COURAGEOUS BAPTIST WOMEN



SPECIALIZING IN THE WHOLLY IMPOSSIBLE

The Life of Nannie Helen Burroughs

BAPTIST HISTORY & HERITAGE SOCIETY

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OVERVIEW



Nannie Helen Burroughs was an African American Baptist leader, educator, civil rights pioneer who helped make a new path for others, and a gifted writer and thinker. Her life showed faith in action. For six decades, she worked for Christian education, women's leadership in the church and fair treatment for all people. Through hard work, bold speeches and writing, Nannie showed that nothing is impossible with God.

BIBLE VERSE

Mark 9:22b-24: "If you can do anything, help us! Show us compassion!" Jesus said to him, "'If you can do anything'? All things are possible for the one who has faith." At that the boy's father cried out, "I have faith; help my lack of faith!"

SESSION OUTLINE

Prepare

- Make copies of the Student Handout.
- Review the Story and Bible Verse.

Welcome

- Greet students as they arrive.
- **Ask:** What impossible thing might God be calling you to do?

Engage

- Distribute the Student Handout.
- Read and discuss the Bible Verse.
- Work on the Handout Activity.
- Transition to Story Time.

Share

- Tell the story, "The Life of Nannie Helen Burroughs."
- Share the photo and caption.
- Discuss the story and pray.
- Watch videos about Nannie.

Conclude

- Lead students in Bonus Activities as time permits.

STORY

The Life of Nannie Helen Burroughs

Nannie Helen Burroughs was born in Virginia in 1879. Her parents had been enslaved, which means they had been forced to work and were not free. After Nannie's father died, she and her mother moved to Washington, D.C., so Nannie could get a good education. She did very well in school and graduated with honors in 1896 from Washington Colored High School, the name of a respected school for Black students at that time. When Nannie applied to teach in Washington, she was turned away. Historians believe she faced colorism—unfair treatment because of her darker skin.

This painful disappointment made Nannie more determined. She decided to create a school where African American girls could receive an excellent education. Instead of giving up, Nannie trusted God's purpose and prepared to "specialize in the wholly impossible"—to work on things that seemed completely impossible. She worked several jobs, including working as a janitor, to pay her bills and gain experience. She also became active in church life.

Nannie's dream came true when she founded the National Training School for Women and Girls in 1909. She asked the Women's Convention, a group of Black Baptist women she had helped start, and the larger Black Baptist community to support the school. Everyone from pastors to women who washed clothes for a living gave what they could. The school educated generations of confident Christian women. Many graduates became teachers, missionaries, businesswomen and community leaders. By starting the school and training more than 2,000 girls and young women, Nannie showed that big change can begin with a bold idea and great trust in God.

Nannie believed in the power of education and service. She said Christians should practice what they preach - that they should do what they say they believe. She gave a bold speech called "How the Sisters Are Hindered from Helping" to the National Baptist Convention, a large group of Black Baptist churches. She also wrote a handbook for youth and women's groups called "What Baptists Believe." In her speeches and writing, Nannie taught that every person—man or woman, Black or white—has a part in God's work.

Some Baptists called Nannie a prophet because she boldly told the truth about what God wanted. She told Black Baptist ministers not to ignore people's everyday needs. She challenged churches to face their prejudices—unfair beliefs about other people—and reminded everyone that God's love rejects every kind of hate. Nannie's faith and courage remind us that nothing is impossible with God. Her life shows that God can use ordinary people to do extraordinary things and that true faith is lived out through service, learning and standing up for what is right.

DISCUSSION AND PRAYER

- **Ask:** What seemed impossible in Nannie Helen Burroughs' life?
- **Ask:** How did Nannie show courage?
- **Ask:** How can you show courage in the face of the impossible? How can you be bold in your faith?
- **Say:** Nannie Helen Burroughs was turned down for a teaching job, apparently because of prejudice against her darker skin. She wanted other young women to receive a good education, so she worked hard to start a school for them. She could have given up or let other people's prejudice—unfair beliefs about her skin color—stop her. Instead, she stood up. She also helped start the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention, a group that gave Black Baptist women more ways to serve and lead. Nannie taught that God's love is for everyone and that every person has a part in God's work.
- **Pray:** Dear God, thank you for the faith and courage of Nannie Helen Burroughs. Help us to stand up for what's right and to follow where you lead us. Amen.

LEARN

To learn more about Nannie Helen Burroughs, check out:

- *http://thebhhs.org/nannie1*
- *http://thebhhs.org/nannie2*
- *http://thebhhs.org/nannie3*
- *http://thebhhs.org/nannie5*
- Pictures: *http://thebhhs.org/nanniephotos*

FACT CHECK

📖 Nannie Helen Burroughs knew the Bible. She talked about biblical heroines like Miriam (Moses' sister) in her speech, "How the Sisters Are Hindered from Helping," to the National Baptist Convention in 1900. This speech helped convince the National Baptist Convention to create the Women's Convention. She also used her knowledge to write a handbook for youth and women's groups called "What Baptists Believe."

🖋️ In Nannie Helen Burroughs' first year as the corresponding secretary of the Women's Convention (part of the National Baptist Convention), she traveled over 22,000 miles, delivered 215 speeches, organized 12 new missionary societies and wrote over 9,000 letters.

🏫 Nannie Helen Burroughs created a school for African American girls with the mission to provide excellent academic, religious and job-training education.

🤝 Nannie Helen Burroughs believed that following Jesus means loving everyone as a brother or sister. She challenged churches to love their neighbors and to stop excluding people because of their race.

ACTIVITIES

Enjoy a Virginia Staple

Items needed: *Roasted peanuts or peanut butter crackers; if foods need to be nut-free, use popcorn instead*

Give children their snacks. As they are eating, tell them that in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Nannie Helen Burroughs' time), Virginia was the top producer of peanuts. It was home to 14 of the United States' 20 peanut processing factories. (If using popcorn instead, talk about how it was a popular snack during that time since it was cheap and easy to make at home.)

Run a Relay Race

Items needed: *Two batons (empty paper towel rolls or other cylindrical objects that children can hand off), open area such as a long hallway*

Mark either end of your course with tape or chairs. Divide children into two teams. Encourage children to stand at various points along your course. (Space them out according to the number of children you have.) Tell children they will run a relay race where each person runs part of the way and then hands off the baton (paper towel roll, etc.) when they reach the next person. That person then runs it to the next person and hands it off. This happens until the last person has crossed the finish line. Play a few rounds and then talk about how Nannie Helen Burroughs helped girls cross the finish line of school by raising money and opening a school for African American girls.

Dream Big Dreams

Items needed: *Paper, pencils, crayons/markers*

Encourage children to think about the big dreams they have. Ask them to name one big dream they have that would make the world a better place. Encourage them to write it down or draw it. Talk about how Nannie Helen Burroughs had a big dream that seemed impossible (that African American girls would receive a good education), but nothing is impossible with God.

DESIGN TEAM

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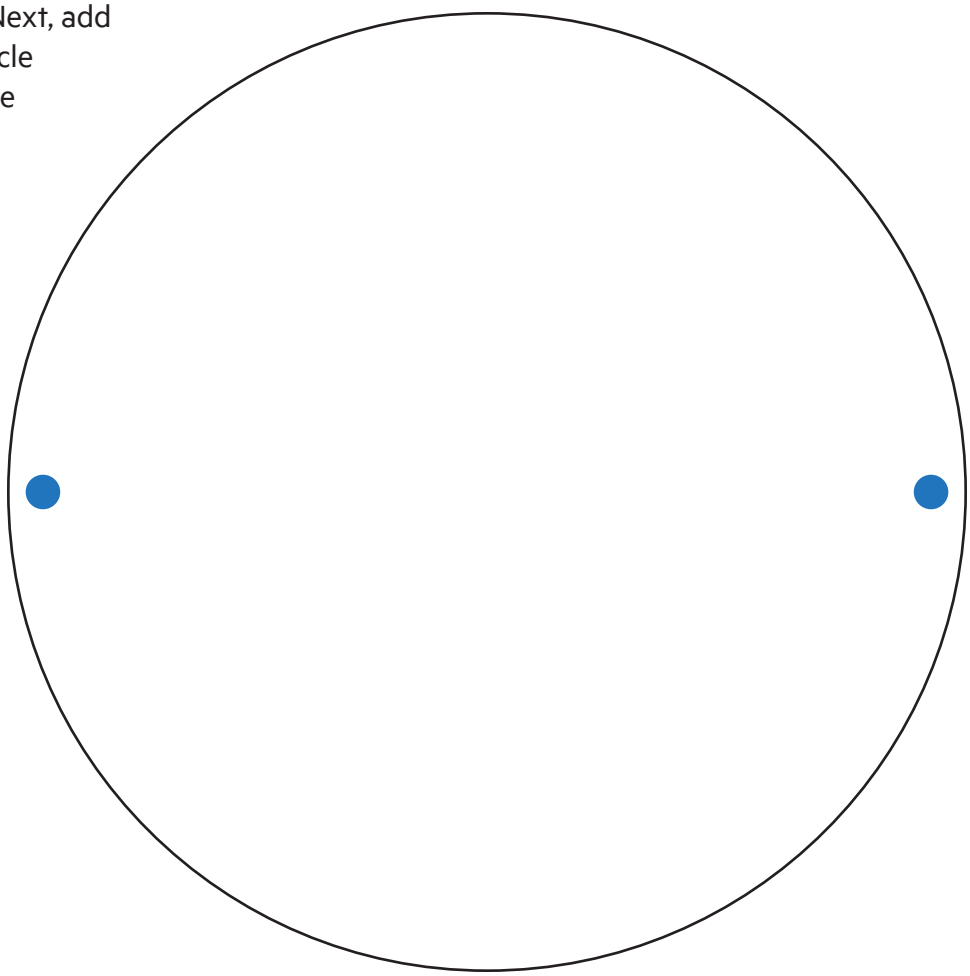
STUDENT HANDOUT

Create a Thaumatrope

A thaumatrope is a simple spinning toy from long ago. Each side has a different picture. When the toy spins quickly, your eyes make the two pictures look like one picture.

***Items needed**: Glue sticks, thin, sturdy cardboard or cardstock, markers or crayons, pencils, scissors, hole punch, rubber bands (two per person) or string, video and video player. Each child needs two copies of the circle below.*

1) Watch the video of how to create a thaumatrope with your class: *https://www.thebhhs.org/thaumatrope*. Tell children that thaumatropes were very popular in Victorian times, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when Nannie Helen Burroughs was alive.
2) Cut the circles out and draw whatever picture you wish. Be creative! Draw a different picture on each side.
3) Cut the cardboard into a circle.
4) Add glue to the back of one of your circles. Glue it to your cardboard circle. Next, add glue to the back of your other circle and glue it to the other side of the cardboard circle. Make sure this picture is upside down.
5) Use the hole puncher and punch a hole on each side of the circle (use the blue circles as a guide).
6) Tie a rubber band or piece of string through each hole.
7) Wind up your thaumatrope and then let it go! What happens when it spins?



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Help share the Baptist story.

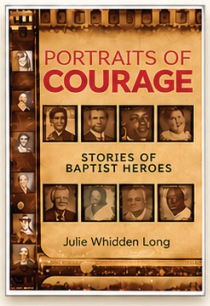
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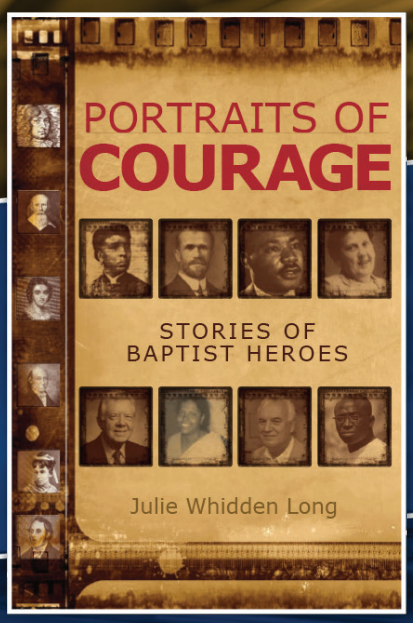


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