



## MTC STUDY GUIDE

# Black Boy

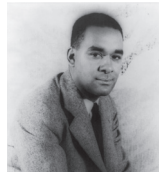
## About the Play

This one-person play is based on the memoir of the same name by Richard Wright, an African-American author, detailing his upbringing in the racially segregated South and eventual move to Chicago, where he pursued a writing career and became involved with the Communist Party. The book gained acclaim for its honest portrayal of racism in America but also faced controversy due to Wright's political views. Despite this, "Black Boy" remains a significant work in American literature, shedding light on the harsh realities of racial discrimination and the struggle for identity and dignity during that era.



**If this country can't find its way down a Human path if it can't inform conduct with a deep sense of life... then all of us, Black as well as White, are heading down the same drain."**

– Richard Wright, "Black Boy"



## Who Was Richard Wright?

Richard Wright, born on September 4, 1908, in Roxie, Mississippi, was an African-American writer and poet. Raised by his single mother, Wright had limited formal education but cultivated a deep love for literature and writing. He moved to Chicago in 1927, joined the Communist Party in 1932, and later relocated to New York City to pursue his writing career. Wright gained recognition for his work with the publication of "Uncle Tom's Children" in 1938, followed by his breakthrough novel "Native Son" in 1940, which became a bestseller and brought him fame. In 1945, he published his autobiography, "Black Boy," depicting his upbringing and experiences of racial violence. After living in Mexico, Wright moved to Paris and continued writing until his death on November 28, 1960. His life and works continue to be esteemed for their portrayal of racial struggles and their lasting impact on literature.

## Questions After the Show

- ➔ What were the major themes explored in "Black Boy?" How did Richard Wright use his personal experiences to shed light on broader societal issues?
- ➔ In what ways did Richard Wright's upbringing in the racially segregated South influence his writing and worldview?
- ➔ Ask your students to explain how the controversies surrounding Richard Wright's works, which were both celebrated and criticized for their depiction of racial issues, contributed to shaping the discourse on racism in America during that era?

**Communism** – a socio-economic and political ideology advocating for a classless society where resources are collectively owned and distributed according to need.

**NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)** – a prominent civil rights organization in the United States, dedicated to fighting racial discrimination and promoting equal rights for African Americans and other marginalized communities.

## Civil Rights Movement Timeline

<b>1896</b>	Plessy vs. Ferguson: It was ruled that segregated railroad cars were not unconstitutional as long as they were "separate but equal" to the other cars. "The Fourteenth Amendment. could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color or commingling of the races."
<b>1939</b>	A Civil Rights Section is created in the Department of Justice to prosecute violations.
<b>1940</b>	Richard Wright's "Native Son" was published.
<b>1944</b>	Adam Clayton Powell Jr. of New York became the first African-American Congressman.
<b>1945</b>	Richard Wright's "Black Boy" was published.
<b>1950</b>	Gwendolyn Brooks is the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize in poetry for her collection of poems, <i>Annie Allen</i> .
<b>1952</b>	NAACP brings cases against various school districts and universities to the Supreme Court to take issue with the policies of segregation under which they are run.
<b>1954</b>	The U.S. Supreme Court decision in <i>Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka</i> states that segregation in public schools violates the Fourteenth Amendment.
<b>1955</b>	December 1st, Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a bus thereby violating the bus segregation ordinance in Montgomery, Alabama. A bus boycott organized by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began on December 5th and lasted 381 days.
<b>1960</b>	Four black students sit at a "white only" lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. This sparked demonstrations and sit-ins throughout the South.
<b>1963</b>	Dr. Martin Luther King leads a march on Washington, DC.
<b>1965</b>	Civil Rights workers march from Selma to Montgomery.
<b>1967</b>	Thurgood Marshall is elected to the US Supreme Court.
<b>1974</b>	"I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," the first volume of seven in the autobiographical series by Maya Angelou was published.
<b>1987</b>	Toni Morrison won the Nobel Peace Prize for fiction for her novel "Beloved."
<b>1995</b>	October 16th—the Million Man March is held in Washington, DC.



### RESEARCH ACTIVITY:

## Civil Rights Movement

By engaging in this activity, your students will gain a comprehensive understanding of the historical context of the Civil Rights Movement and its significance in shaping the themes and experiences depicted in Richard Wright's "Black Boy." Additionally, the visual representation will provide them with a creative outlet to express their insights and showcase their learning. This classroom activity allows students to delve deeper into the social, cultural, and political context of the Civil Rights Movement and its relevance to Richard Wright's "Black Boy." Here's a breakdown of the steps for the activity:

- 1. Review (15 minutes):** Start by sharing the Civil Rights Movement Timeline with the students. Briefly go over the key events listed on the timeline to provide them with an overview of the movement's chronology and significance.
- 2. Select & Research (Flexible - begin in class and/or complete as homework):** Ask each student to pick one event from the Civil Rights Movement Timeline for further research. They can use computers, their school library, or other resources available for their research. Encourage them to take notes on the event's background, significance, key figures involved, and its impact on society.
- 3. Present (30 minutes):** Divide the students into small groups and have them present their research to their peers. In their presentations, students should highlight the themes, actions, responses, and outcomes related to their chosen event. This will help the class understand the various aspects of the Civil Rights Movement in-depth.
- 4. Reflect (20 minutes):** After each group presentation, encourage a class discussion on the shared themes and patterns they identified throughout the events. Prompt them to discuss the broader implications of these themes on American society during that era.
- 5. Visual Representation:** For an extension activity, have the students work in groups to create a visual representation of their collective understanding of the themes discussed. The suggested options are a timeline mural, an abstract painting, a spoken word poem or rap, or a representational mural. This artistic exercise will help them synthesize the information they learned and express it creatively.

## Reflection Questions:

These questions encourage students to make connections between the Civil Rights Movement and Richard Wright's "Black Boy," analyze the historical significance of the events they researched, and reflect on the importance of visual representation in understanding complex historical contexts.

- ➔ What were some of the key themes that emerged from your group's presentations on different events from the Civil Rights Movement? How do these themes connect to the experiences and challenges faced by Richard Wright in his memoir "Black Boy?"
- ➔ How did the events of the Civil Rights Movement shape the social, cultural, and political landscape of the United States during that time? In what ways do you see the lasting impact of the movement in today's society?
- ➔ Discuss the different strategies and approaches used by activists during the Civil Rights Movement. How did they vary across various events and why do you think they chose those specific methods to bring about change?
- ➔ Richard Wright's writing often focused on themes of racial injustice and the struggle for equality. How do the stories and events from the Civil Rights Movement align with the themes in his work? Can you identify any instances where his experiences mirrored those of the activists during the movement?
- ➔ Reflecting on the group's visual representations created, how do they represent your collective understanding of the Civil Rights Movement, how did visual representations add a new dimension to your learning? How does art provide a unique perspective on historical events and their impact on society?

## Suggested Resources for Teachers:

Here are several valuable books and websites that present teachers with a diverse array of perspectives and resources to enrich their students' learning, enabling them to develop a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of the Civil Rights Movement and its historical context.

### BOOKS:

**"The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr."** by Martin Luther King Jr. (Edited by Clayborne Carson) – This book offers a firsthand account of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and his leadership in the Civil Rights Movement.

**"March Trilogy"** by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell – This graphic novel series provides a compelling and accessible way to learn about the life of Congressman John Lewis and his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

**"Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965"** by Juan Williams – This book serves as a companion to the acclaimed documentary series "Eyes on the Prize" and offers a comprehensive overview of the major events and figures of the Civil Rights Movement.

### WEBSITES:

**National Civil Rights Museum** – The museum's website provides a wealth of information, including interactive exhibits, primary source materials, and educational resources related to the Civil Rights Movement.  
Website: [www.civilrightsmuseum.org](http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org)

**The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute** – Hosted by Stanford University, this website offers a vast collection of primary sources, including speeches, writings, and historical documents related to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement.  
Website: [kinginstitute.stanford.edu](http://kinginstitute.stanford.edu)

**National Museum of African American History and Culture** – The Smithsonian's museum's website features online exhibitions and educational resources exploring the history and impact of African Americans, including materials on the Civil Rights Movement.  
Website: [nmaahc.si.edu](http://nmaahc.si.edu)

**Facing History and Ourselves** – This educational organization provides resources for teachers to explore topics related to racism, prejudice, and the Civil Rights Movement, helping students to make connections between history and contemporary issues.  
Website: [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)

**Teaching Tolerance** – A project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, this website offers free resources for educators to promote diversity, inclusivity, and social justice in the classroom, including materials on the Civil Rights Movement.  
Website: [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)

Special thanks to the team at Literature to Life including Josefina Callender and Lisa Beth Vettoso for some of the content in this study guide.



**TEACHERS PLEASE SHARE WITH YOUR STUDENTS!!**

**ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A FUN  
AND INTERESTING INTERNSHIP  
THIS SPRING OR SUMMER??**

MTC Interns work alongside teaching artists as they help campers create a musical show while earning valuable community service hours. Interns will assist with acting, music, dance, and playwriting.

- 15–18 yrs old
- Passion for Theater
- Work closely with teaching artists to develop acting, dancing, music, and writing skills
- Opportunity to lead Theater Games
- Will learn Stage Managing techniques
- Have the opportunity for artistic and professional growth with our creative consultant, Diana Garle—working on monologues/acting for the camera, etc.
- Work directly with children from ages 7–14
- Gain community service hours



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