

Building Fluency through **Reader's Theater**

Lessons and Activities

The 20th Century

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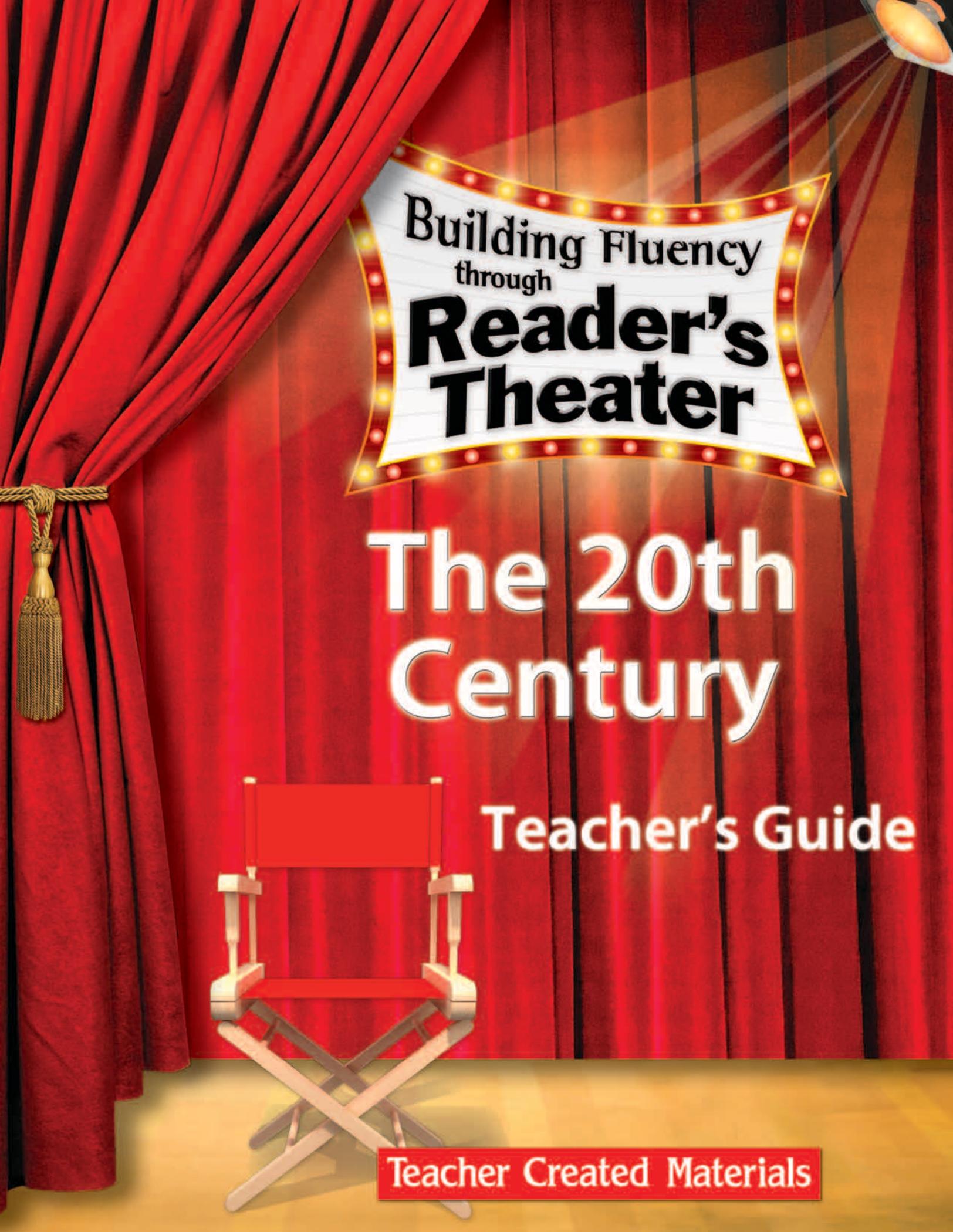
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Building Fluency
through

**Reader's
Theater**

**The 20th
Century**

Teacher's Guide



Teacher Created Materials

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What's Included in Each Lesson

Objectives

The objectives state the purpose of each lesson and communicate the desired outcome of the lesson related to fluency and the content area. The objectives are taken from the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) compilation of content standards for K–12 curriculum. As stated on the McREL website (<http://www.mcrel.org>), the purpose of the standards compilation is “to address the major issues surrounding content standards, provide a model for their identification, and apply this model in order to identify standards and benchmarks in the subject areas.”

Summary

Within each lesson there is a summary section that describes the script and provides information to share with students to prepare them for the reader's theater performance. To decide which scripts to complete with students, read the summaries to determine how each fits in with your teaching plans. As a convenience, the summaries for the scripts are also provided below.

In *Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution*, two sisters work in a linen mill under horrible conditions. Their boss is cruel, they can't speak during their long workdays, and the mill is unsafe. Their father reluctantly agrees to let them be interviewed by people from the National Child Labor Committee. Years later, the girls, now women, are about to receive an honor for this interview.

Immigration: For a Better Life follows the lives of two immigrant families—an Italian Catholic family and a Russian Jewish family. It follows them from the time they arrive at Ellis Island in 1914 until they become United States citizens five years later. The lives of these two families intertwine as they help each other work through hazardous living conditions, personal hardships, and family tragedies.

In *Women's Suffrage*, three women's rights activists disagree on the steps necessary to change the law in America so that women can vote, but all three show that they are willing to make great sacrifices to fight for this important right. President Woodrow Wilson is confronted, and he promises to help. Things become difficult when promises are not kept.

In *World War I: In Flanders Fields*, Lieutenant Colonel Dr. John McCrae is assigned to help the wounded soldiers in a field hospital during the second major battle at Ypres, Belgium. Friendships grow as the medical personnel and wounded soldiers share stories about their personal lives and their war experiences. When a young soldier, who is close to Dr. McCrae, dies, the doctor is forced to think about his understanding of war itself.

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Summary *(cont.)*

In *The Great Depression: A Migrant Mother's Story*, Florence's grandson, Joshua, finds the famous photograph of his grandma taken when she was a migrant worker during the Great Depression. Joshua and his father coax Florence to tell her story, to confront the photographer and another government official about what happened, and to give her side of the story to Bill Ganzel who is writing a book about the lives of people during the Depression.

In *World War II: Battle of Normandy*, two American World War II veterans, who served together as officers in a prisoner of war camp, talk with their granddaughters about their experiences in the Battle of Normandy. The script takes the reader back in time to the battle where two German soldiers are captured. The American officers and the German soldiers form a surprising bond as they learn about each other.

In *Civil Rights: Freedom Riders*, two African American students decide to join the Freedom Riders organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). African American and Caucasian CORE volunteers sit together as they ride on buses in the South to protest the Jim Crow laws that deny African Americans the same rights as white people. When the Freedom Riders are beaten by angry mobs in the streets, the governor and the attorney general are forced to get involved.

In *Cold War: Communism on Trial*, Jude Hill is called before the House Un-American Activities Committee to prove he is not an enemy of his country. He is willing to testify about his patriotic background as well as his membership in the Communist Party, but adamantly refuses to implicate anyone else in his testimony. When the hearing concludes, there is a worldwide protest against its results.

Materials

The materials needed to complete a lesson are listed in this section to assist you in preparing for each lesson. In addition to these materials, each lesson has the following components:

- PowerPoint® slide show (Teacher Resource CD)
- overhead transparencies of the poem and song (Teacher Resource CD)
- Practice and Performance Tips (Performance CD [audio] and Teacher Resource CD [text])

Introduce the Literature

Each script in this kit is based on real events. Some of the characters are real people and others are based on individuals who could have lived at that time in history. In addition, there are six pages of primary source material in each lesson that can be used to enrich students' understanding of the time period.

What's Included in Each Lesson (cont.)

Differentiation Support

Reader's theater can be used effectively in classrooms with all students, regardless of ability levels, to enhance proficiency in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The program can also be adapted to scaffold and model language usage to meet students' needs at multiple levels. Through this program's support activities and other various components of the lesson plans, students will become actively engaged in authentic language development activities. As a result, students' motivation to utilize the English language will increase.

The drama component of reader's theater helps students feel less inhibited in both speaking and reading the English language, and thus fluency in both areas will increase. In *Stage by Stage: A Handbook for Using Drama in the Second Language Classroom* by Ann F. Burke and Julie C. O'Sullivan, the authors state that "Drama is simply a good way to get students' whole selves involved with language and it is fun" (p. xiii). The authors also emphasize that once students feel less inhibited, their fluency will increase, because within the context of reader's theater there is an inherent opportunity to do repeated readings and practice skills, such as pronunciation, in an authentic context.

Jennifer Catney McMaster (1998), in her review of research studies involving literacy and drama in the classroom, states the benefits of drama for emergent readers. Drama provides prior knowledge and rich literary experiences needed for future readers as well as a scaffold for literacy instruction. It helps students develop symbolic representation, new vocabulary, knowledge of word order, phrasing, and metacognition, and introduces them to various forms of discourse, all of which contribute to the construction of meaning from text.

Each script in this kit is accompanied by a musical piece as well as a corresponding poem. Both of these components have also been shown to facilitate students' language acquisition. Educator Tim Murphey (1992) analyzed the lyrics of pop songs and found several common language characteristics that would benefit language learners: the language is conversational; the lyrics are often sung at a slower rate than dialogue; and there is a repetition of vocabulary and structures. Moriya (1988) found that music provided Asian learners a forum to practice pronunciation and learn the phonemic differences between Asian languages and English. Speakers of various languages can benefit from the language experience that the music selections will provide.

The poetry component to the program can be used in many creative ways to enhance students' language acquisition in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Gasparro and Falletta (1994) assert that using poetry in a classroom of English language learners provides the opportunity to explore both the linguistic and conceptual facets of text without focusing on the mechanics of language. Choral reading of the poem builds fluency for below-grade-level readers and provides practice in pronunciation. Some of the vocabulary words used in the script are reinforced through the poem, providing the opportunity to see the words used in multiple contexts.

What's Included in Each Lesson (cont.)

Differentiation Support (cont.)

The accompanying poems can also serve as a model for students to write their own poems. Depending on the level of the English language learner, a framework or template can be developed for each poem to structure the writing process and provide students another opportunity to use the vocabulary and word order they have learned from the script and the poem. Additionally, the poem can also serve as a medium for discussion of the themes and concepts presented in each script. Moreover, students and teachers can create action sequences to facilitate visualization and comprehension of the text. Gasparro and Falletta (1994) emphasize that dramatizing poetry enables the learner to become intellectually, emotionally, and physically engaged in the target language; therefore, language is internalized and remembered.

Students' listening comprehension will also develop as a result of using reader's theater. According to Brown (2001), some characteristics of speech make listening difficult, such as clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm, intonation, and interaction. Brown proposes methods for helping second-language learners overcome these challenges. Reader's theater utilizes authentic language and contexts, is intrinsically motivating, and supports both bottom-up and top-down listening techniques. Illustrations in the scripts, along with the possible inclusion of realia and gestures, will assist students in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary and idiomatic phrases.

In addition, the professional recording of the scripts on the Performance CD will provide another opportunity for students to enhance listening comprehension and reading ability. The voices on the CD are articulate and expressive, and they serve as models for accurate pronunciation and fluent reading. By listening to the CD, students will be able to practice visualizing text and speech. One *Best Practice* suggested by second-language teacher-training programs is for the students to hear an oral reading of the piece of literature prior to reading it aloud themselves. The CD can be used for this practice, as well.

Reader's theater provides a medium for below-grade-level students and English language learners to interact with other students in the classroom and will facilitate the development of a strong community of language learners. The experience will increase students' motivation and diminish their inhibitions to learn the new language. The components of the program will provide the necessary support and scaffolding that teachers need to provide effective instruction to English language learners, below-grade-level students, on-grade-level students, and above-grade-level students in the areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The program will engage students and serve as a model for fluency, pronunciation, and overall language usage.

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Involving All Students

Even though each script has only six roles, all students can be involved in each reader's theater performance. Students can be involved in a variety of ways. This section of each lesson suggests ways to include all students.

Reading the Script

This section of each lesson explains how to introduce the reader's theater script to your students and offers suggestions for introducing unfamiliar vocabulary and understanding the characters. As you read each script with the students, you may try to use the following performance tips.

Performance Tips

Reader's theater performance can be a frightening experience for some students. Assist them by reviewing the following suggestions.

- Relax! Breathe deeply and speak slowly to avoid a quivering or breathless voice.
- Stand with one foot in front of the other and with your weight balanced to avoid that feeling of shaking and trembling.
- Do not rush through your lines or speak too rapidly. Take your time and say each word distinctly.
- Movement is good for emphasis or to help you look relaxed, but do not move back and forth or develop nervous mannerisms. Avoid wringing hands, tugging at clothing, or twisting hair.
- Mistakes are a normal part of any learning experience. If you make one, correct it and go on.

Getting to know your character will make your performance more believable. Use these questions to get in character as you rehearse.

- How old do you think the character is?
- What kind of voice do you think the character should have? Is the voice soft, loud, high-pitched, or low-pitched?
- How does the character stand or use his or her hands when speaking?
- Does the character seem happy, proud, or excitable?
- Do you think this character is serious or silly?
- Is the character kind?
- Do you think people would like this character?
- What can you do to communicate this character's personality to others?

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Assigning Roles

Each script contains six character roles. Each of the roles is written for a different reading level. The chart below lists the reading levels for all the characters in the eight scripts.

Script Title	High 3rd Grade 3.5 – 3.9	Low 4th Grade 4.0 – 4.4	High 4th Grade 4.5 – 4.9
<i>Child Labor and the Industrial Revolution</i>	Mr. Newman Roberta	Pauline Daniel Tompkins	Leonora Barry Lewis Hine
<i>Immigration: For a Better Life</i>	Joshua Angela	Mario Sarah	Aaron Carmella
<i>Women's Suffrage</i>	Woodrow Wilson Heckler/Guard	Judge Smith Alice Paul	Lucy Burns Carrie Catt
<i>World War I: In Flanders Fields</i>	Robert Smith Nurse Jillian	Nurse Hathaway Alexis Helmer	Dr. John McCrae Cyril Allinson
<i>The Great Depression: A Migrant Mother's Story</i>	Dorothea Lange Florence Owens	Leroy Owens Bill Ganzel	Isaac Wilkes Joshua Owens
<i>World War II: Battle of Normandy</i>	Emma Hans	Hannah Kirk	Richard Howard
<i>Civil Rights: Freedom Riders</i>	Charlotte Devree John Lewis	Governor Patterson Genevieve Hughes	Robert Kennedy James Farmer
<i>Cold War: Communism on Trial</i>	Karl Mundt Ruth Schultz	J. Edgar Hoover Jude Hill	Dona Hill Chairman Walter

What's Included in Each Lesson *(cont.)*

Assigning Roles *(cont.)*

Reading Levels Correlation Chart

Grade Level Range	Guided Reading	Early Intervention	DRA
3.5–4.0	O–Q	22–24	34–40
4.0–4.5	Q–R	24–25	40
4.5–5.0	R–T	25–27	40–44

Meeting the Fluency Objective

Each lesson focuses on a specific fluency objective, such as reading with accuracy or reading with expression. This section provides procedures for teaching the fluency objective related to the featured script.

Content-Area Connection

Each reader's theater script focuses on the social studies content area. This section of each lesson explains the content and provides suggestions for introducing this content to your students. The content in the scripts can be quite sophisticated and warrants specific instruction to help your students understand it.

Fine Arts Connection

Each script has a song and a poem to accompany it. Your students will perform these songs and poems at designated places within the reader's theater performances. Your kit includes a Performance CD containing all of the songs and poems related to the eight scripts. This section of each lesson offers suggestions for using this CD to learn the songs and poems.

Civil Rights: Freedom Riders

Civil Rights Movement Lesson Plan

Objectives

- **Fluency:** Students will determine the meaning of text through text analysis and repeated readings.
- **Content Area:** Students will learn about the Civil Rights Movement in the South.

Summary

In *Civil Rights: Freedom Riders*, two African American students decide to join the Freedom Riders organized by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). African American and Caucasian CORE volunteers sit together as they ride on buses in the South to protest the Jim Crow laws that deny African Americans the same rights as white people. When the Freedom Riders are beaten by angry mobs in the streets, the governor and the attorney general are forced to get



Materials

- *Civil Rights: Freedom Riders* script booklets
- Civil Rights Primary Sources (pages 98–103 or Teacher Resource CD)
- copies of Take-Home Script (Teacher Resource CD)
- Performance CD and CD player or computer with a CD drive and speakers

Introduce the Literature

Explain to students that the word *civil* comes from the Latin word *civis*, which means relating to citizens, and that rights are the legal and moral things that people are allowed to do. Ask students to name groups of people who had to fight for their civil rights in America: women, African Americans, etc. Tell students that they will be studying the Civil Rights Movement that came about because of discrimination against African Americans.

Explain to students that the Civil Rights Movement had many heroes and heroines, who were willing to make great personal sacrifices to stand up for what they believed. As a class, develop a list of the personality characteristics of a hero or heroine. Tell students that as they read the script, they should think about which characters display these characteristics.



Differentiation Support

Show **English language learners** and **below-grade-level students** photographs and illustrations from the Civil Rights Movement (e.g., protests, marches, sit-ins, Freedom Riders, school integration) and have them write fact cards about the pictures. They will add these cards to a class timeline. Have **on-grade-level** and **above-grade-level students** research the major events from the Civil Rights Movement and make a class timeline of the events.

Involving All Students

While this script has only six roles, there are ways to involve all students. For this script, have some students create posters promoting civil rights for all and have other students create backdrop scenes for the script. The backdrops may include buses, restrooms, drinking fountains, and signs.

Reading the Script



1. Tell students to close their eyes as you read the following: “*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. [...] I wasn’t allowed to use the ‘white’ bathroom when the bus stopped, and the ‘colored’ bathroom was filthy. It had no paper or soap, and the toilet was broken. It smelled awful. [...] I was starving, too, but they wouldn’t let me buy any food. I felt dizzy and sick and began to argue, but they refused to serve me.*” Ask students to describe what they visualized as you read the sentences to them. Ask them what they think is happening to this person. Tell students that they will be reading a script that deals with discrimination against African Americans and the people who protested against it during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. As a class, develop a list of the rights that U. S. citizens have.
2. Provide each student with a copy of the script. Small groups may use the script booklets, or you can print copies of the Take-Home Script. Play the professional recording as students follow along. As you play the recording, ask students to pay attention to how the readers convey the thoughts and feelings of the characters through their tones and expressions. Discuss what the students noticed.
3. Have students read the script with partners. Have them write a fact sheet of information about the Civil Rights Movement. Discuss this as a whole class and develop a class list.
4. Discuss the emotions of the different characters and ask students why they think that the characters felt the way they did. Then, use the *PowerPoint*® edition of the script to conduct a whole class reading. Model the most dramatic way to read some of the parts and call on different students to read other parts with the appropriate tone, phrasing, and expression.
5. After reading the script as a class, have students look at the glossary in the back. Review the words. Have students work in pairs to do one of the following two tasks with the glossary.
 - Create a crossword puzzle using the glossary words. Tell students that under the *Down* and *Across* columns, they are to write the definitions in their own words. Have pairs exchange papers with other pairs to complete the puzzles.
 - Create a word find with the words from the glossary. Have the pairs exchange papers with other pairs to complete word finds.

Differentiation Support



Review all of the vocabulary with **English language learners** and **below-grade-level students** to

make sure they understand what the words mean and what they are supposed to do. Provide them with a word bank and some illustrations, if necessary. Differentiate the crossword puzzle by providing some of the answers on the crossword. In addition, use icons or small pictures to help with the vocabulary on this activity.

As your **on-grade-level students** and **above-grade-level students** practice, have them focus on using more voice inflection and emotion as they speak the parts. It is helpful if they use an audio recording to listen to how they speak so they can work on improving their speaking abilities. Let these students create podcasts with their recordings that can be enjoyed by your school.

Civil Rights: Freedom Riders

Civil Rights Lesson Plan



Assigning Roles

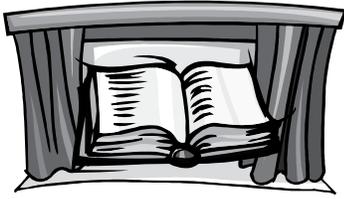
The roles of the characters are written on three different proficiency levels. Assign roles to students based on their reading proficiency. Remember that when students practice fluency, they should read materials at or below their reading levels. This helps them to focus on their prosody (accuracy, expression, and reading rate). If a student is reading text that is too difficult, his or her attention will be focused on decoding words rather than reading with fluency.

These are approximate reading levels for the roles in this script:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ❖ Charlotte Devree:
high 3 rd grade | ❖ Governor Patterson:
low 4 th grade | ❖ Robert Kennedy:
high 4 th grade |
| ❖ John Lewis:
high 3 rd grade | ❖ Genevieve Hughes:
low 4 th grade | ❖ James Farmer:
high 4 th grade |

Meeting the Fluency Objective

1. The fluency objective for this script focuses on repeated readings and text analysis to increase understanding. The objective also concentrates on understanding how punctuation can indicate correct expression during oral reading.
2. Write the following lines from the script on the board without punctuation marks: *This is outrageous! How long should people wait before they are treated fairly? Don't you think everyone has been patient long enough?*
3. Ask volunteers to read the lines on the board. Ask students why it is difficult to do so, and what the purpose of punctuation is.
4. Explain to students that when they read scripts aloud, it is through their vocal expression that the audience knows what they are feeling. Tell them to pay special attention to punctuation because it gives the reader direction as to when to pause or stop and what to emphasize. As a class, determine where the exclamation marks, question marks, and commas should be placed in the above passage and write them with a different color chalk or circle them in the text. Have students reread the lines using the correct expression.
5. Have students work in one of six groups to examine the lines of one of the characters, paying special attention to the punctuation. Have them each choose one part for that character to read aloud. Tell group members to help one another prepare by reading the text, discussing the meaning of the text, and understanding the punctuation. After everyone is ready, have each student read his or her part to the class.



Social Studies Connection

The focus of this script is on understanding the discrimination African Americans faced in the United States, the events that led

up to the Civil Rights Movement, and the changes that were made in the law.

1. Give each student either a blue or a green card. Give out more blue cards than green cards. Have students with green cards sit in the front of the room and students with blue cards sit in the back of the room. Tell students that from now on, they will act as a class on issues such as when to have tests, quizzes, and class parties. However, only the votes of students with green cards will count. Then, group students by card color and have them write how they feel about the new policies and why. Relate this experience to how African Americans were treated prior to the Civil Rights Movement.
2. Have students work in groups to examine the photograph of the Freedom Riders in the back of the police van (page 98). Have groups write and act out skits showing what happened from the time the Freedom Riders were attacked by the mob to when the police arrested them and brought them to the station.
3. Divide the class into two groups. Each group will create a defense case for Rosa Parks. The groups will need to examine the photographs of three documents pertaining to the arrest of Rosa Parks (pages 99–101). After examining the evidence, have the teams construct arguments to free her. Have each group act out the trial with the teacher serving as the judge. Discuss as a class which group had the better defense.
4. Divide the class into teams to examine the August 28, 1963, March on Washington program (page 102). Have each team complete a research report about one of the speakers to find out who the person was, what that person did to help the Civil Rights Movement, and what remarks that person made at the march.
5. Examine the photograph of the protest marchers (page 103). Ask students to make T-charts that include the rights that all people should have and ways people can peacefully protest if these rights are denied.
6. Have students write an essay entitled “Something Worth Fighting For.” Explain that “fighting” means to take a stand for something that is important. They need to explain what is worth fighting for and why, and how they would do it.

Differentiation Support



Create some leveled questions based on the primary sources for your students to answer.

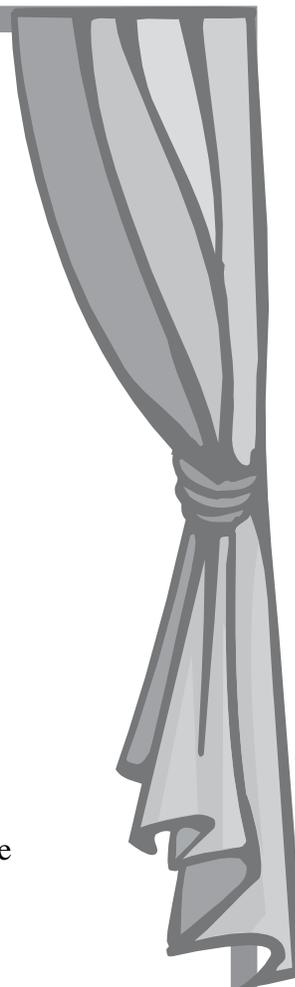
First, think of what your **on-grade-level students** can answer. Then, increase the complexity of the question for your **above-grade-level students**. Rather than asking students to do more work, make their vocabulary words more complex.

Then, provide necessary support so that your **below-grade-level students** can answer the questions. This might be giving them an additional piece of information on the primary source, providing a few sample answers for them, or defining vocabulary words for them.

For your **English language learners**, include images and allow them to tell you their answers instead of writing them. If possible, meet with them in small groups to help guide them through the questions.

Fine Arts Connection

1. Explain to students that the script *Civil Rights: Freedom Riders* contains the poem “Sympathy” and the song “Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around.” The song and poem relate to the reader’s theater, but are not limited to use only with this script.
2. Distribute copies of the poem or show the transparency of the poem on an overhead projector. Read the poem to the class. Ask students to compare the plight of the “caged bird” in the poem to the experience of the African Americans in the script. Ask students to compare the bird’s song to the protests of the Freedom Riders and other civil rights activists and to show this comparison in creative ways, such as making collages, poems, illustrations, drawings, or paintings.
3. Next, have students listen to the professional performance of the poem. Ask the students to analyze the expression of the performers. Have students practice reading it in small groups, and then read it as a class.
4. Play the professional recording of the song “Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” for students and ask students to sing it with the clapping motions. Then, have students meet in groups to add hand and body movements that relate to the verses already written or add additional verses that relate to the Civil Rights Movement.
5. Have students work individually or in groups to create new civil rights posters.



Differentiation Support

Ask **English language learners** to find out about the civil rights in their countries of origin and to talk about it with the class. Have lists of words available for them to use as they write.

Have your **below-grade-level students** act out situations that show civil rights problems from the past or today. Other students can provide oral or written commentary on their actions.

Have **on-grade-level students** and **above-grade-level students** research civil rights problems in the United States and in other countries today and tell the class what they found.

Civil Rights: Freedom Riders

Civil Rights Lesson Plan

Performance CD

Description	Track
Characters, Setting, Script Reading, pages 6–12	Volume III, Track 01
Poem: “Sympathy”	Volume III, Track 02
Script Reading (<i>cont.</i>), pages 13–29	Volume III, Track 03
Song: “Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around”	Volume III, Track 04

Teacher Resource CD—Primary Sources

Page	Description	Filename
98	Freedom Riders in the Back of a Police Van	riders.jpg
99	Bus Diagram	bus.jpg
100	Fingerprints of Rosa Parks	fingerprints.jpg
101	Arrest Record for Rosa Parks	arrest.jpg
102	March on Washington Program	program.jpg
103	March on Washington	march.jpg

Teacher Resource CD—Materials

Description	Filename
Take-Home Script: <i>Civil Rights: Freedom Riders</i>	THS_rights.pdf
PowerPoint: <i>Civil Rights: Freedom Riders</i>	PP_rights.ppt
Song: “Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around”	song_rights.pdf
Poem: “Sympathy”	poem_rights.pdf

Civil Rights

Freedom Riders

Harriet Isecke

Civil Rights

Freedom Riders



Harriet Isecke

Civil Rights: Freedom Riders

Story Summary

John Lewis is an African American college student who is treated poorly while traveling by bus on the interstate. Shocked and upset by the discrimination, he and his friend Genevieve resolve to join the Freedom Riders to help enforce civil rights laws. James Farmer, the leader of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), organizes the Freedom Ride and tries to secure police protection for his riders. Unfortunately, he is refused protection, and the Freedom Riders are attacked in Alabama. After witnessing the racial violence, the federal government steps in at last and promises to support African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement.

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Tips for **Performing** Reader's Theater

Adapted from Aaron Shepard

- Don't let your script hide your face. If you can't see the audience, your script is too high.
- Look up often when you speak. Don't just look at your script.
- Talk slowly so the audience knows what you are saying.
- Talk loudly so everyone can hear you.
- Talk with feelings. If the character is sad, let your voice be sad. If the character is surprised, let your voice be surprised.
- Stand up straight. Keep your hands and feet still.
- Remember that even when you are not talking, you are still your character.

Tips for **Performing** Reader's Theater *(cont.)*

- If the audience laughs, wait for them to stop before you speak again.
- If someone in the audience talks, don't pay attention.
- If someone walks into the room, don't pay attention.
- If you make a mistake, pretend it was right.
- If you drop something, try to leave it where it is until the audience is looking somewhere else.
- If a reader forgets to read his or her part, see if you can read the part instead, make something up, or just skip over it. Don't whisper to the reader!



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 Equality, 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.



Genevieve: What? That doesn't make any sense. It's been six years since Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white rider on a bus in Montgomery. The bus boycott led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. changed things.

John: It hasn't. They pushed me around, called me names, and threatened me. They said they would arrest me if I didn't do what I was told.

Genevieve: I was sure segregation had stopped on buses in the South!

John: The people said they could do what they wanted because it was an interstate bus, and they claimed it was just "too bad" for me because I had no rights.

Genevieve: But, they can't do that. In 1946, the Supreme Court said that segregation was illegal on interstate buses. The case was about a rider named Irene Morgan, and just like Rosa Parks, she would not give up her seat to a white man. She was arrested. Her case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and she won.

John: That's not all.



Genevieve: What else happened?

John: I wasn't allowed to use the "white" bathroom when the bus stopped, and the "colored" bathroom was filthy. It had no paper or soap, and the toilet was broken. It smelled awful.

Genevieve: I can't believe this! It's also illegal to segregate the bathrooms used in interstate travel.

John: I was starving, too, but they wouldn't let me buy any food. I felt dizzy and sick and began to argue, but they refused to serve me.

Genevieve: That's against the law, too! There was a court case about that in 1960. The case was *Boynton v. Virginia*. They can't refuse to sell food to you at the counter when you travel between states.

John: Well, they didn't care about the law, and they certainly didn't care about me. When I tried to stick up for myself, the bus driver yelled at me. He stopped the bus, got out of his seat, and shoved me. He said I would be arrested if I didn't do exactly what I was told. I finally gave up, but I'm just furious now. I want to do something about it, but I'm not sure what.



Genevieve: Have you ever heard of CORE?

John: No, what's that?

Genevieve: It stands for Congress of Racial Equality. They do work in the South to make sure that people are treated fairly. Maybe you should tell them what happened.

John: That's a good idea. I think I will.

Genevieve: John, this infuriates me too, and I will do anything I can to help. We can't sit back and let this happen anymore. Just let me know what you find out and what we can do.

Poem: Sympathy

Act 2

Charlotte: John was quite shaken by what had happened to him, so he called James Farmer at CORE. I was there, and I heard what James said.

James: Thank you for calling, John. I'm really upset about what happened to you on the bus, and believe me, you are not alone.

John: What they did was illegal, right?

James: Yes, but the Southern bus companies often ignore laws they dislike. They think that they can make their own laws.

John: I feel like I need to do something now. I have a friend named Genevieve Hughes who also would like to help. Is there anything we can do to stop this?

James: You've called at the right time. Our new president, John F. Kennedy, cares about civil rights, and we think that this is the time to take a stand. We are planning to do something important this spring, and we are looking for some brave men and women to help us.



John: What are you going to do?

James: We are organizing a Freedom Ride. We will be taking a bus from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans. We plan to leave Washington on May fourth and should get to New Orleans on May seventeenth.

John: What will happen on the Freedom Ride?

James: African American Freedom Riders will sit in the front of the bus and use the “white” bathrooms, and white Freedom Riders will sit in the back and use the “colored” bathrooms.

John: That doesn’t sound too hard. I want to join.

James: You shouldn’t say yes too quickly, John. You need to think about it carefully first. This protest will not be easy. Some people in the South are opposed to any change and will fight against integration. It may be very dangerous. There is a real possibility that you may get hurt.

John: I understand, but if we don’t stand up for ourselves, we will never be treated equally. We shouldn’t continue to live this way.



James: I agree with you completely.

John: How can we respect ourselves if we allow others to treat us like this? Genevieve and I are ready, and we will be there.

James: You may think you are ready, but you will need to be trained first.

John: We cannot wait any longer. Something must be done about this. All people deserve to have civil rights, and we now need to stand up for what is right.

James: As I said, there may be violence, and you must learn how to resist it peacefully. No matter what anybody does to you, you can’t strike back. If you still want to go on the Freedom Ride, you must attend the three-day training session at the end of April.

John: I realize I might get hurt, but I’m not afraid. I don’t think that Genevieve will be afraid either. We will both find the courage to do whatever we need to do. Count us in because we will definitely be there!



James: I appreciate your dedication, John, and I will do what I can to get protection. I will talk to John Patterson, the governor of Alabama, and I will also talk to the U.S. attorney general, Robert Kennedy. I'm not sure that they will help, but I will still try.

John: Thank you, Mr. Farmer. I'll see you soon.

James: Charlotte, I want you to be on that bus, too.

Charlotte: I don't know, James. This is a difficult decision for me.

James: It is necessary for us to have a reporter there. It's the only way we can be certain that the truth will be told.

Charlotte: I'm frightened because I have people who depend on me. What will happen to my family if I get hurt?

James: I can't promise that you won't get hurt, Charlotte. I know I am asking you to do something that is dangerous, but it is also very important.



Charlotte: I know that this is the most important thing anyone has asked me to do, but truthfully, I am afraid. I will have to discuss it with my family. If you can get some protection for the bus, that might help me decide what to do.

James: I promise that we will not break any laws, and I will try to get police protection. I think that we may run into some trouble in Alabama. I'm meeting Governor Patterson and Attorney General Kennedy at the governor's mansion next Monday. They know about our plan, and they asked to speak to me. Would you like to come?

Charlotte: Okay, I can do that.



Act 3

Governor: Welcome to my home, Mr. Farmer and Mr. Kennedy. I hope that the trip was easy for you. We have a lot to discuss. Mr. Farmer, I see you brought a friend.

James: Yes, let me introduce you. This is Charlotte Devree, a reporter.

Governor: A reporter? Oh, I see. I must say I'm a little surprised. I just invited you here to have a conversation.

Charlotte: I didn't mean to surprise you.

Governor: Miss Devree, what we say here is not for publication. We need to be able to talk freely. We need to be able to say what we think.

Kennedy: Some of the things we say may be very sensitive. They may make you uncomfortable. This must be off the record. That is of utmost importance.

Charlotte: That's a strange request. I'm here because I want to understand what is going on.



Governor: We will tell you what we think. But, you must be careful about what you report. You can cause trouble if you are not careful.

Charlotte: Governor, my job is to report the truth, and I take that very seriously. My purpose is not to cause trouble. But first, I need to know the truth to report it. That is why I came here. I am happy to listen to what everyone has to say.

Kennedy: Mr. Farmer, I must be completely honest with you. I think that the Freedom Ride is a terrible idea at this time. In fact, you could not have picked a worse moment.

James: Why is that?

Kennedy: There is a big threat in the world right now. The United States is having problems with other countries, and we are trying to fight communism. There is a cold war going on with Russia, and we are having trouble with Cuba.

Charlotte: What does that have to do with the Freedom Ride?



Kennedy: It has plenty to do with it. This is not the time to do something that may cause problems in the country. You should wait for a better time.

Charlotte: Just a minute. That doesn't seem fair.

James: The African Americans in this country have suffered for too long already. There is a long history of slavery. There is still a lot of discrimination. They have never been treated as equals, and they deal with prejudice every day. This is not right. No one should be asked to wait any longer.

Kennedy: There have been several key laws passed to protect rights. I'm sure you both are aware of that.

Charlotte: Yes, but unfortunately the laws are not enforced.

James: When these laws are broken, there are no consequences for the people who break them. We actually came here to ask for your help. Are you willing to help us?

Governor: What do you want us to do?



James: We want you to send policemen to our Freedom Ride. We promise to follow the law. I will personally train our Freedom Riders not to strike back, even if someone tries to hurt them. But, I am still concerned. Many people won't like what we're doing. I think we'll need police protection.

Kennedy: That is a matter for the local police. It is not the right time for the federal government to get involved. It is up to you, Governor. Maybe you should consider this.

Governor: I don't think it's necessary. In fact, I think that Mr. Farmer should call this off. He is acting like a fool. I don't care what the law says about interstate buses. Bus companies are businesses. They have the right to make money. They have a right to please their white customers. They have the right to tell people where they can sit.

James: I disagree with you, Governor. Bus companies are required to obey the law. They are just like every other company.

Kennedy: I understand what you are saying, Mr. Farmer. But there is a more pressing issue here. I do not want anyone to get hurt. Governor, do you think there will be any violence?



Governor: I really don't think so. But, Mr. Farmer should think long and hard before he goes ahead with this. He shouldn't put his people in danger.

James: We are only asking that the law be followed.

Governor: Not all laws make sense, Mr. Farmer. Don't go looking for trouble, or you just might find it.

Kennedy: I don't want to have to keep repeating this, but there must not be any violence, Governor. I hope that is extremely clear to you. You need to make sure that things will be all right. Do you understand what I am saying?

Governor: I really don't think there will be any serious trouble. If I did, I would send the police.

Kennedy: I am counting on your judgment, Governor. I hope you are certain about this. On the other hand, Mr. Farmer, I agree with the governor that this is a terrible idea. You need to be patient. You need to wait for a better time.

James: This is outrageous! How long should people wait before they are treated fairly? Don't you think everyone has been patient long enough?

Charlotte: When I came here, I was afraid and couldn't decide whether to join the Freedom Riders. I was hoping that you'd help Mr. Farmer so that we would be safe on the bus. But now, I'm fuming! I'll be on that Freedom Bus, and you can be certain that I will report the truth!

James: The Freedom Ride began on the fourth of May, 1961. Everyone on the bus was pretty quiet. I guess we were all thinking about what might happen.

Charlotte: Just as planned, the black Freedom Riders rode in the front, and the white Freedom Riders rode in the back. I rode with the first group.

James: At first there was no trouble, but we didn't expect any until we reached Alabama. There we split into two buses.

Charlotte: But, when we got to Anniston, Alabama, everything changed.



Act 4

Charlotte: My job is to report the complete truth. Before I do, I've called this meeting because I want to hear what each of you has to say. As you know, this is a real crisis for America. The Freedom Riders were met with terrible violence. That is why I have asked all of you to speak with me.

Genevieve: I was on the bus with Charlotte. An angry mob of about 200 met us in Anniston, Alabama.

John: There were men, women, and children. I think they were members of the Ku Klux Klan, but they were not wearing white sheets. They were in their Sunday best.

Genevieve: They threw stones at the bus and slashed the tires, and they didn't seem worried that they might be punished.

John: We wanted to get out of town and away from the mob, but they just followed us. We stopped about six miles away to change the tires, and that's when someone in the crowd threw a firebomb into the bus.



Genevieve: We were afraid that we would be burned, so we broke the doors and windows and got out.

John: Some riders were beaten up and needed to be treated at a hospital. It was difficult to get to a hospital because the mob tried to stop us. But after a great struggle, we finally managed to get the injured riders there.

Charlotte: I saw this with my own eyes. It was awful. There were no policemen there to help us, and none of the people who hurt us were arrested.

James: The second bus did not fare any better. All of the Freedom Riders were beaten. One of them needed 50 stitches. There was blood everywhere. It took a long time before they were all safe.

Kennedy: I can't believe this! Governor, you said there would not be violence.

Governor: Well, I thought that there might be a little trouble. But I never thought that it would be this bad.



Charlotte: That is hard to believe. You know how people feel. You should have sent the police to arrest anyone who was violent.

Kennedy: This is inexcusable, Governor. This is your job, and I was counting on you to do it. Do you understand? You should have stopped this!

Governor: I did warn Mr. Farmer not to go through with this. I told him not to put his people in danger. But I didn't want any trouble, and I was surprised that it got so out of hand.

Kennedy: The governor was wrong not to protect your people, Mr. Farmer. But now, you have another decision to make. You can't continue with the Freedom Ride to New Orleans by bus. It's just too dangerous. The federal government will give you a plane to use instead. Then, the Freedom Riders will get to New Orleans safely.

Governor: Yes, Mr. Farmer. It is definitely too dangerous to continue this ride. And, it is a big problem for us, too. We cannot let you use another bus. The bus company won't risk losing it, and the bus drivers cannot be asked to risk their lives.



Genevieve: No! We must go on! Don't you understand how crucial this is? We cannot allow the Freedom Riders to be stopped by senseless violence. If we stop now, we will never be treated equally.

James: The people on the first buses can travel by plane to New Orleans. But we have a new group of riders coming in from Nashville. They are determined to continue what we have started, and I can assure you, they will ride by bus to New Orleans.

Genevieve: We can't let people think that violence will stop us. If we do, they will continue to hurt us.

Governor: Just hold on a minute. Don't you think we all need a cooling-off period? You should seriously consider waiting for a year or two. A lot could change in that time, Mr. Farmer.

James: No, we will not wait any longer. We have been cooling off for 350 years! You are a fair man, Mr. Kennedy. Surely you can understand why we can't stop now. If we quit, the racists will have won.



Kennedy: You have a good point, Mr. Farmer. Governor, it is obvious that they are right. We cannot let the violence win. The Freedom Riders must continue.

Governor: What do you want me to do?

Kennedy: Make sure that the Freedom Riders are protected. Let me know if there is more trouble. If there is, you will need to declare martial law and call on the National Guard.

Governor: I don't understand. The bus companies will not let this continue anyway.

Kennedy: Don't worry. I will call the bus companies myself. I will also talk to the police. Just let me know if you need me to send out the federal troops. It is time for African Americans to have their civil rights.

James: Thank you, Mr. Kennedy.

Kennedy: Please accept my apology, Mr. Farmer. I am deeply sorry about what happened to you and the Freedom Riders. Is there anything else we can do?

James: The bus companies have ignored the present law, Mr. Kennedy. We need the law to be much stronger.

Kennedy: I will call the Interstate Commerce Commission. We will make a stronger law, Mr. Farmer. Interstate transportation will no longer be segregated. You all have shown true courage. You will win this important battle. And I will make you this promise: the federal government will support the Civil Rights Movement.

Charlotte: The American people will learn the truth. We will tell them about the courage of the Freedom Riders. We will let them know that they would not quit. And even though they were attacked, they never struck back. We will tell people how the government helped their cause in the end. This is a day to celebrate!

**Song: Gonna Let Nobody
Turn Me Around**



Sympathy

By Paul Lawrence Dunbar

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opens,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!



Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around



Traditional

Chorus:

Gonna let nobody (*clap*) turn me 'round, (*clap, clap*),
Turn me 'round, (*clap, clap*), turn me 'round,
Gonna let nobody (*clap*) turn me 'round,
Gonna keep on walkin', keep on talkin'
Walkin' on to Freedom Land.

Gonna keep on marchin' (*clap*), 'til we're free, (*clap, clap*),
'Til we're free, (*clap, clap*), 'til we're free!
Gonna keep on marchin' (*clap*), 'til we're free,
Gonna keep on walkin', keep on talkin'
Walkin' on to Freedom Land.

Chorus

This is an abridged version of the complete song.



Glossary

bus boycott—when groups of people refused to ride on buses to force changes in bus company practices

civil rights—the rights of all human beings to be treated equally under the law

Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)—a group that worked for civil rights in the American South

discrimination—unequal treatment of people based only on their class, race, or gender

integration—providing equal opportunity for all people; the opposite of segregation

Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC)—a group that makes rules that affects business between states

martial law—rules that are enforced when the military takes control of an area

racist—a person who feels that people of one race are better than those of another race

segregation—separation of people because of race

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