

Teacher's Guide

One Maryland One Book
2008



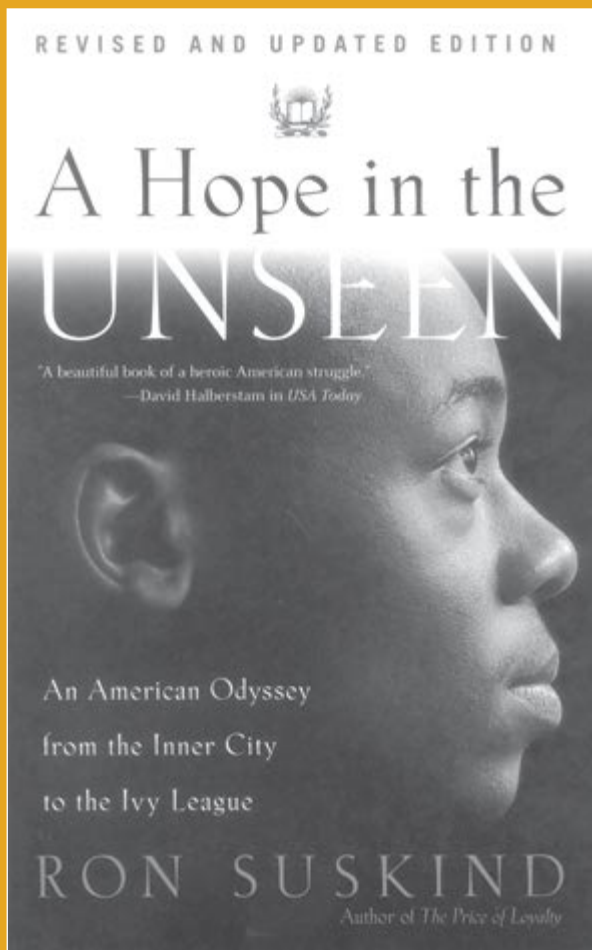
A Hope in the Unseen:
An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League

by Ron Suskind

Imagine if all five million Marylanders read the same great book at the same time.

The Maryland Center for the Book, a program of the Maryland Humanities Council, is pleased to launch One Maryland One Book—Maryland's first-ever statewide, community-centered reading program designed to encourage everyone in the state to read and discuss one common book.

This year's selection—*A Hope in the Unseen* by Ron Suskind—is rich and multilayered. It was selected not only because it offers the opportunity to discuss important and highly relevant topics such as education and socioeconomics, but also because it presents the opportunity to talk about race and race relations in Maryland and in America—a common theme running through the Maryland Humanities Council's programming in 2008.



Get the Book.

Pick up a copy of *A Hope in the Unseen* at your local public library or bookstore and start up a conversation with your family, friends, co-workers or even the person sitting next to you on the bus or train. This is your chance to take a moment to have a great conversation that moves beyond the weather or what you did today.

Join In.

We invite you to join Honorary Chair, Maryland's First Lady Katie O'Malley, and millions of other Marylanders at one of the many conversations and related programs happening around the state in August, September and October.

To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to www.onemarylandonebook.org and click on the Calendar.

A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey
from the Inner City to the Ivy League by Ron Suskind
14 Chapters; 390 pgs (including Epilogue, Author's note, and Afterword)
Lexile: 1080; Reading level: gr. 9. Updated edition © 2005
ISBN 0-7679-0126-6

Letter from the Honorary Chairperson



Greetings,

On behalf of the State of Maryland, I would like to invite you to participate in One Maryland One Book, Maryland's first-ever statewide community reading project. I was delighted to be asked to serve as Honorary Chair for this momentous project because it offers an opportunity for residents in communities around the state to reconnect by opening dialogues with one another.

This year's selected book, *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League* by Ron Suskind, is one that broaches topics relevant to our daily lives, such as race, class and educational achievement. I encourage you not only to read it, but also to talk to family, friends, neighbors and co-workers about how the issues in the book relate to your community, our state and our country.

Spearheaded by the Maryland Center for the Book, this project is only possible due to the involvement of many community partners and the support of our sponsors, whom we heartily thank for their support. Please join me and many other Marylanders in this reading project by going to your local public library to check out a copy of *A Hope in the Unseen*. I hope that it spurs conversations and thoughts to make this world a better place.

Thank you for being a part of this very special project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie O'Malley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie O'Malley
First Lady of Maryland

“I encourage you not only to read it, but also to talk to family, friends, neighbors and co-workers about how the issues in the book relate to your community, our state and our country.”

About the Book

It is 1993, and Cedric Jennings is a bright and ferociously determined honor student at Ballou, a high school in one of Washington D.C.'s most dangerous neighborhoods, where the dropout rate is well into double digits and just 80 students out of more than 1,350 boast an average of B or better. At Ballou, Cedric has almost no friends. He eats lunch in a classroom most days, plowing through the extra work he has asked for, knowing that he's really competing with kids from other, harder schools. Cedric Jennings's driving ambition—which is fully supported by his forceful mother—is to attend a top-flight college.

In September 1995, after years of near superhuman dedication, he realizes that ambition when he begins as a freshman at Brown University. *A Hope in the Unseen* chronicles Cedric's odyssey during his last two years of high school, follows him through his difficult first year at Brown, and tells the story of his subsequent successes in college and the world of work.¹

About the Author



Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and best-selling author Ron Suskind has written several important works of nonfiction that have framed national debates while exploring the complexities of the human experience. His first book, *A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the*

Ivy League (1995), is based on a series of articles written for the *Wall Street Journal* that earned Suskind the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing in 1995.

He has since written two other best-selling works of nonfiction, *The One Percent Doctrine* (2006), a journey deep inside America's battles with violent terrorists, and *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House and the Education of Paul O'Neill* (2004), both critically-acclaimed works.

Mr. Suskind currently writes for various national magazines, including *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Esquire* and the *Wall Street Journal*, appears on network television, and spends summers as a Distinguished Visiting Scholar at Dartmouth College. He is a graduate of the University of Virginia and Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, and lives in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Cornelia Kennedy Suskind, and their two sons, Walter and Owen.

About Cedric Jennings

Cedric Jennings was born in 1977 and raised in one of the most depressed and dangerous neighborhoods in Washington, D.C.'s Southeast section. His father was a frequently absent and jailed drug addict, while his mother, Barbara Jennings, was a devout church woman who quit her government job and went on welfare for several years to devote her time to raising Cedric.

With his mother's support and good grades in school, Cedric went on to complete a childhood dream and attended an Ivy League school. After graduating from Brown in 1999, Cedric received his Master of Education at Harvard University and a Master of Social Work in 2003 from the University of Michigan. Presently, he speaks at schools and universities across the country on issues in education and youth advocacy. He plans to eventually earn a doctorate degree and become a psychotherapist working with disadvantaged youth.

Introduction

A Hope in the Unseen chronicles Cedric Lavar Jennings's journey through his last two years at Ballou High School—“where only 69 girls and 12 boys out of 1,389 enrolled here have managed a B average or better”—through his first year at the prestigious Brown University. This story is not about a poverty-stricken prodigy who fights to take his place among his intellectual equals. Instead it's about an African American boy from “the most troubled and violent school in the blighted southeast corner of Washington, D.C.” with a 3.3 average and a 960 SAT score who, with the support of his mother, his church, and his pride, makes education the choice that will take him beyond the constraints of poverty.

This is truly an American odyssey filled with struggles, hardships, awakenings and achievement; it is the commonality of these elements, which crosses race, nationality, and gender, that touches the readers. Cedric Jennings is like most high school students—filled with doubt, contradictions, anger, and frustration—but he was motivated rather than pulled down by the weight of poverty and the bestiality of his neighborhood. *A Hope in the Unseen* is a contemporary odyssey which all students can relate to on some level and which adults can wholly appreciate.

¹ From the back cover

MSDE Core Learning Goals - English

GOAL 1: READING, REVIEWING AND RESPONDING TO TEXT

The student will demonstrate the ability to respond to a text by employing personal experiences and critical analysis.

EXPECTATION 1.1 The student will use effective strategies before, during, and after reading, viewing, and listening to self-selected and assigned materials.

INDICATOR 1.1.1 The student will use pre-reading strategies appropriate to both the text and purpose for reading by surveying the text, accessing prior knowledge, formulating questions, setting purpose(s), and making predictions.

INDICATOR 1.1.2 The student will use during-reading strategies appropriate to both the text and purpose for reading by visualizing, making connections, and using fix-up strategies such as re-reading, questioning, and summarizing.

INDICATOR 1.1.3 The student will use after-reading strategies appropriate to both the text and purpose for reading by summarizing, comparing, contrasting, synthesizing, drawing conclusions, and validating the purpose for reading.

EXPECTATION 1.2 The student will construct, examine, and extend meaning of traditional and contemporary works recognized as having significant literary merit.

INDICATOR 1.2.1 The student will consider the contributions of plot, character, setting, conflict, and point of view when constructing the meaning of a text.

INDICATOR 1.2.2 The student will determine how the speaker, organization, sentence structure, word choice, rhythm, and imagery reveal an author's purpose.

INDICATOR 1.2.3 The student will explain the effectiveness of stylistic elements in a text that communicate an author's purpose.

INDICATOR 1.2.5 The student will extend or further develop meaning by explaining the implications of the text for the reader or contemporary society.

EXPECTATION 1.3 The student will explain and give evidence to support perceptions about print and non-print works.

INDICATOR 1.3.1 The student will explain how language and textual devices create meaning.

INDICATOR 1.3.5 The student will explain how common and universal experiences serve as the source of literary themes that cross time and cultures.

GOAL 4: EVALUATING THE CONTENT, ORGANIZATION, AND LANGUAGE USE OF TEXTS

The student will demonstrate the ability to evaluate the content, organization, and language use of texts.

EXPECTATION 4.1 The student will describe the effect that a given text, heard or read, has on a listener or reader.

INDICATOR 4.1.1 The student will state and explain a personal response to a given text.

EXPECTATION 4.2 The student will assess the effectiveness of choice of details, organizational pattern, word choice, syntax, use of figurative language, and rhetorical devices.

INDICATOR 4.2.1 The student will assess the effectiveness of diction that reveals an author's purpose.

INDICATOR 4.2.2 The student will explain how the specific language and expression used by the writer or speaker affects reader or listener response.

Chapter Summaries

Free

<http://mb.sparknotes.com/mb.epl?b=2386&cm=1183783&t=336628>

Fee to download (\$6.95), but extensive

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/hopinunbyron.html>

Before Reading

In an effort to provide common background knowledge and to promote pre-reading discussion, a PowerPoint is provided at the One Maryland One Book website, www.onemarylandonebook.org. Click on Teacher Resources.

Teacher's Note: The following scenes as written represent an effort by the author to convey the reality of Cedric's story in the most accurate way. These potentially objectionable scenes are found in the book as follows:

- Page 11: Explicit quote from crack dealer
- Page 18: Girl's cover for cheating from Cedric includes explicit sexual reference
- Page 57: Objectionable language
- Page 126: Objectionable language
- Page 200: Discussion of sexual acts
- Page 218: Reference to homosexual act
- Pages 210, 225, 305, 350, 351: Objectionable language

Important Characters

- Cedric Lavar Jennings – the protagonist
- Barbara Jennings – Cedric's mother
- Cedric Gilliam – Cedric's father
- Mr. Clarence Taylor – Cedric's chemistry teacher
- LaTisha Williams – another outsider at Ballou and Cedric's friend
- Phillip Atkins – Cedric's Ballou classmate who made different choices
- Professor Trilling – white faculty director of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's MITES (Minority Introduction to Engineering and Science) program
- Bishop C.L. Long – Pastor of the church Barbara and Cedric attend
- Donald Korb – Cedric's benefactor
- Rob Burton – Cedric's roommate at Brown University
- Zayd Dohrn – a friend at Brown
- Chiniqua Milligan – the only other African American in Cedric's freshman dorm at Brown

Reading, Vocabulary & Discussion Questions

ASSIGNMENT #1

Pages 1-50

Vocabulary: gamecock, kufi (pg. 1)
gauntlet (pg. 5)
call and response (pg. 6)
temerity (pg. 19)
affectations (pg. 20)
abeyance (pg. 25)

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the "crab/bucket syndrome" (pg. 17) and is it visible at our school?
2. Compare and contrast Cedric with the other students at his school. (pg. 18)
3. Why does he impose a self-exile? (pg. 18) Would you if you were Cedric?
4. What does "busy python of traffic" mean? (pg. 31) What kind of figurative language is that phrase?
5. Why do you think Cedric and his mother reacted the way they did to the news that Cedric couldn't return to Jefferson? (pg. 40) Would your parents react the same way if you were told you couldn't return to this school?
6. Compare and contrast Cedric's anxieties about being at a crossroads to that of other college-bound students (you or someone you know). (pg. 44)



ASSIGNMENT #2**Pages 51-100 (end of chapter 4)**

Vocabulary: slaloms (pg. 65)
 cacophony (pg. 74)
 novitiate, visceral (pg. 79)
 anomaly (pg. 83)
 aphorism (pg. 85)

Discussion Questions:

1. How does your school's attitude about homework compare with the students' attitude at Ballou? With whom do you agree, Cedric or the SAT Prep teacher? (pg. 59)
2. Is there any truth in Torrence's explanation for Cedric's unhappiness? (pg. 87)
3. Are Ramsey's concerns about having a white director for a minority enrichment program valid? (pg. 92)
4. Since Cedric struggled much of the time that he was in the MITES program, should he have been surprised when Trilling told him he was not MIT material? Was he right to call Trilling a racist? (pg. 97)
5. What advantages would Cedric have to improve his SAT score if he were at your school? Why do you think those programs aren't available at Ballou?
6. Explain the irony between Cedric feeling comfortable at Ballou and yet hating it so much. (pg. 100)

ASSIGNMENT #3**Pages 101-158 (end of chapter 6)**

Vocabulary: self-deprecating (pg. 103)
 behest (pg. 117)
 naysayer (pg. 119)
 rhetorical (pg. 122)
 anomalous (pg. 124)
 infidel (pg. 132)
 arboretum (pg. 142)
 bulwark, phalanx (pg. 149)

Discussion Questions:

1. How does James Davis's experience at Ballou differ from Cedric's? (pg. 103)
2. Do you think Cedric's conversation with Clarence Thomas impacted him? Why or why not? (pgs. 118-122)
3. Should the valedictorian and salutatorian be allowed to speak about any topic at graduation? If you were the principal, would you object to Cedric's speech about "Dreambusters?"

4. Why do you think the last few weeks of school are so difficult for Cedric?
5. How is Cedric's graduation speech similar to his singing in front of the church as a child? (pg. 137) What does it say about Cedric?
6. Consider Barbara's definition of a man. (pg. 145) Is this a realistic definition? Explain. According to Barbara's definition, has Cedric become a man yet?

ASSIGNMENT #4**Pages 159- the break on 208**

Vocabulary: nascent (pg. 162)
 embryonic, cavernous (pg. 169)
 preemptive (pg. 170)
 parlance (pg. 172)
 portentous (pg. 174)
 diatribes (pg. 175)
 exurb (pg. 178)
 mawkishly (pg. 180)
 anal-retentive (pg. 183)
 parsed (pg. 191)

Discussion Questions:

1. Though Cedric says, "I, uh, got a 960...I'm not ashamed of it or anything," how do you think he feels hearing everyone else's SAT scores? Could the disparity become what he "pushes against?" (pg. 170)
2. Suskind's coverage of Elie Wiesel's speech to Brown students is almost dismissive. Indeed, there is no comment from Cedric at all. What are possible reasons why Cedric could be unimpressed and unmoved by Wiesel? (pg. 187)
3. Do you think the differences between Cedric and his roommate Rob are due to their race? Why or why not?
4. Why would the open curriculum at Brown benefit students like Cedric? (pg. 173)
5. Why was Cedric's response at the diversity orientation "lost in the thicket?" Do you agree with him or not? (pg. 177)
6. How do the two white professors' feelings about affirmative action differ from from Cedric's? Who's right?

ASSIGNMENT #5

Pages 208-261 (end of chapter 10)

Vocabulary: ethos (pg. 220)
anachronistic (pg. 223)
addendum (pg. 243)
piqued (pg. 246)
patrician (pg. 248)
languid (pg. 255)
assimilationist (pg. 258)
juxtaposition (pg. 260)

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Suskind includes so much information about Cedric's father even though he has so little contact with his son?
2. Was Barbara wise or foolish to make the trip to Brown for parents' weekend? (pg. 227)
3. Why is Cedric so surprised that Zayd didn't grow up to hate black people? (pg. 246)
4. Who made the strongest impact on Cedric when he was at Mr. Korb's house for Thanksgiving? Why? (pg. 249)
5. What does Professor James mean when he says Cedric is "not accommodationist" and is "culturally fixed?" Would you agree or disagree? Are these descriptions negative or positive? (pg. 260)

ASSIGNMENT #6

Pages 262-303 (end of chapter 12)

Vocabulary: candor (pg. 263)
contingency (pg. 266)
jocular (pg. 272)
cursory, acerbic (pg. 282)

Discussion Questions:

1. Read Cedric's musings on pages 274 and 275. What is the difference between pride and confidence? Which does Cedric possess?
2. What contradiction has been a "real shock" to Cedric? (pg. 275)
3. Why is it harder for Cedric to be friends with Zayd than it is for Zayd to be friends with Cedric? (pgs. 277-280)
4. Suskind describes the groups at Brown. (pgs. 292-293) How are such divisions positive? How are they negative?
5. What evidence does Suskind provide that Cedric is changing?
6. What does Wakeford mean when he tells Cedric, "The key [...] is to put your outrage in a place where you can

get at it when you need to, but not have it bubble up so much, especially when you're asked to embrace new ideas or explain what you observe to people who share none of your experiences?" (pg. 303)

ASSIGNMENT #7

Pages 304-361 (end of chapter 14)

Vocabulary: imprimatur (pg. 307)
proprietary (pg. 315)
admonitions (pg. 332)
entropic (pg. 334)
beefin' (pg. 353)
extricate (pg. 359)

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Cedric's line of poetry, "Let the colors run..." mean to you? Do you like it as much as Zayd and Cedric? (pg. 305)
2. Chiniqua says, in reference to music and culture, "You have to have grown up with it like us, to really know it." (pg. 315) Do you agree or disagree? If this is true, what does it tell us about cross-cultural relationships? Does multicultural education then not have a purpose?
3. What are some of the elements of Cedric's personality that helped him make it through his first year at Brown?
4. Why do you think Cedric and Rob had so many difficulties as roommates?
5. How is Barbara's pride different from Cedric's pride?
6. Do you think that Cedric has become a man by the end of the story? Why or why not? Use situations from the story to justify your opinion.

ASSIGNMENT #8

Pages 362-end (epilogue, author's note, afterword)

No vocabulary
No specific discussion questions
Just read

After Reading

- Take time to return to the class questions created during the Before Reading PowerPoint (found at www.onemarylandonebook.org under Teacher Resources).
- Allow students small group time to discern whether the story, epilogue, author's note, and afterword were able to answer all the questions initially posed.
- Erase all questions that were answered and see if any of the Extension projects supply the answers.

Extension Topics/Projects

1. Characterizations

Go to www.onemarylandonebook.org, click on Teacher Resources, then After Reading Activity to print copies of an exercise where students demonstrate their understanding of people connected with *A Hope in the Unseen*.

2. Impact of racism on students in your school

- As a class, create a survey of questions to ask the minority students in your school. One team of students completes the survey, posts some of the most poignant quotes around the classroom, and turns the results into a PowerPoint or a research paper.
- Watch the movie “The Great Debaters.” Have students determine changes that have occurred in the U.S. between 1935 when the movie takes place and 60 years later when *A Hope in the Unseen* takes place.

3. Affirmative Action/Diversity Issues

- One team of students researches the history and the pros of Affirmative Action; another team researches the cons. Together they present a debate in front of the class.
- Invite the ESOL teacher to visit your class and discuss the trials that ESL students face.
- A team researches the history of affirmative action, reverse discrimination, and Title IX and presents a multimedia presentation.
- One team rereads the description of the MITES program (pgs. 91-93) and then lists the pros and cons of the program. The team then comes up with suggestions that would eliminate the weaknesses.
- One team researches Clarence Thomas’s record as a Supreme Court justice and determines how his decisions on the bench and in the running of his office demonstrate his professional success or failure in living up to the advice he gave Cedric.

4. The importance of faith in one’s life

- One team surveys elders, one team surveys classmates, one team surveys younger children on the topic. Quotes are posted around the classroom and the three teams create a news show about the importance (or unimportance) of faith in your town.
- Invite an African American pastor to come talk to your class about the tradition of faith in the black community. Prior to the visit, allow students to create questions to ask.

5. Poverty

- One team researches the impact of urban poverty on students their age.
- One team contacts social services in your town and finds out what constitutes “poverty” in your town and what services are available to the poor. Students present their findings to the class.
- One team plans four days of meals for two on \$12.50. Something must be eaten each day though three meals a day will be unlikely. What is the most nutritious meal that can be made, and the most filling?

Other Helpful Resources

Author’s website

<http://www.ronsuskind.com/about/>

Interview with Suskind

http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/zforum/02/life360_010402.htm

Audio interview with Suskind and Jennings.

www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0798/suskind/interview.html

May ’06 Jennings reflection on Brown

<http://media.www.browndailyherald.com/media/storage/paper472/news/2006/05/25/Features/hope-On.Campus-2013815.shtml>

Sept. ’07 news article about Jennings speech at Eastern Illinois U.

<http://media.www.dennews.com/media/storage/paper309/news/2007/09/25/News/Jennings.Speaks.About.Real.Hope-2988938.shtml>

Interview with Jennings about his faith

<http://explorefaith.org/faithStories/cedric.html>

LBJ’s 1965 commencement speech at Howard

<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp>

Publisher’s Teacher Guide

<http://www.randomhouse.com/acmart/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780767901260&view=tp>

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