

# JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM

written by

**Nambi E. Kelley**



Cameron Goode as Jabari. Chicago Children's Theatre, 2016. Photo by Chuck Osgood.

## **Study Guide!**

Recommended for ages 8+

**JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM follows a young Chicago boy's journey from fear to hope.**

#theatre #children #racelrelations #civilrights #newwork #blacklivesmatter

# **JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM Welcome!**

**Welcome to Nambi E. Kelley’s JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM directed by Daniel Carlton with musical 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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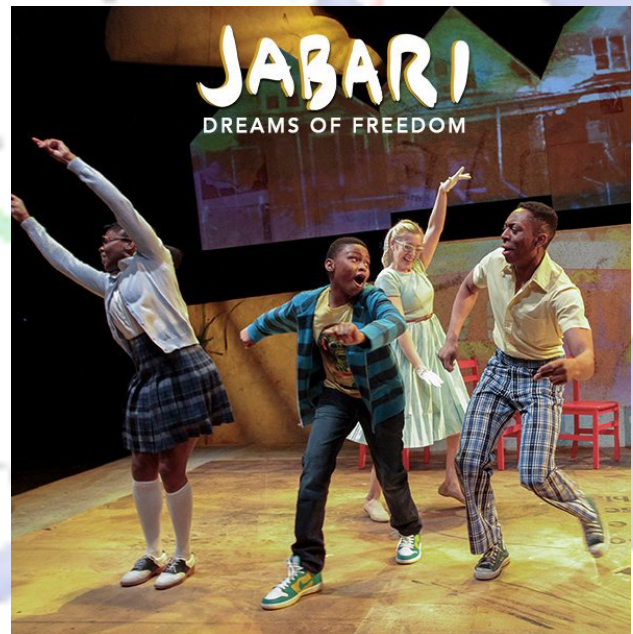


# **The Story of JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM**

JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM is a play to save Black youth from living through fear. It tells the story of Jabari, a young Black boy from the South Side of Chicago who loves to paint. Through painting, he can escape the turbulent world around him. When a friend is hurt by police, Jabari is afraid to leave the house. With his Forever President Barack Obama as a guide, he dreams he meets children from the Civil Rights Era including Ruby Bridges and Claudette Colvin who teach him how to be fearless, which Jabari also learns is the meaning of his name. Then, he meets his hero, Barack Obama, as a 7-year-old boy on the eve of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr... Can Jabari use the lessons he's learned to instill in young Barack the ideas he'll need to become president? Will Jabari take these lessons back into his own life and heal his community? Using history, rap, freedom songs, and humor, this play explores what it means to have courage in a world where Black children are not safe.

## **PRODUCTION HISTORY:**

JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM was commissioned by Artistic Director Jacqueline Russell at the Chicago Children's Theatre in 2015. It had its first workshop in the winter of 2015, followed by the world premiere in 2016 directed by Lili-Anne Brown with musical composition by Jaret Landon. JABARI was then awarded a residency at the New Victory Theatre in NYC as part of New Victory LabWorks 2018-19. The residency included development, networking opportunities, rehearsal space, and multiple workshops over the course of the season. Two public performances were held in June 2019 directed by Daniel Carlton. The play is currently being offered in a digital format and as a national tour.



## **ABOUT PLAYWRIGHT NAMBI E. KELLEY:**



Award-winning playwright and actress Nambi E. Kelley was chosen by literary legend Toni Morrison to adapt her novel *Jazz* for the stage (Baltimore Center Stage, Marin Theatre Company). Her adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son* has been seen across the country and premiered off-Broadway in 2019 at The Duke on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street (The Acting Company; AUDELCO Award for "Best Play"). Nambi is a former playwright-in-residence at the National Black Theatre, the Goodman Theatre, and the New Victory Theatre. She is the winner of the Prince Prize 2019 and a Dramatists Guild Foundation Writers Alliance Grant 2018-19. Nambi is a season three staff writer on Showtime's *The Chi*.



# JABARI and The Civil Rights Movement



Although enslaved Americans were freed as a result of The Civil War and were granted basic civil rights through the passage of the 14th and 15th amendments to the U.S. Constitution, they struggled for protection of these rights into the next century. The fight to liberate Black Americans in the 1950s and '60s has special historical significance and is referred to as The Civil Rights Movement. Centering on nonviolent protest, this movement achieved the greatest breakthrough in equal rights legislation for Black Americans since the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), including the desegregation of public areas in the South.





# JABARI and Civil Rights – Timeline

JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM references many historical people and places from the Civil Rights Era and today – some of these people even appear as characters in the play! Here is a quick overview of some of the important historical events you'll hear mentioned on Jabari's journey through The Civil Rights Movement and beyond!

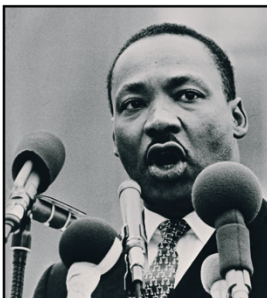
**May 17, 1954 – Brown v. Board of Education** is decided in the Supreme Court, effectively ending racial segregation in schools.

**Aug. 28, 1955** – 14-year old **Emmett Till** is killed in Chicago, bringing international attention to the Civil Rights Movement.



**Nov. 14, 1960 – Ruby Bridges** is the first African American child to attend an all-white elementary school in Louisiana.

**May 2, 1963** – Hundreds of students leave school to march in Birmingham, Alabama. **The Birmingham Children's Crusade of 1963** resulted in many arrests.



**April 4, 1968 – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** is assassinated on the balcony of his hotel room in Memphis, Tennessee.

**March 2, 1955 – Claudette Colvin** is the first person arrested for resisting bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama.



**Dec. 1, 1955 – Rosa Parks** refuses to give up her seat on the bus to a white man, prompting a year-long bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama.

**Aug. 4, 1961 – Barack Obama** is born in Honolulu, Hawaii to a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas.

**Aug. 28, 1963 – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.** delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech in front of more than 200,000 people in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial. He voiced his belief that all men could be brothers.

**Jan. 20, 2009 – Barack Obama** is inaugurated as the 44th and first African American President of the United States of America.



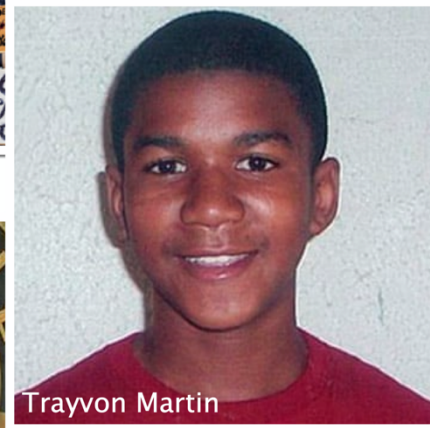
# The Fight Continues: Black Lives Matter

Though the Civil Rights Movement tends to refer to this period in the 1950s and '60s, the fight for civil rights is far from over. Injustice against Black Americans continues, reaching through time into our current moment. In fact, it was the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin on February 26, 2012 that moved playwright Nambi E. Kelley to write JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM. In response to Martin's murderer going free in 2013, #BlackLivesMatter was founded. The mission of the organization is to "eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities." #BlackLivesMatter advocates for non-violent demonstration to achieve this goal.

Today, we are living in the aftermath of the killings of innocent Black men and women like George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. These deaths—many at the hands of police officers—have sparked protests across the nation. #BlackLivesMatter continues the work of rallying Americans in the fight for justice for these and all Black Lives.



Breonna Taylor



Trayvon Martin



George Floyd



Ahmaud Arbery



# **Civil Rights Vocabulary List**

**Enslaved** – an enslaved person is a human being who is legally owned by another.

**The Civil War** – the war fought in the U.S. between northern states that wanted to remain a united country and southern states who wanted to form their own. The North was also fighting to end slavery, which the South wanted to keep. The war began in 1861 and ended when the South surrendered in 1865.

**U.S. Constitution** – the highest law in the United States. Our Constitution guides how our government works.

**14<sup>th</sup> Amendment** – the change to the Constitution that defined what it means to be a U.S. citizen and gave all citizens equal protection under the law.

**15<sup>th</sup> Amendment** – the change to the Constitution that ensured the right to vote regardless of race.

**Liberate** – to release or free.

**Legislation** – the laws that are made.

**Reconstruction Era** – the effort to rebuild the South and integrate 4 million newly-freed people into the United States after the Civil War.

**Segregation** – the separation of people in their daily lives based on race; **desegregation** is a process to end this.

**Boycott** – To refuse to buy something or to take part in something as a way of protesting.

**Assassinated** – murdered by sudden or secret attack, often for political reasons.

**Inaugurated** – welcomed into an office (such as the Presidency) with appropriate ceremonies.

**Eradicate** – to do away with as completely as if by pulling up the roots.

**White Supremacy** – the belief that the white people are better than people of other races.

**The Civil Rights Acts** – The eight laws passed between 1866 and 1991 that banned discrimination in its various forms. The most well-known is the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made it illegal to discriminate in public places, facilities, and schools.

**Discrimination** – when a person or group of people is treated unfairly because of some part of their identity, like their race.

# **Traditional Negro Spiritual Songs**

Traditional Negro spiritual songs are highly influenced by the cultural environment. The first Negro spirituals were inspired by African music, and some of them were accompanied by dancing including hand clapping and foot tapping. Traditional Negro spirituals are still sung today, but new songs have also emerged that center on religion and faith, community life, and personal improvement. Several also take inspiration from and serve in response to social issues like segregation. During the Civil Rights Movement, Negro spirituals like “We Shall Overcome”, “This Little Light of Mine”, and “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” were sung to breed hope among African Americans. They are cries for liberation and affirmation. African Americans sing these songs to remind themselves that they can be and do anything! Here are the lyrics to some of the spirituals featured in JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM!

## **OH FREEDOM!**

Oh, freedom, Oh, freedom  
Oh, freedom over me  
And before I'd be a slave  
I'd be buried in my grave  
And go home to my Lord  
And be free.

## **THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE!**

This little light of mine  
I'm gonna let it shine  
This little light of mine  
I'm gonna let it shine (Hallelujah)  
This little light of mine  
I'm gonna let it shine  
Let it shine, let it shine  
Let it shine.

## **WOKE UP THIS MORNING**

Woke up this morning with my mind  
Stayed on freedom  
Woke up this morning with my mind  
Stayed on freedom  
Woke up this morning with my mind  
Stayed on freedom  
Hallelu-, Hallelu-, Hallelujah.

## **LIFT EV'RY VOICE AND SING**

Sing a song full of the faith that the  
Dark past has taught us  
Sing a song full of the hope that the  
Present has brought us  
Facing the rising sun  
Of our new day begun  
Let us march on till victory is won





# Healing in the Classroom

JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM is about fear, hope, and one's relationship to their community. As a company, we strive to assist teachers and students with the emotional processing of the show. **Trauma-Informed Care** is an approach in the human service field that assumes that a person is more likely than not to have a history of trauma. The Five Principles of Trauma-Informed Care are **Safety, Choice, Collaboration, Trustworthiness, and Empowerment**. Using these principles to guide your classroom discussions about the play lowers the risk of re-traumatization and promotes healing. Here are some helpful tips!

**Safety:** Create a physically and emotionally safe environment for students. Establish the opportunity to pass on a question or activity and give them the option to share confidentially.

**Trustworthiness:** Establish boundaries and adhere to them. Consistency builds trust, as does clarity. When students share their viewpoint, actively listen and ask curious questions!

**Choice:** The more choice and control the students have, the more likely they are to participate! Give them the autonomy to choose what they share and how.

**Collaboration:** The teacher/student relationship is one with a power dynamic built in, and it's important to recognize that. Make students co-creators in the lesson plan or give them the opportunity to evaluate its effectiveness. Also, participate in the activities yourself!

**Empowerment:** Focusing on an individual's strengths and empowering them to build on those strengths promotes resilience. An atmosphere in which students feel validated and affirmed is key—Equal speaking time is an indispensable part of this empowerment.

Another excellent resource for creating an equitable learning environment is **The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning**. CASEL presents a framework with five Core Competence Areas: **Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Self-Management, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making**.

**Self-Awareness:** The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

**Social Awareness:** The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.

**Self-Management:** The abilities to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

**Relationship Skills:** The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.

**Responsible Decision-Making:** The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

These competencies can be taught, modeled, and practiced!

**See the “Additional Resources and Further Reading” section for more about Trauma-Informed Care and Social and Emotional Learning.**

## Activities

### Meet the Characters of JABARI!



**DIRECTIONS:** Match each character or historical figure with their description and write the appropriate letter next to their name.

\_\_\_\_\_ PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

\_\_\_\_\_ EMMETT TILL

\_\_\_\_\_ CLAUDETTE COLVIN

\_\_\_\_\_ JABARI

\_\_\_\_\_ RUBY BRIDGES

\_\_\_\_\_ DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

A. The first African American girl who wouldn't give up her seat on the bus.

B. The 44th and first African American President of the United States of America.

C. The first African American child to go to an all-white school in Louisiana.

D. A 10-year-old Black boy who loves to paint but does not love studying civil rights.

E. Delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial.

F. Chicago child who started the Civil Rights Movement. Or rather, his death did.



# Jabari's Word Search!

**DIRECTIONS:** Complete the following word search for fun!

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

## WORD BANK:

CHICAGO

CLAUDETTE

EMMETT

JABARI

SEGREGATION

RUBY

OBAMA

# **Discussion Questions**

**DIRECTIONS:** Write or share a short response to each of these questions.

## **About the Show:**

- In the beginning of JABARI DREAMS OF FREEDOM, why is Jabari afraid?
- Who was your favorite character in this story and why?
- What lesson did Jabari learn from Claudette, Ruby, and the other young people of the Civil Rights Movement?

## **The Civil Rights Movement:**

- This production highlighted some of the young people in the Civil Rights Movement - who else do you know that fought for someone else's rights?
- Young people are still leading movements today, like Greta Thunberg for climate change and Malala Yousefzai for female education. If you were to lead or join a movement, what would you fight for?

## **Traditional Negro Spiritual Songs:**

- Traditional Negro spiritual songs are about hope - What other song or songs do you know that you find inspirational and why?
- Traditional Negro spiritual songs are also called "Freedom Songs" - why do you think that they are called that? What is your definition of "Freedom"?

## **Emotional Connections:**

- Have you ever stood up for a friend? If so, how did you stand up for them?
- Have you ever been afraid of something? If so, what? How did you conquer your fear?
- Have you ever fought for something in which you believed? If so, what?
- Have you ever made a new friend before? If so, what was that experience like for you?
- Have you ever dreamed something so big that you achieved it? If so, what did you dream, and how did you achieve your goal?
- What is your definition of bravery?
- Who is in your community? How do you stay connected to them?



## **Additional Resources and Further Reading**

Bridges, Ruby. *This is Your Time*. Random House Children's Books, 2020.

Chambers, Veronica. *Resist: 40 Profiles of Ordinary People Who Rose Up Against Tyranny and Injustice*. HarperCollins Publishers, 2020.

Levinson, Cynthia. *The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2017.

The Children's Theatre Company. "Theatre as a Tool for Moral Reasoning." *YouTube*, uploaded by Wilmette Institute, 26 May 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THCvC54JjOU>.

Bell, Lee Anne et al. "The Storytelling Project Curriculum: Learning About Race and Racism Through Storytelling and the Arts." *Racial Equity Tools*, [https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/stp\\_curriculum.pdf](https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/stp_curriculum.pdf). Copyright 2008.

Derman-Sparks, Louise et al. "Children, Race, and Racism: How Race Awareness Develops." *Teaching for Change*, [https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/ec\\_childrenraceracism\\_english.pdf](https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/ec_childrenraceracism_english.pdf). 1980.

The Institute on Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care. "What is Trauma-Informed Care?" *University at Buffalo, Buffalo Center for Social Research*, <http://socialwork.buffalo.edu/social-research/institutes-centers/institute-on-trauma-and-trauma-informed-care/what-is-trauma-informed-care.html>. Copyright 2020.

*Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*. CASEL, 2020, [www.casel.org](http://www.casel.org).