

# *Fire From the Rock*

## Study Guide

The following questions could be used for small group discussions, whole class discussions, or short answer written questions.	Common Core Standard(s)
1. Fire from the Rock is a work of historical fiction, even though the year 1957 was not really very long ago. How does the blending of recent history and fiction make for a successful story and an easy way to learn about events in the past?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.5 RL.6-12.7 RL.6-12.9
2. Which elements of the story are purely fictional? Which elements are basically historical? How does this method of telling the story affect the reader's response? Support your answer with details from the text.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.9
3. The first chapter introduces fifteen-year-old Sylvia, her eight-year-old sister, and the rest of her family. Tragedies seem to either bring families together or tear them apart. What predictions can the reader make about this family using evidence from the text?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
4. Why didn't the family call the police after Donna Jean's attack? What would you have done in that situation?	RL.6-12.1
5. As you first meet Sylvia, even though she lives in 1957, how is she like many fifteen-year-old girls today? How is she different?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
6. Describe the relationship between Sylvia and her parents. Give specific examples from the book to show the conflicts as well as the closeness.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
7. Describe the relationship between Sylvia and her sister. Give specific examples from the book to show the conflicts as well as the closeness between them.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
8. Describe the relationship between Sylvia and her brother. Give specific examples from the book to show the conflicts as well as the closeness between them.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
9. What strengths do you find in Sylvia's family and home life? What negatives do you observe? Give specific examples.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
10. How do Sylvia's diary entries add to the narrative? What do you learn about her through these entries?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
11. Discuss the relationship between Sylvia and Rachel. What do you learn about each culture from their friendship? What strengths do they give each other? What social problems does their friendship face?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
12. Rachel gets to go to Central High School with no problem, but she and her family also suffer discrimination. Describe the Zucker family and their family difficulties as well as strengths. What makes them unusual?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
13. Discuss the relationship between Sylvia and Reggie. How is their relationship similar to teens today? How is it different? What predictions can you make about their future together using evidence from the text?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
14. Describe the school that Sylvia attends. How is it different from yours? How is it similar? What advantages does a segregated school have? What disadvantages?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 W.6-12.1
15. Sylvia's teacher seems to have her best interests at heart. Describe her	RL.6-12.1

relationship with Miss Washington. How will Miss Washington forever affect Sylvia's life? Support your answer using details from the text.	RL.6-12.3
16. What do you think the family should do about the situation with Gary and the boys who beat him up? How does each family member respond to the crisis?	RL.6-12.1 W.6-12.1
17. Why do you think Sylvia was chosen to be on the list of students to integrate Central High School? Why wasn't Gary chosen? How do you predict that choice will affect the relationship between the brother and the sister?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 RL.6-12.3
18. How is the church an important factor in the lives of Sylvia and others like her? What strengths can be found in religious beliefs?	RL.6-12.1 W.6-12.1
19. Why are some members of the black community opposed to integration? Cite specifics from the book.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
20. From the descriptions in the book, what comments can you make about every day life in 1957? Discuss the price of goods and services, as well as family life.	RL.6-12.1 W.6-12.1
21. Make a list of all of Mrs. Patterson's proverbs and wise sayings and then tell what you think each one means. Why do you think Sylvia's mother resorts to these statements?	RL.6-12.3 RL.6-12.4 W.6-12.1
22. Why is making the decision to go to Central such a difficult one for Sylvia? Why does her relationship with Reggie make the situation more confusing? Give specific examples.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
23. What are your reactions to the Sylvia's interview with the school board? How would you have handled that situation?	RL.6-12.1 W.6-12.1
24. Discuss the scene in which Sylvia and DJ are assaulted by the three boys. What does the reaction of the boy named Jim show about society?	RL.6-12.2 RL.6-12.3
25. Describe the last day of school at Dunbar. How does it compare with the last day for graduates at your school? How is it similar? How is it different?	RL.6-12.2 W.6-12.1
26. Discuss the attack on the store. Describe how you think Sylvia felt? How would you have reacted in that situation?	RL.6-12.2 W.6-12.1
27. Do you think Sylvia made the correct decision concerning Reggie? What would you have done in the same situation?	RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.1
28. Do you think Sylvia made the correct decision concerning being one of the students to integrate Central? What would you have done in the same situation?	RL.6-12.1 W.6-12.1 W.6-12.9
29. How do you think Sylvia felt as she watched the events unfold as the nine students attempted to enroll at the school?	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3
30. Explain the title of the novel. Why does the title have more than one possible interpretation? Find several examples of reference to "fire" and "rock" within the story.	RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.4 RL.6-12.5
The following questions are designed to be individual writing projects or small group writing projects depending upon the needs of your classroom.	Common Core Standard(s)
<b>Narrative</b> There are many dangerous situations over the course of this novel. Write a narrative paper from the point of view of someone whose friend or family member is in a dangerous situation. Tell the story as the person tries to grasp the enormity and horror of what is happening.	RL.6-12.5 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4

<p><b>Newspaper Article</b></p> <p>A. You are a reporter at one of the following scenes. Write the story for your newspaper.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The destruction of Zucker's and Miss Lillie's store</li> <li>• Reggie's attack by the three boys</li> <li>• Donna Jean's attack by the dog</li> <li>• A day at Central High School <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ For a white student</li> <li>○ For a black student</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>B. Trace the story of one of the following characters. Imagine you are a reporter doing a story on one of their lives. Write everything you know, as well as whatever you can infer about the character in order to write your article. Include how these people might influence Sylvia and her decisions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rachel Zucker</li> <li>• Candy Castle</li> <li>• Donna Jean Patterson</li> <li>• Ethel Washington</li> <li>• Lou Ann Johnson</li> <li>• Johnny Crandall</li> <li>• Calvin Cobbs</li> <li>• Miss Lillie Cobbs</li> </ul>	<p>RL.6-12.1  RL.6-12.2  W.6-12.3  W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Letters</b></p> <p>Write a letter to one of the characters in the book explaining your feelings about the events in the story. What advice would you give Sylvia, or Reggie, or Rachel, or Gary? What would you say to the Crandalls?</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1  RL.6-12.3  W.6-12.3  W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Point of View Paper</b></p> <p>"It was clear Elizabeth was frustrated--she tried several times to get past the guards. The last time she tried, they pointed their bayonets at her.</p> <p>"They're pointing guns at her! Are they going to shoot a teenager on live television?"</p> <p>"Oh, my Lord," Aunt Bessie mumbled, her eyes fixed on the television screen.</p> <p>Sylvia grabbed her aunt's hand. "If that was me, I'd be so scared I'd be wetting my pants? I know she's terrified!"</p> <p>Elizabeth turned then, glanced around to see what she should do, or to look for help perhaps, and all that stood in front of her was a sea of angry white faces. She walked slowly down the steps, and as she got closer to what was now a mob, they grew fierce.</p> <p>Sylvia started to cry as she watched. "Oh, Aunt Bessie, a lady is spitting on her."</p> <p>"She's all alone," Aunt Bessie moaned.</p> <p>"They're calling her names! How can grownups do that to a kid?" Tears streamed down Sylvia's face.</p> <p>Elizabeth walked slowly and silently. It was unbelievable.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.6  W.6-12.1  W.6-12.4  W.6-12.9</p>

<p>Reread the scene above and explain how the point of view of the character who makes the observation influences the description. How would Elizabeth have written this passage? How would a person in the mob have written this passage?</p>	
<p><b>Descriptive Paper</b></p> <p>"The explosions that surrounded her the next moment caused her to drop the eggs in her hand as she was tossed to the floor. Her head connected with the floorboards before the rest of her body. A shelf full of groceries fell over onto Sylvia. As if she were outside of herself watching the horrible scene, she knew she was screaming, knew she was falling, knew this must be what it felt like to die.</p> <p>The noise of the falling shelves and dry goods frightened her more than the feeling of crumpled wood on her legs. Most of it fell around her rather than upon her. Even so, sheer terror overwhelmed her. Her screams became clogged as debris filled her mouth, and she was finding it hard to breathe.</p> <p>Stunned for a moment, Sylvia at first could see nothing. Gradually she dimly became aware of eggshells and gooey egg yolk in her hair and on her clothes. Something wet and drippy snaked down her back. Her mouth was full of a thick and powdery substance. She couldn't move her legs. Her head throbbed. Rachel seemed to have disappeared. . . . Sylvia sat up carefully and tried to catch her breath, but she coughed once more as a sharp, acrid odor filled the small room. The smell reminded her of the barbecues her father prepared on holidays--how her mother always fussed at him because he used too much kerosene to start the fire. Fire. It was then the odor of burning wood and oil assaulted her. <i>Oh, my God! The store's on fire!"</i></p> <p>Using the passage above as a guide, write a descriptive paper that uses sensory imagery. Use vivid verbs and powerful adjectives and adverbs as you write. Use as many of the senses as you can--sight, sound, smell, touch, taste--as well as deep, rich colors.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.5 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Research Topics</b></p> <p>A. Research the history of school segregation and integration in the United States.</p> <p>B. Look up the complete story of how Central High School was integrated. Investigate what happened the rest of the 1957-1958 school year, as well as the 1958-1959 school year in Little Rock. Find out also all you can about Central High School today.</p> <p>C. The novel goes deeply into popular culture of the time. Investigate any of the following and compare to today.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music of 1957</li> <li>• Musicians of 1957</li> <li>• Television shows of 1957</li> <li>• Costs of products in 1957</li> <li>• Magazine ads in 1957</li> </ul>	<p>W.6-12.1 W.6-12.2 W.6-12.4 W.6-12.7 W.6-12.8 W.6-12.9 RI.6-12.1 RI.6-12.2 RI.6-12.4 RI.6-12.8</p>

- Miss America of 1957
- American Bandstand, which began in 1957

D. The novel discusses several important social developments of the time. Investigate any of the following.

- The establishment of the country of Ghana
- The Bus Boycott in Montgomery, Alabama
- The early years of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- The lynching of Emmett Till
- "Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas," (1954)
- Thurgood Marshall

E. Explain the definition, significance and importance of the following terms:

- boycott
- discrimination
- segregation
- integration
- intolerance
- tolerance
- prejudice
- persecution
- bigotry
- resistance
- courage
- non violence
- anti Semitism
- swastika

F. Investigate any of the following real people who are mentioned in the novel. Find out what they were doing in 1957, and if still alive, what they are doing now.

- Ralph Bunche
- Jackie Robinson
- Fats Domino
- Chuck Berry
- Little Richard
- Pat Boone
- Elvis Presley
- Harry Belafonte
- Daisy Bates
- Rosa Parks
- Marian Anderson
- Orval Faubus
- Dwight Eisenhower
- Miss America of 1957
- Ernest Green

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elizabeth Eckford</li> <li>• Jefferson Thomas</li> <li>• Terrence Roberts</li> <li>• Carlotta Walls</li> <li>• Minnijean Brown</li> <li>• Gloria Ray</li> <li>• Thelma Mothershed</li> <li>• Melba Patillo</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Persuasive Paper</b></p> <p>Write a persuasive paper that argues ONE of the following points. Whether you agree or disagree, your paper should address only one side of the issue. Use specifics from the novel to support your points.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Individuals who are full of hate and bigotry are the source of much unhappiness in the world.</li> <li>• "All human beings are given strong spirits in order to withstand the difficulties of life."</li> </ul> <p>"Individuals who suffer discrimination become stronger and can help others as a result. OR "Individuals who suffer discrimination become weaker and can be destroyed as a result.</p>	<p>W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Personal Essay</b></p> <p>A. Write a self-descriptive personal essay. Focusing on the positive, include your interior as well as exterior assets.</p> <p>B. Write a personal essay that describes a special memory or object in your life. Explain why it is meaningful to you. Be sure to include sensory imagery--sights, smells, touches, tastes, sounds.</p>	<p>W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Expository Essay</b></p> <p>"Sylvia thought about the women she'd seen in those magazine ads--all of them housewives, not professionals. "Absolutely," she said. "I want to do more than what I see women doing on television, Rachel," Sylvia admitted. "I Love Lucy is a great show, but all she does is stay home, clean house, and get in trouble with Ricky! Besides, who's gonna take seriously a lady who's wearing a lace apron and holding a mixing spoon in her hand?"</p> <p>Both girls laughed. "That's why Lucy is so popular! You and I think alike, Sylvia Faye. Do you think there will ever be a television program with a policewoman or lady detective or lady doctor as the main character?"</p> <p>"Only if she's funny and acts silly," Sylvia replied, as she helped Rachel sort the goods for the shelves."</p> <p>Write an expository (explanatory) paper on the role of women in television and magazine commercials. Discuss how those roles and images have changed since 1957.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p>

<p><b>Character Sketch</b></p> <p>"Miss Ethel Washington, their English and Social Studies teacher, who was a stern, unsmiling woman with large hips and a tiny waist, got the class quiet and serious with a glance. She was tall and plump, and from what Sylvia could tell, probably close to sixty years old. She had taught many of their parents and a few of their grandparents as well. Her black hair, streaked with lots of gray, was pulled back tightly into a bun on her neck. She wore large brown glasses, which fell to the tip of her nose when she asked a question in class, and sturdy brown shoes that were never seen untied. Her dresses, made of stiff fabric in various shades of black or gray or brown, never seemed to wrinkle. Sylvia had never seen Miss Washington wear a brightly colored or a flowered dress. She figured a painted rose or a daisy just might wilt, like one of Miss Lillie's leftover buds, if it had to lie that close to the body of Miss Ethel Washington!" Write a character sketch of a strong powerful person that you know or have met. Use strong verbs and adjectives, as well as sensory imagery.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Conversation/Dialogue</b></p> <p>Imagine it is one year after the end of the novel. Create a conversation between the following characters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sylvia to Reggie</li> <li>• Sylvia to Gary</li> <li>• Gary to Johnny Crandall</li> <li>• Sylvia to Rachel</li> <li>• Mrs. Zucker to Mrs. Patterson</li> </ul>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.3 W.6-12.3 W.6-12.4</p>
<p><b>Poetry</b></p> <p>"Sometimes I feel like scrambled eggs all runny in the pan My life's the yolk and I'm the joke that's served with cheese or bran . . ."</p> <p>Write a poem in the format of "Scrambled Eggs" that includes your feelings. Include sensory imagery and vivid vocabulary.</p> <p>"She tends us like hyacinths— Delicate sprouts, fragile buds, Determined we will bloom. Fiercely she rips the weeds from around us— No ragged, uncultured piece of greengrowth would ever dare to approach us."</p> <p>Write a poem in the format of "My Mother's Garden" that discusses a favorite person in your life. Include sensory imagery and vivid vocabulary.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.4 W.6-12.3</p>

<p>"You grasp frantically to fight away the void of air and the collapse of earth and the sting of fire."</p> <p>Write a poem in the format of "Searching for a Dream" that discusses hopes and dreams and possibilities. Include sensory imagery and vivid vocabulary.</p>	
<p><b>Literary Analysis</b></p> <p>Read the poem "Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou or another similar work in which the poet describes themes and issues discussed in the novel. Use what you have learned from reading <i>Fire from the Rock</i> by Sharon Draper and the poem to write an essay that provides an analysis of how different artists discuss civil rights and issues of intolerance. Think about what is emphasized in each text. Think about what is different about each text. What implicit message is each author trying to send to the reader? Be sure to provide evidence to support your argument from both texts.</p>	<p>RL.6-12.1 RL.6-12.2 RL.6-12.4 RL.6-12.5 RL.6-12.7 W.6-12.1 W.6-12.4 W.6-12.9</p>