

# The Giants Wore White Gloves

Theresa Schafer

Performance  
Grade 11

## Process Paper

The Civil Rights Era grasped my attention while I was searching for an unsung hero topic, due to the immense amount of unsung heroes that helped transform America during this pivotal time. Ann Williams and her mother, Frances, became my focus. Ann was one of the few white students who befriended the Little Rock Nine at Central High School during the 1957-58 school year. Ann was willing, in the middle of this great debate, to stand up for what she believed, even though she knew there would be consequences for her actions. The following year, when Governor Orval Faubus closed the public schools of Little Rock to prevent integration, Frances Williams was an influential member of the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC) that fought Faubus' segregationist policies. My performance not only conveys the significance of the debate for civil rights, but also highlights the diplomacy used by the WEC to successfully accomplish their goal of reopening the Little Rock schools.

When I began my project, I met with Ann Williams to discuss her memories. She was able to provide me with many newspaper clippings from the time period, and also suggested some factual books about the events in Little Rock. I read a documented interview of Ann's parents, Frances and Grainger Williams, which proved invaluable. I interviewed Elizabeth Jacoway, an author who has interviewed several members of the WEC. To obtain primary resources, I searched the Library of Congress and the National Archives and Records Administration. In addition to this research, I was fortunate to visit Little Rock, meet Elizabeth Eckford, and walk the roads where so much history has taken place.

One prop I carry in the performance is a student's annual from the 1957-58 school year. I fashioned my costume as the character of Ann from her memories of high school years and from looking through the annual. As a result of my need

to portray two characters, I decided that a simple costume change - taking off a girlish cardigan and slipping on white gloves and a hat - would be essential in transitioning into Frances. The hats I use originally belonged to Frances Williams. The interviews of several history professors and primary quotes from documentaries of the ladies of the WEC were all essential in writing my script.

Frances Williams was a vital member of the Women's Emergency Committee, an organization that took a successful stand for justice during one of the most important debates in American history. She, and all the other giants who wore white gloves, fought against Governor Faubus and segregationists in Little Rock. As a result, the WEC was able to accomplish their goal, a federal court ruling that the schools should be reopened, but failed to remove the prejudice in the hearts of some of their community members. The outcomes of the Civil Rights Movement were successfully impacted by the work of Frances Williams and the Women's Emergency Committee. She proved that an unsung hero could change history.