

# LESSON 3: MEET MARI COPENY

PHILANTHROPIST, ACTIVIST, FUTURE USA PRESIDENT



*“My generation will save the world.”*

-Mari Copeny

## INTRODUCTION

To “keep your eyes on the prize” means to determine what is important and to muster up the courage to take action towards making the vision a reality. This year’s VocalEssence WITNESS School Program introduces us to three women who continue to make a positive impact on our society as they speak out about and stand up for change. As you learn more about them and their life’s work, we hope each of you are inspired to consider, What is the prize that your eyes are on? What issues or causes are you willing to work and stand up for to make our society a better place?

## PROCESS

1. Divide students into small groups to read the short biographical article, “Meet Mari Copeny” (one copy per group, or per student).
2. Direct them to read out loud and share the reader’s role within their group.
3. Remaining in groups, students then discuss what they’ve learned about Mari Copeny, highlighting some of the events, experiences, and key details of her life they find interesting or significant.
4. Encourage note taking as they share information and comments on her background, achievements, and other interesting and important events and circumstances that led to her becoming an important figure in the American Civil Rights Movement and the impact and legacy of her work.
5. Provide a copy of the “A Portrait of Mari Copeny” worksheet for each individual student to complete. They can work in their group or as individuals. You may also make it a homework assignment.
6. As time allows, consider doing some of the suggested EXTENSION ACTIVITIES to engage student’s creativity and student-led projects to further their learning and understanding while meeting other MN Academic Standards. These extension activities can be done with any of the three “biographical” lesson plans (Claudette Colvin, Ruby Bridges, Mari Copeny)

## OBJECTIVES

### LEARNING GOALS

- *Students will learn about Mari Copeny’s activism in the Flint water crisis and her support for communities nationwide.*
- *Students will explore how Mari Copeny has used her platform to raise awareness about environmental racism and infrastructure issues in America.*
- *Students will analyze Mari Copeny’s advocacy and leadership roles in organizations like the Women’s March and Flint Youth Justice League.*
- *Students will create a project highlighting Mari Copeny’s community contributions and philanthropic efforts.*

### MATERIALS:

- *Copies of the Biographical Article: Meet Mari Copeny*
- *Copies of the Student Worksheet: A Portrait of Mari Copeny*
- **EXTENSION ACTIVITIES** call for other resources or materials not included with this lesson.

# LESSON 3: MEET MARI COPENY

PHILANTHROPIST, ACTIVIST, FUTURE USA PRESIDENT

## ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students' written descriptions on the biographical "A Portrait of Mari Copeny" worksheet provide evidence of critical thinking and understanding, and their ability to summarize and describe Mari Copeny's life's work, impact and achievements toward racial justice. Additional assessments may include any student-created projects as outlined in the EXTENSION ACTIVITIES section below.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR ALL AGES

- **VISUAL ARTS:** Students may work individually or in pairs or small groups to create an artistic collage using the information they learned and recorded on their "Portrait" worksheets. Encourage the use of a variety of art supplies, materials, and student creativity (paints, markers, colored paper, found materials, student-created illustrations, etc.) These can then be displayed in the classroom or school hallway for others to enjoy and learn from.
- **LANGUAGE ARTS:** Students may work individually or in teams to create an acrostic poem, using each letter of Mari's first and last name to create statements reflecting her impact and legacy.
- **DANCE & MOVEMENT:** Students may work in teams to create tableau, choreography or other sequences of movement to highlight important aspects of Mari's life and work. Consider encouraging students use the acrostic poems they created, or to write a new spoken word poem or rap to accompany their movement.
- **SONGWRITING:** Students in music classes may work individually or in teams to create an original song about Mari Copeny, which could be performed for their peers. Use instruments or found objects to create a rhythmic soundscape.
- **DEEPER DIG FOR OLDER STUDENTS:** Students can explore more about Mari Copeny by researching and writing an essay about her life and aspects of her work and legacy. Students can present highlights from their research for the rest of the class.

## MINNESOTA STATE STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS:

#### Read

-Standard 1: Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details

#### DANCE: Create

-Standard 1: Improvise a movement phrase using stimulus/stimuli  
-Standard 2: Choreograph a movement phrase using the elements of dance

#### MUSIC: Create

-Standard 2: Generate rhythmic or melodic patterns  
-Standard 6: Create or improvise musical ideas that can be combined into a melody  
-Standard 3: Organize chosen musical patterns into phrases using a system of notation or recording technology

### RESOURCES:

*"Mari Copeny and the Flint Water Crisis."* Teaching Tolerance, [www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources](http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources).

*"Activism for Young Leaders: The Mari Copeny Story."* Scholastic.

## LESSON 3.1

### MEET MARI COPENY

PHILANTHROPIST, ACTIVIST, FUTURE USA PRESIDENT

VOCALESSENCE

WITNESS 

#### MEET MARI COPENY

*“My generation will fix this mess of a government. Watch us.”*

– Mari Copeny



Mari Copeny, (b. July 6, 2007)

16-year-old activist, philanthropist, and “future president” Mari Copeny is on the front lines of tackling America’s water crisis head on, and helping kids to embrace their power through equal opportunity. When the Flint Water Crisis began instead of feeling helpless Mari decided to use her voice to help out her community and to fight for the kids in Flint. Since then she has expanded her efforts to help communities across the nation dealing with toxic drinking water.



Mari is a 16 year old from Flint, Michigan known globally as Little Miss Flint. Born on July 6th, 2007. She first entered the public spotlight when her letter to President Obama about the water crisis prompted him to visit the city and survey the

water crisis for himself. That visit ultimately led to him approving \$100 million dollars in relief for the city of Flint. Her young age has not prevented her from making a significant impact on the dialogue around environmental racism and confronted the entire country with the reality faced by victims of state negligence. Her youthful honesty prevents political leaders from being able to ignore the consequences of neglectful leadership. She gives voice to the unheard hardships of Americans trapped by a collapsing and toxic infrastructure.



In 2017 Mari continued her dedication to social justice by becoming a national youth ambassador to the Women’s March on Washington and the National Climate Mari. Mari is also dedicated to preventing bullying and works with the anti-bullying group Trendsetters Productions. She is also a member of the Flint Youth Justice League. She also sat on the 2019 Kid Box board of directors as the chairwoman of the board. She also proudly works with Eighteen by 18, a youth organization founded by her mentor Yara Shahidi. Mari has also spoken twice at the March for Science about how the Flint water crisis has affected her community. Mari has a doll that is modeled after her by the doll

company Lottie. She also sits on the Flint Youth Justice League and the MDE Anti-Racism Student Advisory Council.

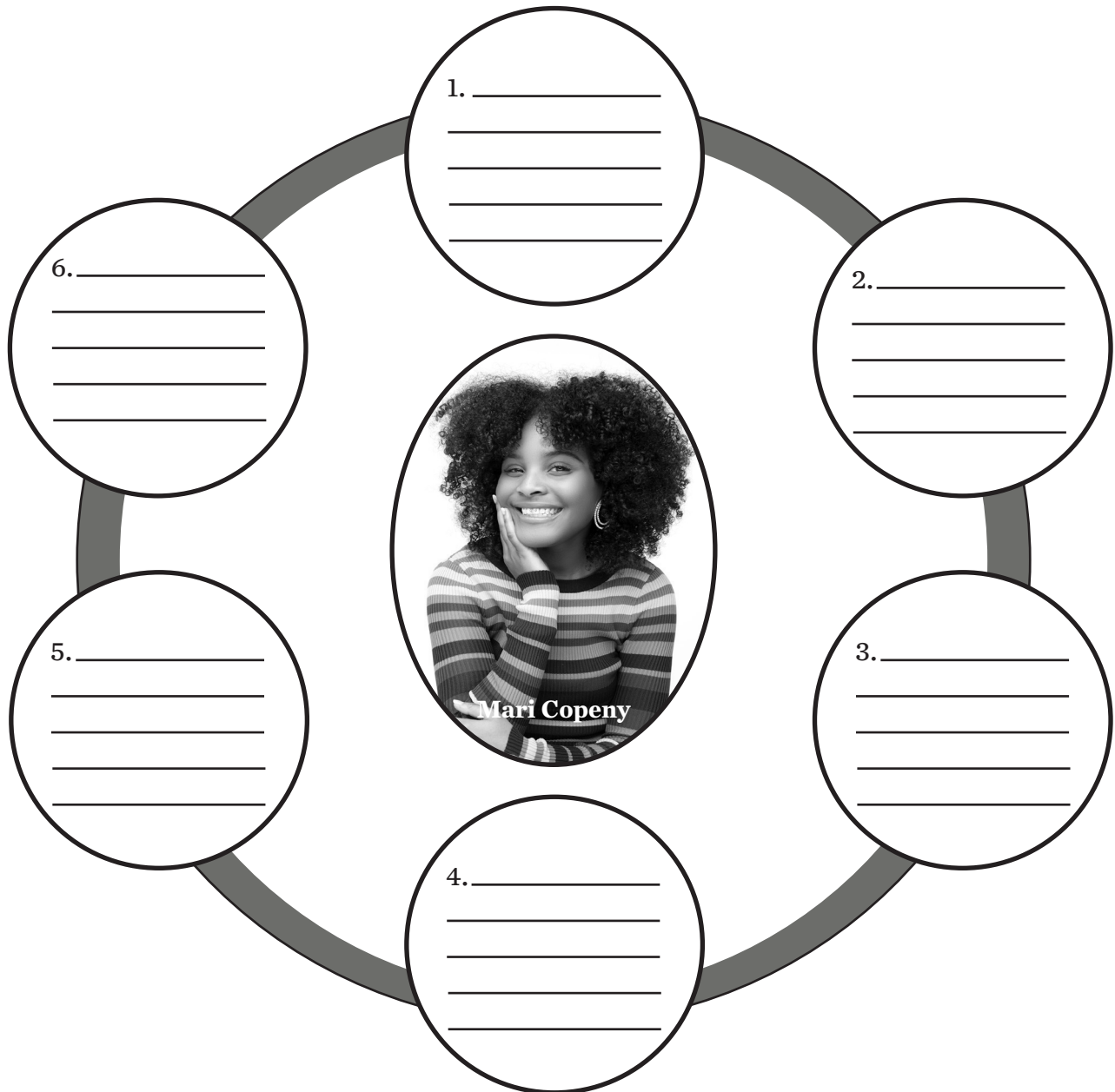
Mari has used her platform to not only bring awareness to the water crisis in her community but to also give back. Mari has raised over \$700,000 for her Flint Kids projects including giving out over 19,000 backpacks stuffed with school supplies, a yearly Christmas event with thousands of toys, hundreds of Easter baskets, movie screenings, and lots of other events centered around the kids in her community. Her book project where she gets books by authors of color into the hands of local children. Her dear Flint Kids letter project has received thousands of letters of support to the children of Flint from people all around the world. She also raised over \$250k and given away over a million bottles of bottled water. But she takes the most pride in pivoting away from single-use bottled water to partnering with a company (Hydroviv) to produce her very own water filter, that is shipped all over the country to those that are facing toxic drinking water, to date she has raised over \$700k to produce and distribute her filters.

Mari Copeny has been featured in Teen Vogue, The Guardian, VICE, TIME, Refinery 29, The Washington Post, NBC News, Rewire, Buzzfeed, and more for her vocal opposition to the injustices of environmental racism. When Mari grows up she plans on running for president in 2044.

# LESSON 3.2:

## A PORTRAIT OF MARI COPENY

A portrait is a verbal picture or description of a person. If you were going to introduce Mari Copeny to someone who knows nothing about her, what would you say to paint a short, accurate picture of her life? Read your notes, revisit some of the readings, reflection on some of the events, facts, and/or interesting experiences that you think are important, and summarize six of them in the circles. (You can write inside AND outside the circles.)



The graphic consists of a central oval containing a black and white photograph of Mari Copeny, a young woman with curly hair, smiling and resting her chin on her hand. Below the photo is the name "Mari Copeny". Surrounding this central oval are six smaller circles, each containing a number from 1 to 6 and several horizontal lines for writing. The circles are arranged in a ring around the central photo, connected by a thick grey band.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_