GET ON THE BUS

Introduction to Study, grades K – 6

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

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

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 klappier@tacomaartslive.org) or Antonio Gómez (253.573.2301 or tonyg@tacomaartslive.org).
Pre-Show Activities
Grades K – 6

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.

Discussion: 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.) What does it mean to treat people fairly?
2.) Can you think of a situation when you saw someone being treated unfairly?
3.) When you see something like this happen, have you ever felt like you need 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.

Ask students if they or anyone they know might be considered an activist? What was the issue that concerned them and what was the action they took?

Introduce the attached images to students (found on the last page of this packet). Then look at each picture in isolation.

❖ 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.

❖ 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.

Extension
Review key vocabulary for the play, including terms such as:

**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
  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.

  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?
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Contrasting Movements

Bettmann/Corbis; Accessed from pbslearningmedia.org

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Contrasting Movements

Darren Hauck / Getty Images; Accessed from nbcnews.com