

# Study Guide For Teachers

## Washington Productions IN *A Seat for Rosa*

presented by  
Young Audiences

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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

The civil rights movement had its roots in the constitutional amendments enacted during the Reconstruction era, 1865 to 1890's. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery and the Fifteenth Amendment barred voting restrictions based on race. However, by the late nineteenth century, state governments in the south enacted a variety of laws that included barring blacks from voting by enforcing voting taxes, literacy tests, and physical intimidation.

Resistance to racial segregation and discrimination included strategies such as civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance, marches, protests, boycotts, "freedom rides," and rallies that received national attention as newspaper, radio, and television reporters and cameramen documented the struggle to end racial inequality. There were also continuing efforts to legally challenge segregation through the courts.

The 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education United States Supreme Court decision overturned the "separate but equal" doctrine that, since 1896 had made racial segregation legal in public facilities. This legislation made it illegal to have separate schools for whites and blacks.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks boarded a bus in Montgomery Alabama after a long day at work. Once the bus filled up, the driver asked her to give up her seat to a white man – she refused. On December 5, a citywide bus boycott began. 42,000 black residents of Montgomery Alabama, led by Martin Luther King, Jr. participated in a year-long boycott of city buses to protest racially segregated seating. After 381 days of taking taxis, carpooling and walking, African Americans won their fight to desegregate seating on public buses, not only in Montgomery, but throughout the United States.

### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

When a child tells his aunt about a bully on his bus, she gives him advice by telling the tale of Rosa Parks and the events that led to the beginning of the civil rights movement in America. This production includes many songs of the Civil Rights Era and brings this historical time alive for children.

### LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Understand the hardships and oppression that black Americans faced during the civil rights movement
- Learn the specific conditions under which black Americans lived during this era, and how they coped
- Learn about some people who were pivotal in the civil rights movement
- Experience the rich song culture that was so important to the civil rights struggle

### **Washington Productions' *A Seat for Rosa*:**

**Auditorium performance**

**250 audience limit**

**Intended for grades K-6**

## **BEFORE THE PROGRAM**

1. Discuss the following questions with your students:
  - What should you do if you know someone is being treated unfairly? Why?
  - In a democracy, who decides who gets fair treatment? When is this decided?
  - When and why should you stand up for your rights and the rights of your neighbors?
2. Investigate the spirituals and work songs used by African Americans during slavery. Talk to students about how these songs were used and how the meaning of the lyrics might have been interpreted differently by whites than by the slaves themselves. Let students know that songs were also important during the Civil Rights era. Come up with a list of the reasons songs might have been used (to show solidarity, to rally the people to the cause, to point out injustice, etc.)

## **AFTER THE PROGRAM**

1. Discuss the three questions in #1 above with students now that they have experienced the program. Do they feel differently about their answers, or can they expand on them in light of what they have learned?
2. Talk with students about the songs of the Civil Rights era. How were they similar/different than the spirituals and work songs used during slavery? Look back at the list of reasons for using songs that you created with the class. Can you add any more now?
3. Have students create a list of messages that are important to them (e.g., help your neighbor, keep your neighborhood clean, be peaceful, etc.), and create lyrics to a song using a tune that they are familiar with.
4. Have students paint or draw images depicting their message. This could be used as their "CD cover". Students may also use these images to enhance the written version of their lyrics.
5. Get the music teacher involved! Work with them in having students listen to and perform more songs of the civil rights movement, and later music influenced by these songs.
6. Get the visual art teacher involved! Work with them in exposing students to visual art of the time, and have students create their own artwork as influenced by these artistic expressions and messages and the performance of "A Seat for Rosa".

## **VOCABULARY WORDS**

Democracy

Constitutional amendment

Thirteenth Amendment

Fifteenth Amendment

Civil rights movement

Segregation / Desegregation

"Separate but equal"

Civil Disobedience

Non-violent Resistance

Freedom Rides

## **ARTIST INFORMATION**

For more than a decade, Alicia Washington, a BFA graduate of Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts, has developed Arts in Education programs. She has created and performed storytelling programs, designed and taught writing, creative storytelling and dramatic workshops.

Washington has also guest starred on TV programs such as *Law and Order* and *Ally McBeal* and starred in the film *24 Hour Woman*. She has worked extensively in Off-Broadway productions and has acted in dozens of roles in various regional theaters throughout the country.

## **RESOURCES**

*A Picture Book of Rosa Parks.* David A. Adler.

*I Am Rosa.* Rosa Parks and James Haskins.

*If a Bus Could Talk: The Story of Rosa Parks.* Faith Ringgold.

*Rosa.* Nikki Giovanni.