

2. WHO ARE WE?

EXPLORE YOUR IDEAS

1. Why do Aunt Seneva, the author, and the other children in the house group together?
2. How do the children keep the house from blowing away?
3. What are some qualities the group shows as the children work to keep the house from blowing away?
4. Which quality of those you listed in question 3 do you think is most important to building strong communities, and why?
5. How can the qualities that make a community strong help a nation in facing its challenges? What are some of these challenges?

What to Do

Read the introduction and text excerpt below, then write your thoughts on the facing page.

Who are we? What is a community? Each of us has a unique identity that makes us an *I*, but how do we see ourselves as a *we*? Are *we* a group of friends who enjoy the same clothes and laugh at the same jokes? Or are *we* a part of a group who share a similar challenge? Our identity is partly defined by the groups to which we belong.

John Lewis is a member of Congress. In the excerpt below, taken from his autobiography, *Walking with the Wind*, Lewis describes huddling with a group of children in his Aunt Seneva's house during a fierce windstorm that literally lifts the house off the ground. He recalls:

Her house was not the biggest place around, and it seemed even smaller with so many children squeezed inside. Small and surprisingly quiet. All of the shouting and laughing that had been going on earlier, outside, had stopped. The wind was howling now, and the house was starting to shake. We were scared. Even Aunt Seneva was scared.

And then it got worse. Now the house was beginning to sway. The wood plank flooring beneath us began to bend. And then, a corner of the room started lifting up....

That was when Aunt Seneva told us to clasp hands. Line up and hold hands, she said, and we did as we were told. Then she had us walk as a group toward the corner of the room that was rising. From the kitchen to the front of the house we walked, the wind screaming outside, sheets of rain beating on the tin roof. Then we walked back in the other direction, as another end of the house began to lift....

And so it went, back and forth, fifteen children walking with the wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of our small bodies.

More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house, rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart....

Children holding hands, walking with the wind. That is America to me...the endless struggle to respond with decency, dignity, and a sense of brotherhood to all the challenges that face us as a nation, as a whole.

YOUR VIEW

Think of a time when you, your family, neighbors, or others you know worked together to face a common challenge. What was the challenge?

What did you learn from the experience?