The Recess Revolt

A Reading A–Z Level U Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,945

LEVELED BOOK • U

Connections

Writing

Identify an issue in your school or community. Write an essay proposing a solution. Include the pros and cons of your solution.

Social Studies

Research one civil rights leader. Write a biography that covers the person's early life and impact on society.

Written by Keith and Sarah Kortemartin
Illustrated by Steven P. Hughes

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Focus Question

What effect does the lesson Elias and Ada learn in class have on the outcome of the story?

Words to Know

app	petition
budget	protests
circulate	segregation
civil disobedience	signatures
civil rights	sit-ins
funding	sponsorship

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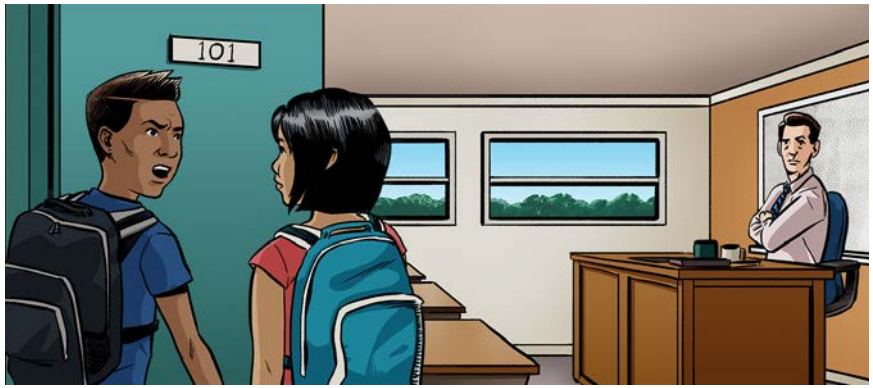
Correlation

LEVEL U	
Fountas & Pinnell	Q
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



Elias stormed into social studies class, complaining to his friend Ada about the new school recess policy.

"It's totally ridiculous," he griped. "Isn't recess supposed to be about free time and having fun?"

"All right now, settle down," Mr. Sterling called from the front of the room. "I know it's only the first day, but we already have a lot to do."

Elias sank into his chair, still seething. He had spent the whole summer looking forward to a chess rematch with Ada during recess since he'd been away all summer. But when they arrived on the playground, they'd been confronted with a new set of recess rules. Instead of playing on their own, students now had to participate in a set of activities run by the teachers. Elias and Ada had been immediately sent over to the soccer field with no chance to argue—and no chance to do what they wanted, which was to play chess.

It's so unfair, Elias thought.

"All right, class," said Mr. Sterling briskly. "We're starting with the **civil rights** movement of the 1960s. What do you already know about it?"

"Rosa Parks," someone said.

"Peaceful **protests**," another student called out.

"Right," said Mr. Sterling. "The civil rights movement was noted for using tactics of nonviolent **civil disobedience**. In general, that means that the civil rights protesters resisted unfair laws, but they did it in peaceful ways, refusing to get into fights or hurt anyone. This week, we're going to look at three different nonviolent tactics used by civil rights protesters in the 1960s: marches, boycotts, and **sit-ins**." As the class settled in to take notes, Elias raised his hand.

"What's a sit-in?" he asked.

"Sit-ins started in restaurants, which were often open only to white customers," answered Mr. Sterling. "So African Americans would go to a whites-only restaurant and order food. When they were refused, they'd simply sit and wait to be served. Sometimes people would yell at them, or throw food, or threaten them, but they just sat quietly."

"Did it work?" asked Elias, fascinated.

"It worked brilliantly," Mr. Sterling said. "The restaurants couldn't make money with protesters sitting at their counters. Meanwhile, the whole country was watching the protesters' peaceful tactics. Gradually, the system of racial **segregation** in public spaces began to fall apart."

The class discussed the boycotts, marches, and rallies that the civil rights protesters organized in the 1960s. Elias followed everything intently as a strategy formed in his mind. When class ended, he turned to Ada.

"I've got an idea about how we might get our free time back," he said. "Meet me on the soccer field at recess tomorrow."

The next day, Ada joined Elias on the soccer field, and he told her about his plan. "We're going to sit down right in the middle of the soccer field," he said. Ada looked at him as though she thought he was crazy. "It's a sit-in," Elias explained, "like we learned about in class yesterday. We're going to sit here quietly and refuse to play to protest the new recess rules."

Ada still looked doubtful. "Do you really think that will work?" she asked.

"I think it's worth a try," Elias said. "It worked for the civil rights protesters, so why not us?"

"But won't we get in trouble?" Ada asked.

Elias shrugged. "Probably," he said, "but that's the point: I want the teachers and the principal to notice us. We won't get expelled or anything; we're not hurting anybody."

Ada hesitated but sat down next to him.

At first, nothing much happened. They could see a couple of kids pointing at them, but that was all. Then Ms. Fremont, the teacher organizing the soccer game, jogged up to them.

"Ada and Elias, what are you doing here? I need you over on this team, please," she said. They glanced at each other nervously but didn't move.

"What's the matter, you two?" she asked. "Don't you want to play today?"

They shook their heads silently. Ms. Fremont looked at them for a moment. A couple of other kids approached, trying to see what was holding up the game.

"Well . . . you can take a break today," Ms. Fremont decided, "but obviously you can't do it here. I need you to move to the sidelines so you don't get injured. And I'm going to need you back in the game tomorrow, okay?"

Reluctantly, Elias and Ada rose and shuffled off the field. "Walk really slowly," Elias whispered to Ada. "We want people to notice what we're doing. These protests only work if a bunch of people get involved."

His strategy worked. As kids subbed in and out of play, several of them asked Elias and Ada why they had been acting so oddly at the beginning of the game. When Elias explained, people's faces lit up; clearly, many other kids were unhappy with the new policy, too. By the end of the recess period, several more students had joined them on the sidelines, watching the game quietly. When the whistle blew, they all stood and returned to class.

All that day, word of Elias's protest spread throughout the school. Kids kept approaching him in the halls during class breaks and passing him notes. By the end of the day, his throat felt like sandpaper from all the talking he'd been doing. He gave everyone the same message: "If you want to protest the new rules, meet us on the soccer field tomorrow at recess."

The following day, a group of thirty kids waited for Elias on the soccer field. Elias was stunned—he'd never thought that so many kids would respond. He looked around, cleared his throat, and pitched his voice to carry over the crowd.

"All right, everybody," he called, "let's try this again. We'll sit in the middle of the field and disrupt play. They're not going to be able to continue the game with all of us sitting there, and we're not moving to the sidelines today."

As the students poured onto the field and began sitting down, the teacher came running over.

"What is this again?" she asked sharply. Elias spoke up.

"We're staging a nonviolent protest, Ms. Fremont," he said. "We want our free time at recess back."

Ms. Fremont pursed her lips, then ordered everyone to get up. The students sat quietly and looked back at her.

"Whose idea was this?" Ms. Fremont asked. Elias and Ada raised their hands.

Ms. Fremont shook her head and said, "I think it's time for a visit to the principal's office."

The principal, Ms. King, looked from Elias to Ada and back again.

"Explain this to me, please," she ordered.

Elias explained how much he'd been looking forward to playing chess with Ada at recess this year. He explained how much he hated playing soccer and how angry he was that there was no free time at recess anymore. He explained how he'd gotten the idea for a sit-in in social studies class. When he finished, there was a long silence.

"All right, you two—I understand why you're unhappy," Ms. King said finally. "But what about all the kids who like playing soccer? What do they think about the new recess rules?"

"I don't know," Elias admitted.

Ms. King nodded. "I think we need more information," she told them. "I want you to write a letter explaining your position, and I want to see how many of your fellow students are willing to sign it. You have three days to bring me your **petition**. We have about four hundred students in this school. If you can get more than two hundred **signatures**, I'll work with you and the student body to consider some alternatives. Meanwhile, no more sit-ins. Do we have a deal?"

Elias and Ada nodded.

That night after school, Ada and Elias worked on their petition. In their letter, they argued for a return of free time at recess so students could spend their time developing skills that interested them instead of playing prearranged games that only a few people really liked.

The next day, they began to **circulate** their petition at every opportunity—at lunch, in the halls, and at recess itself. Elias and Ada rapidly found that once the kids understood what was in the petition, most were eager to sign. It seemed as though everyone was fed up.

"First music class got canceled, then art class, and now there's this recess stuff," another fifth grader told Ada disgustedly. "It's like we never get to do anything fun at school anymore."

By the end of the second day, they had over two hundred signatures. Elias and Ada marched into Ms. King's office and laid the paper down on her desk with a flourish. Ms. King examined the petition and looked up at them.

"You've explained your position well," she said. "Now let me explain mine. The school had some severe **budget** cuts this year, and we had to cut P.E. as well as art and music. We didn't want to cut any of them, you understand, but we had no choice. Meanwhile, the law says that elementary school students must get thirty minutes of physical activity every day. I thought that the only way for us to do that was to get everyone playing sports during recess periods. But I can see that this is not working for everyone and that the student body is unhappy. So we'll need to think together about what we can do to find a new solution."

Elias and Ada thought about it.

"What if we could raise the money to bring P.E. back?" asked Ada suddenly. "Could we have our free time at recess back if we had a regular P.E. class again?"

"I think so," said Ms. King slowly, "but that's a very tall order. You won't raise the money for a P.E. program with just a bake sale or a car wash, for example."

"We need to reach more people," said Elias. "Wait a second! I just saw something the other day that might work for us. It was an **app** you can use to raise money for a cause online. We can set a **funding** goal, and people can contribute whatever they want from their phones or computers."

"We can certainly try it," Ms. King said.

For the rest of that week, Elias and Ada worked with Ms. King to set up a fund-raiser online. They worked especially hard on the wording of their funding appeal, trying to make it as persuasive as possible. On Friday, the fund-raiser went up, and Ms. King personally shared it on the school's social media pages. Elias and Ada posted links, too, and asked their parents and friends to share it widely. Then they sat back to wait and hope.

Over the weekend, they watched as their fund-raiser link was shared, and shared, and shared again throughout their town.

On Monday morning before the start of school, Elias and Ada raced into the principal's office with some news. The owner of a local sporting goods store had called Elias personally to offer **sponsorship** of the school's P.E. program for the next five years.

Ms. King sat back in her chair and looked from one to the other.

"Well done, you two," she said quietly.

Elias and Ada grinned at each other and exchanged a high-five. Ms. King stood up and shook their hands. "I'll be in touch with Mr. Pope over at the sporting goods store," she told them. "Meanwhile, I just heard the bell for recess. Don't you two have a game of chess to catch up on?"

Glossary

app *(n.)*	a computer program designed for a mobile electronic device (p. 14)
budget *(n.)*	an amount of money to be used for a specific purpose or time frame (p. 13)
circulate *(v.)*	to pass or move around from person to person (p. 12)
civil disobedience *(n.)*	the peaceful refusal to obey laws because they are considered unjust (p. 4)
civil rights *(n.)*	legal, social, and economic rights that guarantee freedom and equality for all citizens (p. 4)
funding *(n.)*	money given by an organization for a specific purpose (p. 14)
petition *(n.)*	a formal written request, usually signed by many supporters (p. 11)
protests *(n.)*	actions done to express strong disagreement or disapproval (p. 4)
segregation *(n.)*	a policy of separating groups of people from one another, often on the basis of race (p. 5)
signatures *(n.)*	people's names, each signed by that person (p. 11)
sit-ins *(n.)*	peaceful protests that involve people sitting in a particular place and refusing to move (p. 4)
sponsorship *(n.)*	the act of giving money to an individual, organization, or project in exchange for advertising (p. 15)