

CLASSROOM COMPANION

**Online
Curriculum**

**Fight for
Your Rights**

ATLANTA

HISTORY

CENTER

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ACTIVITY

ONE

The Freedom Rides From Multiple Perspectives (Using Drama Techniques)

Stepping into another person's shoes is one of the best ways to engender empathy for alternate perspectives and promote tolerance. During the Fight for Your Rights program, your students experienced the dramatic bombing of the Freedom Riders' bus in Anniston, Alabama. But what were the experiences of each individual involved in that moment in time? This drama-inspired activity will help your students grasp the idea that history is more complex than identifying "good guys" and "bad guys." Everyone has a story.

Try This!

Use 10 student volunteers to recreate a frozen moment in time: a tableau of the Anniston bombing of the Freedom Riders' bus. Other students in the class will be able to tap them on the shoulder to reveal their thoughts (in character) or ask them a question.

1. Set up 9 chairs in the shape of a bus, in the front of class. One chair in the front will be the bus driver's chair.
2. Cut apart the Freedom Rider role cards and give them to 10 students to read to themselves. You may want to create some sort of pin or wristband for the students to wear that indicates which students are playing African American roles and which are playing white roles.
3. Instruct these 10 students to think intently about what it would feel like to be the person on their card. They must think like that person and be ready to explain that person's thoughts.
4. Situate students who have role cards on the "bus" in an appropriate seat: bus driver in front, black Freedom Riders in front, white freedom riders in back, black journalist in back, black passenger in back, white passenger in front, the Anniston resident outside the bus
5. Read aloud the following scenario:

The date is May 14, 1961... Mother's Day. The last ten days have been exhausting for the Freedom Riders, but they have managed to desegregate the bus and bus stations through 16 southern towns. Meanwhile, a group of white KKK members intends to make Anniston, Alabama the last stop for this group of determined protesters. Fifty men, women, and children are waiting at the bus station with bats, chains, and metal pipes—including this person right here (referring to student playing the Anniston Resident). As the bus pulls up, there is a strange silence. Is the bus station closed? Then, coming out of their hiding places are the 50 angry white residents of Anniston. They beat on the bus, yelling angry remarks. The bus starts rocking. The passengers stay on the bus out of fear. Then all of a sudden, one of the members of the mob throws a gas bomb through the window of the bus. Crash!

6. Instruct students in role to create a frozen snapshot, with their bodies, of that exact moment in time. Emphasize that this is not a joke. They are to depict the real emotions and thoughts of the people on their card.
7. Ask students in the audience to come up to the front of the room and tap one of the characters on the shoulder. When the character is tapped, they must explain what they are thinking in that moment.
8. After a few characters have been tapped, instruct students in the audience that they may now ask questions of the characters in role, again by tapping them on the shoulder. If students are unsure of what to ask, the teacher may start off the questioning with “Why are you on the bus?” or “What will you do next?”
9. After this exercise, lead a discussion with the students as a class about the process of “doing” history and the importance of gathering multiple perspectives.
 - How does this activity add to what they already knew about the Freedom Rides?
 - If you read a diary written by one of the real-life participants in this event, what information would be missing?
 - How did the perspectives of the different Freedom Riders differ?
 - Do you feel that the passengers on the bus (who were not Freedom Riders) were victims? Was it necessary or not necessary to put them in danger?
 - Did the Anniston resident have good reason for his/her anger towards the Freedom Riders? Why or why not?
 - What false ideas do you think some of the characters might have had about each other? (For example Freedom Rider #2 and the Anniston Resident)

Tips for Success

- If you have students of different races in your class, it is a good idea to assign them roles that represent a different race than they are. It is awkward for a white student to be in a position of aggression towards black students, and may create a tense situation.
- During the discussion, point out specific questions and answers given by students to exemplify certain concepts. Tailor the discussion to your class’s experience.
- Preparing students for this activity will increase its success. Make sure students know how to respond in character. You may want ask them questions individually (before-hand) to make sure they really understand their character’s point of view.
- Use this technique for other historical events. Try having your students re-create a scene in a poignant photograph!



The Original 13 Freedom Riders

Front, left to right: Joe Perkins, Charles Person, Frances Bergman, Genevieve Hughes, and Jimmy MacDonald; Back, left to right: John Lewis, Jim Peck, Ed Blankenheim, Hank Thomas, Walter Bergman, James Farmer. Not pictured: Rev. Benjamin Elton Cox, and Albert Bigelow.



The bus ridden by the first Freedom Riders was fire bombed in Anniston, Alabama May 14th, 1961.

Roles

Freedom Rider #1

You are an African American 21 year-old graduate of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee (an all-black college). You applied to CORE to be a Freedom Rider after having participated in many other protests in Nashville. You are experienced in non-violent protest and are fully aware that this ride could be dangerous. You are ready to face the dangers because you are tired of African Americans being treated like second-class citizens. Your mother was recently fired from her job cleaning houses by a white woman who falsely accused her of stealing.

Freedom Rider #2

You are an African American 18 year-old student at Clark College in Atlanta. You joined the Freedom Riders because you think segregation is wrong. And many of your friends have been active in protests, so you want to be involved too. But you have never participated in any kind of non-violent protest. You don't know any of your fellow Freedom Riders very well, and this is the first time you've traveled outside of Georgia. Your mother and father did not want you to become part of the Freedom Riders, but you convinced them it would be safe.

Freedom Rider #3

You are the African American leader of this Freedom Riders group. You are an experienced protester and have studied non-violent methods in India with Gandhi. You are willing to be arrested, to be hurt, or even to die for the cause of equality. You have trained this group of Freedom Riders to remain calm and not to fight back if racist whites start a fight. You hope that the training is enough to keep everyone's temper in control in times of danger. Although you don't want anyone to get hurt, you know that a violent incident will give your cause attention in the press. And if no one fights back, the Freedom Riders will look like victims, showing racist whites to be aggressive bullies.

Freedom Rider #4

You are a white 35 year-old woman who joined the Freedom Riders to support the new Civil Rights Movement. You are traveling with your husband who is also in support of equality for all. The two of you are middle-class and have no children. Your husband is a high school math teacher and you are secretary at the same school (a school with both black and white students in New York). You and your husband believe strongly that segregation in the South is wrong. You're sick of just talking about the injustices at dinner parties. You want to do something about it. But you have never experienced racism yourselves.

Freedom Rider #5

You are a white 36 year-old man who joined the Freedom Riders to support the new Civil Rights Movement. You are traveling with your wife who is also in support of equality for all. The two of you are middle-class and have no children. You are a high school math teacher and your wife is a secretary at the same school (a school with both black and white students in New York). You and your wife believe strongly that segregation in the South is wrong. You're sick of just talking about the injustices at dinner parties. You want to do something about it. But you have never experienced racism yourselves.

Bus Passenger #1

You are not a Freedom Rider. You are an African American journalist who has joined the Freedom Riders to report on the experience for Ebony Magazine. As a journalist you don't want to become part of the protest because you want to be able to objectively write about what you see as a witness. You sit at the back of the bus so that you don't attract too much attention from white passengers.

Bus Passenger #2

You are not a Freedom Rider. You are an African American woman who is traveling by bus to see family in Alabama. It is your great aunt's 90th birthday and it's important to you to be there. You've read about the Freedom Riders, but you don't want to get involved in protests. You agree that African Americans are not treated fairly, especially in the South, but things will probably never change. You think that protesting just makes things worse for African Americans in the South who are just trying to earn a living and raise their children the best they can.

Bus Passenger #3

You are not a Freedom Rider. You are a white adult passenger who is traveling by bus to interview for a job. You've been out of work for about six months and your family is counting on you to land this job. You are nervous. You don't have anything against African Americans as long as they don't make trouble for you.

Bus Driver

As the driver of the bus, you've been warned about the Freedom Riders. Your boss has instructed you to let the Freedom Riders sit where they want as long as a white passenger does not complain. You want a nice quiet ride that doesn't attract the attention of the press. If there is an incident, the Freedom Riders become famous. If there is no incident, probably no one will ever remember this event. On the other hand, you are a white man who has grown up around racism your whole life. You believe white people are superior, although you don't go around saying it. And if blacks are allowed equal rights, you'll have more competition for your job.

Anniston Resident

You're a white man who has lived in the small town of Anniston your whole life. You love your town. The bus station here has always been segregated. Black and whites have always been separate. That's just the way things are. The black people you know are the people that shine your shoes, clean your house, and bag your groceries. They do not seem equal to you. Things in Anniston are peaceful. It's a nice place to raise a family, and you want it to stay that way. You've seen awful things on the news about protests and riots between blacks and whites. What is happening to America? Most white men in town belong to the KKK and so do you. Anniston has heard that a bus full of outsiders, called "Freedom Riders," is coming to town to start trouble. You and your KKKs friend have decided to teach them a lesson when they get here. You must protect your beloved town.

ACTIVITY

TWO

Fight for Your Rights: The History of African American Progress

Directions: After listening to John Wesley Dobb's performance, make a poem of how you can inspire change.

I Am John Wesley Dobbs

A poetic masterpiece by _____

Line 1 I am John Wesley Dobbs

Line 2 I am _____

and _____

(2 adjectives that describe Dobbs best)

Line 3 I wonder _____

Line 4 I hear _____

Line 5 I see _____

Line 6 I want _____

Line 7 I pretend _____

Line 8 But I understand that _____

Line 9 I feel _____

Line 10 I need _____

Line 11 I say _____

Line 12 I am _____

and _____

(Repeat line 2)

Line 13 I am John Wesley Dobbs

ACTIVITY

THREE

You're a Supreme Court Justice!

Decide Real Cases About the 14th Amendment's "Equal Protection Clause"

Ever wonder what it would be like to be one of only 9 people in the whole USA who has the power to make final decisions about what the Constitution really means? Here's your chance! Since you probably don't have a law degree, let's take baby steps. For this activity, you will only decide cases that focus on one part of one amendment: the 14th. Let's get to know the amendment first.

The 14th Amendment was added to the Constitution in 1868 to guarantee citizenship and equality to the newly freed slaves after the Civil War. Since that time, it has become one of the most important and most debated amendments in the Constitution.

There are 3 important "clauses," or phrases, in the amendment:

- 1. Citizenship Clause** If a person is born in the United States, he or she is automatically a citizen of the United States. A state is not allowed to make a law that takes away your rights as a citizen, as long as you were born here.
- 2. Due Process Clause** A state cannot make a law that takes away a person's "life, liberty, or property without due process." Due process means having a trial. For example, the government of Georgia could not take your house (your property) from you without having a good reason and taking you to court. But what exactly is liberty? What counts as property? Sometimes it's hard to tell. People argue. That's why we need a Supreme Court to make the final decision.
- 3. Equal Protection Clause** A state cannot make a law that allows people to be treated unequally. The definition of "equal" is something the Supreme Court has debated for 150 years. The Court's opinion has changed with the times. Back in 1896, the Court said that if there are separate facilities for black and whites (like schools or train cars), then that is equal. Separate did not necessarily mean unequal. But in 1954, this definition changed. A different Supreme Court said that if facilities are separate, then blacks feel unequal. And often times, the facilities for blacks were not good quality, so they were unequal in this way too.

Today, there are still debates about what "equal" means. Could there be things like safety or other people's rights that outweigh equality? Try your hand at being a Supreme Court justice. You decide what is equal and what is not by taking on these real Supreme Court cases.

Remember, whatever you decide has the force of law, so think carefully about the consequences of your decisions.

Directions: The real Supreme Court is made up of 9 justices. But you will be in groups of 3. You will vote to determine the verdict of each case— majority rules. Circle your group’s majority opinion and give a reason for the opinion. If you are the only one to disagree with your group, you may state your reason for disagreeing. These are all real Supreme Court cases.

Case #1

The Facts Dianne Rawlinson applied to be a correctional counselor with the Alabama prison system. Her qualifications are impressive, but she does not meet the minimum requirement for weight and height (5’2” and 120 pounds). Since Alabama’s physical requirement bars 33% of women from employment, she claims gender discrimination. On the other hand, could the physical qualifications be there for a reason? Rawson says this is not the case.

Majority Opinion (Circle One)

A. Yes, women are being treated unequally in this case. This is a violation of the 14th Amendment.	B. No, women are NOT being treated unequally in this case. This is NOT a violation of the 14th Amendment.
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Your Opinion:

Case #2

The Facts James Dale was Assistant Scoutmaster of a troop of New Jersey Boy Scouts He was fired from his post for being gay. He believes his 14th Amendment right to be treated equally are being violated. The Boy Scouts of American organization said they were justified in firing Dale because they are a private organization and are allowed to have their own beliefs and opinions under the 1st Amendment. (The 1st amendment gives us the right to freedom of expression)

Majority Opinion (Circle One)

A. Yes, James Dale is being discriminated against. His 14th Amendment rights are being violated.	B. No, James Dale’s 14th amendment rights do not override the Boy Scouts 1st Amendment rights to express an opinion.
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Your Opinion:
