

# 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

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.

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.

## **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.

### **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* 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 of the 2018 protests against family separations on the border. Next, they will compare and contrast these two examples of activism for social change.

### **1.) Discuss**

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.

### **2.) View Film Clips**

Use the film clips to compare and contrast the two examples of social movements. Students will want to have paper and pencil during viewing as they note responses to the following questions:

- *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”

<https://kcts9.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/fr11.soc.civil.tactics.frchange/freedom-riders-freedom-riders-create-change/>

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

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/thousands-across-u-s-join-keep-families-together-march-protest-n888006>

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

<https://www.nbcnews.com/video/watch-john-lewis-powerful-speech-at-keep-families-together-1267680835570>

### **3.) Compare and Contrast**

After viewing both videos, ask students to compare and contrast what they observed by completing a Venn diagram. Create your own, or use the one 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?

## **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?*

# GET ON THE BUS

## Contrasting Movements

