

# Alliance Theatre

## *institute*

### Study Guide

#### *Sit-In*

Created as part of the Alliance Theatre's Dramaturgy by Students program  
By: Celithia Tahtinen's fifth grade class at Henderson Mill Elementary School

Jasmine Thomas, Teaching Artist

Rebecca Pogue Fields, Head of Elementary School Programs

*Developed December 2020*



By Pearl Cleage

Inspired by *Sit In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down*, the *New York Times* bestselling book by Andrea Davis Pinkney; Illustrated by Brian Pinkney

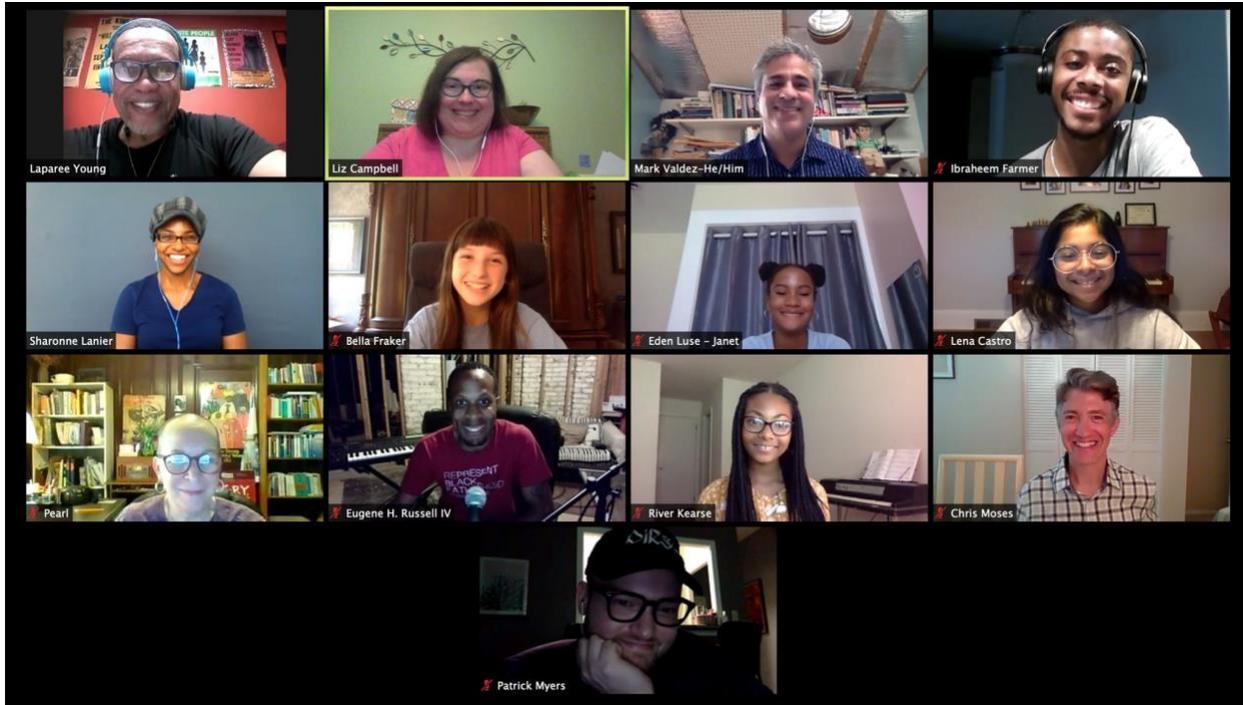
A Palette Group Production

Original Compositions by Eugene H. Russell IV

Directed by Mark Valdez

## Table of Contents

Georgia Standards of Excellence .....	2
Author Study .....	3
From Stage to Screen .....	4
Synopsis.....	4
Characters .....	5
Vocabulary.....	6
Sit-In Movement.....	7
Modern-Day Activism.....	8-10
Freedom Songs.....	11
Compare and Contrast: Book vs. Play.....	12
Intergenerational Conversations.....	13-14
Pre-Show Discussion/Journal Prompts .....	15
Post-Show Discussion/Journal Prompts .....	15
Comic Strip Template .....	16
Statues/Tableau .....	17
Crossword Puzzle .....	18
Resources/Answer Key.....	19



Pictured: Cast of the Alliance Theatre’s *Sit-In* in rehearsal in summer 2020.

## Georgia Standards of Excellence

### English Language Arts (Grades 4-6)

- 5.T.T.1.a Analyze the use of narrative techniques to present ideas, design texts, and convey information about characters, setting, and plot.
- 5.T.T.1.b Analyze how setting, events, conflict, and characterization contribute to the plot.
- 5.T.T.1.c Explain how a theme is demonstrated through a character's growth or resolution.
- 5.T.C.1.b Classify various texts by mode and describe how the author's choice of mode influences audiences and contributes to the overall purpose and effect.
- 5.T.RA.1 Conduct research to ask and answer questions that clarify, deepen, and extend understanding of a topic of interest using credible sources and communicating relevant and accurate information.

### Social Studies (Grade 5)

#### **SS5H6 Describe the importance of key people, events, and developments between 1950-1975.**

- b) Explain the key events and people of the Civil Rights movement: Brown v. Board of Education (1954), Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March on Washington, Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, and civil rights activities of Thurgood Marshall, Lyndon B. Johnson, Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Theatre (Grades 4-6)

#### **TA5.CR.1 Organize, design, and refine theatrical work.**

- a) Conceptualize and design technical elements that support a theatre experience.
- b) Appropriately apply theatre vocabulary.

#### **TA5.CN.1 Explore how theatre connects to life experience, careers, and other content.**

- a) Analyze how theatre experiences reflect and connect with life and other content areas.
- b) Identify and use theatre resources in the community
- c) Differentiate artistic and production careers in theatre (e.g. director, stage manager, designer, technician, playwright, actor).

#### **TA5.CN.2 Examine the role of theatre in a societal, cultural, and historical context.**

- a) Relate dramatic work to information about its historical period.
- b) Describe when, where, and how theatrical activities occurred during a specific time period.
- c) Use diverse materials to make artistic choices based on historical and cultural information.

## Author Study



Pearl Cleage



Andrea Davis Pinkney

Pearl Cleage is an Atlanta based writer, currently Distinguished Artist in Residence at the Tony Award®-winning Alliance Theatre. Her new play *Angry, Raucous, and Shamelessly Gorgeous*, had its world premiere as a part of the theatre’s 50th anniversary season. Her other plays premiered at the Alliance include *Pointing at the Moon*, *What I Learned in Paris*, and *Flyin’ West*, and *The Nacirema Society Requests the Honor of Your Presence at a Celebration of Their First One Hundred Years* (commissioned by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival), and *Tell Me My Dream*. Her book for children, co-authored with her husband, writer Zaron W. Burnett with illustrations by Radcliffe Bailey, was a part of the 2019 Mayor’s Reading Club. Cleage wrote *Sit-In*, a play for young audiences about the sit-in movement in conjunction with a national exhibition sponsored by Scholastic Books, starting at the High Museum in 2020. Some of her other plays include *Late Bus to Mecca*, *Bourbon at the Border* and *A Song for Coretta*.

Andrea Davis Pinkney is the New York Times bestselling and award-winning author of numerous books for children and young adults. Her work has received multiple Coretta Scott King Book Award citations, and she is a four-time nominee for the NAACP Image Award. Ms. Pinkney is the recipient of both the Regina Medal and the Arbuthnot Honor Award for her distinguished contribution to the field of children’s literature. Additionally, she is Vice President, Executive Editor at Scholastic. Ms. Pinkney has been named among the “25 Most Influential People in our Children’s Lives” by Children’s Health magazine and is included in the “50 Over 50 Extraordinary Women Who Light up the Arts Scene” noted by Good Housekeeping and Woman’s Day magazines.

## From Stage to Screen

Why did *Sit-In* become an animated short? The Alliance Theatre intended to produce *Sit-In* in summer 2020 on its Hertz Stage. As the Alliance navigated developments related to COVID-19, it remained committed to sharing the story of *Sit-In*. Created with the Palette Group, the Alliance Theatre is excited to share this production as an animated short, reaching new audiences, encouraging intergenerational conversations, and inspiring the next generation of conscientious social activists.

### Synopsis

By: Lorelay and Deja

Janet Payne, Consuelo Flores, and Mary Beth Allen are practicing for the talent show. Janet can't go to the talent show because she wants to lead a sit-in for climate change. They talk to Dr. Wilson, who will expel whoever is going to sit-in on the day of the talent show. The friends get into an argument, and Consuelo storms off.

Janet walks alone to her grandfather's cafe. She walks in with a smile on her face, but Mr. Payne knows that something is wrong. Janet tells him everything about that day. Mr. Payne tells her that he participated in a sit-in during the Civil Rights Movement. Mary Beth and Consuelo talk about what they should do; should they sing at the talent show or participate in the sit-in with their best friend?

*What happens on the day of the talent show? Does Janet lead the sit-in or perform? What do Mary Beth and Consuelo decide? Watch "Sit-In" to find out the ending!*

To learn more, visit: <https://alliancetheatre.org/production/2020-21/sit>



Photo Credit: Cory Anchors

## Characters

By Layton

Janet Payne

- She is the main character, and she is 11. Janet wants to participate in a sit-in for climate change and realizes the price she'll have to pay for activism.

Consuelo Flores

- She is 11 years old and is one of Janet's friends. She is worried that Janet will get in trouble for doing the sit-in, but also really wants her to take the talent show seriously.

Mary Beth Allen

- She is 11 years old and another one of Janet's friends. She loves social media and is a jokester.

Jackson Payne (Mr. Payne)

- He is the grandfather of Bobby and Janet. Mr. Payne is very old and owns a diner. He gives Janet some great advice and tells her how he was part of the first sit-in movement.

Dr. Wilson

- Dr. Wilson is the principal of the middle school. The kids fear her. She does not want the sit-in to take place at Grace Hamilton Academy and warns Janet of the consequences if she decides to stage a sit-in.

Ella Payne

- She is Bobby and Janet's mother. She does not want Janet to do the sit-in.

Bobby Payne

- He is 17 years old, plays basketball, and is Janet's older brother. He writes a freedom song/rap for the pep rally.

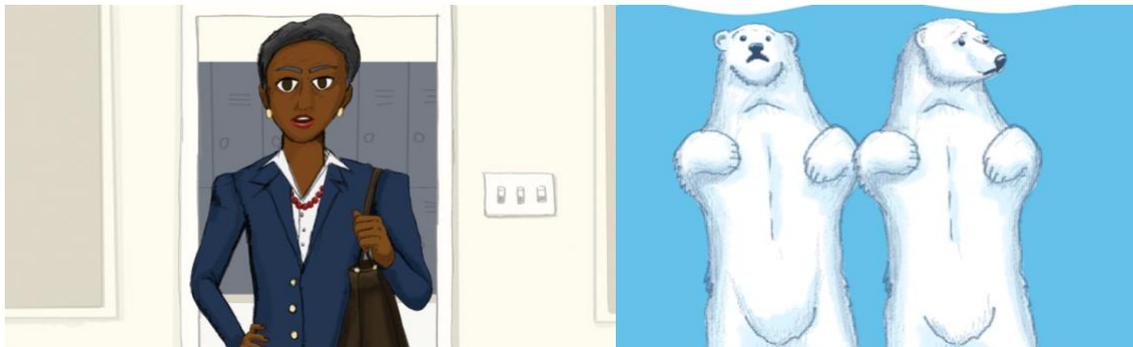


Photo Credit: Cory Anchors

**Vocabulary**  
By Josselin and Geber

Word (part of speech)	Definition	In Context
Climate change (n.)	Change in global patterns	"I never wanted to sing at some climate change rally in the first place."
Polluted (adj.)	Describing a place that has a lot of garbage	"The air is so polluted in some places; people can't even breathe!"
Sit-in (n.)	A group of protesters sitting at a certain place and refusing to leave to promote political, social, or economic change	"Sit-ins were a tool of the Civil Rights Movement."
Protest (n.)	Public expression of objection, disapproval, or dissent towards an idea or action, typically a political one	"I just keep looking at all these kids, marching and protesting and making speeches!"
Activist (n.)	Someone who is fighting for political or social changes	"I'd like to sit with you, but I'm more of a hashtag activist."
Innovator (n.)	A person who creates or develops new items	"I'm an innovator... Who convinced you to open for breakfast and drop dinner?"
Speech (n.)	A formal address delivered to an audience	"He made the 'I Have a Dream' speech."
Vote (n.)	A choice between two or more options, typically through a ballot or a show of hands or by voice	"I wasn't trying to influence their votes."
Optimist (n.)	Someone who is hopeful of something in the future	"How do you know (she'll sing)?" "I just know. Hashtag – optimist. Okay?"
Equal (adj.)	Being the same in quantity, size, degree, or value	"They were about equal rights, and I can assure you, they had nothing to do with polar bears."
Law (n.)	A rule that is made from a governing body	"There used to be a law that said some people could be free and some couldn't."
Mayor (n.)	Someone who is elected to rule a city	"We've got a list of people as long as my arm who want to see the mayor."
Influence (v.)	To affect or change someone or something in an indirect but important way	"I wasn't trying to influence their votes."
Consequences (n.)	A result of an action	"I also said there would be consequences."
Freedom (n.)	The power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint	"She's looking at a freedom song."

## Sit-In Movement

By: Izzy and Nayla

The sit-in movement was a big part of America's history. Back then, there were laws that limited where Black people could go, and it was not fair. Four brave African American students went to a “white only” diner. Nobody served them because of their skin color. Many people saw them, and the students got the inspiration to fight for what they believe in. Many people went and sat in at the diner, refusing to leave.

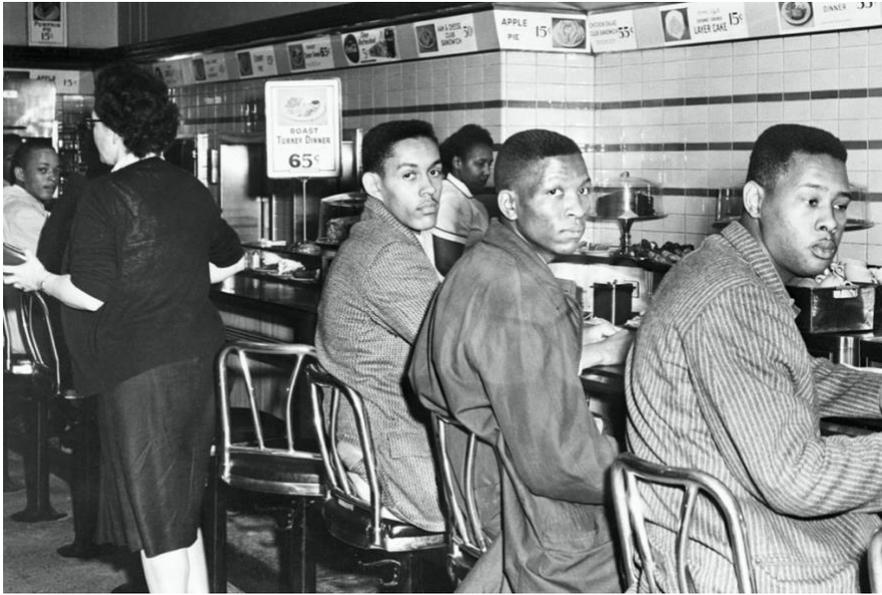


Photo Credit: CNN



Photo Credit: Britannica

## Modern-Day Activism

### Youth Activism

Youth activism is when young people between the ages of 15-24 bring change to their community. They take lead roles in protests and advocacy, and many use technology and digital media to participate in activism. See below for modern-day movements that are led by young people all over the world.

### Black Lives Matter

In 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by a member of neighborhood watch, George Zimmerman. The police told Zimmerman not to pursue Trayvon, but he did not listen and fatally shot him. Zimmerman was acquitted for the crime.

In response, Black Lives Matter was founded in 2013. It seeks to “eradicate white supremacy, stop violence inflicted on Black communities, and create a safe space for Black communities, imagination, and innovation.”

Its message is important to the present anti-racist movement in response to the death of George Floyd. The movement speaks out against police brutality and unaccountability, not solely with regard to George Floyd, but also Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and the thousands of victims wrongly treated by the police.

In the summer of 2020, many young people protested for Black Lives Matter, specifically saying that “Black Kids Matter.”



Photo Credit: Hartford Courant

## Climate Change

Climate change describes a change in the average conditions – such as temperature and rainfall – in a region over a long period of time. NASA scientists have observed Earth’s surface is warming, and many of the warmest years on record have happened in the past 20 years. For example, 20,000 years ago, much of the United States was covered in glaciers. In the United States today, we have a warmer climate and fewer glaciers.

The effects of climate change include:

- Rising sea levels
- Shrinking mountain glaciers
- Ice melting at a faster rate than usual in Greenland, Antarctica, and the Arctic
- Changes in flower and plant blooming times

Scientists agree that Earth has been getting warmer in the past 50-100 years due to human activities, such as burning fuel to power factories, cars, and busses. These changes cause the atmosphere to trap more heat than it used to, leading to a warmer Earth.

Greta Thunberg is a Swedish environmental activist who is famous for protesting against climate change. At age 15, she started spending school days outside of Swedish parliament to call for stronger action on climate change. Soon, other students joined her and organized a school climate strike movement. She has given speeches all over the world, becoming the face of youth activism on climate change.



Photo Credit: VOX

## March for Our Lives

March for Our Lives is a student-led demonstration that supports preventing gun violence in the United States. The movement's largest event took place on March 24, 2018 in Washington, D.C. and in 880 sister events across the country. It was the largest single day of protest against gun violence in history. The event followed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting a month earlier. Protesters urged for implementing background checks on gun sales and raising the age of gun ownership to 21. The movement was coordinated by students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.



Photo Credit: NPR

## Freedom Songs

By Izzy and Nayla

Freedom songs started around 1954 during the Civil Rights Movement. Mary King said, "The outpouring of freedom songs went to the core of the struggle and expressed, as nothing else was able, the hope, belief, desire, passion, dreams, and anguish of the conflict."

Many freedom songs were easily adapted to local circumstances. Sometimes, police were not able to justify arrest of nonviolent singers instead of a crowd of unruly-sounding chanters. On one occasion, singing proved to be effective camouflage that prevented the Freedom Riders, a group of protesters who were against segregation, from getting arrested.

Freedom songs spread through communities. They wove into a single Freedom Movement: the adults who sang them in mass meetings, the young militants who carried them into jail, and the local activists who raised them in small spheres of courage surrounded by danger. Freedom songs were the vows people took to stand together for justice and freedom. They were the pledges that they made, each one to the other, to stand side by side through all that they might have to endure.

During the Civil Rights Movement, Guy and Candie Carawan of the Highlander Center wrote, "Freedom songs today are sung in many kinds of situations: at mass meetings, prayer vigils, demonstrations, before freedom rides and sit-ins, in paddy wagons and jails, at conferences, workshops, and informal gatherings. These actions were nonviolent and peaceful, although abuse was frequent in order to gather their own rights."

### **Freedom Song from *Sit-In – House Is On Fire* (Lyrics by Eugene Russell IV):**

Our house is on fire	And we need the rain
I refuse to let it burn	But can't get a drop.
Our house is on fire	Pollution's high
I refuse	The clean air is low
I refuse	When this place ain't safe
We got space for waste	Where will we go.
With no space for us.	Our house is on fire
We gotta face the day	I refuse to let it burn
When earth's had enough.	Our house is on fire
We got summers cold	I refuse
And now winter's hot.	I refuse

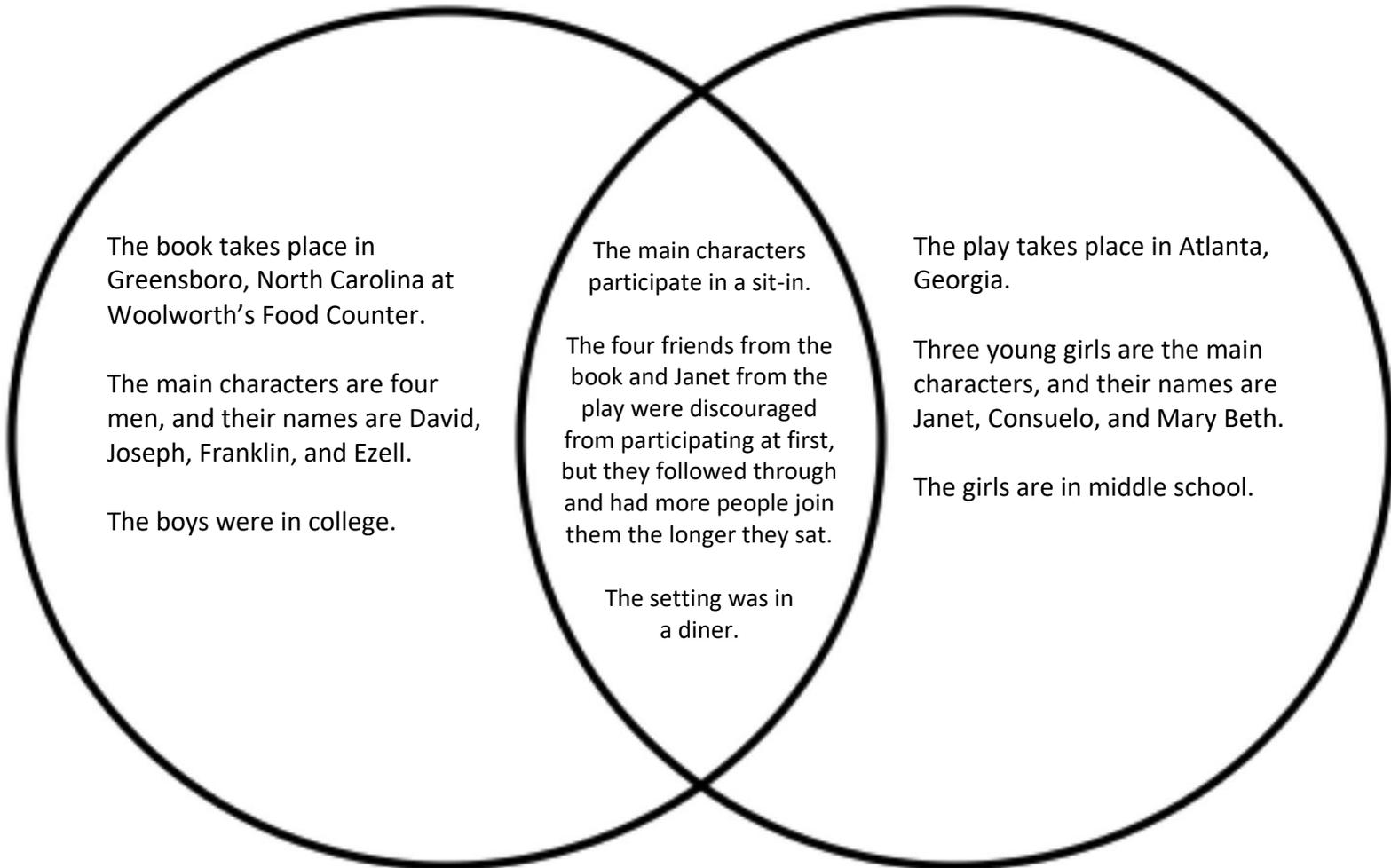
## Compare and Contrast: Book vs. Play

By: Layton

Ms. Tahtinen's class read the script for the animated short and Andrea Davis Pinkney's book, *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down*. The following Venn diagram compares and contrasts the two.

*Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down*  
(Book)

*Sit-In*  
(Play)



For more information on *Sit-In: How Four Friends Stood Up By Sitting Down* by Andrea Davis Pinkney and illustrated by Brian Pinkney, click [here](#).

## Intergenerational Conversations

In *Sit-In*, Janet learns about her grandfather's participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Students in Ms. Tahtinen's class interviewed their friends and family to discover more about their own experiences and foster intergenerational conversations. See below for what they learned. They included their questions so you can interview your own caregivers!

### **Jude's interview with his father:**

1. *Did you ever go to a sit-in?*

No, I don't remember even hearing about a sit-in, but there were fairly regular protests in college on the green, a free speech area. Usually, they related to 'Free Tibet' or other social causes, but my college, the University of Central Florida, was built in the Civil Rights era. Buildings were specifically built to not be easily overtaken by student protestors.

2. *Did white people and African Americans have equal rights when you were growing up?*

Yes, in a way, the Civil Rights laws were in place, but in practice, not everyone had the same experience. Oftentimes, it depended on a person's race, economic status, or even citizenship status.

3. *Did you ever protest?*

Yes, several times in college and most recently for a county employee that had been unfairly treated. The local community organized for this recent effort or event more than any other in my experience.

4. *Were there any protests where you lived?*

Not in my neighborhood or anything, but there have been many in Atlanta for Civil Rights, Workers Unions, and many social causes. Atlanta has a tradition of peaceful protests, and it can even be considered a civic responsibility.

### **Cooper's interview with his friend's mom, Tanya:**

1. *How was school different back then?*

We did not have computers in the classroom.

2. *Was it hard to make friends?*

I don't think it was hard to make friends. We had a lot of friends that lived in our neighborhood.

3. *What was the oldest family story you have?*

My great grandparents came to the United States from Scotland. They started a farm in Kansas.

4. *Where were you born?*

I was born in Guatemala.

5. *Where did you live when you were growing up?*  
I lived in Tucker, Georgia growing up. It is right down the street from where I live.
6. *Have you ever participated in a sit-in ?*  
No, I have not done a sit-in, but I have done a peaceful protest.
7. *Have you been in a talent show?*  
Yes, I sang in a talent show when I was in high school.
8. *Socially, how are things different now compared to when you grew up?*  
If you interacted with people, it was in person and sometimes on a telephone but mostly in person. We saw people at school and church. I feel that relationships were more personal.

#### **Israel's interview with his mother:**

1. *Have you ever been discouraged from doing something you wanted to do?*  
Yes, when I was trying to decide what career choice I wanted to go into.
2. *Have you ever been in a sit-in or protest?*  
Yes, my son and I went to a Black Lives Matter protest in Tucker this summer.
3. *Do you support climate change?*  
Yes, I believe that it is important to protect the environment.
4. *Do you get in arguments with your friends?*  
I've gotten into disagreements before with my friends, but we always talk it out and are very respectful of each other's opinions.
5. *Have you ever almost lost a friend?*  
Yes, over the years especially back in my high school and college days. Sometimes, things like interests, distance, and personal experiences may cause people to outgrow each other.
6. *Was becoming a teacher your first choice for a career?*  
No, I wanted to be a corporate lawyer because I liked law. Then, in my senior year of high school, I took a class called teacher cadets, and that helped me to decide to be a teacher.
7. *Have you ever almost not done something you really wanted to do?*  
On my honeymoon with my husband we were going snorkeling, but he couldn't go because his mask wouldn't seal to his face. I was not going to go, but then, I decided I can do it by myself. It was wonderful!

## Pre-Show Discussion Questions/Journal Prompts

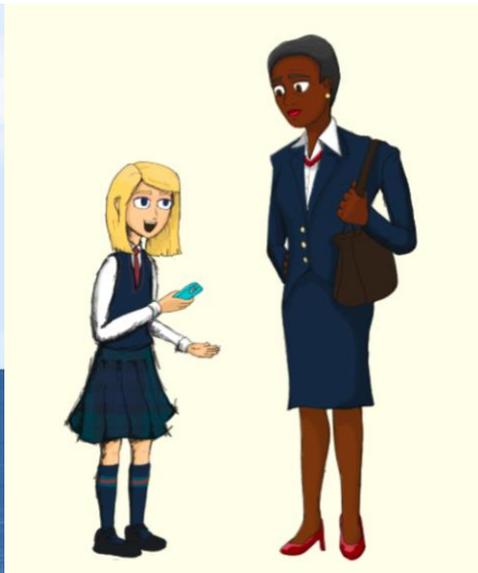
1. What is an activist?
2. What was the sit-in movement?
3. Describe a time that a friend or family member did not understand or relate to your interests. How did it make you feel?
4. How can music be used to share a message?
5. Describe a time you had to sacrifice something to stand up for your beliefs.

## Post-Show Discussion Questions/Journal Prompts

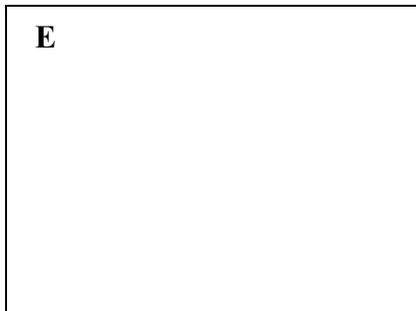
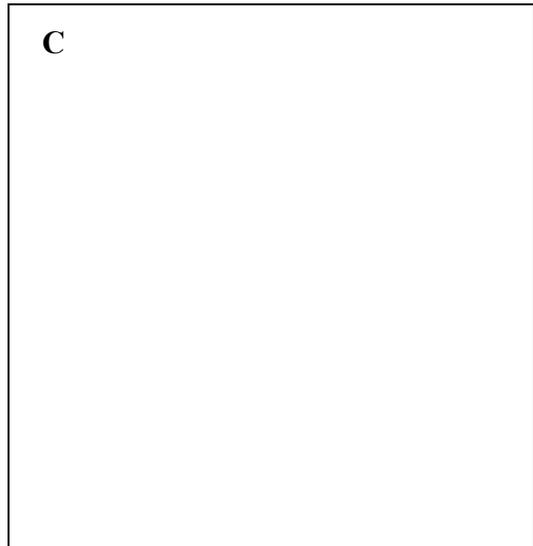
1. If you were a student at Janet's school, would you have participated in her sit-in? Why or why not?
2. How did the sit-in movement of the Civil Rights Movement impact modern-day activism?
3. If you were Consuelo or Mary Beth, what advice would you have given Janet?
4. How did the format of *Sit-In* (an animated short) impact how the story was told?
5. Compare and contrast the activism of Janet and her grandfather. How are they similar and different?
6. Write and draw a comic strip to share what happens after the end of *Sit-In*. (See the template on the next page.)



Photo Credit: Cory Anchors



Comic Strip Template:



## Statues/Tableau

A tableau can be used to quickly establish a scene that involves a large number of characters, to explore a particular moment in a story or drama, or to recreate a photograph or artwork for deeper analysis.

- Introduce the word “tableau” – still images or statues created with the actors’ bodies to represent a scene.
- Show a moment from *Sit-In* or describe the scene verbally so everyone knows what will be created.
- Have the participants/actors join the scene one at a time, building the image one statue at a time.
  - Virtual Option: Ask students who are not participating in the tableau to turn off their video. Then, hide non-video participants to create a “stage” where the students’ statues are easily visible on screen.
- Incorporate the use of levels. High, low, and medium body positions make the tableau more interesting for the audience.
- Additional options:
  - For younger students, begin with single “statues” to practice the strategy, and then, scaffold into a tableau of two, three, or more statues representing a certain scene.
  - Scaffold into the variation of activated tableau.
    - The teacher activates certain statues by calling their name and/or unmuting them (virtual option).
    - Once activated, the statue, as the character, speaks a relevant word, phrase, or statement connected to the theme of the tableau.

### Tableau Prompts for *Sit-In*:

- Janet explaining to Consuelo and Mary Beth that she will not be participating in the talent show
- Dr. Wilson telling Janet and her friends that she would be expelled if she participated in Fridays for Future
- Mr. Payne and his friends participating in a sit-in during the Civil Rights Movement
- Characters singing the freedom song outside of the school at the end of the play
- The beginning, middle, and end of the play



Students at West Jackson Elementary create a tableau of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

## Post-Show Activities

By: Connor

### Sit-In Play for the Young

E	R	O	E	V	E	I	L	E	B	A	C	A	A
C	T	T	S	E	T	O	R	P	M	O	R	H	F
L	C	C	A	R	E	H	T	E	G	O	T	L	A
I	O	C	M	H	E	N	O	H	P	A	G	E	M
M	N	T	O	E	E	A	E	R	U	T	U	F	V
A	G	D	O	L	A	E	E	N	L	T	P	E	E
T	R	R	S	P	A	C	E	C	I	G	E	G	A
E	E	E	F	R	E	E	N	N	C	O	A	A	R
C	S	A	I	R	R	P	G	A	L	L	R	P	M
H	S	M	N	O	I	T	U	L	L	O	P	Y	T
A	M	A	T	T	O	M	N	I	T	P	T	T	L
N	A	G	N	S	A	C	H	A	R	I	T	Y	O
G	N	R	N	O	E	I	M	M	G	U	M	R	O
E	N	R	O	T	A	V	O	N	N	I	T	E	Y

BELIEVE  
FUTURE  
ICECAPS  
TEAM  
CONGRESSMAN  
PLAN  
INNOVATOR  
CLIMATE CHANGE  
CHARITY  
MEGAPHONE  
FREE  
PROTEST  
HELP  
DREAM  
ALTOGETHER  
POLLUTION

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/1495546/>

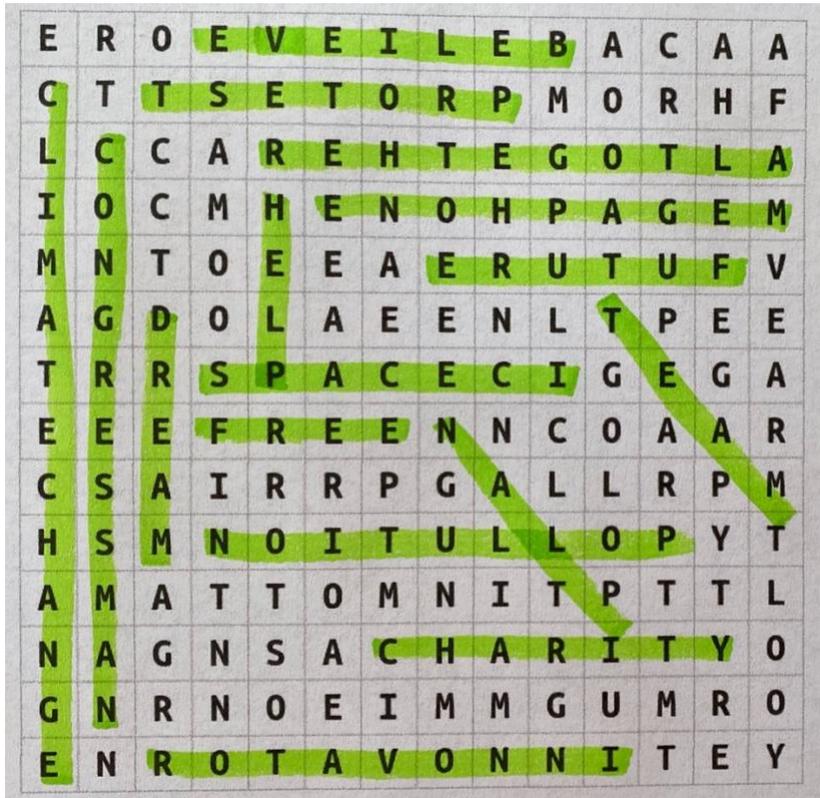
Answer key on page 19



Photo Credit: Cory Anchors

## Resources/Answer Key

Crossword Puzzle Answer Key:



### Sources:

- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qfs53>
- <https://www.crmvet.org/info/fsongs.htm>
- <https://plan-international.org/youth-activism>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth\\_activism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_activism)
- <https://marchforourlives.com/mission-story/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March\\_for\\_Our\\_Lives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_for_Our_Lives)
- <https://yoopies.co.uk/c/press-releases/blacklivesmatter>
- <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>
- <https://climatekids.nasa.gov/climate-change-meaning/>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta\\_Thunberg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greta_Thunberg)

### Thank You from Ms. Tahtinen:

It has been a pleasure working with Ms. Jasmine and the Alliance Theatre Institute on this Dramaturgy residency. My students have been able to research the history of sit-ins. Through this project, they have a deeper understanding that their voices are powerful, and they can make a difference in the world. It is always an engaging learning experience for our students when we partner with the Alliance Theatre Institute!