

ChaiLights

A Lesson in Civil Rights, History, and Courage!



This year our students had the opportunity to hear from Reverend Gwendolyn Webb, a leader of the children's march during the civil rights movement in Birmingham in the 1960s.

Reverend Webb spoke to our students about her role (which started her ninth grade year) as a leader in the movement. She talked to our students about the injustices that motivated her, as a child close to their age, to get involved. She went into detail about how she got involved, words she heard from Dr. King, and the intricate ways the children of Birmingham planned and executed a march for freedom. The detail with which she recounted her inspirational role in the civil rights movement made for an impactful and memorable discussion. She talked about signing a pledge to be nonviolent, packing toothpaste mixed with baking soda for the march to prepare for jail, and ironing her shirt the day she was to march the eight miles to get to downtown Birmingham. She described what she ate in the makeshift jail where she was imprisoned with thousands of other children. She sang our students freedom songs and even taught them the importance of a love chain (the formation the children marchers used to support one another in the face of water cannons and attack dogs).

She connected her experiences in the 1960s to what students had learned about in relation to the Holocaust. She talked about the importance of freedom and the necessity to learn about the past. Our students were in awe as they asked thoughtful and insightful questions about her role as a leader, the dynamics among other student leaders, and her relationships later in life.

Reverend Webb explained that "we knew it was a possibility we may not live through it, but we were determined to be free." Her faith, determination, and passion were summed up when she shared the fact that "If I had do it all over again, for freedom, I would." We are so thankful for the trails she blazed and the stories she shared, and we will certainly remember her concluding message, "together we stand, divided we fall."