

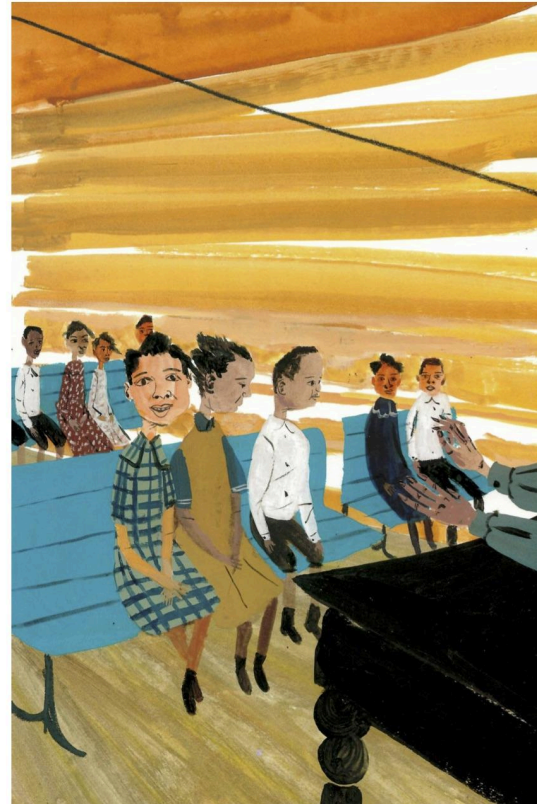
Dear Mr. Rosenwald Excerpts

1921: ONE ROOM SCHOOL

My teacher Miss Mays said,
You can't judge a school
by the building. When the roof leaks,
she calls us vessels of learning.
When the floor creaks, she says
knowledge is a firm foundation.
Wind whistles through walls,
blowing the sheet that splits the church
into two classrooms. Me on one side;
Junior on the other. Till I passed
fourth grade, I sat beside him,
counting with my fingers
and fidgeting on the pew.
Now I know better.

My school is not much to speak of,
but Mama says I'm lucky
even if class don't meet during harvest.
Down here, she said, some black children
go to school in shacks, corncribs
or not at all. Don't know what I'd do,
if I couldn't go to school.

Harvest break —
just when I memorized the times tables.
Instead of learning long division,
I'll be working in the field.



Text Talk U1 W5 D3

Focus on Second/ 2nd Grade for ME | Boston Public Schools Department of Early Childhood P-2/
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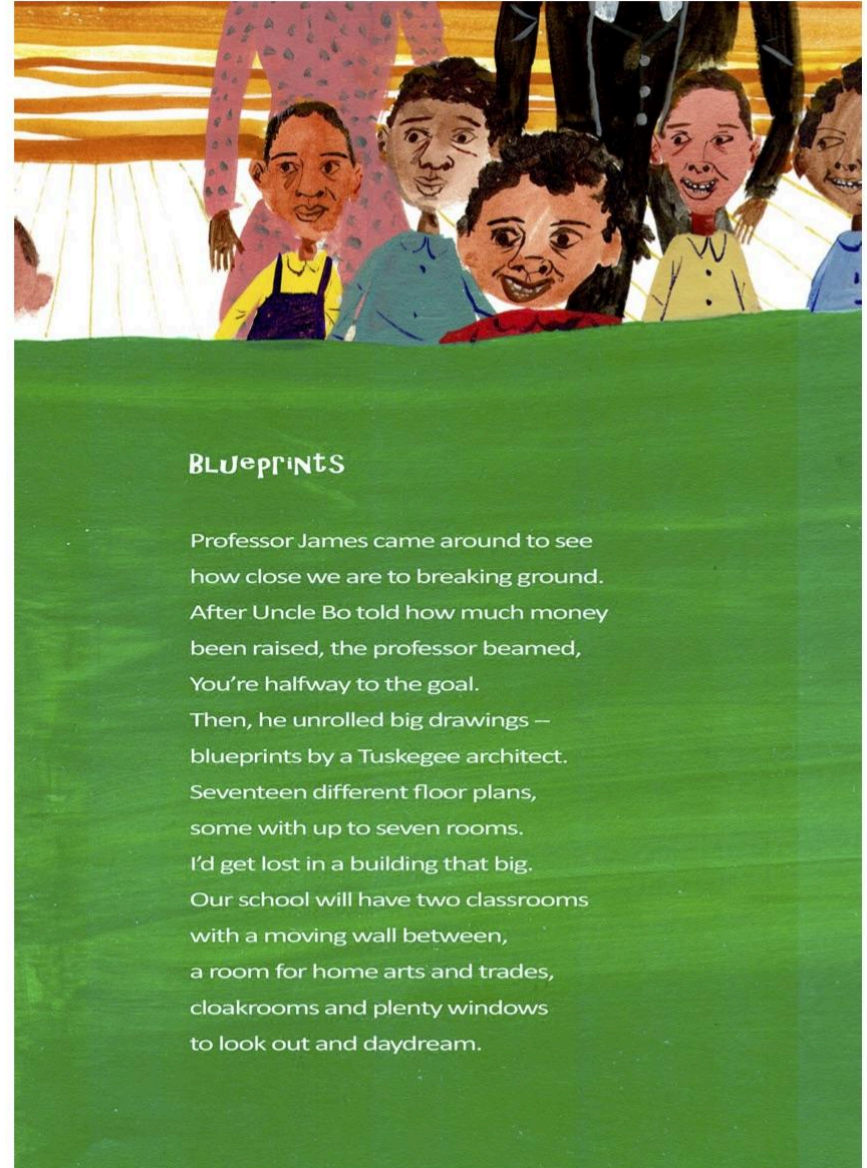


PASSING THE PLATE

Homecoming Sunday, a church-full.
Uncle Bo didn't need to preach a sermon
after going on about the new school.
Said we're gathering money a nickel
and dime at a time. The ushers passed
the plate. Afterwards, Uncle Bo
waved envelopes white neighbors sent.
Twenty dollars in all. Then, the choir sang:
The Lord will make a way somehow.

Just before the service ended,
Miss Etta Mae asked to have a word.
I was born a slave. Worked hard
even after freedom came. Never had time
for book-learning. Here's a dollar,
from money I been saving for my burial.
Hurry and build that school
so I can learn to read my Bible.

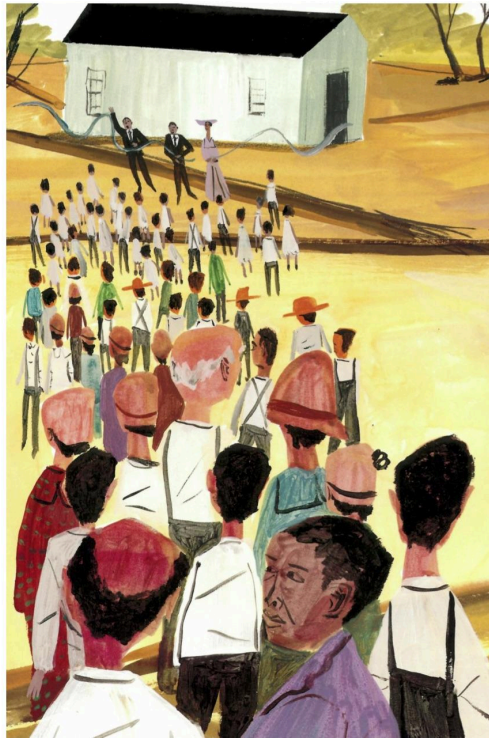
Text Talk U1 W5 D3



BLUEPRINTS

Professor James came around to see
how close we are to breaking ground.
After Uncle Bo told how much money
been raised, the professor beamed,
You're halfway to the goal.
Then, he unrolled big drawings —
blueprints by a Tuskegee architect.
Seventeen different floor plans,
some with up to seven rooms.
I'd get lost in a building that big.
Our school will have two classrooms
with a moving wall between,
a room for home arts and trades,
cloakrooms and plenty windows
to look out and daydream.

Text Talk U1 W5 D3



1922: White Oak School

Uncle Bo cut the ribbon at the doorway
and we marched into the new school,
proud as can be. The place sparkled.
After we sang "Lift Ev'ry Voice,"
Professor James told us to be proud.
Learning is priceless, he said.
He gave Miss Mays a framed picture
of Mr. Rosenwald for the lobby.
Uncle Bo called Miss Shaw up front.
A pretty, new teacher from the city.
No more eight grades in one room.
Miss Shaw has a sing-song voice.
Children, you are diamonds in the rough.
I will polish you bright as stars.

I had to speak next; clammy hands,
knees shaking, heart in my throat.
Thank you, parents and neighbors,
for building this brand new school.
Your sweat taught us a lesson:
Tomorrow is in our hands.

Text Talk U1 W5 D3