

Get on the Bus

An Introduction to the Play



Get on the Bus is a play in [Tacoma Arts Live's](#) Civil Rights Legacy program, a series of original, all-ages theatrical works which explore the on-going story of American civil rights and liberties through the experiences of the nation's diverse peoples. Designed to bring to life both history and civics, each play is accompanied by study materials for varying ages. Included are original resources created by Tacoma Arts Live's Education Department and links to high quality curricula and supporting materials from organizations including and [KCTS 9/PBS LearningMedia.org](#), [Teaching Tolerance](#), the [Zinn Education Project](#), [Youth in Front](#), the [Pew Research Center](#), and the [Inclusivity Zone](#).



Bettmann/Corbis; Accessed from pbslearningmedia.org

Synopsis

Taking a stand on the civil rights of others isn't always easy. Young friends Thalia and James consider boarding a bus to demonstrate for immigration rights. The questions of human dignity and justice are explored further when they meet Ms. Vivian, a veteran of the original Freedom Rides of the 1960s. Through Vivian's memories, the students consider how the challenges and lessons of the Civil Rights Movement could influence their actions today. With evocative dialogue, multimedia elements and supporting curricula, this is one bus ride students will not forget. Along the way, they will think critically about the Civil Rights Movement, civic engagement, American identity and freedom of expression in relation to the urgent issues of our own times.

Accessing Civics Concepts through Past and Current Events

Just as the play weaves together two stories of young activists: one about the contemporary immigration debate and one around the student Freedom Riders of the early 1960s, the learning resources offer content on 1.) The Freedom Rides; 2.) Immigration Today; and 3.) Student Activism.

While the Freedom Rides and today's immigration debate may seem like unrelated issues, they share common ground. Both reflect youth activism, and challenge society to examine whether and how civil rights should extend to a disenfranchised group. Both seek to uphold some existing laws while challenging others.



Darren Hauck / Getty Images; Accessed from nbcnews.com

At the heart of both tales is our national origin story: In a republic built on the sanctity of “unalienable Rights...among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” there has been constant debate over who gets to partake in these rights, and the American Dream that comes with it.

Younger Learners, Grades K-6

The play is leveled to speak to different audiences in different ways. While older students may explore the nuances of the Civil Rights Era or the immigration debates of today, younger audiences will hone in on the emotional journey of Thalia and James. They will pick up on the challenges of that friendship, and the youthful quest to define fairness for oneself and then stand up for it. They will connect with the matronly Ms. Vivian who has a very clear sense of what it means to stand up for someone else, even when you are not personally affected. Similarly, activities in the K-6 Study Guide reflect age appropriate activities, challenging students to define fairness and plan out personal action.

Pre-Show Topical Discussion:

In this quick pre-show discussion, students consider topics related to the show by starting with their own experience of acting on important causes.

- 1.) *What does it mean to treat people fairly?*
- 2.) *Can you think of situation when you saw someone being treated unfairly?*
- 3.) *When you saw an unfair situation, did you feel like you needed to do something? Why?*
- 4.) *What are some things we can do if we see someone not being treated fairly?*

Share with students that when a group of people see something they want to change, it's called a **movement**. When those people take action to change something they don't like or add something they think is better, that's called **activism** and the people working for the change are called **activists**.

Analyzing Pictures:

Use the following questions to analyze and discuss the pictures from page 1 of this document.

- ❖ Who are the people in the picture? (Young, old, smiling, concerned, ethnicity, etc.)
- ❖ What are the people doing? Where are they?
- ❖ What can the picture tell us about when this happened?
- ❖ All the people are activists. What is the issue that is important to them?
- ❖ How are they acting on that issue?

After reviewing each photo individually, ask students to compare and contrast the images.

- ❖ What is similar or different about the people in the photos?
- ❖ What is similar or different about what they are doing in the photos?

Inform students that they will be seeing a play that tells the story of two different examples of activism. One from 60 years ago when young people protested unequal treatment of black and white people. And, one from the past few years, where people have challenged the way our country treats people who are new to our country – immigrants.

Invite students to look out for different ways that young people take action on issues that are important to them in the play.

Vocabulary

Activism

When people act to change something in their community or society. It could be changing a law or a practice. People who take actions to make change are activists.

Civil Rights

The rights granted to everyone who is part of our society. These include rights that protect against unfair treatment. They are rights to ensure we are all treated equally. Your civil rights protect you from being treated different because of your race, ethnicity, religion, gender or orientation.

Freedom Rides

When a group of activists – both black and white – challenged the unfair treatment against African Americans by riding busses together, even though laws at that time forbade it. The Freedom Riders brought attention to an injustice in our country through their personal actions.

Segregation

When one group of people is forced to endure different conditions or use different facilities than another group. For close to 100 years, there was a system of segregation in the United States. People of different skin colors were kept separate. Black people had to endure unequal conditions and were forced, both officially and informally, to remain apart and experience inferior (unfair) facilities and opportunities.

Immigration

When people move from one country to another. The United States has a long history of immigration. In fact, everyone except Native Americans are either descended from or are themselves immigrants from another country.

Immigration Debate

These days, there is a lot of debate about what the rules for immigration should be. Some people are concerned that too many immigrants are coming to the United States while others feel that the treatment of immigrants is unfair, or that immigrants are important for the growth of our country. Some feel strongly that immigration is OK only if it follows current laws. Others feel like the laws should be changed.

Resources for Understanding and Exploration

Civil Rights Movement/Freedom Rides

[American Experience: Freedom Riders](#) linked lessons below can be found at *PBS LearningMedia*.

- [Freedom Riders: The Governor](#)
- [Freedom Riders: The Student Leader](#)
- [Freedom Riders: Fresh Troops](#)
- [Freedom Riders: The Inspiration](#)
- [Freedom Riders: Freedom Riders Challenge Segregation](#)
- [Freedom Riders: The Young Witness](#)
- [Freedom Riders: The Tactic](#)
- [Freedom Riders: Freedom Riders Create Change](#)
- [Freedom Riders: The Exchange Student](#)

Immigration

- <https://kcts9.pbslearningmedia.org/collection/teaching-the-stories-of-the-immigration-debate/>
Explore the current challenges and complex history that informs the present-day immigration debate with short films and interactive resources from KQED and the Waking Dreams project from iNation Media. Find first-person accounts, historical context, lesson plans and more.
- <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2011/ten-myths-about-immigration>
Debunk the misinformation students bring to school—and help them think for themselves.
- <https://www.tolerance.org/moment/supporting-students-immigrant-families>
A landing page from which teachers can explore many articles from working with English Language Learners to understanding Safe Zones and the impact on school climate.
- <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/toolkit-for-the-school-to-deportation-pipeline>
A toolkit to help adults learn how to reduce the risks that undocumented students face.
- <https://kcts9.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/midlit11.soc.splimmig/american-stories-teens-and-immigration/>
A documentary video about four teens who immigrated to the United States, accompanied by a social studies and literacy lesson.

Student Activism

- <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/when-we-fight-we-win/>
A book containing lessons from the contemporary social movements. Each chapter features a core narrative, interviews, short classroom-friendly readings, photographs, and posters.
- <https://inclusivityzone.wordpress.com/2013/01/16/art-activism-social-justice/>
A blog containing student collages of social change movements and how they have been participating in them.
- <http://www.youthinfront.org/>
Short videos with personal stories and strategies by Youth in Front on specific topics including *Why protest? How do I organize a protest? Will I get in trouble? How does a march become a movement?*