

# Let Freedom Ring:

## Music & Poetry of Black History

BRIGHT STAR TOURING THEATRE

### History Through the Eyes of Black Music

Music has been a part of our lives since the dawn of time. It is often referred to as the universal language, and spans through all walks of life. But one of the most influential music styles of all time has come from the African American community, and the rich culture that comes with the music of Black History.

**“MUSIC WAS MY REFUGE.”**  
-MAYA ANGELOU

Music has always been influential, and we feel it is an important tool in education and the arts. We strive to break the mold on theatre, and bring to you creative, knowledgeable, and inspiring shows to audiences of all ages, all across the world! By telling a story through music, we can see history as those that lived it did.



### About the Production...

As the nation's largest provider of Black History programming, we are constantly moved, inspired, and taken aback by so many of the speeches and songs that arisen out of key moments of Black History. From the stories of Frederick Douglass standing up and spontaneously describing his time as a Southern slave to the iconic words of Dr. Martin L. King Jr's speech 'I Have a Dream,' we were deeply inspired to create a show that brings to life some of these life-changing

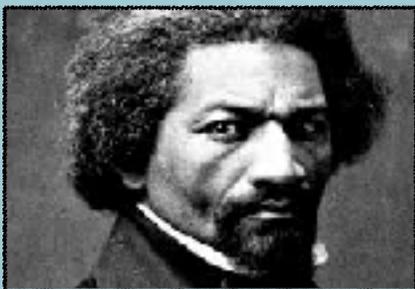
moments from throughout America's history. In creating the show it only seemed appropriate that the powerful anthems, hymns, and songs of these chapters also have an opportunity to shine. We hope that in viewing this production our actors can bring to life these moments in our history and inspire your young audiences with these iconic words, poems, songs and more of our nation's past. We are excited to share all of these amazing and powerful pieces with you.

#### The Show at a Glance:

Running Time : 45-minutes Ideal Audience: 3rd Grade & Higher

Post Show Question/Answer lasting a few minutes.

Two Professional Actors traveling the country with this show!



**FREDERICK DOUGLASS:** Born in 1818, Mr. Douglass taught himself how to read and went on to become one of the most powerful voices of the Abolition Movement--one of his most iconic speeches is 'Fourth of July'



**DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.** The Leader of the Civil Rights Movement-- his speeches empowered & inspired the nation! In 1963, he delivered the 'I Have a Dream Speech' in Washington DC.



**SOJOURNER TRUTH:** In 1851 her speech 'Ain't I a Woman?' was given at the Women's Convention in Akron. Born into slavery in 1791, Ms. Truth was one of the most powerful advocates for human rights in the 19th century.

# I HAVE A



# DREAM...

**Who:** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr delivered the speech.

**When?** August 28, 1963

**Where?** Washington DC

**Why?** This speech was delivered at the March on Washington, a pivotal time in the struggle for Civil Rights for Black Americans. More than 200,000 people from all walks of life attended the march. Since 1960, Dr. King had talked about his 'dreams' and during the key moment in his speech and he began improvising the sections that became so iconic and everlasting!

# The Roots of Protest Songs in Black Gospel Music



## FREEDOM SONGS AND THEIR ROOTS

The Freedom Songs pulled their musical roots from any number of sources: spirituals, gospel, rhythm & blues, and so much more. In fact, they were often referred to as 'Civil Rights Hymns.'

During the Underground Railroad, songs like 'Steal Away' and 'Wade in the Water' clearly came to us rooted from the religious traditions of the African American slaves. These songs not only provided people with a sense of hope for their future, but many also gave instructions to the slaves on ways to win their freedom. For example, 'Follow the Drinking Gourd' is about the stars of the Big Dipper being used as a guide while traveling through the night to avoid capture. It seems that music was a way of life during both the Civil Rights Movement and the struggles to end slavery.

## KEY SONGS FROM THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

### We Shall

### Overcome

This song, based upon an old spiritual, has become THE song of struggle for protestors around the world.

### Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around

First recording was 1947 of this powerful song of

### protest! This Little Light of Mine

This song has a little bit of a secret history, but the first recording of the song appears in 1939.

## Spotlight:

**Guy Carawan**  
1927-2015



Guy Carawan is credited with introducing the song 'We Shall Overcome' to the American Civil Rights Movement. He was the music director of Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee.

## Classroom Activities

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1. **Create Your Own Art!** Supplies needed: pencil, paper. For this project, students can work individually or in small groups of 2-3. The choice is up to you. Have each group or person create a song or poem about something important to them. It must be a topic that invokes emotion and that they feel passionately about sharing with the world. After the song or poem is written, they have the choice to read or perform their piece to the class. Maybe even post them out in the hallway for the other students to read.
2. **Highlight a Hero!** Supplies needed: library access, pencil, paper. Have each student pick or assign to each student an influential musician or poet from throughout Black History. That student must then find out all they can about the life and work of their assigned person. Gathering pictures, works, recorded tracks, and anything else they can find to add to their presentation. Each presentation must be 90 seconds long and the students must stand up and tell the class what they

## DID YOU KNOW?



\* *Langston Hughes created jazz poetry, as well as lead the Harlem Renaissance in New York City.*



*Maya Angelou was the first black female director and producer for 20th Century Fox.*

learned about their hero and why they think they are considered an influential person in the arts.

3. **Discover New Works!** Supplies needed: library access, pen, paper. Challenge your students to find something you haven't discussed before. Go over some of the most famous works and influences of

Black History musicians, poets, and writers, some of which we talk about in this show. Then have them go off and find someone completely new. Find out why that person is influential. The catch is that it has to be someone new: singers, dancers, actors, artists, poets, etc. Then bring a sample of their work and present it to the class.

## SPOTLIGHT: FREDERICK DOUGLASS



After teaching himself to read, Mr. Douglass eventually went on to print 'The North Star' an anti-slavery newspaper from 1847-1851. The paper had more than 4000 subscribers.



William Lloyd Garrison inspired Mr. Douglass to give a speech at the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society Annual convention. His first hand account of living as a slave became a battle cry for the Abolition Movement.

Frederick Douglass became an avid speaker against slavery throughout his life. At his first speech, one correspondent said this of him:



**"Flinty Hearts were pierced, and cold ones melted by his eloquence."**

# Classroom Activities!

## ... ACTIVITY ONE:

Divide the class up into small groups and have each pick a historical figure from the show and research them. Try to find three facts about them that were not mentioned in the show. Then discuss the person as a group, and share what you have found with the rest of the class. Discuss why those things were important, and how some of those facts have helped shape the America we know today.

## ... ACTIVITY TWO:

As a class listen and read various spirituals and consider how likely they are to contain hidden messages and meanings. Another option is to divide the students into group and have them tackle individual spirituals. 'Follow the Drinking Gourd,' 'Wade in the Water,' and more are all beautiful songs and packed with various meanings. For discussion: Why do you think these songs contained hidden meanings? Would you have been able to pick up these messages if you were to hear them when they were first sung?

*"Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice"*

*-Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. I Have A Dream Speech*

## ... ACTIVITY THREE:

There is nothing more powerful than listening to the live recording of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering this speech in Washington DC at the March on Washington. As a class try and transport yourself back to these trying times in American history. What would that have been like to have been there during this time? Do you think his dream has been realized? If he was to deliver the speech today what kind of dreams do you think he would have for a future America? Are there other speeches that you can think of that are as powerful as this one? Which other speeches from American history seem to be as famous as this one? Why? What is it about some speeches that inspire people for generations to come? What's your favorite section of the speech?



*"Truth is powerful and it prevails." -Sojourner Truth*

## ... ACTIVITY FOUR:

People are often separated by the things we see on the outside, but why not try and focus on what we all have in common instead? Have the class stand in a large circle, and have everyone say one thing about themselves. If any person also has that thing, they will all step into the circle.--Example. I have blue eyes. Each person that also has blue eyes will step into the circle, then step out.-- Each round will start with everyone on the outside, and come in for each new similarity. What things shocked you? What things did you not think you had in common?

# Everything about the Theatre!



## Some fun theatre vocabulary!

...

**Costumes:** The wigs, clothing, and glasses that the actors wore to help flush out their characters .

**Auditions:** How an actor gets a role is by auditioning, they may have to interview, pretend to be a character from the play, read something from it, etc.

**Set Designer:** The person who decided what should be on the background and who painted or created it.

**Upstage:** The area away from the audience, like the back wall of the a stage.

**Director:** The person who told the actors where to go while they were on-stage and helped them create the characters they would play.

## Facts about us!

1. Did you know that we're owned by an Emmy award winning actor?

2. Our actors average 1,000 miles a week traveling the country to entertain young audiences.

3. Our programs have been seen in almost every corner of the country and around the world.

4. We watch over 1200 actors a season audition, before we cast our season.

5. We offer dozens and dozens different shows a season from Black History to anti-bullying and literary classics.

6. We now have tours throughout Europe!

7. We're based in Asheville, NC



## BRIGHT STAR THEATRE

Bright Star Touring Theatre performs across the country from Boston to Burbank and virtually every school, museum, theatre, community event in between. Each Season our shows run the gamut from Black History to anti-bullying, from literary classics to biographical shows. Our shows are available throughout the year for any event in any part of the world.



## ABOUT US!

Founded in 2003, Bright Star Theatre tours the nation offering high quality, affordable programs to every imaginable venue. We've had countless engagements at the National Theatre, toured Germany and Russia, and are so grateful to be in your very school today!

## Let Freedom Ring: Music & Poetry of Black History

Made it's Debut in September 2017  
National Tour

We want every show to be special and remarkable for our audience. Please feel free to connect with us at anytime to tell us about your experience:

[David@brightstartheatre.com](mailto:David@brightstartheatre.com)

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Learn more about this show, this company & our whole Season:

[www.brightstartheatre.com](http://www.brightstartheatre.com)