 1994 before he could be tried.

Answer the comprehension questions about this text on the next page.



Comprehension Questions – remember full sentences, capitals and full stops:

1. What was the civil rights movement?
2. What is a white supremacist?
3. What does 'segregate' mean?
4. What was the name of the church bombed in 1963?
5. In which city was the church?
6. What organisation was responsible for the attack?
7. How many people died in the attack?
8. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



9. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



10. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



11. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



12. How many people were injured in the attack?
13. What organisation knew who the killers were and failed to prosecute them?
14. After how many years were three of the four bombers found guilty of their crime?

Task 2

Dudley Randall (January 14, 1914 – August 5, 2000) was an African-American poet and poetry publisher from Detroit, Michigan.^[1] He founded a pioneering publishing company called Broadside Press in 1965, which published many leading African-American writers, among them Melvin Tolson, Sonia Sanchez, Audre Lorde, Gwendolyn Brooks, Etheridge Knight, Margaret Walker, and others.

His most famous poem was 'The Ballad of Birmingham' written in 1965, two years after the Birmingham bombing. The poem was set to music by folk singer Jerry Moore in 1967.

Read the poem aloud at least twice. Reading it aloud will help you hear the poem's rhythm and rhyme. You can also listen to the poem being sung by Jerry Moore [here](#) and another version [here](#).

[Here](#) is another version of the poem with accompanying words and images. Each version is moving in its own way and is worth listening to.

As you read and listen think about these questions:



- Why do you think Dudley Randall wrote this poem?
- Look up any words you don't know that aren't included in the glossary column.

	<p>The Ballad of Birmingham by Dudley Randall</p>	<p>Glossary</p>
1	<p>"Mother dear, may I go downtown Instead of out to play, And march the streets of Birmingham In a Freedom March today?"</p>	<p>downtown centre of the city</p> <p>Freedom March – a protest demanding equality for black people</p>
5	<p>"No, baby, no, you may not go, For the dogs are fierce and wild, And clubs and hoses, guns and jails Aren't good for a little child."</p>	<p>dogs, clubs, hoses, guns – all used by the police to end protest marches</p>
10	<p>"But, mother, I won't be alone. Other children will go with me, And march the streets of Birmingham To make our country free."</p>	
15	<p>"No baby, no, you may not go For I fear those guns will fire. But you may go to church instead And sing in the children's choir."</p>	
20	<p>She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair, And bathed rose petal sweet, And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands, And white shoes on her feet.</p>	<p>drawn – pulled on</p> <p>white gloves and white shoes – worn only on Sunday as best clothes, also a symbol of purity and innocence</p>
25	<p>The mother smiled to know that her child Was in the sacred place,</p>	<p>sacred place – holy church</p>

<p>30</p>	<p>But that smile was the last smile To come upon her face.</p> <p>For when she heard the explosion, Her eyes grew wet and wild. She raced through the streets of Birmingham Calling for her child.</p>	<p>explosion - bomb detonating</p> <p>wet and wild – crying and terrified</p>
<p>35</p>	<p>She clawed through bits of glass and brick, Then lifted out a shoe. "O, here's the shoe my baby wore, But, baby, where are you?"</p>	<p>clawed – to grab and pull in desperation</p>

Task 3

Poem Summary

(Use the word bank below to help you fill in the blanks.)

glass free hair Birmingham shoes friends church conversation
dogs choir bricks Freedom March one gloves safe explosion

In 'The Ballad of Birmingham' by Dudley Randall the poem opens with a _____ between a mother and a daughter. The daughter wishes to attend a _____ in the streets of _____. However, the mother does not want her to go and says this will not be safe – she is worried about _____, clubs, hoses and jails. The daughter assures her mother she will be with _____ and won't be alone – she really wants to attend to make her country _____. The mother refuses to let her go and says that instead she can go to _____ to sing in the children's _____ where she will be _____. We learn that the girl has bathed, brushed her _____ and worn smart white _____ and _____ to be ready for church. Her mother is relieved that her daughter will go to church and be safe. But not long after church begins the girl's mother hears an _____ and races towards the noise looking for her child. Despite searching through broken _____ and _____ to find her child she is unsuccessful – the tragedy of the death of her child is brought to the reader in the mother's discovery of _____ of the daughter's white shoes.

Task 4 – The Poet’s Message: Think



Why do you think that Randall wrote this poem? What was his aim?

I think Randall wrote this poem to ensure all who read it could understand what happened to the 16th Street Baptist Church, where this terrible event took place and most of all the unfairness of the death of the innocent girl in the poem. He wanted to ensure all who read the poem were moved and shocked by the events in Birmingham, Alabama. This poem for me is a good example of how powerful words can be. It is one thing to read a newspaper headline: ‘Bomb Blast Kills 4 Children’, and quite another to read of a mother with ‘wet and wild’ eyes, clawing through rubble only to question ‘O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,/ but, baby, where are you?’

Task 5 – Think Harder: Poetic Devices

Questions about the poem

1. The theme of this poem could be considered as the loss of innocence – for an innocent child to die in a terrible way. Look for examples of children and innocence in each stanza (verse) and note them down.



Stanza 1	<i>‘out to play’</i>
Stanza 2	
Stanza 3	
Stanza 4	
Stanza 5*	
Stanza 6	
Stanza 8	
Stanza 9	

*You will have to look hard in the 5th stanza.

Tip – think about what colours can symbolise/give meaning to.

2. Repetition (using the same word(s)/phrases more than once) is often used in poetry to emphasise a point and Randall uses this to powerful effect in this poem. Which words have you found from your list above

are repeated in this poem? What point do you think Randall was trying to make?

Tip: Look at the paragraph in Task 4 for help you.

Randall repeats the words _____, _____ and _____ in his poem 'The Ballad of Birmingham'. I think he does this to show ...

3. What other words are repeated in the poem? What effect does this have? Find three more examples:

Repeated word or phrase	Effect
'march the streets'	The poet wishes to draw attention to the civil rights movement and its cause.

4. Randall opens and closes his poem with a question. Find the questions and fill in the table below:

Question	Who asks the question?	Who answers the question?

Using questions can be a way for a poet to draw a reader into a poem. What is the significance of who answers the question in the closing question?

5. We have discussed imagery in most of the previous poems we have studied. This poem is not filled with similes and metaphors, and the language use is fairly simple. The poet was very accomplished (clever)

but chose to write the poem in this way and in the style of a ballad, a sad song. Why do you think this might be?

Clue: the answer is to do with how many people he wanted to reach with his poem.

Red Pen Check your answers on the next page and return to the main booklet if you wish to explore some more poetry on the topic of racism.

Red Pen Check your answers

Task 1

Comprehension Questions – remember full sentences, capitals and full stops:

1. What was the civil rights movement?
The civil rights movement was an organisation seeking for equal rights for African-Americans.
2. What is a white supremacist?
A white supremacist is somebody who thinks that the colour of their skin makes them superior to those who do not share their skin colour.
3. What does 'segregate' mean?
Segregate means to separate people of different skin colours.
4. What was the name of the church bombed in 1963?
The church bombed in 1963 was the 16th Street Baptist Church.
5. In which city was the church?
The 16th Street Baptist Church was in Birmingham, Alabama.
6. What organisation was responsible for the attack?
Members of the Ku Klux Klan were responsible for the attack.
7. How many people died in the attack?
4 children died inside the church as a result of the bombing.
8. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



This is Carole Denise McNair. She was 11 when she died.

9. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



This is Addie Mae Collins. She was 14 when she died.

10. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



This is Carole Robertson. She was 14 when she died.

11. Who is this and how old was she when she died?



This is Cynthia Wesley. She was 14 when she died.

12. How many people were injured in the attack?

Over twenty people were injured in the attack on the church.

13. What organisation knew who the killers were and failed to prosecute them?

The FBI knew who the killers were and did not prosecute them.

14. After how many years were three of the four bombers found guilty of their crime?

It took nearly 40 years to find three of the four bombers guilty of murder.

Task 3

Poem Summary

In 'The Ballad of Birmingham' by Dudley Randall the poem opens with a conversation between a mother and a daughter. The daughter wishes to attend a Freedom March in the streets of Birmingham. However, the mother does not want her to go and says this will not be safe – she is worried about dogs, clubs, hoses and jails. The daughter assures her mother she will be with friends and won't be alone – she really wants to attend to make her country free. The mother refuses to let her go and says that instead she can go to church to sing in the children's choir where she will be safe. We learn that the girl has bathed, brushed her hair and worn smart white gloves and shoes to be ready for church. Her mother is relieved that her daughter will go to church and be safe. But not long after church begins the girl's mother hears an explosion and races towards the noise looking for her child. Despite searching through broken glass and bricks to find her child she is unsuccessful – the tragedy of the death of her child is brought to the reader in the mother's shocking discovery of one of the daughter's white shoes.

Task 5 – Think Harder: Poetic Devices



Questions about the poem

1. The theme of this poem could be considered as the loss of innocence – for an innocent child to die in a terrible way. Look for examples of children and innocence in each stanza (verse) and note them down.



Stanza 1	'out to play'
Stanza 2	"No, baby, no", 'a little child'
Stanza 3	'other children'
Stanza 4	"No, baby, no", 'children's choir'

Stanza 5*	'white gloves', 'small brown hands', 'white shoes'
Stanza 6	'her child'
Stanza 7	'her child'
Stanza 8	'my baby', 'but, baby'

Randall repeats the words **child**, **baby** and **white** in his poem 'The Ballad of Birmingham'. I think he does this to show that the attack on the 16th Street Baptist Church led to the unjust death of innocent children. He uses the colour white to represent purity and innocence, but perhaps also to show the white supremacists that the colour of their skin does not make them superior – these black children wore white as a sign of their goodness and purity, qualities that have nothing to do with skin-colour.

2. What other words are repeated in the poem? What effect does this have? Find three more examples:

Repeated word or phrase	Effect
'march the streets'	The poet wishes to draw attention to the civil rights movement and its cause.
'you may not go'	The repetition of this phrase is used by the poet to show that the mother did all she could to protect her child, but that her efforts will end up being in vain.
'smile', 'smiled'	The repetition of 'smile' and 'smiled' is haunting for the reader. At this time many people reading the poem would have known about the attack and would have known what was coming. It places the reader directly in the poem – in an uncomfortable position of knowing the pain the mother is about to experience, but being powerless to stop it. Perhaps Randall wanted white readers to understand the powerlessness felt by

	so many African-Americans during segregation.
'Birmingham'	The name of the city where the attack took place is used four times in the poem – including the title. Randall wants the memory of what happened in Birmingham to be seared on the reader's brain. He was us to remember it now – today. He never wants this tragic event to be forgotten.

3. Randall opens and closes his poem with a question. Find the questions and fill in the table below:

Question	Who asks the question?	Who answers the question?
"may I go...and march...in a Freedom March today?"	The daughter	Her mother
"But, baby, where are you?"	The mother	Nobody

Using questions can be a way for a poet to draw a reader into a poem. What is the significance of who answers the question in the closing question?

By having the mother ask the closing question the reader is all the more aware that the daughter is no longer alive to answer the question her mother asks of her. The reader however is present, is alive and knows the truth of what has happened to her daughter. We are drawn into the poem – unable to look away at the mother in her grief.

4. We have discussed imagery in most of the previous poems we have studied. This poem is not filled with similes and metaphors, and the language use is fairly simple. The poet was very accomplished (clever) but chose to write the poem in this way and in the style of a ballad, a sad song. Why do you think this might be?

Clue: the answer is to do with how many people he wanted to reach with his poem.

Randall purposefully wrote his poem using simple language and stark images. He did not want there to be any question around the meaning and message of his poem. He wanted to be sure that his poem reached a wide audience and would be understood by all who read it. By writing it in the form of a song it reached an even wider audience.