**Scaffolded text-based questions for reading. Checks for understanding embedded in the article : Teacher Version**

**“Area Students Lead the Way”:**

The seeds of revolution were planted in a church fellowship hall, in dorm rooms and in a rented house along Jefferson Street.

They were nurtured in a pivotal emergency meeting at First Baptist Church Capitol Hill, with all who were there convinced that the very idea of America was up for grabs.

When the revolutionaries were ready, they attacked. But they didn’t fire guns, pull knives or throw punches.

They sat at lunch counters. They rode buses. They marched.

And they bled.

More than 50 years ago, a group of Nashville college students joined forces with local preachers to create a nonviolent army that went to war with the segregated South.

While similar groups did the same kind of work in other cities, the Nashville students had the first and most wide-ranging success in the decade when Jim Crow was routed. They stayed at it with such resolve that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., on a visit to Fisk University in the midst of the students’ efforts, said he came not to inspire but to be inspired.

And later, when violence threatened to break them, the students defied the adults who advised them and kept going. They rode buses into police-sanctioned assaults in Alabama, knowing they might die - a decision made during that crucial First Baptist meeting, after one of them, John Lewis, posed two simple questions.

“If not us, then who?” he asked. “If not now, then when?”

The students would go on to play key roles in the civil rights movement’s biggest victories.

“The Nashville students dramatically expanded the notion of what a movement was on two or three occasions,” said historian Taylor Branch, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of “America in the King Years.”

The students were - and are - complicated human beings. Many would go on to achieve spectacular successes, while others met spectacular failure. But most would come to view the protests as the most important undertaking of their lives.

**‘This is the cradle’**

The students came together under the Rev. James Lawson, a graduate divinity student who moved to Nashville after King “literally begged him to move south,” Branch said.

In the fall of 1959, Lawson started holding workshops on nonviolent action. Students from Fisk and Tennessee State universities, Meharry Medical College and American Baptist Theological Seminary gathered at Clark Memorial United Methodist Church on 14th Avenue North.

“Clark was the birthplace of the civil rights movement in Nashville,” said Matthew Walker Jr., who participated in Lawson’s workshops and the sit-ins as a Fisk student. “This is the cradle.”

As Lawson stood or sat on one side of the fellowship hall and the students sat in rows of chairs, they talked about Jesus, Gandhi and Thoreau. Or they would role-play a sit-in, with some students pretending to ignore those who stood behind them, yelling slurs and blowing smoke in their faces.

The goal was clear: to desegregate the lunch counters in downtown department stores and five-and-dimes, where black customers could shop but couldn’t buy a hamburger.

Lawson taught the students to react to violence by turning the other cheek and taking the blows. In a workshop captured on film, he urged them to imagine responding to their attackers in a “creatively loving fashion.”

“It wasn’t always easy, believe me,” said Walker, who lost his lower front teeth in a beating at the Greyhound bus station lunch counter but came back to join the Freedom Rides.

And yet the students were meticulous about their own conduct. Two student leaders from American Baptist, Lewis and Bernard Lafayette, passed out a list of rules: Don’t laugh out loud. Don’t block entrances to stores. Be friendly and courteous. Always face the counter.

They dressed like they were going to church. Often they went to jail.

**The sit-ins begin**

The Nashville sit-ins began on Feb. 13, 1960, nearly two weeks after four North Carolina A&T students spontaneously sat in at a Woolworth’s in Greensboro, N.C. Lawson didn’t think the Nashville movement was ready, but his young charges wouldn’t wait.

“They finally ran out from under him,” Branch said.

Emerging from First Baptist, they would wind their way past the old National Life Building, walk down Union Street and south on Fifth Avenue, home to three department stores: Kress, McLellan’s and Woolworth’s. They also sat in at nearby Cain-Sloan, Harveys, Grant’s, Walgreens and the Moon-McGrath drugstore.

On the first two weekends, waitresses refused to serve the students, so they sat at the counters and quietly did their homework.

On the third Saturday, Feb. 27, the police moved in. Some of the students were assaulted by white shoppers. More than 80 students were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, while police left the attackers alone.

That began a nearly two-month standoff between the mostly black protesters - who kept coming and coming - and the white business owners. The students were spat on, gassed with insecticide and had beverages and condiments dumped on them.

Black residents began to boycott the downtown stores, punishing white merchants during the Easter season.

The tension exploded on April 19, when a bomb tore through the home of Z. Alexander Looby, a leading black civil rights lawyer who lived near the Meharry campus. Looby and his family somehow escaped unharmed, but the students and preachers had seen enough. They sent Mayor Ben West a telegram and started walking.

Led by Fisk junior Diane Nash and minister C.T. Vivian, thousands marched, three by three, to City Hall. After West met them on the plaza, Vivian delivered a blistering indictment. Then Nash quietly lowered the boom.

After getting West to acknowledge the evils of discrimination, she pressed him.

“Then, mayor, do you recommend that the lunch counters be desegregated?”

“Yes,” West replied.

Three weeks later, black students and residents ate at the lunch counters, and Nashville became the first city in the South to desegregate. By then the sit-ins had spread across the South, and students in other cities realized that victory was possible.

**Movement spreads**

But the Nashville students didn’t stop there. They “stood in” outside movie theaters. They protested outside restaurants. And in the spring of 1961, they moved to the forefront of a national campaign.

The Freedom Rides, designed to require enforcement of a new federal rule desegregating interstate bus facilities, appeared to be over after riders had been savagely attacked in Rock Hill, S.C.; Anniston, Ala.; and Birmingham. Federal officials had gotten the battered riders to New Orleans when they learned that the students had other plans.

Back in Nashville, after a meeting at First Baptist, the students decided to keep the Freedom Rides alive. Though the adults who advised them said they would get themselves killed, the students said they couldn’t let violence separate them from freedom. Several of them were beaten badly in Montgomery on May 20.

That was the first of 13 Freedom Rides to originate in Nashville, according to Raymond Arsenault’s book about the rides. Operating out of a Jefferson Street house, Nash and Tennessee State graduate Leo Lillard cashed money orders and bought tickets for students on their way to Jackson, Miss. They intended to fill the jails.

Branch thinks the movement would have been set back by at least a year if the students hadn’t responded as they did. It’s a question the former students have contemplated themselves over the years.

Not long ago, Ernest “Rip” Patton, a former TSU student, discussed with Vivian, who lives in Atlanta, how remarkable it was that this group had all come together at one time.

“John Lewis from Troy, Ala., wanted to go to Troy State,” said Patton, who still lives in Nashville. “Bernard Lafayette from Tampa, Fla., wanted to go to school in Florida. James Bevel, I think he wanted to work in Mississippi and Alabama. C.T. Vivian, who lived in Peoria, Ill., he wanted to go into Chicago and work.

“C.T. and I, we agree that this movement was God sent,” Patton said, “because all of these people who had different agendas ended up in Nashville.”

With 50 years of perspective, it’s easy to conclude that the justice the students were pushing for was inevitable.

But there were no guarantees during those anxious days in the Deep South. And while there’s no way of knowing what would have happened if they had not taken the risks they did, one thing is certain:

It would have been a different world.

By Michael Cass at 615-259-8838 or mcass@tennessean.com. Follow him on Twitter @tnmetro.

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**Text Based Questions for “Area Students Lead the Way”:**

What is a revolution?

According to the article, “When the revolutionaries were ready, they attacked.” How did the revolutionaries attack? How is this different than our normal interpretation of the word “attack”?

1. Who is Jim Crow?
2. What can you infer this quote means? Cite textual evidence to support your answer.
3. Matthew Walker Jr.asserts that Clark is the birthplace—the cradle—of the Nashville Civil Rights Movement. What type of figurative language is this? (metaphor) What does this mean?

What is the goal attempted to be achieved by sitting in at the lunch counters?

1. Citing textual evidence, describe what is happening on the third Saturday. That is, what are the protestors doing? The aggressors? The police?
2. What is the outcome of the sit-ins in Nashville? Use text to support your answer.
3. Why can you infer the Freedom Riders intended to fill the jails?

John Lewis says, “If not us, then who? If not now, then when?” What does this quote mean? Day one exit ticket: Citing textual evidence, who is the ‘us’ John Lewis is referring to? What actions are taken to abolish segregation in Nashville and throughout the South?