HERO: THE BOY FROM TROY

A NEW MUSICAL ABOUT YOUNG JOHN LEWIS

STUDY GUIDE

RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 8+





Welcome

Welcome to Nambi E. Kelley's *HERO: The Boy from Troy*, *A New Musical About Young John Lewis*, with music direction by Joe Plummer!
This guide is designed to help students comprehend and unpack the events of the play through discussion questions, activities, and lessons for use in the classroom both before and after the performance. We hope it enriches their (and your) experience!

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The Story of Hero: The Boy from Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis

Jayden is stuck in detention with a book about Congressman John Lewis, but he thinks that history has nothing to teach him. Together we go on a musical journey through the decades that shows how the heroes in the Civil Rights movement inspired young John Lewis to protest injustice and get into 'good trouble.'

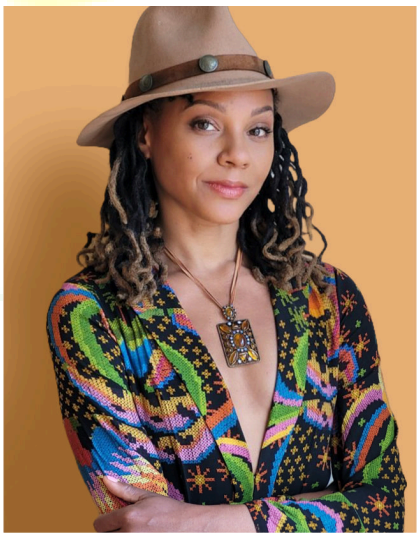
As a boy, John dreams of being a preacher who can help others. While he doesn't have a congregation yet, he does have a loyal group of singing chickens that listen to him as he finds his voice. On a harrowing road trip through the South, John's eyes and mind are opened to the injustices of segregation and racism, inspiring him to take action. As John meets Rosa Parks and Dr. King and ultimately becomes a leader and American hero himself, Jayden learns how he too can take a stand.

Production History

HERO: The Boy from Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis was commissioned through Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, and was developed at New Victory Theatre through the LabWorks Program for BIPOC artists in New York City. LabWorks gifted Nambi $15,000 to participate in workshops and develop the material. The show then toured regionally in early 2023 before receiving a workshop in August of 2023 co-sponsored by First Woman with support from Chicago Children's Theatre, Flushing Town Hall, WP Theater, and Amas Musical Theatre in New York.

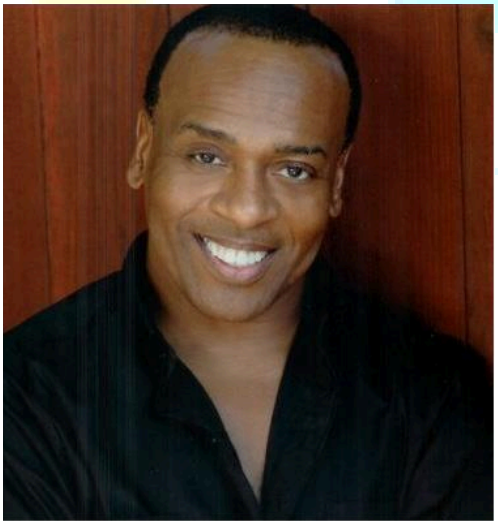


About the Playwright



Nambi's newly formed production company, FIRST WOMAN, produced a digital and in person national tour of Nambi's young audiences' play, *Jabari Dreams of Freedom*, directed by Daniel Carlton. The in person tour recently premiered off-Broadway at the renowned New Victory Theatre on 42nd Street. The digital version of *Jabari* has been selected in several film festivals, including The National Black Theatre Film Festival in North Carolina, Golden Bee International Children's Film

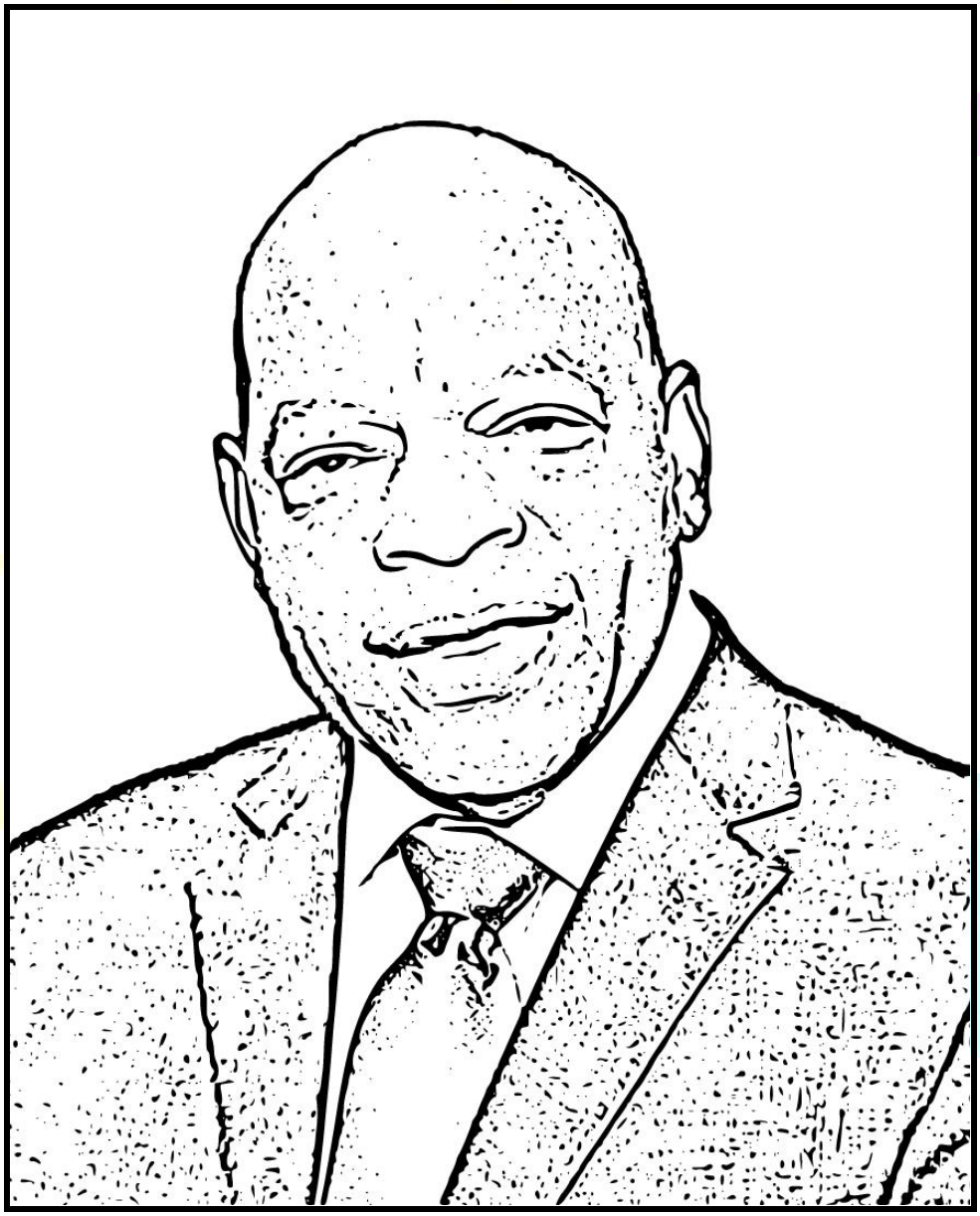
Festival, Black Panther International Film Festival in India, and won BEST KIDS MOVIE at The ARFF Paris International Awards. Nambi served as a season 2 co-producer on Peacock's *Bel Air*. Previous television writing credits include: *Lady In The Lake* (Apple) *Our Kind of People* (Fox), and *The Chi* (Showtime). She is also in development with Lagralane on a film project TBA. Ms. Kelley is the recipient of the NNPN annual commission where her play, *Re-Memori* was just presented at WP's Pipeline Festival in New York City. She is also winner of The Prince Prize which grants $75,000 to Nambi and Court Theatre for a new play based on the life of the great Kwame Ture/Stokely Carmichael. Nambi was named a Dramatists Guild Foundation Fellow and New Victory LabWorks Fellow. She just completed a residency at New Victory Theatre through the LabWorks Program for BIPOC artists in New York City which gifted Nambi $15,000 to participate in workshops and develop her new musical for families based on the early life of Congressman John Lewis (a commission by Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera). Nambi's John Lewis musical, titled *Hero: The Boy From Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis*, will tour regionally in early 2023. Nambi is a former playwright-in-residence at the National Black Theatre, the Goodman Theatre, and a former Dramatists Guild Fellow. She was a finalist for the Francesca Primus Award, and The Kevin Spacey Foundation Award. She was chosen by Tony Morrison to adapt Morrison's Jazz, which premiered at Baltimore Center Stage in 2017. Her adaptation of Richard Wright's Native Son (Sam French, Concord Theatricals) premiered in New York produced by the The Acting Company at The Duke on 42nd Street in July 2019, and was nominated for New York's Drama League Awards, winning Best Production from the AUDELCO Awards. The world premiere of Native Son was presented to critical acclaim at Court Theatre, received nominations for 5 Jeff Awards including winning production of the year, and was the highest grossing straight play produced in Court Theatre's history. Shortlisted professional writing affiliations include: New Victory Playwright in Residence, National Black Theatre Playwright in Residence, Goodman Theatre Playwrights Unit, Steppenwolf Theatre Company New Plays Lab Playwright-In-Residence, Goodman Theatre/Ellen Stone Belic Institute/ Fellowship Recipient, Goodman Theatre Lila Wallace Fellowship, La MaMa Playwrights Symposium Playwright-In-Residence, Spoleto, Italy under the tutelage of Pulitzer prize winner Lynn Nottage, Ragdale Foundation Artist in Residence, HealthWorks Theatre Colonel Stanley McNeil Playwright-In-Residence, Chicago Dramatists Playwright Emeritus, Danny Glover's Robey Theatre Co. Playwriting Lab (Formerly The Blacksmyths At The Mark Taper Forum), and MPAACT Playwright Emeritus, Chicago. Ms. Kelley has a BFA from The Theatre School at DePaul University, formerly known as The Goodman School of Drama, and holds an MFA in interdisciplinary arts from Goddard College in Vermont.



About the Music Director

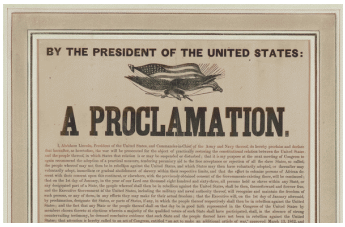
Joe Plummer is a true renaissance man and has found a successful niche as a musical playwright. Get Ready, his premier production alongwith Jaye Stewart, has been produced by

Victory Gardens Theatre (BTA Award for “Best New Writing of a Play”; Jeff Award nomination), ETA Theatre (Jeff Award nomination for choreography), The EnsembleTheatre, and Penumbra Theatre. His musical I Got’cha: The Story OfJoe Tex And The Soul Clan at The Black Ensemble Theatre in Chicago garnered Joe and his co-writer David Barr III two Black Excellence Awards, and the New Horizon Theatre production in Pittsburgh took 11 Onyx Awards. Joe’s third musical Nothing but the Blues was presented at the Black Ensemble Theatre (Jeff Award nomination; 10 BlackTheatre Alliance Awards), New Horizon Theatre, and onboard Celebrity Cruise ship’s Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise. Joe’s next musical Vee Jay Records, co-written with Sanetta Gipson, had its first reading atThe Chicago Dramatists. A film version is being produced by and stars Oscar nominee Viola Davis. www.tri-coastalentertainment.com



The Civil Rights Movement Timeline

Civil rights are the rights you enjoy as a citizen of a country. These include the right to vote, the right to go to school, and the right to practice your religion, among others. Today, it is illegal to violate a person's civil rights based on the color of their skin, their gender, their religion, their nationality, their age, their disability, or their religion. This was not always the case! A lot of people worked together to guarantee every American has the same rights. A lot of their work happened during the **civil rights movement.** Below is a timeline of some events that inspired or resulted from this work.



Jan 1, 1863: President Lincoln issues the **Emancipation Proclamation,** which outlaws slavery in the United States



1890s: "Jim Crow" Laws create and enforce **segregation**



March 2, 1995: Claudette Colvin is arrested at age 15 for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white woman



Dec. 1, 1955: **Rosa Parks** refuses to give up her bus seat to a white man



Aug. 28, 1963: **Dr. Martin Luther King** delivers his "I Have a Dream Speech"

June 19, 1865: All enslaved people in America are officially freed



May 17, 1954: **Brown v. Board of Education** is decided



August 28, 1955: Emmett Till is killed at age 14



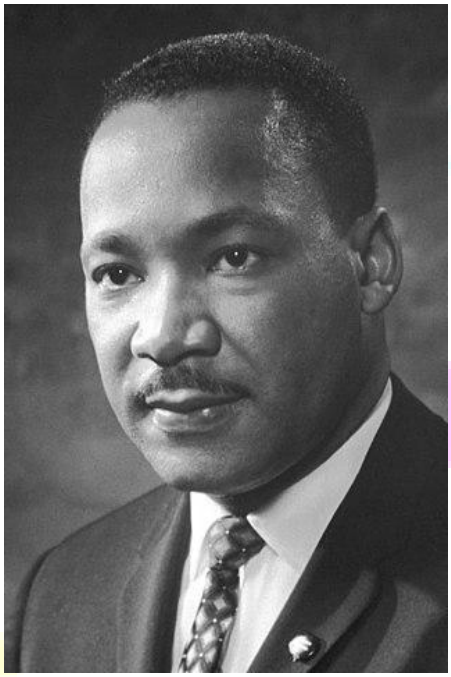
May - December, 1961: **John Lewis** and the **Freedom Riders** protest segregated bus terminals across the South

Faces of the Civil Rights Movement

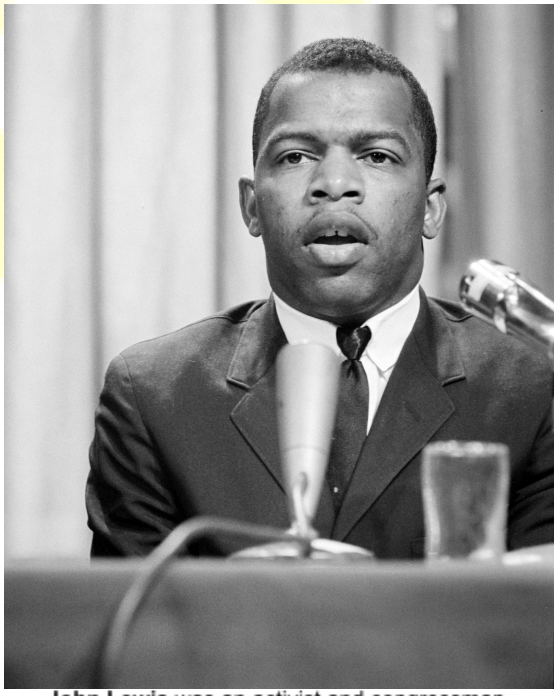
The American Civil Rights Movement was a sweeping political movement that aimed to guarantee the equality of *all* Americans, regardless of race. Some of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement mentioned in the play are pictured below.



Rosa Parks was an activist who fought for civil rights. She worked tirelessly for many years, but is most famous for refusing to give up her seat on a bus for a white man.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a civil rights activist. He is famous for leading marches and for delivering speeches. He was a powerful speaker and writer. He led the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which started after **Rosa Parks** was arrested for refusing to give up her seat.



John Lewis was an activist and congressman. In his youth, he fought for civil rights alongside people like **Martin Luther King, Jr.** As a congressman, he worked for causes such as gun control and voting rights

John Lewis's Accomplishments

John Lewis was an activist from a young age and remained dedicated to his beliefs throughout his life.



The Nashville Sit-Ins
Congressman Lewis helped organize a series of **sit-ins** at lunch counters while he was still in college. A **sit-in** is a kind of protest. Protesters were demonstrating against **segregated** lunch counters. This work could be scary - demonstrators were heckled and even arrested. But Lewis and his colleagues didn't give up, and eventually Nashville lunch counters were **integrated.** In the picture to the right, you can see John Lewis being carried out of a store by two police officers.



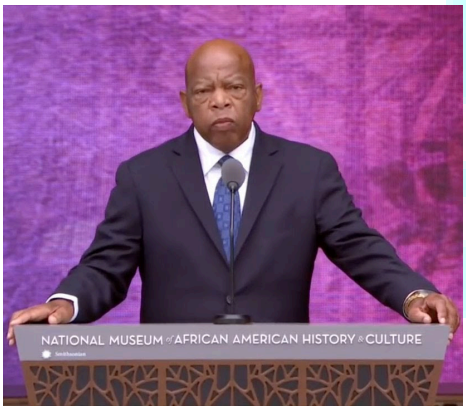
Freedom Riders
John Lewis was one of the original 13 Freedom Riders. Even though segregation had been made illegal, the Freedom Riders realized the law was not being enforced and Black customers were still being treated unfairly. They organized demonstrations against this unfair treatment, and these demonstrations were known as **Freedom Rides**. The picture on the right shows the original riders. John Lewis is on the top left.



The March on Washington
The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was a gathering of over 200,000 people. They were marching for economic equality and racial justice. John Lewis helped organize this march and made a speech before the crowd when he was only 23 years old. This event is also famous because it is where **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** delivered his historic "I Have a Dream" speech. Here, Lewis is pictured with the other organizers of the **March on Washington**. He is second from the right.

John Lewis continued his activism even while working as a congressman.

National African American Museum
The year after he was elected to Congress, John Lewis proposed an African American museum. For fifteen years, the bill failed, but Lewis kept introducing it every year. Finally, in 2003, the bill passed, and the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened in Washington, D.C. in 2016. In the picture to the right, you can see Congressman Lewis speaking at the National Museum of African American History and Culture



House of Representatives Sit-In
In 2016, John Lewis led a **sit-in** on the floor of **Congress**. Lewis and 60 other lawmakers occupied the floor overnight to demonstrate their commitment to gun control. Lewis was the final speaker before the **sit-in** ended. In the picture to the right, you can see Lewis with other lawmakers. He is seated in the center of the picture.



Women's March
On January 21, 2017, people across the world joined marches to advocate for women's rights, LGBTQ rights, and worker's rights. John Lewis led the Women's March in Atlanta and delivered a speech to thousands of demonstrators. In the picture on the right, John Lewis greets a protestor.



March for Our Lives
John Lewis was passionate about many causes. In 2018, he helped lead and delivered a speech at March for Our Lives, an organized protest against gun violence. In the picture to the right, you can see Lewis among a crowd of protesters.



The Work Continues: Black Lives Matter

The Civil Rights Movement lasted from the 1950's to the 1960's, but the work started by civil rights leaders continues today. Black Americans still face injustice, discrimination and violence. In 2012, a young Black boy named Trayvon Martin was shot and killed, but his killer was not charged with any crime. In response to the murderer going free, #BlackLivesMatter was founded. The #BlackLivesMatter organization aims to "eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities." #BlackLivesMatter uses non-violent organization and protests to meet these goals.

#BlackLivesMatter continues to organize and demonstrate against injustice in the wake of the killings of other Black men and women. You probably recognize some of their names. George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery are only three of many Black individuals who have been killed. Leaders and activists across the country honor their memories by fighting every day for justice for all Black lives.



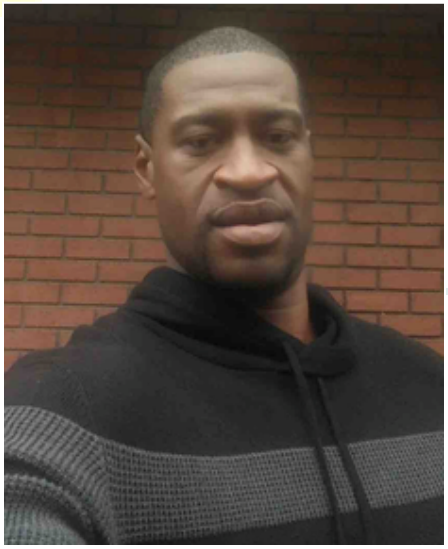


John Lewis on Black Lives Matter Plaza





Breonna Taylor



George Floyd



Ahmaud Arbery

K - W - L Chart

A KWL chart helps you organize and reflect on your thoughts about John Lewis before and after *HERO: The Boy from Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis*.

Fill out the first two columns before the show, then fill in the third after the performance.

K – W – L Chart Topic: *John Lewis*		
What I **K**now	What I **W**onder	What I **L**earned

Discussion Questions

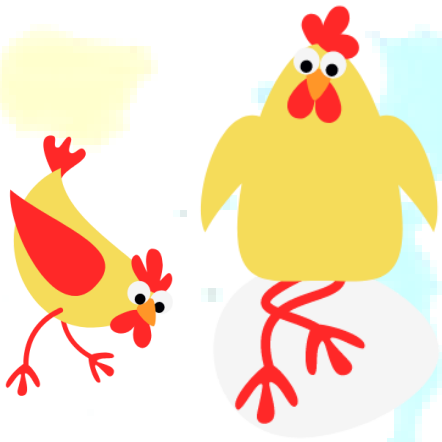
Discuss your answers to these questions with your classmates or write about them in your journal. These questions were written by Heidi G. Balas.

1. Jayden is a dynamic character who changes from the beginning of the play to the end. Can you think of some examples from John Lewis's life that influence Jayden to change his own life?

2. There are only a few actors playing multiple parts in *Hero: The Boy from Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis*. How did the actors help audiences to know they were playing different characters throughout the show? How did they make these characters believable? (possible answers could be acting, costumes, props, etc.).

3. At the end of the play, Jayden delivers a message that John Lewis said in real life: "You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone—any person or force—dampen, dim, or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant...Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice." In what ways can you apply this message to your life? What does he mean when he describes us as "the light?" How can we "lean" more "toward the whispers" of our own hearts?

4. Jayden also says a John Lewis quote about knowing when to get into "good trouble": "Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice." Can you think of anyone in your life or a public figure in America who does this well? Describe that person's characteristics? Are you similar or different?



Who Said It?

Match the quote to the civil rights leader or thinker. You may have to use the internet for help. Ask an adult before going online.

“You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.”	James Baldwin
“Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season. It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year.”	Rosa Parks
“Those who say it can’t be done are usually interrupted by others doing it.”	Angela Davis
“When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something.”	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
"We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now."	W. E. B DuBois
“You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right.”	Malcolm X
"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."	John Lewis



Word Search

Find words, names, and topics from *HERO: The Boy From Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis*. Words can be across, down, or diagonal.



M E O H O N O D B G O O D T R O U B L E B F N K U A H A U H
L V J T V Q F W F R A L A B A M A J D M I J U C S J E A O E
C S B E R N F H J T N H N V G D K X I O L J L E A D E R X X
K C O W A O D G Q K D D J Z P V S F X L E H O P I C J R V E
Q Z P S B V Y H M B O G C I V I L R I G H T S H Z Q C S A Z
W W V I X S L L F K Y Q B F L K P K M X Y Z K A N E B O O F
C W I O L C B E Z W F E Q S R X X D I T P G M C I L A X M C
T J O O T B D R M A R T I N L U T H E R K I N G Q R E O L C
N J I W C I Z M C N J O P I X Z H G C T I M N E K T L W V N
B D G H K D N R O F G V G Z M P M H S D P U I F A J B S I W
T I O R V W H G K N F N N N C M W Z O J J U H M D A W G F S
A G A J L A B I R I T P F W F O P N V H J X N Z Y C J D V T
V H L D E N Y L B I H G F P I R F D S P G U K Q T W D V L K
T D S B Y I Q B B S G I O Q D R E A M S J B W I M A X S Q K
N Y A Z T D H M F O T H D M R E O Y U Y S T I K A N N E J I
E I J P G O E O O N R D T D E P J H F Y E Q T G R B H G F F
T P Y W T T R T A Z Z C O S V R U A T K N Y P W C R A R W Q
Z X P V X J O Y H A F L J Z A P Y R Q T A M H A H D G E T L
J E E S X J L X U O Y K D C G C E O R I T X Q E L T R G F M
E P Q A J N T T B N F W A Y S E T S L Z O A R I J Y U A F D
S Q N C H I C K E N S A A G F Z M A S Z R K F U N T W T F Y
Y K P W U W N O Q W U E R F D F U P K U H R J X I S Z I X T
B I T L M R O G Q Z Y P M M Y I G A J R N A V X O Y S O Z D
W E F V U R K I G J L G E F Q E A R Q B X U J E O Q Q N B R
K D A A L M A L T C C V G G J I B K N J S W V J O L C Z G D
K A D I M H K X L G B A L O I U T S R G E C D S B O S F E M
M T M C O I T Y C U Z V B O Y C O T T A T A X K P I Y V Y X
H Q P M E L L J J L O X J T F E F R E E D O M X J G Y J D Q
C B W E J J J Y V B F T Y V J V L Y I N S P I R A T I O N B
U V J O U D G Z B O X E Y I D U R C V V H Y Q F B M Q V Y T



DREAMS
GOALS
FARM
MARCH
TROY
LEADER
HERO

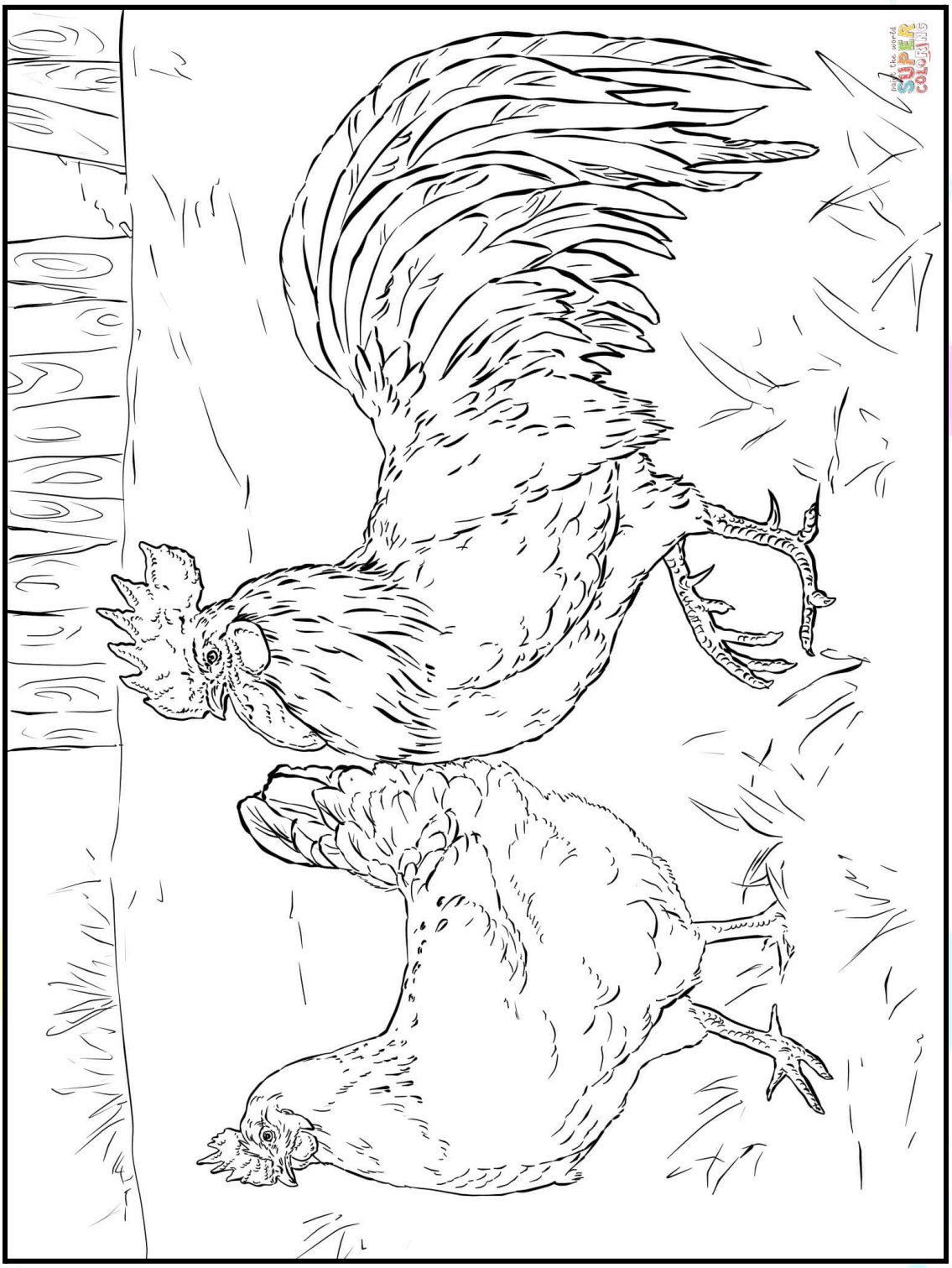
CHICKENS
SENATOR
ALABAMA
BOYCOTT
FREEDOM
FAMILY

GOOD TROUBLE
MONTGOMERY
ROSA PARKS
JOHN LEWIS

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING
VOTING RIGHTS ACT
INSPIRATION
CIVIL RIGHTS
SEGREGATION

Coloring Page

Color in Ursula and Jim Bone!



Further Reading

Want to learn more about the Civil Rights Movement? Ask a librarian to help you find one of these books!

Asim, Jabari. Preaching to the Chickens: The Story of Young John Lewis. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2016.

Giovanni, Nikki. Rosa. Square Fish, 2005.

Davis, Pinkney. *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2010.

Shange, Ntozake. *Coretta Scott*. Katherine Tegen Books, 2009.



John Lewis speaks at the March on Washington, 1963

Vocabulary

Civil Rights Vocabulary

Boycott: A **boycott** is a political strategy in which a person or group of people refuses to deal with a company. A **boycott** is designed to cause economic loss, which forces that company to change its policies.

Brown v. Board of Education: ***Brown v. Board of Education*** is a Supreme Court ruling that says **segregation** is unconstitutional and illegal. In 1954, the Supreme Court (the highest court in America) decided that public schools could no longer separate their students on the basis of race.

Congressman: A **congressman** (or **congresswoman** or **congressperson**) is a politician who serves in Congress. They are responsible for writing laws that protect and help Americans. They listen to their constituents - the people who elected them - and act accordingly.

Freedom Rider: The **Freedom Riders** were a group of activists who rode buses across the South after **segregation** became illegal. Even though it was against the law, many bus terminals and buses still **segregated** their passengers and customers. **The Freedom Riders** drew attention to this illegal practice. **Freedom Riders** had to be brave, as they were often met with anger and sometimes violence.

Philosophy: **Philosophy** is the study of the basic ideas about knowledge, truth, right and wrong, religion, and the nature and meaning of life. Philosophy comes from the Greek words for *love* and *wisdom*.

Picket Line: A **picket line** is an organized protest against a workplace or other institution. Activists might carry signs, sing songs, or chant to tell passersby or journalists why they're protesting.

SCLC: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (**SCLC**) is a civil rights organization. It was founded in 1957 and is still active today. The **SCLC** is dedicated to educating young people and adults about economic justice and civil rights.

Segregation: **Segregation** is a form of discrimination that separates people according to their race. For example, **segregated** buildings might have separate bathrooms, water fountains, or waiting rooms for Black and white people. **Segregation** was a legal practice, meaning it could be enforced by policemen, but it was also violently upkept by white citizens who didn't want Black citizens to use their facilities. **Integration** is the opposite of **segregation**.

Sharecropping: **Sharecropping** is a relationship between a person who owns land and a tenant - a person who lives on that land. The landowner allows the tenant to use his or

her land to grow crops, as long as the tenant gives some of their crop to the landowner after the harvest. **Sharecropping** was common in the United States after slavery ended.

Theology: **Theology** is the study of religion. A **theologian** is a person who practices **theology**. A **theologian** might study one religion, or they might study many. The word **theology** comes from the Greek words for *God* and *study*.

White Supremacy: **White supremacy** is the notion that white people are inherently better than others. **White supremacy** is a violent ideology that aims to oppress or harm people of color.

Theatre Vocabulary

Actor: An **actor** is a person who performs onstage. They must carefully study their lines and **blocking** and work with the other actors to tell a story. Some **actors** also sing, dance, or play an instrument onstage.

Auditions: Anyone who is interested in performing in a musical or play must attend **auditions**. At auditions, an actor might sing a song or act out a scene from the musical for the **director** and **playwright**. The **director** and **playwright** will then work together to select the cast for the performance.

Blocking: Once the cast has been selected, the director will create **blocking**. **Blocking** is the path or movement the actors take onstage. Once **blocking** has been decided, the actors carefully follow it to make sure the performance is the same every time.

Choreographer: Choreography is the art of arranging dance and movement. A **choreographer** is a person who is hired by the artistic team to create dances and teach them to the cast of a play, musical, or ballet.

Composer: A **composer** is a person who specializes in writing music. They might write music for concerts, movie scores, or musicals. When developing music for a musical, the composer works closely with the lyricist and playwright. Joe Plummer is the **composer** and **lyricist** for *HERO: The Boy from Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis*.

Director: The **director** is responsible for guiding the creation and development of a play or musical. He or she works closely with all members of the team, including the playwright, actors, designers, and the stage manager, to ensure the play goes smoothly.

Lyricist: A **lyricist** is a person who writes the words to music. For a musical, the lyricist has to make sure the **lyrics**, or words, to the songs help the audience understand the story and feel like they know the characters.

Playwright: A **playwright** is a person who writes the story of a play. He or she creates the characters and plot, either according to a true story or from his or her imagination. He or she also writes the **book** of a musical. A musical's **book** is all the scenes that are not sung. The **playwright**, **lyricist**, and **composer** work together to make sure the book and music tell one complete story. Nambi E. Kelley is the **playwright** of *Hero: The Boy from Troy, A New Musical About Young John Lewis*.

Rehearsal: During **rehearsal**, the director and playwright will work together to teach the cast the entire show. During the **rehearsal** process, actors and the director might experiment with movement or delivery, but they won't stray from the **playwright's** words.

Stage Crew: The **stage crew** is responsible for working backstage during a performance. While the audience is watching the **actors**, the **stage crew** might prepare props, move scenery, or create special effects to help the **actors** tell the story.

Stage Manager: The **stage manager** is in charge of keeping track of everything related to a musical or play. He or she is responsible for recording the **blocking**, communicating with the **actors, playwright, director,** and **stage crew**, and making sure everything runs smoothly.

