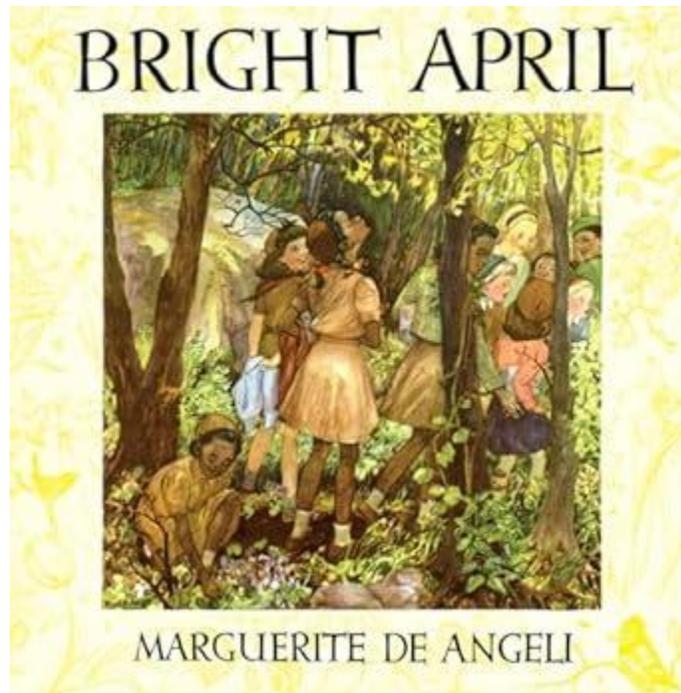


# Bright April's Teaching Guide





## Celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of *Bright April*

Published in 1946, *Bright April* was the first mainstream children's book offering life lessons about racial prejudice written by a white author. Though dated by today's standards, the book's message of racial equality was a new – even radical idea for some people at the time. Newbery medal-winning author/illustrator Marguerite de Angeli relied on a network of African American neighbors – teachers, ministers, and leaders – to develop the story, characters and images in the book. Nellie Rathbone Bright, community activist, civil-rights advocate, painter, author, poet, organizer and principal of Germantown's Joseph E. Hill School, was a primary source for de Angeli's knowledge of the Black experience. Her contribution was so essential that her last name became the family name of the title character.



## The Story of *Bright April*

- *Bright April* is a book celebrating the power of children's literature in African American representation
- The author illustrates the historic landmarks and the pride of place the main characters have for the urban village of Germantown, Philadelphia
- The main character, April Bright, is about to turn ten years old. She lives with her middle class family of six and is a member of a Brownie scout troop
- The story traces April's desire for friendship and learning, while she also endures racial discrimination.



- How does Bright April share stories of Germantown, its people and history?
- What kinds of discrimination in 1940s Germantown require April's parents to have "the talk" with their children to keep them safe and secure? What kind of "talk" has your family had with you?
- Have you ever felt that you were treated differently because of the way you look, feel or act? Write five reasons why you love yourself just the way you are.
- How does April think about her neighborhood and the people who live in it?
- How does the author suggest, through the parents and teachers, how African Americans like April and her family need to appear and act to be accepted and successful in our country? How do you feel about that?
- How does April's Brownie Scout troop and leader Mrs. Cole help April learn about the natural world?
- How does April and Sophie's open friendship benefit and support them in everyday events? What do you think kept Phyllis from this kind of friendship?
- What are the ways we can make our communities welcoming for everyone today?





## April's Father: African Americans in Postal Service

*"If I didn't bring them letters and papers I guess they wouldn't know anything that's going on in the world."*

*-Papa in Bright April*

The 19th century was a time of enormous change in the postal workforce. In 1802, Congress banned African Americans from carrying U.S. mail. It wasn't until shortly after the Civil War in the 1860s that the Postal Service began employing African Americans. They began to be hired as postmasters, clerks, and city letter carriers. It became a major source of good, middle class jobs for African Americans in the early 20th century. During the 1940s, civil rights advocacy, combined with wartime needs, created even more opportunities for Black postal workers. Today, according to [www.inequality.org](http://www.inequality.org), USPS is a vital source of decent jobs for Black workers. It could also narrow the racial wealth divide by expanding financial services.

Sources:

<https://inequality.org/great-divide/black-families-postal-service/>

<https://about.usps.com/who/profile/history/african-american-workers-20thc.htm>

## April's Brother: African Americans in World War II

*"I may get home soon, but don't count on it too much because some of us have to stay here. It seems like a waste of time now, and we are all so anxious to get started on our jobs at home. I don't mind doing my bit, but I'd like to be sure of what we are coming home to."*

*- Ken in Bright April*

The Double V campaign was a slogan championed by The Pittsburgh Courier, then the largest black newspaper in the United States, that promoted efforts toward democracy for civilian defense workers and for African Americans in the military.



The Pittsburgh Courier newspaper, founded in 1907, had long used its voice to champion the rights of African Americans. When World War II began on September 1, 1939, the newspaper immediately made a connection between the United States' treatment of African Americans and Nazi Germany's treatment of Jewish people.

On January 31, 1942, just weeks after the U.S. declared war on Japan and Germany after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Courier published a letter from twenty-six-year-old James G. Thompson, a defense worker in Wichita, Kansas. Like most black war workers at the time, Thompson could not work on the factory floor of the aircraft manufacturing company where he was employed. He was confined to working in the factory cafeteria.

Thompson's letter, "Should I Sacrifice to live 'Half American?'" challenged the lofty rhetoric of American war aims, contrasting them to the actual treatment of African Americans, then one-tenth of the population. At the end of his letter, Thompson reminded his readers that the "V for Victory" sign was being displayed prominently across the U.S. and among its allies, calling for victory over tyranny, slavery, and aggression as represented by the aims of the Axis Powers: Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Thompson called for a "double V for victory" sign, with the first V standing for victory of enemies from without and the second V for victory over enemies within, meaning those in the United States who limited the freedoms of African Americans.



Sources:

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/events-african-american-history/the-double-v-campaign-1942-1945/>

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/summer-1946-saw-black-wwii-vets-fight-freedom-home-180978538/>

[https://www.harvard.com/book/9781608196227\\_the\\_double\\_v\\_how\\_wars\\_protest\\_and\\_harry\\_truman\\_desegregated\\_a/](https://www.harvard.com/book/9781608196227_the_double_v_how_wars_protest_and_harry_truman_desegregated_a/)



## Washington's Birthday: Redefining how we remember our past

*"Washington's Birthday! Washington's Birthday!"*

*-April and her peers in Bright April*

The recognition accorded the February 22 date is—in effect—a look back at how the country survived in spite of itself. It is also a time to reflect on the origins of slavery. Considering that February is also Black History Month, the existence of Washington's Birthday provides an opportunity to take an expanded look at the issue of civil rights from the country's earliest days—not just the days of the Civil War or the 1950s and 1960s.

### **The Story of Ona Judge**

When George Washington was elected president, fifteen-year-old Ona Judge traveled with seven other enslaved people to the executive residence, first in New York and then in Philadelphia. She was among the enslaved people whom Washington secretly rotated out of the latter city in order to evade the 1780 Pennsylvania emancipation law. Washington asked his secretary to accomplish this rotation “under pretext that may deceive both them and the Public.”<sup>5</sup> However, Philadelphia’s large free black and Quaker abolitionist communities offered the young woman new ideas, new connections, and new opportunities to escape.

On May 21, 1796, as the Washingtons prepared to return to Mount Vernon for the summer, Ona Judge fled. As she recalled in 1845, “Whilst they were packing up to go to Virginia, I was packing to go, I didn’t know where; for I knew that if I went back to Virginia, I should never get my liberty. I had friends among the colored people of Philadelphia, had my things carried there beforehand, and left Washington’s house while they were eating dinner.”<sup>7</sup>

Sources:

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2004/winter/gw-birthday-1.html>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/lesson-plans/?grade=3>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/lesson-plans/lesson/george-washingtons-list-of-enslaved-people-1799/>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/additional-sources/>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/search/?q=president%27s+house%2C+philadelphia#gsc.tab=0&gsc.q=president's%20house%2C%20philadelphia&gsc.page=1>

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/hercules/>



## Bright April by Marguerite de Angeli: Hidden Message Puzzle

First find and draw a line through all the words in the list.  
Words can go in any direction and share letters as well as cross over each other.  
Once you find and cross out all the words, copy the remaining letters starting in the top left corner into the blanks below to reveal the hidden message.

N A Y R A R B I L B V R W H M  
O W L E N E A W E W A E O R A  
E L O D S P E G E M L V E D R  
W R T T A O O O P E E O N F K  
I O U P N N R A P R N S G I E  
S S L T I A S C O U T S N W T  
S C E A C M M M O T I A I E S  
A G R I D E J R U W N P L H Q  
H M H E N B T T E B E K T Y U  
I R M E E W J I Y G C F T E A  
C S D A A K O S H A Y B I L R  
K Q I L M Z C R R C W T H L E  
O O K S H K I G B W R F W O J  
N S K C I T S M U R D A V R K  
N A M T S O P I A N O R Q T Z

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|--------------|------------|-------------|
| ARCHITECTURE | BEGONIA    | BROWNIES    |
| CREEK        | DRUMSTICKS | GERMANTOWN  |
| GRACKLE      | LIBRARY    | MAMMA       |
| MARKETSQUARE | PAPA       | PASSOVER    |
| PIANO        | POSTMAN    | SCOUTS      |
| SIS          | TOM        | TROLLEY     |
| VALENTINE    | WHITTLING  | WISSAHICKON |

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<https://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/hidden-message>

<https://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com/hidden-message/result>

**Hidden Message: A whole new world seemed to open for April**