GET ON THE BUS

Introduction to Study, grades 6 – 12

1. Synopsis of the play
2. Introduction to concepts
3. Preshow discussion ideas and activity
4. Online resources for further exploration

Lessons, activities and resources to accompany the Civil Rights Legacy Tour original production, Get on the Bus by Robin Jacobson and Milo Mowery
Getting on the bus. It is both a figurative and literal act for young activists across time and across issues. Historically, busses have transported marchers, protestors, citizen lobbyists and volunteers on a range of topics. But, during the era of segregation to board a bus as Rosa Parks did in 1955 was to emotionally and physically commit to a movement of justice. So it was with the young Freedom Riders in 1961, who used their black and white bodies to challenge segregation norms in interstate transit.

This spirit of youth activism is what fuels the play, *Get on the Bus*, as it links two different generations of young people who are intent to create social change. The materials can be used before and after viewing the play or as stand-alone civics education resources.

**Play 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.

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.

Immigration has become one of the most contentious topics of our day: there are wide differences on how Americans perceive immigrants and their contributions and impact on society. Recent policies are aimed at cutting back not only unauthorized immigration (such as illegal crossings), but have also focused on limiting various forms of legal immigration as well. Some examples include reducing refugee admissions, cutting Temporary Protected Status for victims of violence and natural disasters, imposing new restrictions on asylum petitions, attempting to end DACA, and amplifying existing “public charge” criteria to effectively limit middle to lower income immigrants. But, probably the most controversial step has been the family separation policy which resulted in 5,400 children being separated from their families, as well as the documented overcrowding of adults and children in concentrated facilities such as tent camps and holding centers.

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.
Intermediate & Secondary Learners, grades 6-12
The play is leveled to speak to different audiences in different ways. While younger students may hone in on the emotional journey of Thalia and James as they meet the matronly Freedom Rider, Ms. Vivian, older students will also explore the nuances of the Civil Rights Era and the immigration debates of today. Similarly, activities in the 6-12 Study Guide reflect age appropriate activities, providing opportunities to engage in historical inquiry around the Freedom Rides and analyze contemporary data sets on immigration. Most importantly, they will examine both as expressions of youth activism and contemplate where and how activism and civic engagement figure into their own priorities and actions.

About the Civil Rights Legacy Tour
The Civil Rights Legacy Tour offers original productions to schools and community organizations each winter, with titles including 11 Days in the Life of Dr. King, Ruby Bridges, Nihonjin Face and Get on the Bus.

Our approach to civics education focuses on three major goals. We use the vibrancy of the arts to:
1.) Introduce students to crucial characters, events and places, which have shaped the story of American civil life and whose impact continues to shape our experiences today.
2.) Weave civics education with social emotional learning, by inviting students into story-driven explorations of civics with relatable characters, whose stories advance emerging notions of justice, fairness, opportunity, equality and equity.
3.) Challenge students to see themselves as activist-participants in on-going issues, not passive spectators of history, as they draw connections between the past and present.

We work toward these goals by incorporating both a conventional history-based approach as well as building on social emotional learning strategies and calls to action. Drawing on social emotional learning is essential to a personalized experience of civics. Rather than taking a “heroes and holidays” approach, these resources seek to tap into students’ emerging sense of fairness, self and other.

Civil rights are never static.

We hope that these learning resources will spark lively discussion and reflection at all levels. Civil rights are never static. They expand and contract with the decisions of every generation. Our actions and inactions in the public arena shape the rights and responsibilities as residents of this nation. Students are the emerging characters in this story, and we can’t wait to see how they will shape it! For questions or requests for learning resources, please visit tacomaartslive.org or contact Katie Lappier (253.573.2518 or klapnier@tacomaartslive.org) or Antonio Gómez (253.573.2301 or tonyg@tacomaartslive.org).
Pre-Show Discussion and Activity
Grades 6 – 12

The live performance of Get on the Bus addresses three major topics, one historical, one contemporary and one centered on civic engagement:

1.) The Freedom Rides of 1961 to desegregate interstate bussing
2.) The current immigration debate
3.) Student activism

Any of these can be used as points of entry to prepare students for the performance. These activities can be adapted as stand-alone lessons.

Activity 1: Flagging Relevant Topics

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.) Is there an issue you feel so strongly about that you have taken action?
2.) What are those issues?
3.) What types of actions have you taken? (social media posting, joining a group, sharing resources, organizing events or fundraisers, taking part in a protest or rally, writing to a legislator, etc.)
4.) How would you define activism?
5.) Do you see yourself as an activist on issues important to you? Why or why not?

Next, tell students that Get on the Bus deals addresses two social movements, one historical and one contemporary. One involves young people of the early 1960s, who challenged the segregation of black and white passengers on interstate busses. The other follows protestors against the separation of immigrant children and adults on the U.S.-Mexico border in 2018.

- Ask students what they know and what they would like to learn about the youth-led Freedom Rides of 1961?
- Ask students what they know and what they would like to learn about the immigration reform debates of the past several years.
- Have each student identify at least one thing they will be looking out for during the performance, which relates to one of these two social movements, or to youth activism in general.
**Activity 2: Contrasting Two Movements**

In this approach, students will view short clips of the Freedom Rides and the 2018 protests against family separations on the border. Next, they will compare and contrast these two examples of activism for social change.

**Step 1:**
Brainstorm with students about *movements* to create social and political change. What are some of the causes that led people to act? What are some of the actions they took to create change? Define the practice of working for change as *activism* and those who engage in it as *activists*.

Let students know that they will be analyzing clips from two social movements. One involves young people of the early 1960s, who challenged the segregation of black and white passengers on interstate busses. The other follows protestors against the separation of immigrant children and adults on the U.S.-Mexico border in 2018.

**Step 2:**
Tell students that they will comparing and contrasting the two examples of social movements. Discuss the types of information to consider in each clip. Students will want to have paper and pencil during viewing.

- What is the issue leading people to activism?
- What is the change activists are seeking?
- Who are the activists? (Age, ethnicity, etc.)
- What are the tactics and strategies the activists are using to bring about change?

Take time to discuss these factors after viewing each individual video.

**Video 1:** “Freedom Riders create change”

**Video 2:** “Thousands across U.S. join ‘Keep Families Together’ march to protest family separation”

**Alternate Video 2:** John Lewis at Keep Families Together Rally in Atlanta

**Step 3:**
After viewing both videos, ask students to compare and contrast what they observed by completing a Venn diagram. Create a Venn diagram on the board/projector or distribute the individual student Venn diagrams on the last page of this packet.

Considering factors such as historical period, location, issue, participants, goals, tactics:
- How do the two movements differ?
- How are they similar?

Have students frame goals for viewing the show based on this work.
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

  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-schooltodeportation-pipeline
  A toolkit to help adults learn how to reduce the risks that undocumented students face.

  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/

- 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?
GET ON THE BUS
Contrasting Movements

- Freedom Rides
- Immigration Activism

Learning Resources for the play, *Get on the Bus* © 2018 Tacoma Arts Live | tacomaartslive.org