

# Becoming Darth Vader

How a boy who developed a stutter grew up to become an actor known for his powerful voice

## About the Story

Lexile: 850L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

**Learning Objective:** to write an essay synthesizing information from two articles

**Key Skills:** key ideas and details, setting, problem and solution, text features, compare and contrast, interpreting text, inference, synthesis

### Essential Questions:

- In what ways can we share our voices?
- How can we embrace and celebrate our differences?
- How can we build positive and supportive relationships with our peers?

### Standards:

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at [scope.scholastic.com](https://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Article read-alouds
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

### Video:

- "Get to Know Olivia Simmons"

### Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: Powerful Voices
  - Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice
  - Close Reading and Critical Thinking
  - Quiz\*
  - Contest Entry Form
- \*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

## 1. Preparing to Read

10 minutes

**Note to teachers:** *These articles should be handled with special sensitivity if you have a student who stutters in your class. We suggest sharing the articles with the student in advance, introducing them as inspiring stories about people who stutter. After the student has had a chance to read the pieces, ask how they feel about them and whether they would be comfortable having the class read and discuss them. Listen to any concerns the student has and come to an agreement about whether and how to share the articles with the class.*

### Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your board. Review the words and complete the activity as a class or in groups. Highlighted words: *genetics*, *rapt*, *resonant*, *sonorous*. (Optionally, share the interactive link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently beforehand. The audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides.)

## 2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

### “Becoming Darth Vader”

- Have a volunteer read the **As You Read** box that appears on page 16 of the magazine and at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article through once as a class. Optionally, have students listen to author Allison Friedman read her article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Have students reread the article silently to themselves. Then pose the following close-reading questions to the class. Have students share their thinking with a partner first, then expand the share into a whole-class discussion.

### Close-Reading Questions

(20 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **Why did James Earl Jones stop speaking almost completely?** (key ideas and details) *At around age 6, James Earl developed a stutter, a speech disorder that made it difficult for him to speak fluently. Other kids made fun of him for this, and it became painfully difficult for him to talk—so difficult that he stopped speaking almost completely.*
2. **How does author Allison Friedman characterize the 1930s in America?** (setting) *Friedman characterizes the 1930s as a time of racial injustice. Laws and customs segregated society and dictated most aspects of Black Americans' lives; Friedman explains that at the time, Black people were not allowed to vote or hold many jobs. James Earl's family left the South so they could get a better education and a life of greater freedom in Michigan, though even after moving to the North, the family continued to experience discrimination.*
3. **How has James Earl managed his stutter?** (problem and solution) *After eight years of silence, James Earl's love of poetry led him to discover that his stutter mostly disappeared when he spoke written words aloud. He used this discovery to strengthen his voice—reading poetry, joining speech competitions, studying drama, acting in plays, and eventually, acting in film and television. His years of training with acting coaches continue to help him manage his stutter today.*
4. **How does the sidebar “Famous People Who Stutter” contribute to the article? What similarities do you notice between the people featured in the sidebar and James Earl Jones?** (text features, compare and contrast) *By sharing the experiences of well-known people, the sidebar supports the idea that many people stutter—and also that stuttering should not prevent people from achieving their dreams. Like James Earl, a few of these folks manage their stutter by reading or performing written words aloud through poetry, acting, and music.*

### “Finding Her Voice”

- Read the article as a class. Optionally, have students listen to author Alessandra Potenza read the article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- As a class, discuss the following close-reading and critical-thinking questions.

### Close-Reading Question

(5 minutes)

*The following question can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. Olivia's shirt says, "Stuttering is okay because what I say is worth repeating." What does this message suggest about Olivia? (interpreting text, inference) *This message suggests that Olivia embraces her stutter and believes that her voice is valuable. It shows that Olivia is confident and comfortable with herself.*

## 3. Watch a Video

15 minutes

- Have students watch the video, "Get To Know Olivia Simmons."
- As an exit ticket, have students respond to the following critical-thinking question, which draws on the articles and the video.

### Critical-Thinking Question

(5 minutes)

*The following question can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

- The articles and the video include details about kids laughing at James Earl and Olivia because of their stutters. After reading the articles and watching the video, what advice might you give someone who treats a peer in this way? *Answers will vary.*

## 4. Skill Building and Writing

20 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Powerful Voices**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the prompt on page 19 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.