



Civil Rights: Freedom Riders

Characters

Charlotte Devree

John Lewis

James Farmer

Governor Patterson

Genevieve Hughes

Robert Kennedy

Setting

This reader’s theater begins at a college campus in January 1961. John and Genevieve chat in overstuffed chairs in the common area around a small table. The story then moves to the headquarters for the Congress of Racial Equity, where desks, papers, and volunteers fill the small but organized space. The reader’s theater ends at Governor Patterson’s mansion in Alabama. It is spacious and easily demonstrates the governor’s wealth and position.



Prologue

Charlotte:

The African Americans in the South have been treated unfairly for a long time. African American children can’t go to “white” schools. They can’t eat in “white” restaurants or use “white” restrooms. White people sometimes ignore laws that protect the civil rights of African Americans. My name is Charlotte Devree, and I’m a reporter. I’ve been asked to do something dangerous.

James:

I’m James Farmer, the leader of the Congress of Racial Equality, or CORE. The time has come to take a stand and protect the African Americans in the South. I have asked brave men and women all over America to join our cause. This may be very dangerous for them. I have also asked Charlotte to join us. I need her to see what happens and to report the truth.

Charlotte:

We should start at the beginning. In January 1961, something happened to a young African American man named John Lewis. He is a student at Fisk University in Nashville, and what happened during his vacation was not fair. It was not legal. Let’s listen as John tells his friend what happened.



Act I

Genevieve: Hi, John. I haven't seen you since before the winter vacation from school. You said you were going to visit your grandmother in Alabama. How is she doing?

John: It was a horrifying trip, Genevieve. I'm really shaken. I haven't been able to study since I got back. I can't eat, and I can't concentrate.

Genevieve: Why, what happened?

John: I can barely talk about it.

Genevieve: Is your grandmother sick?

John: No, she's okay. That's not it.

Genevieve: You look awful. It might help to talk.

John: Maybe you're right. It was the trip itself. I can't believe how I was treated.

Genevieve: What do you mean?



John: I decided to take a bus from Fisk to Alabama. It's quite a long trip to where my grandma lives, and I was really tired and thought I would get some sleep on the bus. I certainly wasn't prepared for what happened next.

Genevieve: Why? What happened to you?

John: Well, here at Fisk, we are always treated with respect. That was certainly not the case on this bus ride! It was horrible.

Genevieve: Please, go on!

John: I was eager to get on the bus because I haven't seen my family since school started. I assumed that I could sit where I wanted, and I thought I would use the bathroom when the bus stopped. I was hungry, too, and figured I would eat at the lunch counter when we stopped. I was wrong about everything.

Genevieve: I don't understand.

John: I was forced to sit in the back of the bus. Then more people got on the bus, and I had to stand for hours because a white man wanted my seat.