

# Words from our Community Educators

*The mentors who lead our workshops for teachers share what makes them so passionate and committed to equity in the classroom.*

**Ms. Freda Andrews**



Since she was a child, Ms. Freda Andrews knew that she wanted to pursue a career in education. Her experiences at Northside Elementary, alongside her involvement in the Freedom Movement, influenced her desire to carve out spaces to teach Black history and inspire her students to feel empowered to take on life's challenges. Her grandfather, Hilliard Caldwell (a Chapel Hill civil rights leader), and Floyd McKissick (a Durham civil rights leader) are some of the important figures in her life.

- An interview with Ms. Freda can be found in our Oral History Trust at [archives.jacksoncenter.info](http://archives.jacksoncenter.info). In this short excerpt, Ms. Freda talks about the importance songs like, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around," "Oh, Freedom," and "We Shall Overcome" meant to her and to many in the civil rights movement.

- "That's what moved me, the words to those songs, those chants. We were motivated by them. They inspired us to keep going. Just like warriors who go into battle. You know, they have those chants. That's what built us up and gave us the courage to go on, because we saw a few horrific things, you know, that I kind of put in the back of my mind. But I knew the cause was there. And the words to so many of those were there in our minds. And a good thing about my experience was I carried it on to my classroom experience. Because there were poems that I insisted that my children learn that kind of embodied the whole movement, especially when we were integrated. We were not integrated when I started teaching. And I realized that for my children to feel what I felt, a couple of poems that I remember the most I would have them learn and recite, poems like Harriet Tubman:

**'Harriet Tubman didn't take no stuff and wasn't afraid of anything either. Didn't come in this world to be no slave and wasn't going to stay one either. 'Farewell,' she said to her friends. She was mighty sad to leave them. But she ran away that dark, hot night. Went looking for her freedom.'**

And when I would do that poem for my students, they loved it. That's how I taught history to my children. It used to be Black History but it's History."

**Ms. Gwen Atwater**



**M**s. Gwen Atwater came to call Chapel Hill home after moving here with her husband, who had spent his childhood playing in these streets. She began teaching at Frank Porter Graham Elementary School in 1973, where she spent the next three decades engaging with bright, young minds. To this day, she is remembered with much love for her contributions to the school and its community.

***An interview with Ms. Gwen can be found in our Oral History Trust at [archives.jacksoncenter.info](http://archives.jacksoncenter.info). In this excerpt, she talks about how important it is to respect every child.***

“Children have opinions just like adults do. And if you don’t listen to them, they’re never going to be strong, responsible citizens because you haven’t given them an opportunity to speak. And sometimes they needed a chance to speak. I always had what I call a “family chat” because I called my class my family. I didn’t say this was my class. This was my family. And sometimes I would move up and move back down. I’d teach fourth grade, and they’d move it to fifth so we could have the same class. And then we’d have a family reunion in the summer when school started. We would write to each other. But in that kind of way, I knew my kids; my kids knew me. I had sleepovers at school on a Friday. We would cook out, and the parents would come. We’d play games together as a group. And parents would go home, and we’d do all kinds of things. ... I think you have to know the whole child.”

