

# ESPECIALLY HEROES

Written by Virginia Kroll  
Illustrated by Tim Ladwig

*“People fight hard for ideals like freedom,” said Mrs. Brennan, my fourth grade teacher. “Sometimes heroes die for the things they believe in.”*

Set in the early 1960s, *Especially Heroes* gives an authentic glimpse of some of the challenges of race relations during the era of the civil rights movement in the United States.

Author Virginia Kroll’s powerful childhood memories described in the book are brought to life by illustrator Tim Ladwig’s unique perspective on an ordinary neighborhood of that time and the heroism of everyday people who responded with courage and caring when confronted with acts of hatred.

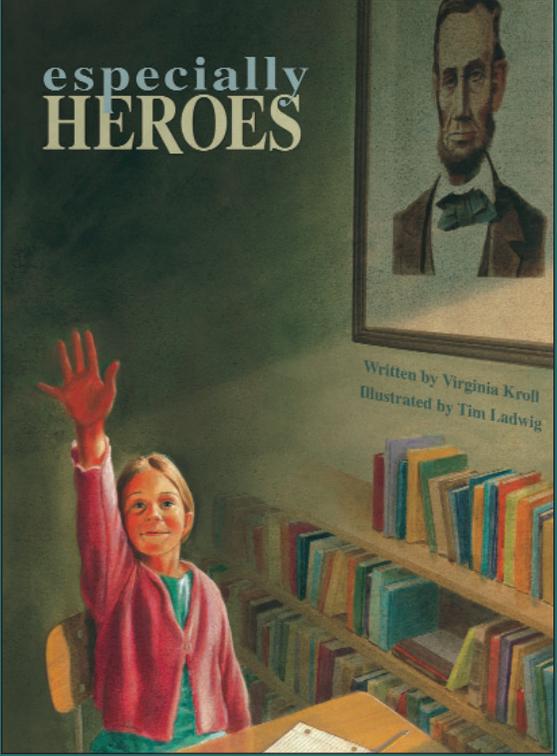


“This is an excellent story for these troubled times, to help children understand the importance of standing up for one’s beliefs, ideals, and freedom.”

—*School Library Journal*

## THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

- ❖ Racism
- ❖ Heroism
- ❖ History
- ❖ Integrity
- ❖ Leadership
- ❖ Respect



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## VOCABULARY

### *Discrimination, Heroism, Integrity, Respect*

What is a hero? Webster's Dictionary defines a hero as "a person of exceptional bravery; a person admired for superior qualities and achievements."

Henry David Thoreau, a famous American writer who lived from 1817-1862, defined a hero differently: "The hero is commonly the simplest and obscurest of men."

Do you agree with one or the other of these definitions?

Would you add or take away something from either definition?



## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE READING THE BOOK

1. What makes a person a hero?
2. Do you think ordinary people can be heroes?
3. Name someone you respect. What do you respect about that person?
4. What does it mean to you to have integrity (to do the right thing)? Give an example.
5. What does it mean to you to be a leader?
6. Have you or anyone you know ever been a victim of discrimination?
7. Have you ever stood up for someone who was being discriminated against?



## QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON AFTER READING THE BOOK

1. Do you think Ginny sees her parents differently at the end of the story than she did the day before?
2. How did Ginny's lesson at school affect her thoughts about what happened that day?
3. Is there anything that you believe in or love so much that you would die for it? If so, what is it? Why?
4. How does your own belief system affect your

opinions about violence, racism, and discrimination?

5. In this story, Ginny's dad responded to the violence of the racists with threats of violence. Since he was normally nonviolent, why do you think he did this? What might be other ways to respond to hate crimes?

6. Why do you think Mrs. Hall chose to stay in her own house that night?

7. What do you think Ginny learned from her experience?

8. What are some prejudices people have? How do people become prejudiced or racist?

9. Do you think racism has changed since the 1960s? Heroism? Do you think that things still need to change? How so?

10. Has your opinion of what makes a hero changed? If yes, how so?



## ACTIVITIES

1. Get together with a parent or a grandparent and ask who their childhood heroes were. Research that person to find out what made him or her special.
2. In your opinion, what is a modern day hero? Explain why, and list some examples.
3. Collect photos of your hero from different sources (magazines, photographs, drawings, etc.) and create a collage. Include words and other images that you believe represent what it means to be a hero and that specifically represent the hero you've chosen.
4. Research what was going on in the early 1960s concerning issues of race. Who were the heroes and leaders of that time?
5. Compare and contrast a mythical hero with a living hero. What are some of the differences in abilities, attitudes, actions, and aspirations?
6. Write a story about the perfect hero. Put no limits on what your hero can do or what he or she represents. Explain how and why your hero is perfect for today's society. Accompany your story with images that support the plot.

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## ABOUT

### *the Author & Illustrator*

**V**irginia Kroll is the author of many award-winning books for children, including *Masai and I* (Four Winds Press), *Pink Paper Swans* (Eerdmans), *A Carp for Kmiko* (Charles-bridge) and *Girl, You're Amazing* (Albert White-man).



“In *Especially Heroes* I wanted to show that race relations are lived, not taught, and that sometimes it can be dangerous to uphold ideals,” says Virginia. “The story is composed of a series of incidents—all true—that had an enormous impact on my life.”

Virginia Kroll lives in Hamburg, New York.

**T**im Ladwig has illustrated many exceptional children’s books, including *When Daddy Prays* by Nikki Grimes, *What Does the Sky Say?* by Nancy White Carlstrom, *Psalm Twenty-three*, and *The Lord’s Prayer* (all Eerdmans).



“I took on this book because of its message,” says Tim. “It is true that ‘everyday’ people are shown to be heroes by events that are thrust upon them. We may be surprised, and yet we see that there was, all along, a strength and purpose to their character.”

Tim’s challenge in illustrating this book was to place the visual story in a 1962 neighborhood. He conducted research to find what hairstyles, furniture, and clothing were popular at that time.

Tim Ladwig lives with his family in Wichita, Kansas.

If you have any other suggestions for using *Especially Heroes* with young readers, we would be happy to hear from you.

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