



# THE FAITH OF ELIJAH CUMMINGS

The North Star  
of Equal Justice

written by  
Carole Boston  
Weatherford

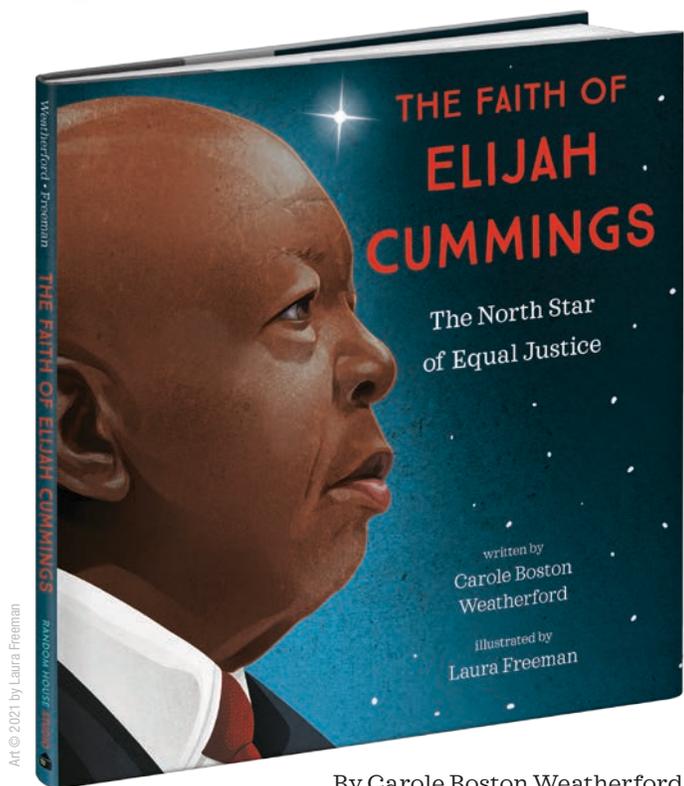
illustrated by  
Laura Freeman

Art © 2021 by Laura Freeman



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Grades 1-4  
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## ABOUT THE BOOK

*“We can do better.”*

When Elijah Cummings was a little boy, he struggled in school. His teachers thought he talked too much and asked too many questions. They said he’d never be able to read or write well.

Despite his difficulties, Elijah never gave up. He persevered, having faith that with hard work, he’d be able to achieve his goals.

Best known as a voice for people of color and an advocate for equal opportunity, Elijah Cummings was a man of faith and dignity, a beacon of justice, and an unrelenting warrior for equality and change.

Carole Boston Weatherford and Laura Freeman marry words and images beautifully in this picture book biography of politician and civil rights champion Elijah Cummings, detailing his inspiring journey from his humble beginnings as the son of former sharecroppers to his unwavering faith as he became a lawyer, state legislator, and leading congressman.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Carole Boston Weatherford**, a two-time NAACP Image Award winner, is the author of the Newbery Honor Book *Box: Henry Brown Mails Himself to Freedom*, as well as three Caldecott Honor Books, including *Freedom in Congo Square* and *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*. She also wrote *Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins*. Born in Baltimore, she first encountered Elijah Cummings when he was president of the Monumental City Bar Association, an affiliate of the National Bar Association, for which she was publicist. Weatherford teaches at Fayetteville State University, in North Carolina.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Laura Freeman** is a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honoree. Her work has been recognized with an NAACP Image Award, reached the *New York Times* bestseller list, and been honored by the Society of Illustrators, the Georgia Center for the Book, and in the annuals for *Communication Arts* and *American Illustration*. In addition to illustrating books, Laura’s art can be found on a wide range of products, from dishes and textiles to greeting cards, and her editorial images are frequently seen in the *New York Times* and other periodicals. She invites you to visit her website, [LFreemanArt.com](http://LFreemanArt.com), to discover more about her.



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Congressman and civil rights advocate Elijah Cummings dedicated his life to public service. This comprehensive guide asks students, through discussion and reading questions, to consider the qualities of a hero and the impact of social justice work. Students will be inspired by Elijah Cummings's unwavering faith as he fought for truth, justice, and equality.

**“WE HAVE BEEN CHOSEN  
TO LIGHT THE WAY  
FOR OUR NEIGHBORS.”**



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### BEFORE READING

- What does your name mean? How does your name represent who you are?
- Who is your hero? What makes this person worthy of that label?
- What dreams or goals do you have for your future? What have you done to achieve them?
- Watch these videos about Elijah Cummings's life.
  - [“Remember the Life and Legacy of Representative Elijah Cummings”](#)
  - [“World remembers Maryland Rep. Elijah Cummings”](#)

After watching the videos, what do you know about Elijah Cummings? What kind of man was he? How did his peers and constituents feel about his service and his life?



## DURING READING

- Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi’s remarks about Representative Elijah Cummings alluded to the “tradition to leave a seat at the table for [the prophet] Elijah, who might show up.” What does this allusion signify about Representative Cummings and his stature within Congress?
- How did Representative Cummings “[make] a seat at the table for others”?
- Speaker Pelosi said that Representative Cummings lived “the American Dream.” What is the American Dream? How did he achieve his American Dream?
- Speaker Pelosi described Representative Cummings as “the North Star of Congress.” Why is the symbolism of the North Star significant?
- Speaker Pelosi selected the word *future* to embody Representative Cummings. Discuss what *embody* means. Do any words embody you? What is the word that anchors or guides your life?
- Why did Elijah’s family move from South Carolina to Maryland? What did they expect once they settled into their new home?
- Elijah’s father had a saying, “If you miss a day of school, that means you died the night before.” How does this statement signal the importance of education in the Cummings household?



**“OUR NATION’S  
CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES  
ARE NOT LIMITED  
TO OUR HISTORY.  
NOW, WE ARE THE  
AMERICANS WHO MUST  
ORGANIZE, MOBILIZE, AND  
FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT.”**



## DURING READING (CONTINUED)

- Elijah said that “the librarians and books . . . did something more than teach me history and English and math.” Why was the library an important place for Elijah? How did the library provide a foundation for his future?
- What meaningful memories do you have with your parents and other family members? Why are they significant? Reflecting on these moments, what did you learn about yourself?
- What key moments in Elijah’s life served as the impetus for him becoming a lawyer?
- Have you ever had someone you trust try to deter you from your dream or goal? How did you respond? How did Elijah respond when his school counselor implied that he could not be a lawyer?
- Why did Elijah Cummings not move to Washington, DC, when he was elected to the US House of Representatives? Why do you think this decision was important to his constituents?
- The Congressional Black Caucus labeled Representative Cummings “a civil rights icon.” How did his life align with this description?
- Select a quote from the book that resonates with you. Write a reflection on that quote. Create a visual representation or rendering of that quote.



## AFTER READING

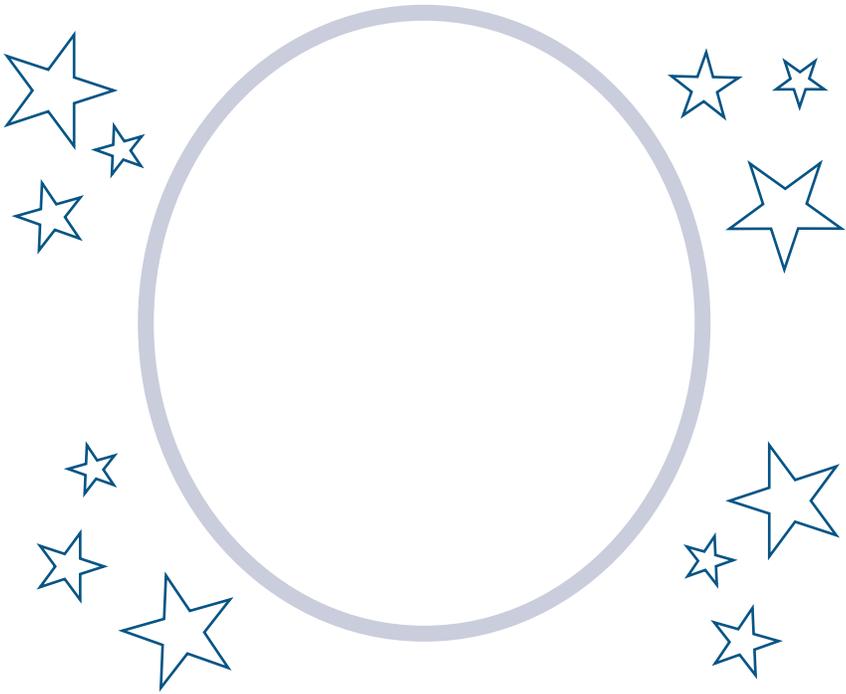
- Reread the book. What were life lessons that Elijah’s parents taught him and his siblings? Create a list. How can these lessons help you in your life?
- Share how the title *The Faith of Elijah Cummings* connects to the theme of book.
- Which illustration in the book strikes you as the most important? Explain your thinking.
- On the next page, create a tribute to *your* hero with a brochure that tells other people more about them. You can also create a video or a speech which celebrates your hero.



This guide was created by Shanetia Clark, Associate Professor of Literacy at Salisbury University in Salisbury, Maryland.

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# MY HERO IS . . .



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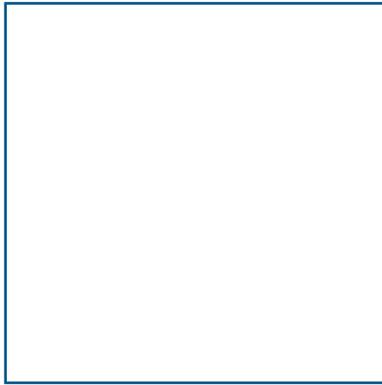
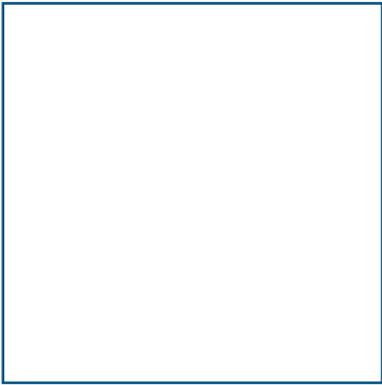
## FUN FACTS

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BY

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WHAT MAKES THEM A HERO?

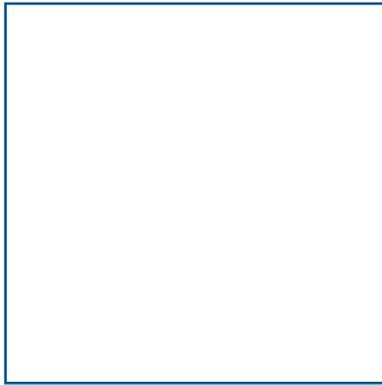
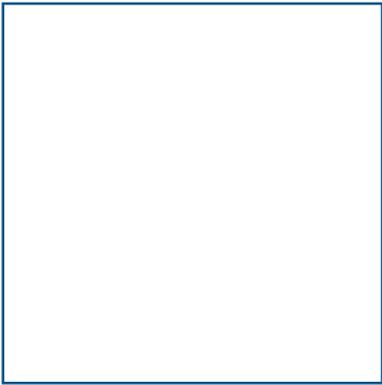


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I'LL BE A HERO  
IF I...

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