



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Warriors Don't Cry

Melba Pattillo Beals

**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

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Melba Pattillo Beals

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

[sales@novelunits.com](mailto:sales@novelunits.com)

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Interpreting evidence, compare/contrast, forming opinions, identifying stereotypes, pros/cons, research

### Comprehension

Cause/effect, classifying, details, generalizing, inference, main idea, predicting, summarizing

### Writing

Article, description, list, narrative, letter, report, poem

### Literary Elements

Analogy, characterization, descriptions, foreshadowing, plot development, setting, point of view, simile, metaphor, theme, figurative language

### Across the Curriculum

Art—drawing, architecture; Science—first aid, skin pigmentation, tuberculosis; Social Studies—maps, history, culture, laws, politics, sociology; Math—statistics, percentages; Technology—Internet research; Music—singing, opera

**Genre:** memoir

**Setting:** Little Rock, Arkansas; Little Rock Central High School, 1957–1958

**Point of View:** first person

**Themes:** prejudice, dealing with injustice, courage, fitting in, commitment, friendship

**Conflict:** person vs. society, person vs. person, person vs. self

**Style:** narrative

**Date of First Publication:** 1995

## Summary

Melba Pattillo is 15 years old when she and eight other black students integrate all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. What she thinks will be a great educational opportunity quickly turns ugly and dangerous. The black students are not allowed in the school on the first day because the Arkansas National Guard won't let them through the official barricade. After a court order and a half day of school that ends with the black students being secretly escorted out of the school, President Eisenhower sends in soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division to protect the black students.

Melba Pattillo Beals reconstructs her junior year in high school from her diary, her mother's notes, newspaper and magazine clippings, and her memory. Faced daily with terrors around every school hall corner, she practices the art of ignoring her enemies. Her grandmother's encouragement and Gandhi's example of passive resistance help Melba get through the horrible year, with her goal being to merely get out alive. She grows in courage and faith and hopes that integration will eventually quell many injustices.

## About the Author

Melba Pattillo Beals was born December 7, 1941, in Little Rock, Arkansas. She grew up using drinking fountains marked "colored" and bathrooms designated for black people only. Day after day, she endured life as a second-class citizen. When the opportunity came to attend an all-white high school, she volunteered because she thought she would finally have the same opportunities as white students. But that was not the case. Melba and eight other black students spent a dangerous, stressful year at Little Rock's Central High. After the Arkansas governor closed all Little Rock high schools for the 1958–1959 school year, Melba moved to California and lived with a white family while she finished high school. She earned a degree from San Francisco State University and later a graduate degree from Columbia University. She has worked as a news reporter and writes articles and books on public relations and marketing.

Beals' memoir of her year at Central High was named an American Library Association Notable Book for 1995 and also won the 1995 Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Book Award. It was included in the *Reader's Digest* 1995 edition of Today's Best Nonfiction.

Beals currently lives in San Francisco. In 1999, she and the other eight black students who integrated Central High were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by President Bill Clinton. Melba Beals' official Web site is [www.melbabeals.com](http://www.melbabeals.com) (active at the printing of this guide).

## Background Information

After the Civil War, slaves were freed, but black citizens made few inroads into equality with whites. Blacks were treated as second-class citizens, especially in the South where the doctrine of “separate but equal” (separate stores, separate schools, separate hospitals, and separate railroad waiting rooms for blacks and whites) was maintained. In 1939, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund was established, and lawsuits were filed against segregated schools. With the NAACP victory in 1954 in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, segregation was declared unconstitutional. The Supreme Court did not say how integration should be carried out, and the Little Rock Central High integration made headlines as segregationists fought integration with mob actions and National Guard barricades.

## Major Characters

**Melba Pattillo:** 15-year-old black girl who integrates Little Rock’s Central High School

**Grandma India:** Melba’s strong grandmother who trusts in God to make things right

**Mother Lois:** Melba’s mother; an English teacher

**Conrad:** Melba’s younger brother

**Danny:** Melba’s bodyguard; a soldier in the 101st Airborne Division

**Link:** white boy who warns Melba of segregationists’ plans

**Minnijean Brown:** one of the nine black students who integrated Central High

**Daisy Bates:** president of the Arkansas NAACP

**Orval Faubus:** Arkansas Governor who sends in the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the black students from attending Central High

# Feelings

Directions: Complete the chart below for Melba.

Describe Melba in the beginning.

Summarize important events in the boxes below. Describe how Melba feels after each one.

Event #1:	Melba feels ...
Event #2:	Melba feels ...
Event #3:	Melba feels ...
Event #4:	Melba feels ...
Event #5:	Melba feels ...
Event #6:	Melba feels ...

Describe Melba at the end.

## Vocabulary

acknowledgment (189)  
despite (191)  
loathed (192)  
participate (193)  
predicament (194)  
motives (196)  
violate (198)  
consequences (201)  
agility (206)  
fragile (214)

## Discussion Questions

1. Mother Lois stands up to question the school administrators. She is told her question is none of her business. She disputes the answer and then sits down out of embarrassment. What does this say about her character? (*She is very concerned about her daughter's safety. She is a courageous person. She is furious with the superintendent but is humiliated when he ignores her. p. 189*)
2. What does Melba's family's Thanksgiving tradition of giving away two things that are important to each of them tell about their home life? (*They believe in helping others and in sacrificing of themselves for the benefit of others. They live their religious beliefs. p. 196*)
3. Melba yearns for human contact outside her family. Why? (*She is ignored by the white students and by her old friends. She hates feeling like an outcast. pp. 205, 208*)
4. Mother Lois says the way Melba can strike back at the segregationists is to stay in school. Do you agree with this? Why or why not? (*The main thing the segregationists want is to force the black students to leave Central, so by not giving cause to be expelled, Melba is doing the one thing that will hurt them most. Answers will vary. p. 210*)
5. Does it surprise you that only Vince shows up at Melba's birthday party? Why or why not? (*Answers will vary. pp. 214–217*)
6. **Prediction:** Will Minnijean attend school after Christmas?

## Supplementary Activities

1. Interviewing: Attend a school board meeting and interview a member of the board about how racial problems are handled in the school district.
2. Research: Check local libraries for back copies of *Life* magazine with the picture of Melba as she salutes the flag.
3. Writing: Write a paragraph about a time you wanted to help someone but didn't, and explain why.

## Chapters 21–23, pp. 221–250

Melba tries not to worry about what will happen after the new semester starts. She wants desperately to enjoy Christmas break, but a shopping trip to town results in boys from school recognizing and threatening her. She attends a special party for the Little Rock Nine and a family get-together but has to forgo other parties. She makes a list of New Year's Resolutions. Topping the list is "To do my best to stay alive until May 29."

School becomes more challenging in January. Melba wishes she were dead so she wouldn't have to face the daily battlefield. Grandma India shows her how futile that wish is. The family makes efforts to keep Melba's spirits high. Minnijean is suspended again, this time for saying, "White trash" and throwing a purse.