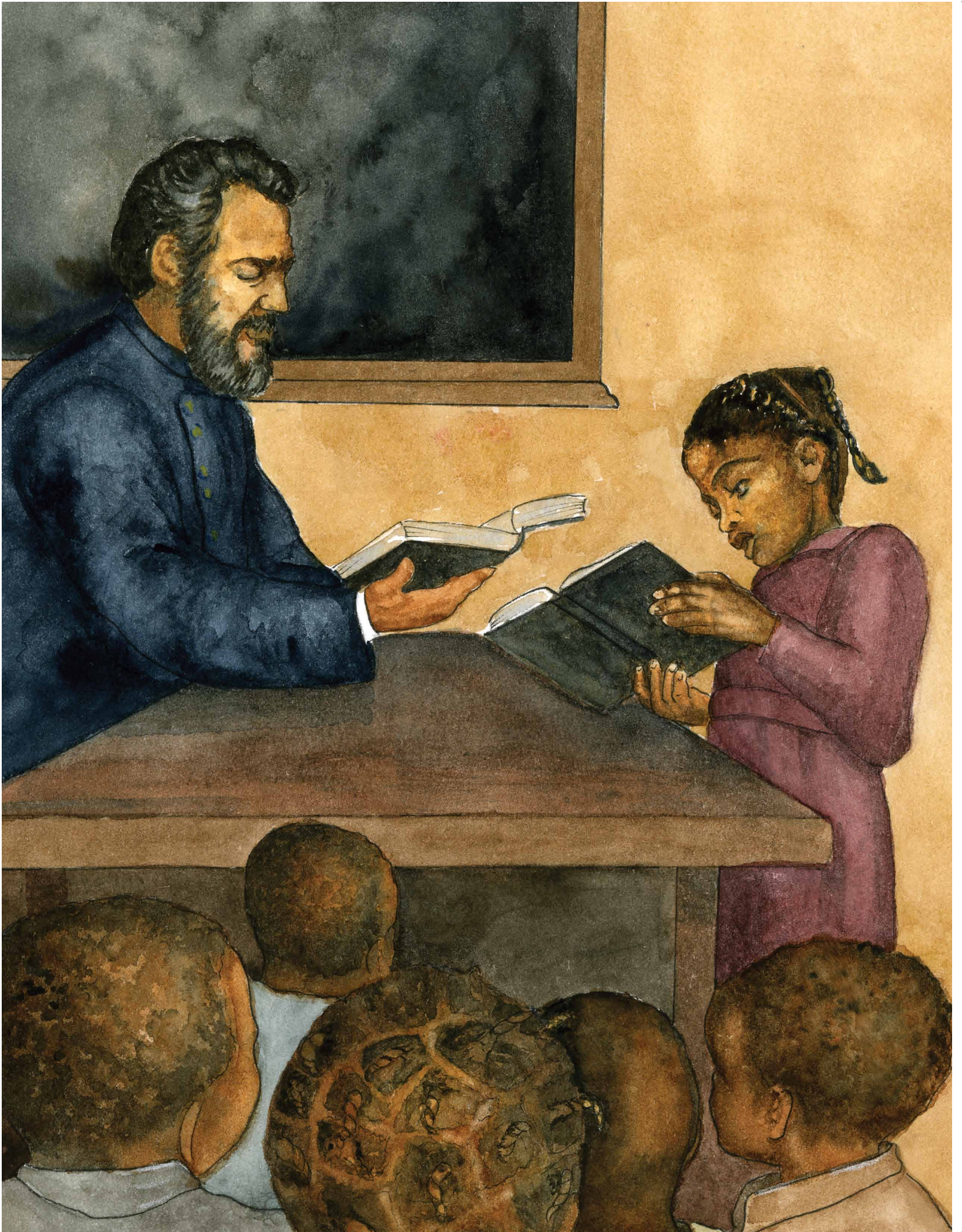


STONEWALL JACKSON'S BLACK SUNDAY SCHOOL





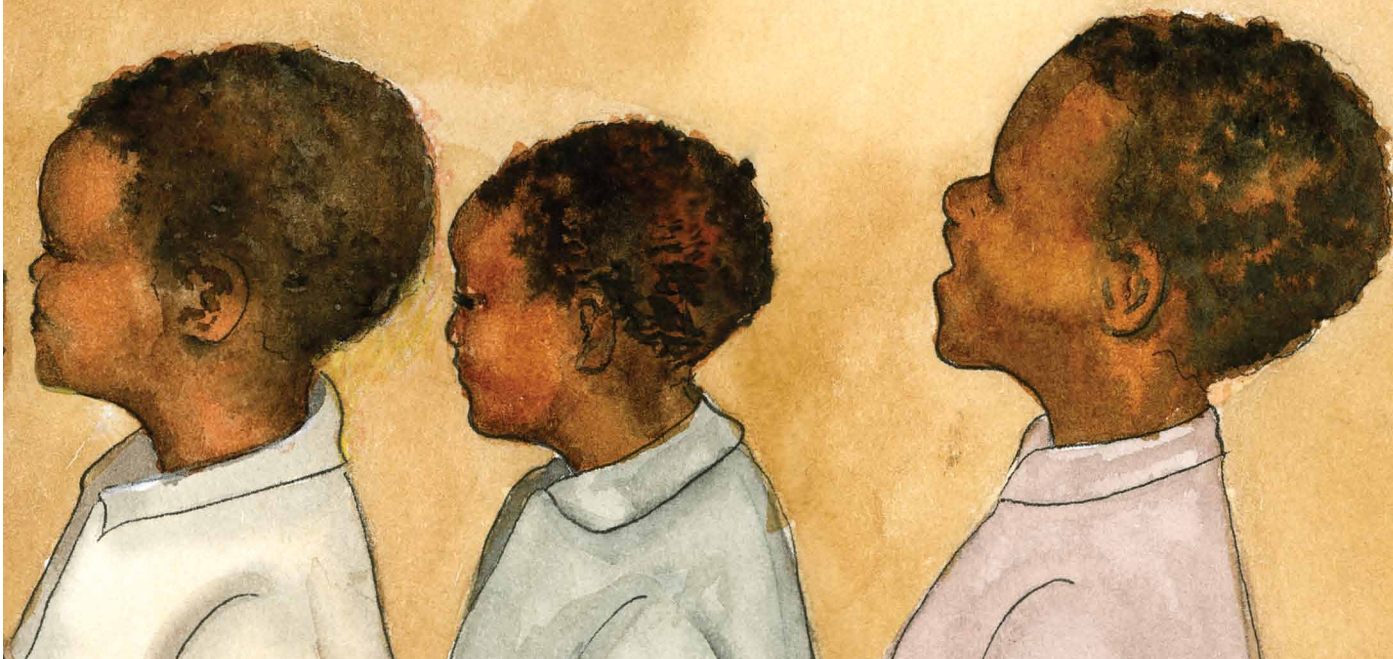
STONEWALL JACKSON'S BLACK SUNDAY SCHOOL

By Rickey E. Pittman

Illustrated by
Lynn Hosegood



PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
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To Declan, Brynn, and Camden
—L. H.

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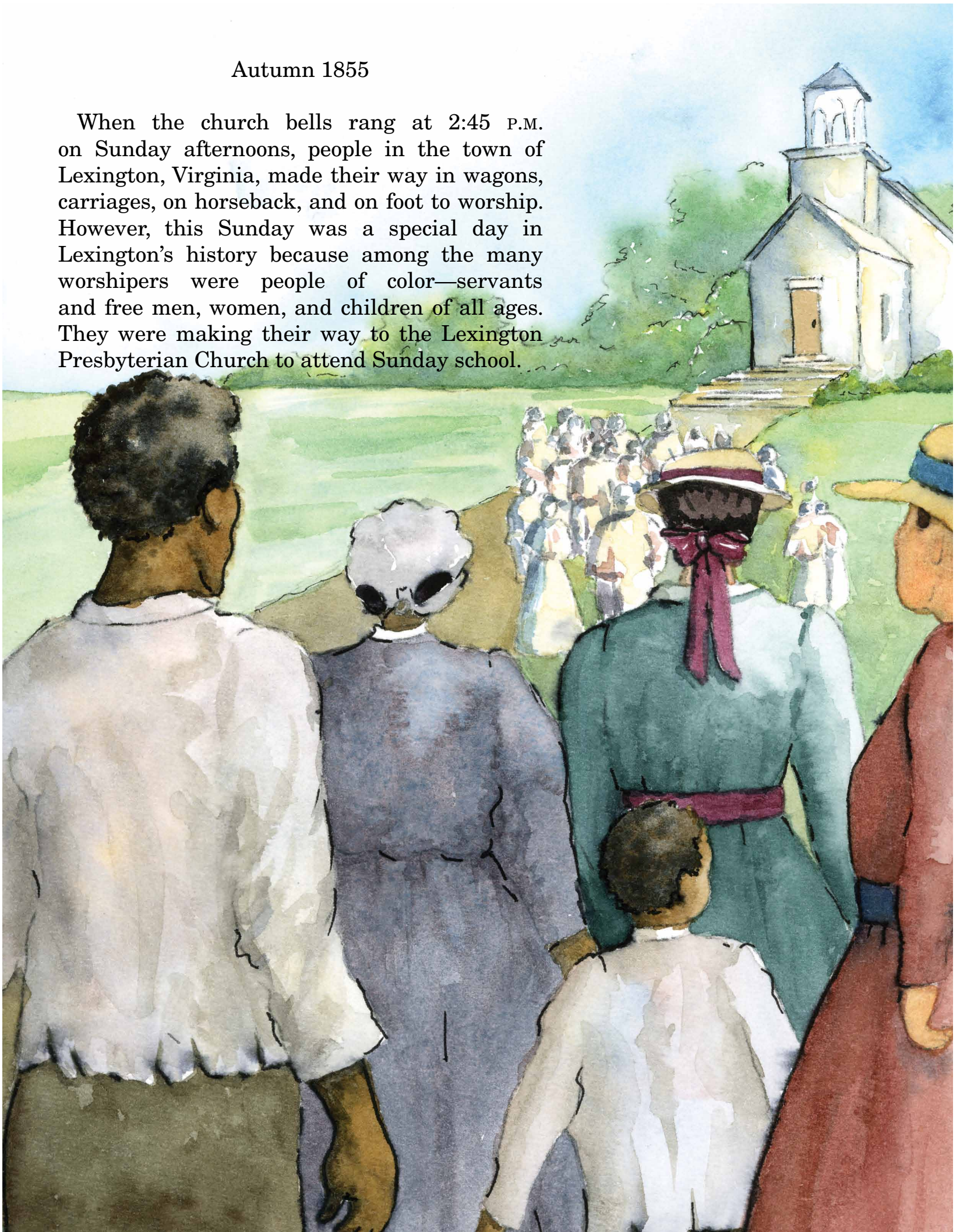
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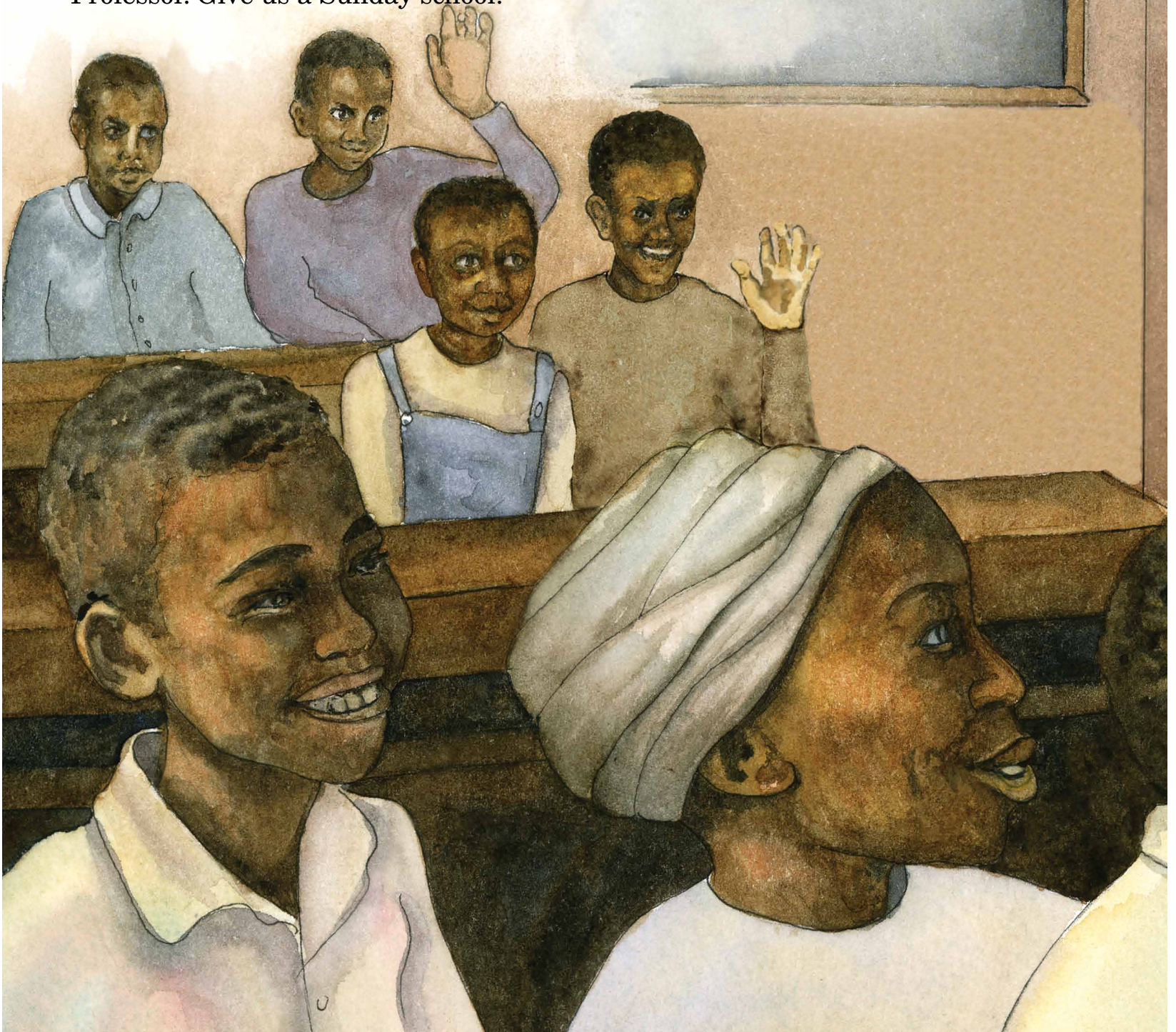
Autumn 1855

When the church bells rang at 2:45 P.M. on Sunday afternoons, people in the town of Lexington, Virginia, made their way in wagons, carriages, on horseback, and on foot to worship. However, this Sunday was a special day in Lexington's history because among the many worshipers were people of color—servants and free men, women, and children of all ages. They were making their way to the Lexington Presbyterian Church to attend Sunday school.



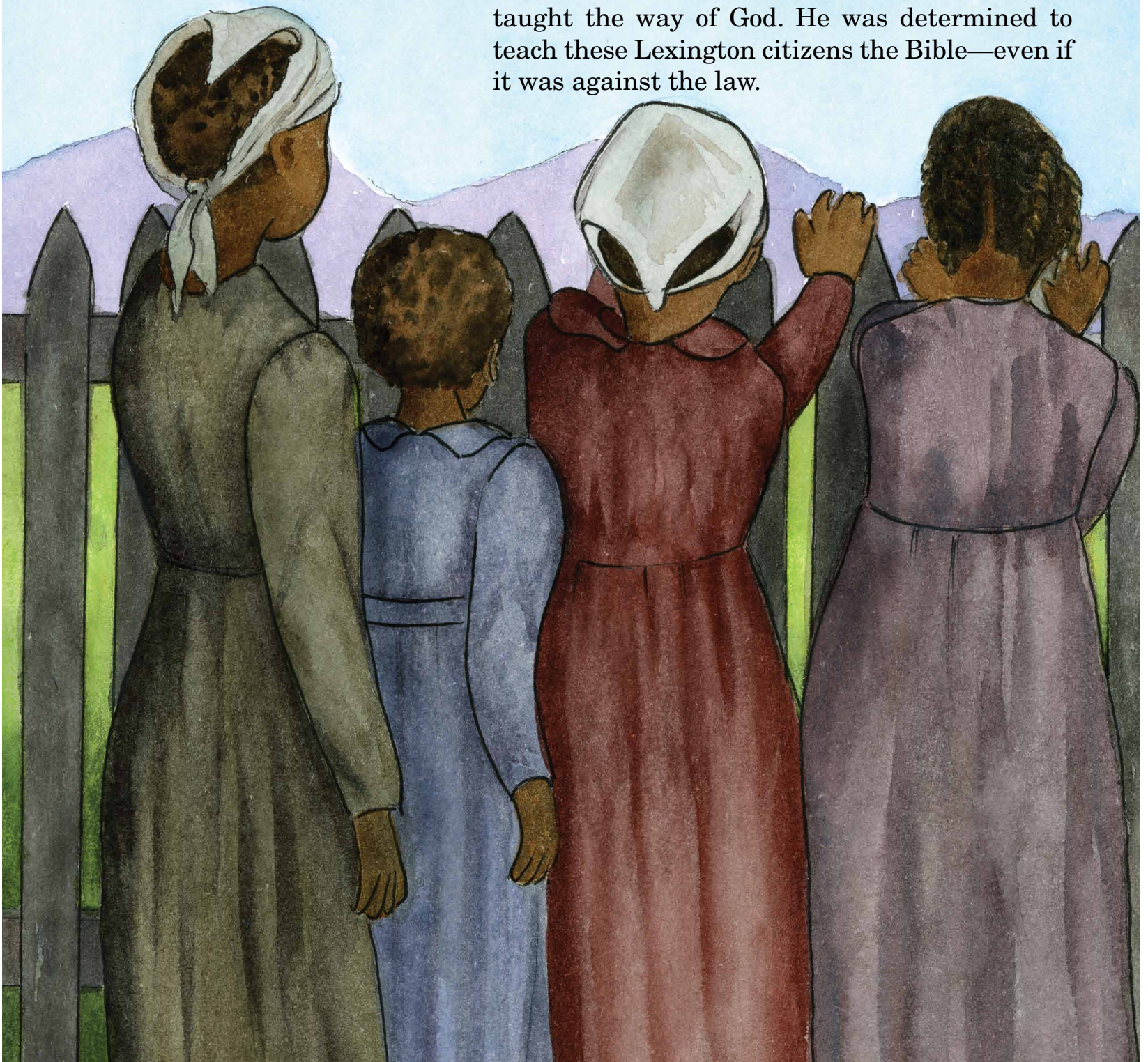
At 3:00 P.M., Thomas J. Jackson, professor of Virginia Military Institute, would be the first superintendent of this Sunday school. He walked into the lecture hall where the class would be held. Professor Jackson welcomed the crowd and then said, "All men need to be taught the way of salvation. However, I cannot make you come to school and learn. Are you willing to be taught and come to school every week?"

The room was full of people who were excited to be given the opportunity to worship and be taught the Bible. They all replied, "We are willing, Professor. Give us a Sunday school!"



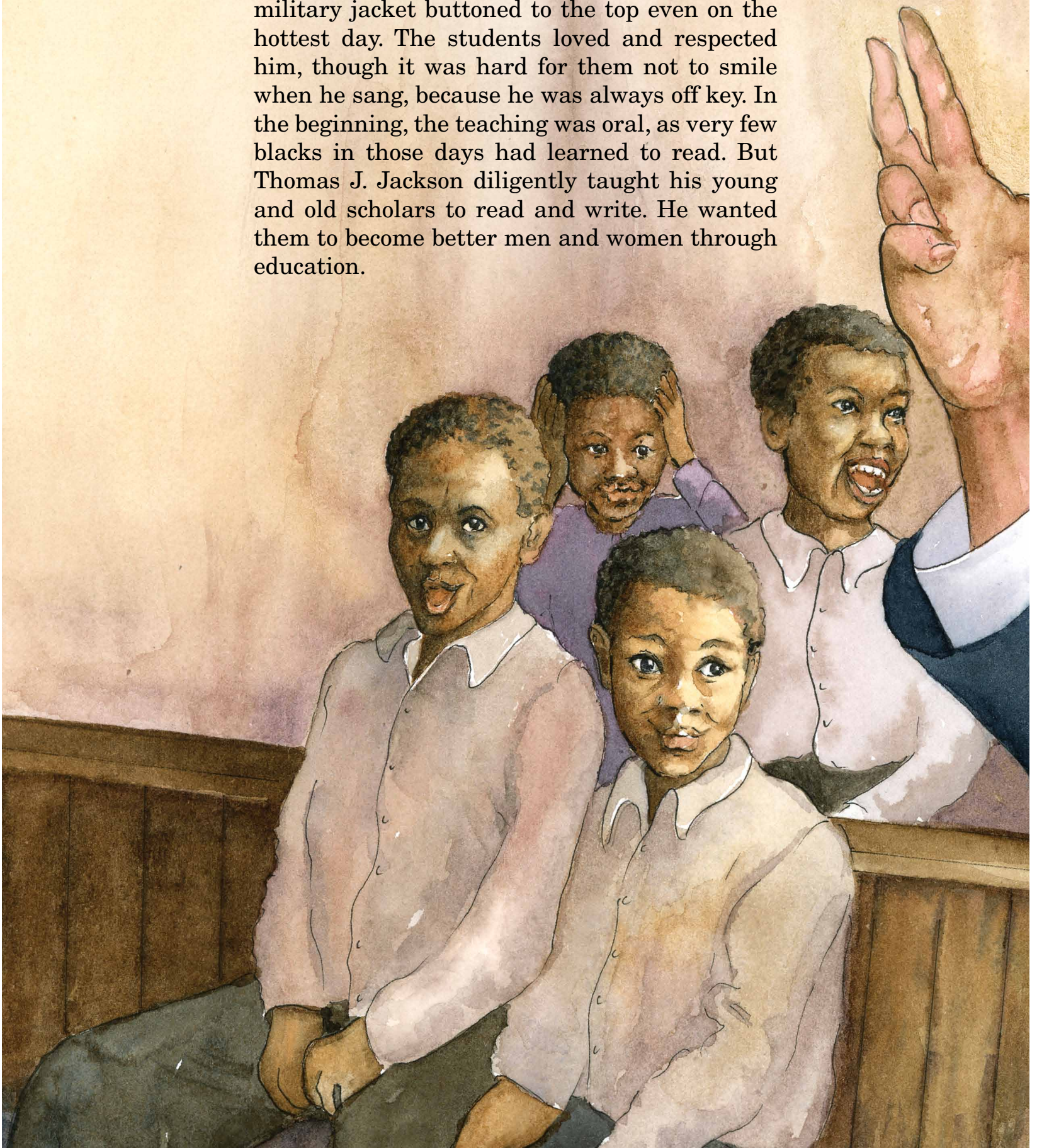


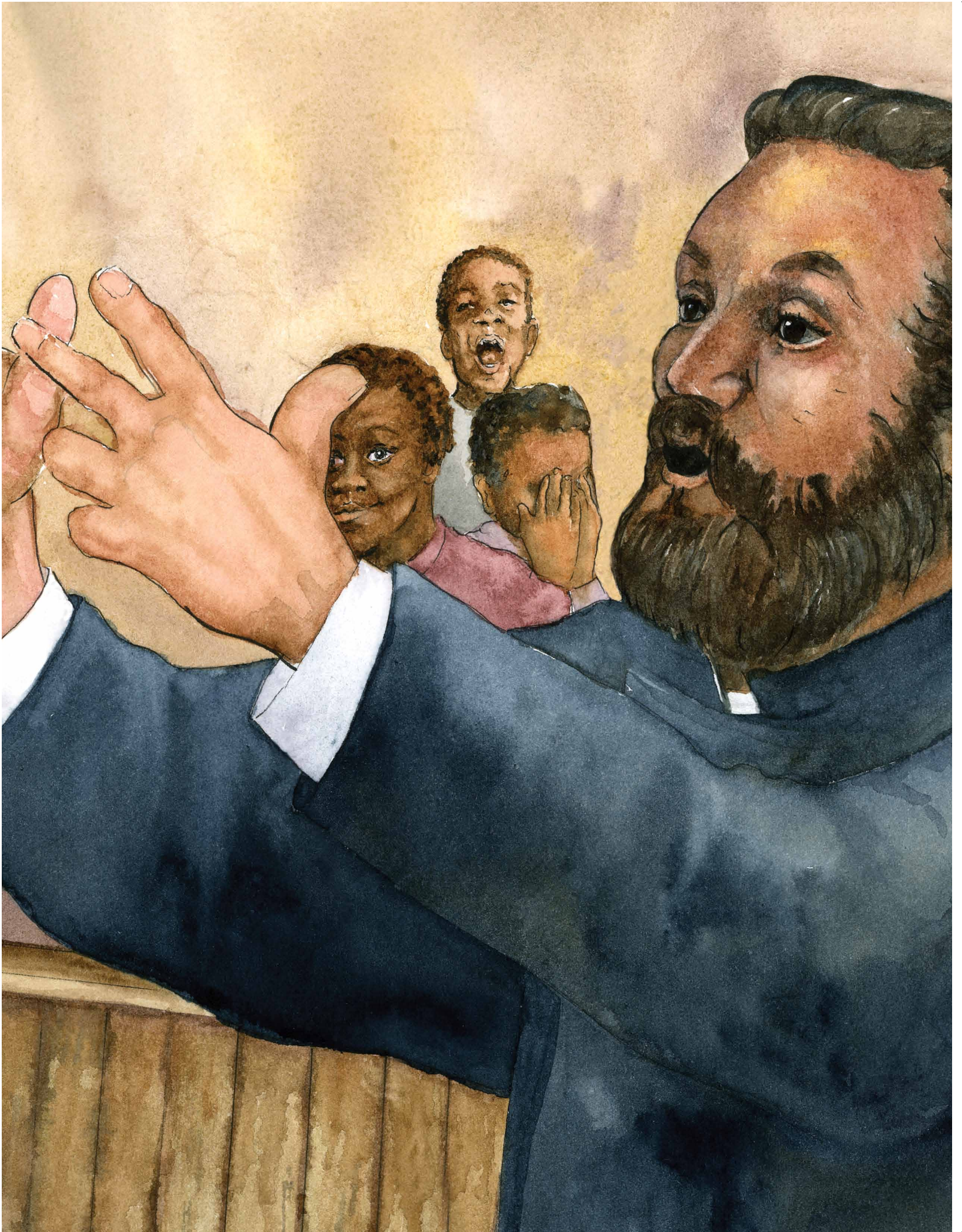
For many years, Virginia law had long declared it illegal for blacks to assemble in groups for worship or instruction in reading and writing, so opportunities like this one were rare. Those who violated the law risked ridicule, fines, and imprisonment. Many slave traders in the North and slaveholders in both the North and South did not think black Americans were as capable of instruction as white Americans. However, times were changing, and Professor Jackson believed all men, no matter what their race, should be taught the way of God. He was determined to teach these Lexington citizens the Bible—even if it was against the law.

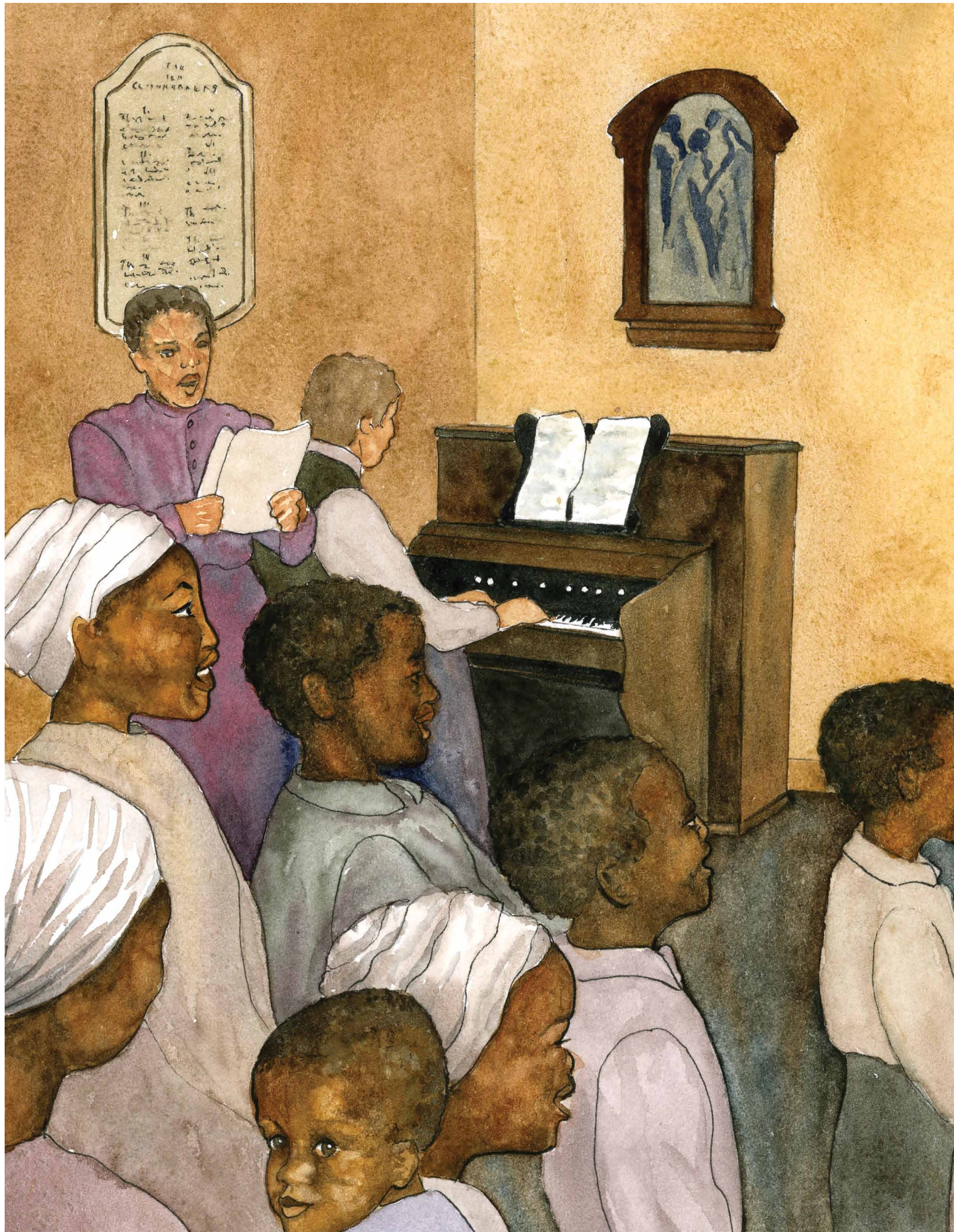




Professor Jackson always wore his blue military jacket buttoned to the top even on the hottest day. The students loved and respected him, though it was hard for them not to smile when he sang, because he was always off key. In the beginning, the teaching was oral, as very few blacks in those days had learned to read. But Thomas J. Jackson diligently taught his young and old scholars to read and write. He wanted them to become better men and women through education.

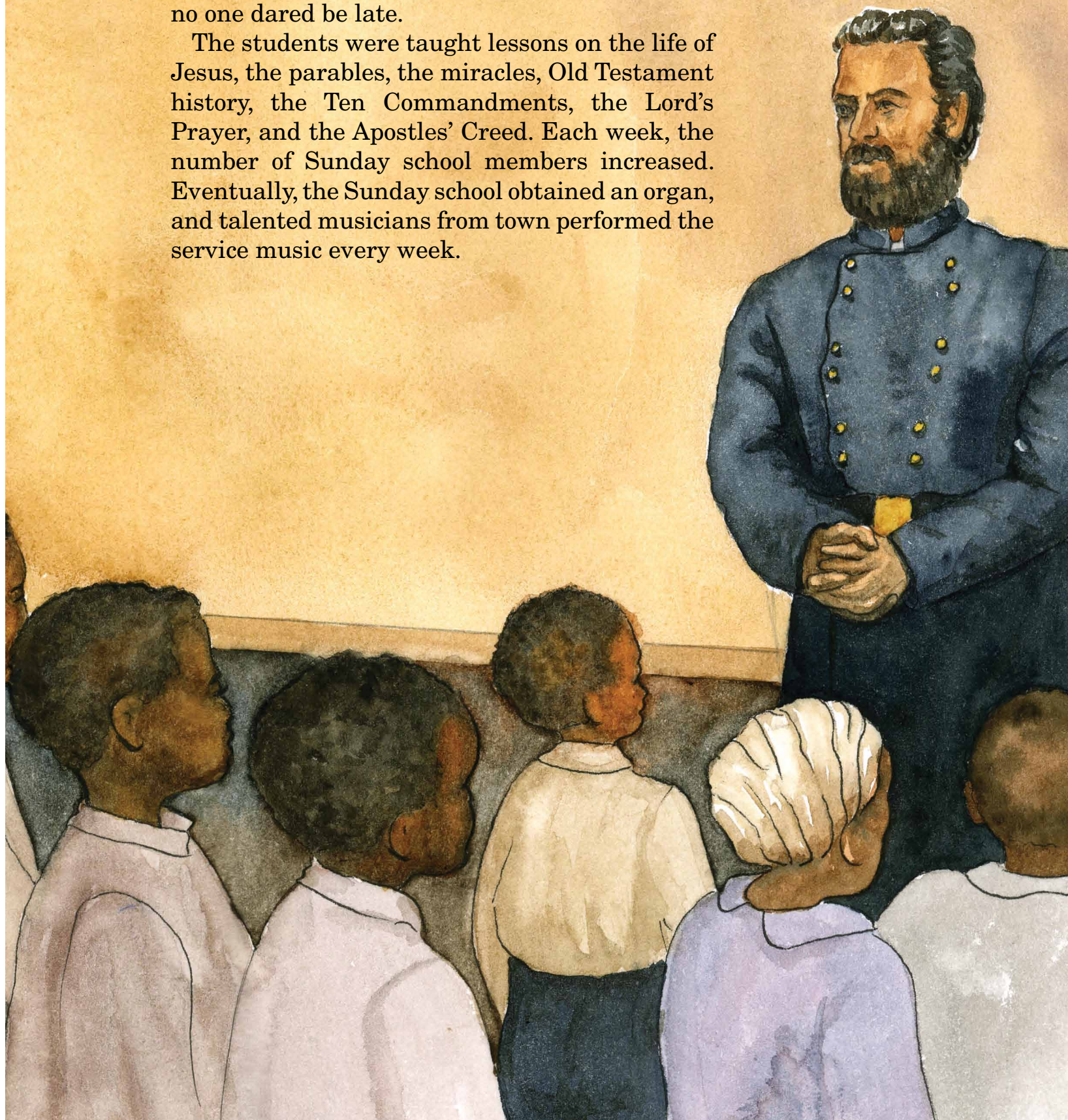


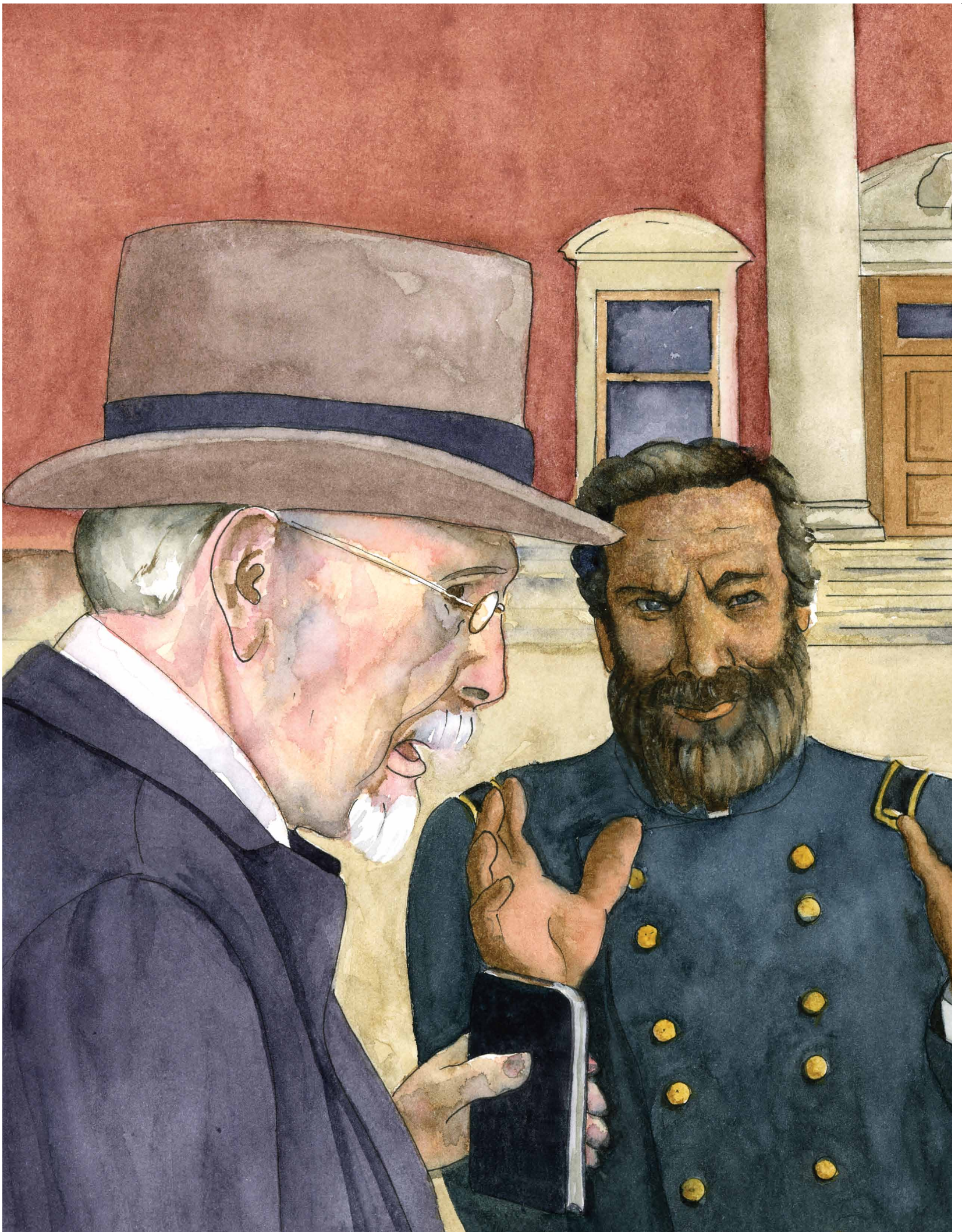




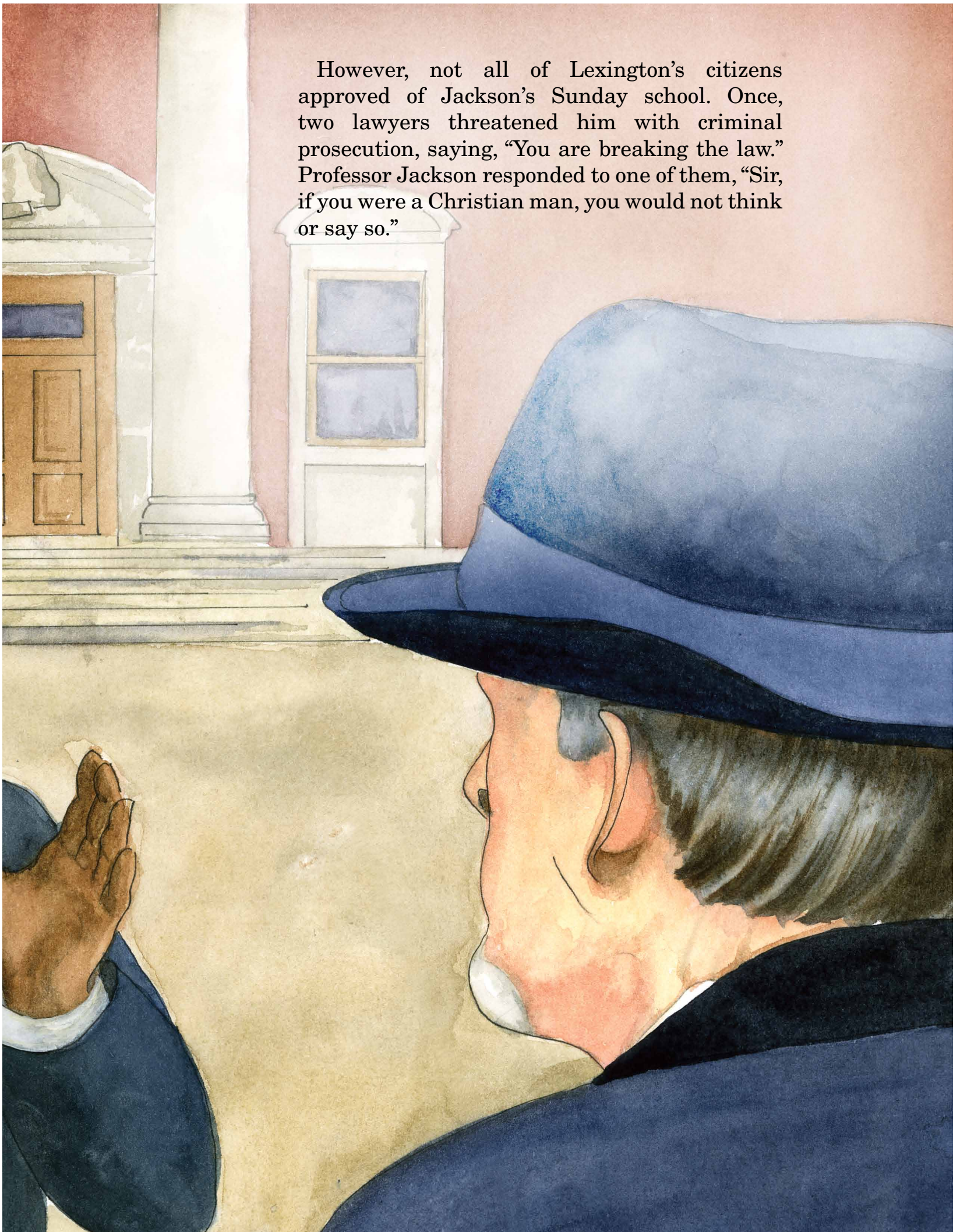
He and the other teachers kept attendance records, and students with good attendance were rewarded. Professor Jackson showed interest in and prayed for every student. Starting promptly at 3:00 P.M., the class door would be locked, and no one dared be late.

The students were taught lessons on the life of Jesus, the parables, the miracles, Old Testament history, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. Each week, the number of Sunday school members increased. Eventually, the Sunday school obtained an organ, and talented musicians from town performed the service music every week.





However, not all of Lexington's citizens approved of Jackson's Sunday school. Once, two lawyers threatened him with criminal prosecution, saying, "You are breaking the law." Professor Jackson responded to one of them, "Sir, if you were a Christian man, you would not think or say so."



Thomas J. Jackson's belief that the gospel should be taught to all men kept these threats from discouraging him. He worked with the Rockbridge Bible Society, whose mission was to spread the word of God, to raise money for Bibles and literature for the members of his Sunday school. Many free blacks in Lexington were the first to contribute. On the first Sunday of each month, Professor Jackson rewarded his most diligent and loyal students with these gifts.

