The Recess Revolt

A Reading A–Z Level X Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,995

LEVELED BOOK • X

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

Reading A–Z
Visit www.readinga-z.com
for thousands of books and materials.

www.readinga-z.com

The Recess Revolt

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

www.readinga-z.com

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	segregated
civil disobedience	signatures
civil rights	sit-ins
funding	sponsorship

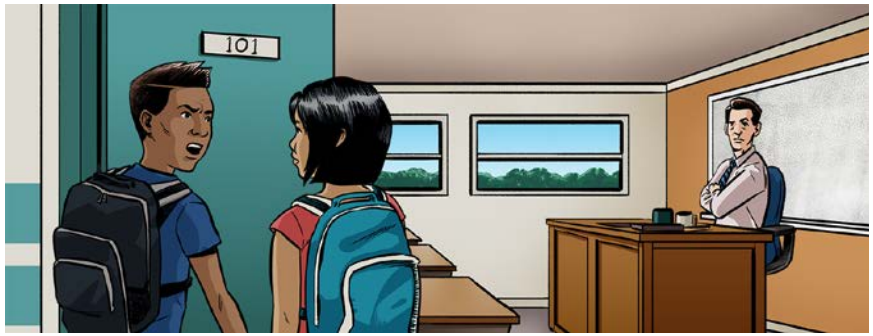
The Recess Revolt
Level X Leveled Book

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

www.readinga-z.com

Correlation

LEVEL X	
Fountas & Pinnell	S
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—isn't recess supposed to be about free time and having fun?" he griped.

"Settle down," Mr. Sterling called from the front of the room. Elias sank into his chair, still seething.

He had spent the whole summer looking forward to the first day of fifth grade, and he'd especially been looking forward to a chess rematch with Ada during recess after traveling all summer long. But when they went outside, they'd been confronted with a new set of recess rules: instead of freely choosing what to do, students now had to participate in a predetermined 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.

"We're starting with the **civil rights** movement of the 1960s today. What do you already know about it?" asked Mr. Sterling briskly.

"Rosa Parks," someone said. Someone else called out, "Peaceful **protests**."

Mr. Sterling nodded and said, "The civil rights movement was noted for using peaceful tactics; the strategy was called nonviolent **civil disobedience**. In general, it 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 was especially difficult because the protesters themselves were often physically attacked, and the principle of nonviolence led them to endure this treatment without fighting back. This week, we're going to look at three different nonviolent tactics used by the 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 **segregated**," answered Mr. Sterling. "African Americans would enter a whites-only restaurant and order food; their orders were usually refused, and when that happened, they'd simply sit and wait for service. Sometimes people would scream 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 lost income with protesters sitting at their counters, and meanwhile the whole country was watching the protesters' peaceful tactics. Gradually, public opinion began to swing in the protesters' favor, and the system of racial segregation in public spaces began to fall apart."

The class discussed the boycotts, marches, and sit-ins that the civil rights protesters organized in the 1960s, and Elias followed everything intently. A strategy was forming in his mind, and when class ended he turned to Ada.

"I have an idea about how we might get our free time at recess 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 here 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, like we learned about in class yesterday," Elias explained. "We're going to sit here quietly and refuse to play soccer to protest the new recess policy."

"Do you really think that will work?" Ada asked doubtfully.

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

"Won't we get in trouble?" Ada asked.

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

Ada hesitated but sat down next to him.

At first, nothing much happened; 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?" Ms. Fremont asked. "Don't you want to play today?" They shook their heads silently. Ms. Fremont looked at them for a moment. Then a couple of other kids approached and peered at Ada and Elias, trying to see what was holding up the game. Ms. Fremont glanced back at the other students, clearly impatient to get the soccer match underway.

"Well . . . you can take a break today," she 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."

Elias's strategy worked; as the soccer game progressed and 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; it was evident that many other kids were discontented 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, and 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, Elias was stunned to discover a cluster of thirty students waiting for him on the soccer field. 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 and join the game, but nobody moved.

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

She 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, and he explained how much he hated playing soccer, and he explained how irritated he was that there was no free time at recess anymore. Finally, he explained how he'd developed the idea for a sit-in during social studies class. When he finished, there was a long silence.

"All right, you two—I understand why you're unhappy," Ms. King said, "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 alternative policies. 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 doing things 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. The principal examined the petition and looked up at them.

"You've explained your position well," she said; "now let me explain mine. We had some severe **budget** cuts this year, and the school administration 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, and I thought that the only way for us to do that was to get everyone playing organized 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 reflected.

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

Ms. King agreed to the idea, and for the rest of that week, Elias and Ada worked with her to set up their fund-raising campaign online. They labored especially hard on the wording of their funding appeal, trying to make their rhetoric as persuasive as possible. On Friday, they posted the fund-raiser, 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 distribute it widely; then they sat back in nervous anticipation.

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 sprinted 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, and 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 or application designed for a mobile electronic device such as a cell phone (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 a 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)
segregated *(adj.)*	kept apart based on group differences, such as 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, usually in exchange for advertising (p. 15)