

# **GOOD TROUBLE**

*A One-Act Play*

*by Dolores Klinsky Walker*

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Get a glimpse of the Civil Rights Movement in 1965 in Selma, Alabama, through the eyes of young Sandra. This play reveals the realities of segregation that prompted ordinary people to risk their security and sometimes their lives in pursuit of justice. Despite her father's disapproval and her mother's reluctance, Sandra skips school to attend Movement rallies, marches with adults to seek voting rights, and participates in "Bloody Sunday," the infamous failed march from Selma to Montgomery. A realistic but upbeat drama that can be a life-changing experience for both cast and audience. An excellent resource for Martin Luther King Day celebrations, Black History Month, and for promoting voter participation.

**Running time:** 30 minutes

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(6 m, 4 w, 2 girls, extras)*

*(All characters are African-American, except as indicated.)*

**SANDRA WEBSTER:** A young girl.

**ELLEN:** Her mother.

**AJAY:** Her father.

**LILY:** Her teenage sister.

**GWEN:** Sandra's best friend.

**DANIEL:** Lily's boyfriend.

**MISS MASON:** Daniel's aunt, a teacher.

**TWO YOUNG WHITE MEN:** Movement organizers.

**NURSE:** A white woman from the North.

**HOSEA:** A civil rights movement leader.

**MICAH:** A civil rights movement leader.

**MARCHERS:** As many as desired.

*(The roles of THREE BLACK MEN, NARRATOR and ANGRY WHITE MAN are minor and can be doubled by other actors.)*

### **SETTING**

The living room of Sandra's house, SR, contains a couch, overstuffed chair, hassock, rocking chair, and console TV. Toward the back is a large wooden dining table. A swing door at the rear leads to the kitchen.

The church dominates CS, and most of the action takes place in front of it. There should be steps up to the entrance; people need to enter the church and disappear through its doors. A large church sign identifies the church as Brown Chapel AME Church.

### **COSTUMES**

The action takes place from January to March, so coats would be appropriate; but since it's the South and there are mild days in winter, they aren't always worn. Also, be careful to avoid stereotyping. This story takes place in 1965, in a town, so overalls, bandannas, corncob pipes, etc., are not appropriate. The people are poor and/or working class. The women and girls wear dresses, not jeans or slacks. The black civil rights leaders wear suits for Movement meetings, possibly also for the marches.

### **PROPS**

Infant doll in blanket (Ellen)  
Pipe and newspaper (Ajay)  
Pencil and homework papers (Sandra)  
Letter in envelope (Ellen)  
School books (Sandra)  
Paper lunch bag (Sandra)  
Paper sack with cookies (Sandra)  
Crumpled piece of paper (Sandra)  
3 beanbags (Nurse)  
Metal chain (Daniel)

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### Scene 1

*(AT RISE: The living/dining room of Sandra's house. ELLEN is rocking a baby in the rocking chair, and AJAY, with pipe, stocking feet up on hassock, is reading a newspaper. SANDRA sits at the dining table, large pencil in hand, doing homework.)*

AJAY: *(Shakes head, sighs.)* What's wrong with them! Why can't they face reality?

ELLEN: What are you talking about, Ajay?

AJAY: Oh, I was just reading about another Movement protest. Some college students trying to get a bowling alley to integrate. Why can't they see that they only bring more trouble down on themselves? They'll never win.

ELLEN: Sometimes they win. The bus boycott in Montgomery made a difference. They had to start treating blacks like regular paying passengers and let them sit wherever they please. I'd say that's progress. Remember when we were in Montgomery right after we got married? We had to board at the front to pay our fare, then go back down the steps and get back on through the door at the back of the bus. Now that was stupid.

AJAY: Oh, now and then we come out ahead. But for over a year our people had to do a lot of walking.

ELLEN: It was worth it. We have friends who walked, and you know they say it was worth it.

AJAY: Maybe, maybe. But do you think the 50 people who tried to register to vote here in Selma last summer think their march was worth it? Old Sheriff Clark shoved 'em back with cattle prods and stuck 'em in jail. They still aren't registered, and they ain't gonna be either. *(Pause.)* Oooh, my feet hurt. I think I must have delivered two tons of furniture today.

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LILY: *(Bursts through kitchen door.)* Momma! Am I going to have to do all the dishes myself? Sandra's supposed to be drying! *(LILY stands with hands on hips, glaring at SANDRA.)*

ELLEN: Homework comes first, Lily. You know that. Just stack them in the drainer and Sandra can put them away later.

LILY: *(Makes face.)* When's the TV going to be fixed? Here I don't have any homework and I can't even watch TV!

AJAY: We'll get it fixed next payday, I hope. Unless you want to take in ironing and pay the repair bill yourself.

*(BABY in Ellen's arms whimpers. ELLEN soothes her and starts rocking again.)*

ELLEN: *(Quietly.)* Lily, the dishes.

*(LILY flounces back into the kitchen.)*

AJAY: Sandra, how's that homework coming?

SANDRA: *(Suddenly remembering what SHE'S sitting there for, bends down over her paper, and mumbles.)* Doing OK, Daddy.

AJAY: What you working on now?

SANDRA: Spelling. I'm almost done.

ELLEN: Well, hurry it up. You need to finish up the dishes, too, before you go to bed.

*(ALL return to what they were doing at beginning of scene. Then ELLEN fishes in her apron pocket, under the BABY, and pulls out an envelope.)*

ELLEN: *(To AJAY.)* I almost forgot – got a letter from Belle today.

AJAY: Did you! How's our daughter doing?

ELLEN: *(Peruses letter.)* Well, it's kind of hard to say. She's still mad about being sent to live with Belle, so she isn't talking much.

AJAY: We did it for her own good. She'll come around.

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ELLEN: I hope you're right. Belle says Sis went to a sit-in at a lunch counter downtown. Belle grounded her pronto. Isn't letting her out of her sight. Says she's even walking Sis to and from school.

AJAY: (*Slams down newspaper.*) One of my own children's a Movement fool! You try to raise them right, let them learn from your experience, but do they care? No, they go off grinning, thinking they've just invented justice, thinking the world's suddenly going to change just because they start hollering about how unfair it is to be a Negro in the South. Well, whoever told them life was fair? Wasn't me!

ELLEN: (*Darts an anxious glance at SANDRA, who acts like she's repeating a spelling word.*) They're just young, honey. All things seem possible when you're young.

AJAY: Young is when you're supposed to get off on the right foot. Not chalk up a record of arrests for protesting the hard life dealt you.

ELLEN: But young people are the ones who have the least to lose. Older folks have jobs and employers to worry about, landlords or mortgages, payments. If we aren't going to wait another hundred years for equal treatment, someone has to protest, someone has to risk. (*Suddenly notices SANDRA taking this all in.*) If you haven't finished your homework yet, Sandra, you're out of luck. Go dry the rest of the dishes and then get to bed.

(*SANDRA puts down her pencil and goes into kitchen.*)

AJAY: Sounds like you think we're going to get somewhere, like things will get better instead of worse.

ELLEN: Oh, they'll get worse for a while, I don't doubt that. But yes, I do believe things will change. The world will get better for us. (*SHE stands up, plants a kiss on her BABY'S head.*) C'mon, sugar, beddy-bye for you. (*Approaches stairs as AJAY looks thoughtful.*)

(*LIGHTS fade.*)

**End of Scene**

### **End of Freeview**

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