



STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM: THE LIFE OF DR. KING

Bright Star Touring Theatre Study Guide



About the show:

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a minister, an activist, and a prominent leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Born in Atlanta, GA in 1929, Dr. King did some truly amazing work to better our society in only 39 years. Starting with the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the 1950s and continuing on through the March on Washington and the Memphis Sanitation Strike, he truly became the voice of the oppressed. Most remarkably, of course, was his ability to combat the hatred and anger he encountered with peaceful demonstrations and loving kindness.

Dr. King used his skill as a powerful orator to deliver his message of peace and equality through sermons and speeches. Perhaps the most famous of Dr. King's addresses is the "I Have a Dream" speech given on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. Ironically, Dr. King had not prepared that portion of the speech prior to stepping up to the podium. Overcome with the emotion of the day, Dr. King put aside his prepared remarks and offered his dream of a better America.

Struggle for Freedom: The Life of Dr. King is presented as a living history program in which the audience gets a wide angle view of the life of Dr. King and his many contributions - from his early days as a minister to his work to bring equality to all Americans. Racism, segregation and the tension between races can all be very challenging issues to understand and hear about as a student. ***Struggle for Freedom: The Life of Dr. King*** seeks to bring important material to life while being sensitive to the difficulty younger audiences may have with comprehending the material. We hope this production inspires many great conversations and questions.

About Our Production:

This production is a touring show with Bright Star Theatre. During its run, this production may be seen by audiences in as many as 15 different states! Professional actors join Bright Star from across the United States to tour our shows. In a typical week, they'll perform in 10-13 venues for all kinds of audiences. Our actors travel in minivans, averaging 800-1000 miles of driving *per week*, and they have performed for as many as 10,000 people *in one week*! After the show, our actors are available for you to ask questions about this production and their lives as actors - it's one of the most exciting parts of the Bright Star experience! We hope you'll have a chance to have your question answered!



Words to Know:

Theatre is a form of storytelling that has been entertaining people for thousands of years. Theatre has its own kind of language. Here are some terms that actors, directors, and other “theatre people” use all the time!

Audition: A hopeful actor will either read, sing or dance (or sometimes all three!) in order for the director to decide which actor she wants to cast in a particular role.

Director: The director reads the script, and tells the actors where they should go and what they should do. Each director has a different way of telling a story from every other director, and this means that each play will be unique from every other play!

Set: All of the scenery on the stage is part of what is called the “set.” It helps to paint a picture of where the story takes place, so it is easier for the audience to follow the play. For *Struggle for Freedom*, our actors use a backdrop, which is the colorful painted background.

Costumes: All of the clothes that are worn onstage by the actors are costumes. The hats, the wigs, and even the shirts and shoes are all part of the costumes!

Props: Anything that an actor carries during the show is a prop. Can you remember any of the props used by the actors in this play?

Rehearsal: Once the cast of the play is set, everyone on the show needs to practice to get ready for the show. This can take weeks, and that gives time for the sets and costumes to be built, and for the actors to learn their lines.

Actors: These are the people that you see on stage. They each have a character to play, and they spend a long time rehearsing before they perform. They have to learn where they should walk, when they should talk, and how their characters should act. It’s a lot of work!

and of course -

Audience: Perhaps the most important element in the show! The audience consists of the people who come out to watch the play. You were our audience for *Struggle for Freedom*!

Struggle for Freedom: The Timeline

- 1865:** Slavery is officially abolished in the United States.
- 1944:** Dr. King attends Morehouse College, where he is inspired to become a minister.
- 1948:** Dr. King attends Crozer Seminary in Pennsylvania, graduating as Valedictorian!
- 1954:** After graduating with a doctorate degree from Boston University, Dr. King moves to Montgomery, Alabama to lead Dexter Avenue Baptist Church.
- 1955:** Rosa Parks refuses her seat to a white passenger, sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott
- 1956:** Dr. King's home is bombed while he is at a meeting. His wife and daughter escape unhurt.
- 1957:** Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).
- 1960:** The Sit-in Movement gains national attention with the Greensboro, NC Woolworth sit-in, sparked by four students from NC Agricultural and Technical University. Dr. King returns to Atlanta where he becomes co-pastor of his father's church and expands the work of the SCLC.
- 1963:** Dr. King brings the SCLC to help Birmingham become integrated. This is the most violent city in America and has earned the nickname of “Bombingham.”
- April 1963:** Dr. King responds to a letter in the paper with his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”
- August 1963:** The March on Washington challenges America as millions tune in to watch the “I Have a Dream” speech on televisions around the world.
- 1964:** The Nobel Prize for Peace is awarded to Dr. King. The Civil Rights Bill is passed making segregation in public places illegal.
- 1964-67:** Dr. King speaks out against the Vietnam War, and starts focusing on other issues such as poverty and the rights of the poor.
- 1968:** The SCLC is refocused to tackle the issues facing poor Americans of all races.
- April 3, 1968:** In Memphis, TN, Dr. King delivers his “I Have Seen the Mountain Top” speech, a remarkable and inspiring speech that is also his last.
- April 4, 1968:** James Earl Ray shoots and kills Dr. King at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN. Dr. King has been in town to help ease tensions resulting from a black sanitation workers strike that has led to recent violence in the city.

Classroom Activities:

Investigation Presentations!

This activity incorporates creative thinking, knowledge of history, writing, and performance!

1. Break students into small groups. Have each group research one of the following Americans: Rosa Parks, Ralph Abernathy, Oliver Brown (from the Brown vs. Board of Education Case), Dr. Benjamin Mays, Lyndon B. Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Coretta Scott King or The Little Rock Nine.

2. Turn the research into a presentation. Presentations could take the form of a newscast, an interview, a play, a song - the possibilities are endless! Have each group think about how costumes, props, and the set could help bring their presentation to life. If there's time, try to create some of these props or costume pieces from everyday items!

3. Time for performance! Have each group perform their short play. Remind the other students about being good audience members while they watch their friends onstage!

Civil Rights Dictionary

Look up the following words and phrases and create a dictionary of terms! Can you think of other words or phrases to add?

Boycott, Civil Rights Bill, Civil Rights Movement, Demonstration, Integration, Lunch Counter, March on Washington, Montgomery Improvement Association, Segregation, Sit-In, Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Design a Dream!

This activity incorporates creative thinking, writing, and visual arts!

1. Have students pull out the paper and the crayons or colored pencils. At the top of the sheet of paper, have students write "I Have a Dream."

2. Using words, pictures, and symbols, have students fill the page with important dreams they have for our country. Be creative!

3. Have each student talk about why he or she made his/her specific choices. Display the dreams in the classroom.

Seeing the Play:

Attending the theatre is very different than going to the movies or watching television. For one thing, the actors are real people who can hear and see everything that's happening in the audience. It's important to know a few rules before seeing a play:

★ Please be quiet and respectful during the performance so that those around you can hear what's happening.

★ If something's funny, it's okay to laugh!

★ If you like the play, be sure to clap at the end.

What else can you add to the list?

Questions for Discussion:

1. Read the full transcript of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech. What would some of Dr. King's dreams be if he were to deliver the speech today? What made the speech so powerful and effective? Do you think Dr. King is pleased with how much progress we have made in America?

2. Think about this statement: *Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common.* What does that mean?

3. Imagine the bravery it took for these Americans to stand up for their beliefs while being threatened with bombings, police arrest and more. Are there injustices today that deserve our attention and help?

4. What are some other significant events in history that our play didn't dramatize?

