



Discussion and Activity Guide for...

What Do You Do with a Voice Like That? The Story of Extraordinary Congresswoman Barbara Jordan

written by [Chris Barton](#) * illustrated by [Ekua Holmes](#)

Beach Lane Books/Simon & Schuster * 2018

48 pages * ISBN 9781481465618 * eBook available

a 2020-21 Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List book

Even as a child growing up in the Fifth Ward of Houston, Texas, Barbara Jordan stood out for her big, bold, booming, crisp, clear, confident voice. It was a voice that made people sit up, stand up, and take notice.

So what do you do with a voice like that?

Barbara took her voice to places few African American women had been in the 1960s: first law school, then the Texas state senate, then up to the United States congress. Throughout her career, she persevered through adversity to give voice to the voiceless and to fight for civil rights, equality, and justice.

New York Times bestselling author Chris Barton and Caldecott Honoree Ekua Holmes deliver a remarkable picture book biography about a woman whose struggles and mission continue to inspire today.

Chris Barton is the author of picture books including bestseller *Shark vs. Train*, Sibert Honor-winning *The Day-Glo Brothers*, Orbis Pictus honoree *Dazzle Ships*, and *Whoosh! Lonnie Johnson's Super-Soaking Stream of Inventions*, included on 19 state reading lists. His newest books include *Fire Truck vs. Dragon* and *All of a Sudden and Forever: Help and Healing After the Oklahoma City Bombing*. Chris and his wife, YA/middle-grade novelist Jennifer Ziegler, live in Austin, Texas, where Chris has advocated for greater diversity in children's literature by co-founding the Modern First Library program with BookPeople. For more information about him, please visit www.chrisbarton.info.

Ekua Holmes is an illustrator and fine artist whose work explores themes of family, relationships, and faith. Her debut picture book, *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement*, written by Carole Boston Weatherford, won multiple awards, including a Caldecott Honor. She received the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award for *Out of Wonder: Poems Celebrating Poets*, written by Kwame Alexander with Chris Colderley and Marjory Wentworth. She lives in Boston, just steps from Boston University, where Barbara Jordan received her law degree. For more information about her, please visit www.ekuaholmes.com.

Pre-Reading Questions

In author Chris Barton's school presentations, he connects Barbara Jordan's natural gift of a powerful speaking voice—a gift that she grew and developed throughout her life—to natural gifts that each of us has.

With that in mind...

1. What's one of your natural gifts?
2. How did you discover that you had it?
3. What are some things that you can do to grow and develop that gift?

Additional Resources

In addition to the Author's and Artist's Notes, Time Line, and resources found in the Recommended Viewing and Reading section at the back of the book, author Chris Barton recommends these picture books:

- *The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch*, by Chris Barton & Don Tate
- *Lillian's Right to Vote: A Celebration of the Voting Rights Act of 1965*, by Jonah Winter & Shane W. Evans
- *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, by Doreen Rappaport & Bryan Collier
- *A Time to Act: John F. Kennedy's Big Speech*, by Shana Corey & R. Gregory Christie
- *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer: The Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement* by Carole Boston Weatherford & Ekua Holmes

Online resources that might be of interest to educators or students include:

- [Van, a shaggy blue puppet, interviews Chris Barton about *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That?*](#) at the 2019 Texas Library Association annual conference, posted on 6/18/2019 to the Austin Public Library's YouTube channel
- [22 More Barbara Jordan Books, Please](#), written by Chris Barton and published on 9/25/2018 on the Nerdy Book Club blog
- [Pairing Picture Books and Primary Sources: *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That? The Story of Extraordinary Congresswoman Barbara Jordan*](#), written by Tom Bober and published on 2/22/2019 on the American Association of School Librarians Knowledge Quest blog
- [What Was Left Out of *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That?*, Powered by PechaKucha](#), presented by Chris Barton on April 16, 2019, at the Texas Library Association annual conference

Discussion Questions

1. In the Texas Senate and U.S. Congress, what were Barbara Jordan’s accomplishments and contributions to politics? Why was she important? [Grade 5 Social Studies TEKS (5)(C); Grade 4 Social Studies TEKS (15)(D)]
2. Author Chris Barton writes, “Barbara wanted more justice and more equality. She knew that these things began with more citizens sharing their own voices with their representatives in government.” Who are your representatives in local, state, and national government, and what are some ways to contact them so that your voice can be heard? [Grade 4 Social Studies TEKS (16)(A); Grade 5 Social Studies TEKS (17)(B)]
3. In the televised speech that Barbara Jordan gave on July 25, 1974, she said, “My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total.” What changes to the Constitution led her to have that faith? [Grade 3 Social Studies TEKS (8)(A); Grade 4 Social Studies TEKS (13)(C)]
4. In what ways did Barbara Jordan encourage other people to be good citizens? [Grade 3 Social Studies TEKS (9)(A)]
5. Out of the entire book, only the two-page spread that begins “That speech made Barbara a star” contains exactly the same words that were in Chris Barton’s first draft. On every other spread, he made changes to the text. One example was the sentence that begins, “Barbara Jordan’s former students still move among us.” An earlier draft of the story read, “Barbara Jordan’s former students still walk among us.” Why do you think the author made that revision? [Grade 4 Writing TEKS (11)(C)]
6. When discussing what Barbara Jordan’s political future might have held, the narrator exclaims, “Who knew how high she might rise!” What job in government do you wish Barbara Jordan had had, and why?
7. In law school, Barbara Jordan “hid her struggles from her classmates, studying long and hard and out of sight.” While in Congress, Barbara did not tell people about her medical condition. Why do you think Barbara chose to keep those challenges mostly to herself? [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1]
8. Author Chris Barton is a white man from Texas, where Barbara Jordan lived for most of her life. Illustrator Ekua Holmes is an African American woman from Massachusetts, where Barbara Jordan attended law school. How do you think the author’s and illustrator’s backgrounds might have shaped their work on Barbara Jordan’s story?
9. How does the narrator’s voice in *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That?* Compare to the narration in Chris Barton’s other nonfiction books, such as *The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch*, *Whoosh!* or *Dazzle Ships*? What similarities and differences do you notice?

Post-Reading Activities

- Put these events from the book into the correct sequence, with “1” for what happened first.

____ Barbara begins using a wheelchair.

____ Barbara explains to the American people why Richard Nixon should not remain President.

____ Barbara graduates from law school at Boston University.

____ Barbara is the only woman and the only African American in the Texas Senate.

____ Barbara receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

____ Barbara travels outside Texas for the first time.

____ Barbara wins her final election.
- Chris Barton describes Barbara Jordan’s voice as “big, bold, booming, crisp, clear, confident.” Write a description of the speaking voice of someone you know.
- Plan an ABC book about Barbara Jordan. Use *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That?* to come up with a key word or name relating to Barbara Jordan for each letter in the alphabet. (For instance, “C” might be for Congress, and “V” might be for Voice.) Which letters are the most difficult to find words for, and what resources beyond this book could you turn to for help?
- With an adult’s help, find a Barbara Jordan speech other than the one she made on July 25, 1974, and watch, read, or listen to it. What is your favorite part of that speech, and why?
- The [complete bibliography](#) for *What Do You Do with a Voice Like That?* is available on Chris Barton’s website. Of all the sources named in the bibliography, list the ones that you think might have provided the best information about Barbara Jordan’s childhood. How would you go about seeing those sources for yourself?



photo by Heather Gallagher

Chris Barton is available for in-person and online school visits. His “Write What You'd Love to Learn” presentation can be tailored to students of all ages and includes an emphasis on the importance of research, revision, and collaboration. For more information, please see www.chrisbarton.info/visits.html.