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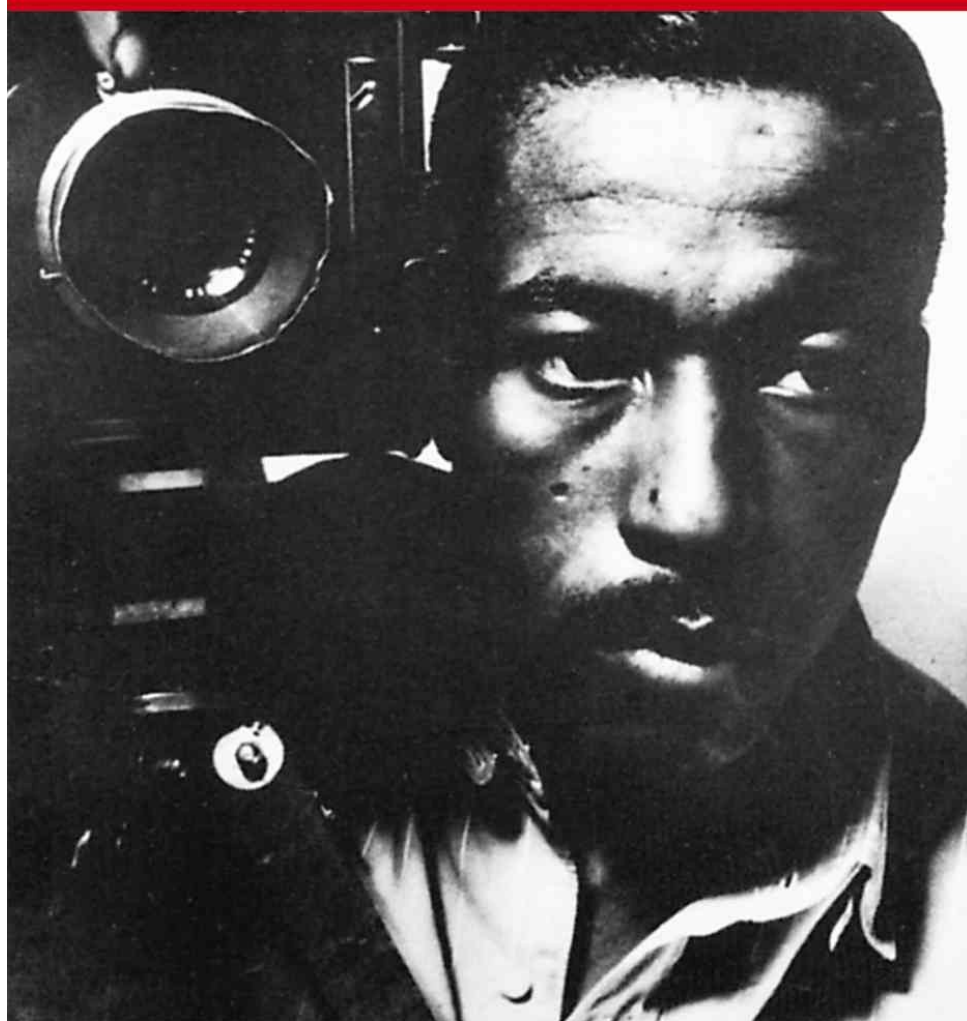
Study Guide for

GORDON PARKS

NO EXCUSES

TEXT BY: ANN PARR

PHOTOGRAPHS BY: GORDON PARKS



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Guide
created by
Ann Parr

Guide includes:
Discussion topics
Writing activities
Suggestions for further
reading

First, read *Gordon Parks: No Excuses* aloud.

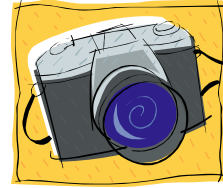
Discussion Suggestions for the Topic:

Prejudice

- ◇ Discuss what students (1) know about segregation (2) don't know about segregation.
- ◇ Discuss ways students have experienced segregation or prejudice. Describe how individuals or groups may have different perspectives and why.
- ◇ How has racism changed since Gordon was a young man?
- ◇ Discuss segregation in the early 1900s compared to now.
- ◇ Ask students: What is an example of a time when you believed differently from someone else (your friend) and acted on that belief? What happened? Did you change your belief? Did your friend change his/her belief?
- ◇ Discuss ways that prejudice harms the world today.
- ◇ Have students describe one behavior that would help overcome racism and prejudice.
- ◇ Discuss what Gordon might say about today's events of prejudice.
- ◇ Discuss prejudices based on things other than skin color.
- ◇ Discuss how Gordon used his camera as a weapon against racism.
- ◇ Have students write a description of a black person for someone who has never seen a black person.
- ◇ Have students list three things one could learn from a black person who is (1) their age (2) 60 years old.
- ◇ What questions would students like to ask someone of a different race or religion?
- ◇ Students will prepare a speech / presentation about how black people are treated now as compared to the 1920s.
- ◇ Ask students: What would you say to one of your friends who was prejudiced against black people?

Discussion Suggestions for the topic:

Gordon Parks



- Discuss why we honor Gordon Parks.
- Have students list three of Gordon's strongest characteristics shared in this book.
- Have students discuss if and how those characteristics are present in their lives.
- Ask students: What was a contribution that Gordon Parks made to his race? To the fields of photography and literature?
- Have students pretend to be Gordon's mother, Sarah. Students pretend she didn't die before he became a successful photographer. As his mother, have them write a letter to Gordon, telling him what they think of him and what he has done.
- Students pretend to be Gordon Parks when he lived in Minnesota. Have them write in a journal a day in his life from morning to night. Include his feelings, descriptions of what he saw, heard, touched, and tasted. Include dialogue he might have had with friends and people in the public.

Activities Related to Writing

- ◆ Discuss biographies. Discuss how some cover a person's entire life and some cover one segment of a person's life or even one event only.
- ◆ Discuss themes. What is the theme of this book? (*No Excuses*) How could students use this theme in their own lives?
- ◆ Discuss the difference between nonfiction and fiction writing.
- ◆ Starting with page one, retell several pages of the book as if Gordon is telling the story of his own life (first person).
- ◆ Have students write a book review of *Gordon Parks: No Excuses* including the following:
 - ◆ Description of the Beginning, Middle, and Ending of the story.
 - ◆ Persuade readers to read or not to read the book.
- ◆ Have students rewrite the middle and ending of the book as if it were fiction. Have Wilson Hicks refuse to look at Gordon's pictures. What does Gordon do?
- ◆ Have students write a newspaper article about some segregation event mentioned in the book.

Additional Activities

- ❖ Students will write a letter from Gordon to his family in Kansas when he moved to Minnesota.
- ❖ Students will write sentence pyramids to form poems about Gordon's life.
SAMPLE:

Gordon Parks took photographs.
Gordon Parks took photographs of poverty and fashions.
Gordon Parks took photographs of the Fontenelle family's poverty and fashions.
Gordon Parks took photographs of the Fontenelle family's poverty and French fashions for *Life* magazine.

- ❖ Assign selected words from the story that are grade-level appropriate. Assign two words to pairs of students. Ask students to create flash cards that explain and illustrate what each word means. Use the flashcards to create a Gordon Parks bulletin board using such words as racism, prejudice, editor, photographer.
- ❖ Discuss what students would have to do to change their race for a play about the 1920s. Include make-up, clothing, behavior, feelings conveyed, attitudes, and tone of voice.
- ❖ Student project: Make a mask of a different-colored face than your own. Wear the mask and act out (1) living in the year Gordon was your age, and (2) living in current time.

Discussions Regarding Personal Feelings

- ❑ What feelings come from being prejudiced? Do some of them come from being afraid? Of what?
- ❑ What are some things that make you angry or afraid?
- ❑ What good things can come from being angry or afraid? What bad things can come from being angry or afraid?
- ❑ When might it be okay to angry? Afraid?



Additional Reading Suggestions:

Gordon Parks played an important role in the Civil Rights Movement. To learn more about that time in United States history, read the following books:

The Montgomery Bus Boycott, a Graphic History from World Almanac Library

The 1963 Civil Rights March, a Graphic History from World Almanac Library

Freedom's Children by Ellen Levine

Freedom Walkers by Russell Freedman

The Montgomery Bus Boycott by Kerri O'Hern and Frank Walsh

The Civil Rights Movement: The History of Black People in America 1930-1980
by Stuart Kallen

Martin's Big Words by Doreen Rappaport





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GORDON PARKS

No Excuses

By Ann Parr
Photographs by Gordon Parks

ACCELERATED READER PROGRAM SELECTION

“Gordon Parks is remarkable: a Renaissance man who has mastered photography, filmmaking, and writing. The story of his life is certainly an incredible one. Transcending voyeurism, Parks’ photographs reveal vulnerabilities of the human experience with grace and compassion. In his 90s and still driven to experience what the world has to offer, and to express his response to it, Gordon Parks is an inspiration to us all.”

--Janet St. John, *Booklist*

Gordon Parks overcame the obstacles of poverty and racism and never gave up on his dreams. He attributes his drive for excellence to his mother who told him, “What a white boy can do, you can too--and no excuses.” The first black photographer for *Life* magazine, Gordon Parks spent over two decades as a professional photographer, and his resume has grown to include novelist, musician, artist, and poet.

After reading a story about Gordon Parks in a Kansas newspaper, Ann Parr immediately set out to learn more about his life. She first interviewed the mayor of Fort Scott, Kansas, whose efforts healed wounds between Gordon Parks and his hometown, and then many of Parks’ friends. But it was after interviewing Parks in person that she knew she had a success story that would inspire generations.

Featuring forty-one vibrant black and white photographs and illustrations, this book includes details of Gordon Parks’ life and his work. Included are his photographs of the poor, stylish Parisian models, and the Civil Rights movement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ann Parr has written many of the young-adult books in the *Race Car Legends*, *Behind the Moves*, and *Wild Rides!* series. Parr received her bachelor of arts degree in public school music education and her master of fine arts degree in writing for children from Vermont College. She lives in Kansas with her husband. This is her first book for young children.

GORDON PARKS: No Excuses

By Ann Parr

Photographs by Gordon Parks

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