

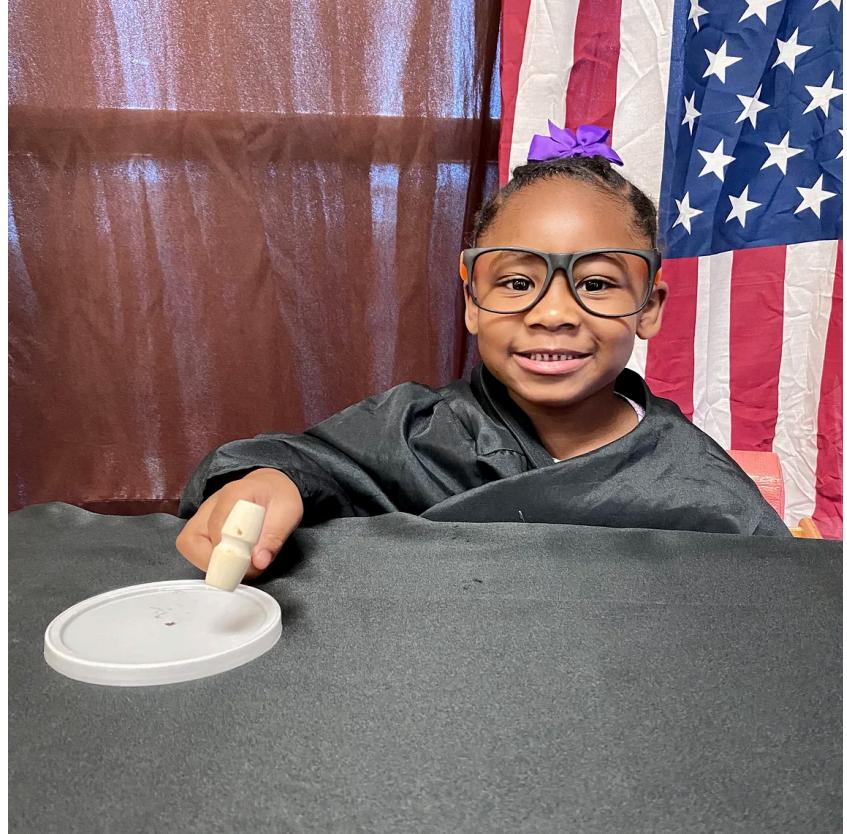


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# Head Start: Making Civil Rights History in 1965, and Celebrating It Today

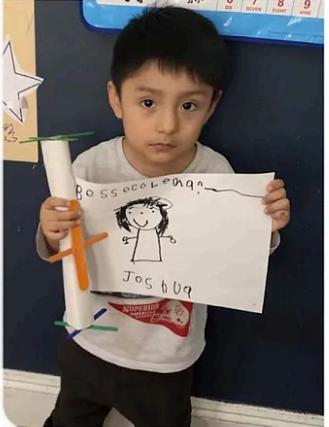
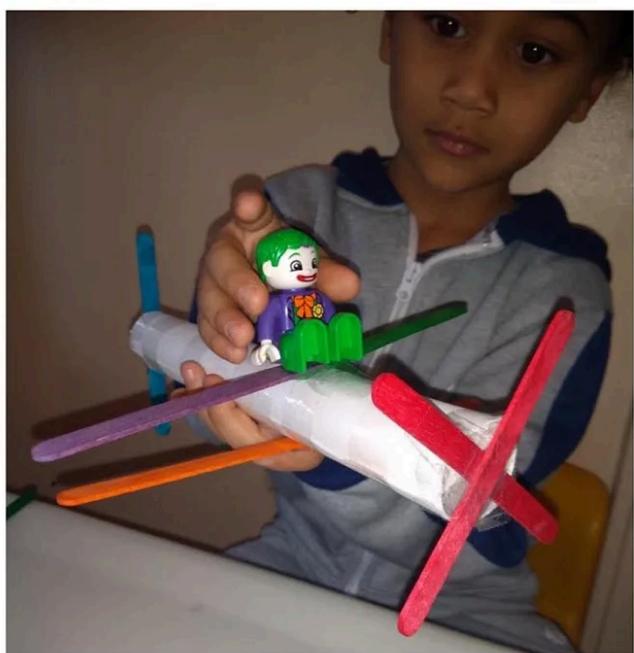


National Head Start Association · Feb 18, 2021 · 3 min read



In honor of Black History Month, children in Head Start classrooms across the country are learning about and celebrating the monumental impact made by influential leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. And while they may not be among the names children commonly learn about in the classroom, Head Start's own leaders are also an important part of our Civil Rights history.

As NHSA has explored this February in our own celebration of Black History Month, Head Start's early leaders created equitable access to opportunity for Black children in the US like never before. In celebration of Head Start's 50th anniversary six years ago, Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president emerita of the Children's Defense Fund and legal champion for Head Start in its early years, recalled Head Start's Civil Rights roots. "After the Mississippi project of the summer of 1964, without a doubt, Head Start coming to Mississippi in 1965 was the most important follow up and aftermath, which led to independent people getting jobs outside of the plantation structure, not going to the state structure where they wouldn't have gotten jobs, just as janitors," she said.



Children at Montclair Child Development Center learn about Besse Colman this Black History Month

Marian Wright Edelman herself was a key player in creating the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), and then leading the charge in the legal battle to keep the program funded. She went on to found the Children's Defense Fund in 1973, broadening the scope of her children's equity work. Her work, and that of other early Head Start leaders at programs like CDGM and Friends of Children of Mississippi, laid the groundwork for Head Start to thrive today.

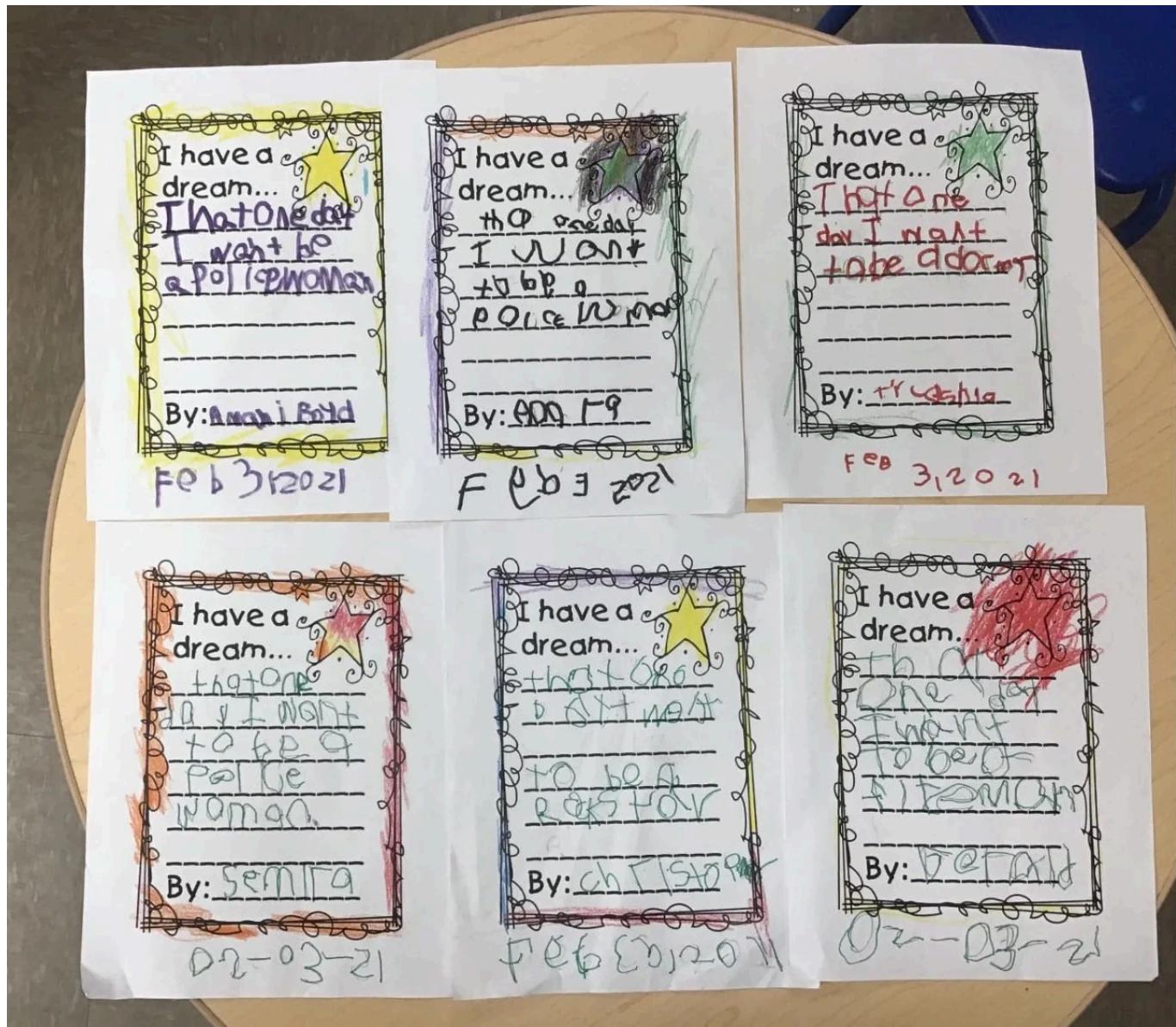
Because of the heroic efforts to keep Head Start funded and the creative community solutions to keep the program afloat, children are celebrating Black History Month in Head Start classrooms today.

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Children at Rise and Shine Early Learning Head Start celebrate Black History Month, February 2021

At Rise and Shine Early Learning in Manatee County, Florida, Head Start children are learning about Black leaders every day of Black History Month. “On the first day of this month we explored the beauty and culture of Black women’s hair, which led us into exploring Madam CJ Walker,” teacher Kayla Schramm shared. “The next day we explored Rosa Parks and created our own bus.”



And at Lutheran Services Florida Inc. this year’s celebrations include an “I Have Dream” activity, taking inspiration from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous speech to encourage children to achieve their own dreams. Countless Head Start children and their parents have gone on to reach ambitious goals, becoming the elected government officials, business owners, artists, teachers, doctors, and respected community members we know.

Through these classroom activities, and with an enduring mission to set children, families, and communities up for success in school and beyond, Head Start is carrying on the critical work of the program's early leaders in pursuit of racial, economic, and social equity.



Head Start student from Lutheran Services Florida participates in a coloring activity of Rosa Parks, February 2021

Head Start

Black History Month

Education