THE CENTRAL PARK FIVE

DEAR EDUCATOR

Welcome to the study guide for the screening of The Central Park Five that you and your students will be attending as part of BAM Education’s Civil Rights in Cinema series. This absorbing documentary film focuses on the story of five young men falsely accused of a shocking and brutal crime. In their own words, the men take us through their heart-wrenching journey from their arrest (while still in their teens), interrogation, coerced confessions, trials, prison terms, and the eventual overturning of their guilty convictions. The filmmakers interweave archival footage, photographs, newspaper headlines, and interviews with individuals directly involved in what became a grievous miscarriage of justice and one of the most polarizing events in recent New York City history.

YOUR VISIT TO BAM

The BAM program includes this study guide, a pre-performance workshop in your classroom led by a BAM teaching artist, and the screening and discussion in the BAM Rose Cinemas.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to connect to the Common Core State Standards with relevant information and activities; to reinforce and encourage critical thinking and analytical skills; and to provide the tools and background information necessary for an engaging and inspiring experience at BAM. Please use these materials and enrichment activities to engage students before or after the show.

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In the early evening of April 19, 1989, a woman was attacked while jogging through Central Park. She had been bound, gagged, beaten, raped, and left for dead. The woman was discovered in the early hours of the next morning, unconscious and clinging to life. She was rushed to a nearby hospital where doctors held out little hope that she would survive her injuries.

That same evening, the local police precinct received phone calls describing random beatings and muggings by a gang of marauding youths in Central Park. In response to these reports, the police arrested 30-odd individuals, including Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Korey Wise, Yusef Salaam, and Raymond Santana. Soon the police learned of the assault on the jogger and targeted the boys for questioning about this attack.

The five boys sat for some 14—38 hours without food, water, or sleep while police officers relentlessly interrogated them: yelling, swearing, and grilling them. But the young men knew nothing about the attack on the jogger. The detectives told them they couldn’t go home until they admitted their involvement in the assault and that other suspects had already implicated them. (During the trial a detective explained how he had tricked Yusef Salaam into confessing by telling him that the police had fingerprints incriminating him. In reality, there were no fingerprints. But the detective was legally allowed to lie like this while interrogating a suspect.)

The police interrogation was so intense that the young teens would say anything to bring it to an end. With seemingly no choice, each teen confessed to attacking the jogger, though in reality they were innocent and their confessions were fabricated.

“We charged her. We got her on the ground. Everybody started hitting her and stuff...Everybody stompin’ and everything. Then...I grabbed one arm, some other kid grabbed one arm, and we grabbed her legs and stuff. Then we all took turns getting on her, getting on top of her.”

—Antron McCray

The news media covered some of the raciest and seemingly damning comments, such as those quoted in the article, “The Central Park Jogger Trial Begins.” Though the boys immediately took back their confessions, it was too late—they had incriminated themselves.

**Police Interrogation: Words and Pictures**

When questioning suspects, police are legally allowed to be antagonistic, accusatory, use leading questions, and say they have evidence they don’t have. Listen to a fascinating interview about the relationship between interrogations, false confessions, and their overwhelming impact on verdicts at [Beyond Good Cop/Bad Cop](https://www.beyondgoodcopbadcop.com). Afterwards, read [False Confessions and The Reid Technique](https://www.falseconfessionsandthereidtechnique.com). Then, research an alternative method called **PEACE**, which doesn’t allow manipulation or coercion, but is more similar to an interview.

If you were a detective, which technique would you want to use? Create a graphic novel with a chapter for each method that illustrates why you believe one technique is better than another.

**Interrogation Reform**

Advocates for reform to prevent false confessions demand interrogations to be taped in their entirety. Read the arguments of these advocates and the police response in “Crime, False Confessions and Videotape” and “Central Park Revisited” Craft a newspaper editorial that persuades the reader which side is right. Before writing, clarify the difference between a news article and an editorial. You can read examples in [The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com). Share your editorial on social media sites, asking for people’s response. Hopefully, you can get a lively debate going.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7** Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8** Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
THE TRIAL AND CONVICTIONS

These articles from The New York Daily News take you through the case’s timeline, from the assault in 1989 up to 2013.

At the end of the first trial, in August 1990, Raymond Santana, Yusef Salaam, and Antron McCray were acquitted of attempted murder. However, they were convicted of other charges including rape, assault, riot, and robbery. The three teens each received 5 to 10 years in a youth correctional facility, the maximum sentence allowed for juveniles. In a separate trial, which ended in December 1990, Kevin Richardson was found guilty of attempted murder and rape, and was given a prison sentence of 5 to 10 years. In this same trial, Korey Wise was convicted of riot, sexual abuse, and assault and received a sentence of 5 to 15 years.

THE MEDIA: REPORTER RESPONSIBILITY

Some in the African-American community criticized major media outlets for biased reporting. A lot of questions were raised by this case: Why weren’t reporters more skeptical about what they were being told by the police and prosecutors? Why didn’t they pursue other sources on their own? What kind of responsibility do reporters have as the frontline interpreters of historic events? Are they honor-bound to be unbiased? Can human beings ever really be truly neutral, since our perceptions are influenced by experience and beliefs?

PUBLIC REACTION: UGLINESS WAS IN THE AIR

The rape outraged the public. Many people, including politicians and community leaders, demanded the death penalty even though the defendants were minors. The business celebrity Donald Trump took out a full-page advertisement in four major New York City newspapers entitled “Bring Back the Death Penalty. Bring Back Our Police!”, denouncing those who counseled against “hate and rancor.” Trump was quoted in The Village Voice as saying “I want to hate these muggers and murderers. They should be forced to suffer and, when they kill, they should be executed…I am looking to punish them…I want them to be afraid.”

The reaction of the African-American community was more nuanced. The mother of a 15-year-old who’d been questioned but later released was quoted in The New York Times as saying “If it were a black woman in a black neighborhood, no one would care about this…Since black kids supposedly did this to a white woman, they’re going to try and find some way to blame all of us.” But there were also African Americans that assumed the boys were guilty. Others disassociated themselves entirely from the issue.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Journalistic Code of Ethics

Learn about the famous example of outstanding investigative journalism that exposed the government cover-up in the Watergate break-in and led to President Richard Nixon’s resignation. Then, reflect on journalistic ethics and create what you believe should be an official “journalistic code of ethics”—the standard to which any good journalist should be held. Take a look at medical profession’s Hippocratic Oath.

Who Is Left Out of the History Books?

Read a unit on Civil Rights in a high school text book and decide whether it is completely objective. What might have be added that could change the “official” story? For instance, it wasn’t until recently that some textbooks began to include accurate and unbiased information about Native Americans when telling the history of North America, even though hundreds of different nations had existed on the continent for some 15,000 years before the Europeans arrived.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.
New York in 1989 was plagued by bloody and often lethal crime. Every four to five hours, someone was killed; several rapes were reported in the week the jogger was attacked. An epidemic of crack cocaine addiction created a lucrative market for dealers. As a result, young minority men were supplied with money and guns, resulting in gang wars and ceaseless violence that destroyed whole minority families and neighborhoods.

The Art of Keith Haring

Consider artist Keith Haring’s signature work, *Crack Is Wack*. Click here to learn how Haring helped transformed graffiti—which at the time was used to deface walls, buildings, and subway cars—into a public form of positive expression. Draw sketches of what you would graffiti on a playground wall today to raise awareness about a social issue. How could you get the community involved in helping you paint it?

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5** Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH: AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

Korey, Yusef, Kevin, Raymond, and Antron’s plight was not the only race-related incident in New York City at the time of their arrest. African American Yusef Hawkins was shot to death when a gang of some 30 white youths surrounded him and his friends on their way to check out a used car. Trinidadian Michael Griffith was fatally hit by a car when running from a mob of white youths in Howard Beach, Queens, and Bernhard Goetz shot and seriously wounded four young African-American men when they allegedly tried to mug him on the subway.

Graduation: Supporting Success

The high school drop-out rate in 1989 was 30.7%. In 2012—2013, it was 11.4%. In small teams, investigate what possible impact race, class, income, and so forth have on these ratios. Share your research with one another, then debate what the numbers might tell us about how things have or haven’t changed. What factors have contributed/continue to contribute to these graduation rates?

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.9-10.7** Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words into visual form (e.g., a table or chart) and translate information expressed visually or mathematically (e.g., in an equation) into words.

12 Angry Men

Watch the film *12 Angry Men* (1957) an intense peek inside a jury room that wrestles with the influence of race and the presumption of innocence. Note the film’s similarity to the Central Park Five case. Why do you think this movie has a different outcome? One juror in *The Central Park Five* remembers how he gave in to the pressure the other jurors put on him and, to end the long deliberation, went along with the guilty verdict. This is in stark contrast to what happens in *12 Angry Men*. What does this distinction tell us about the ideals expressed in Hollywood films? How do these ideals reflect reality?
Thirteen years after the attack, serial rapist and murderer Matias Reyes confessed to the assault. Reyes had raped eight women in a seven-month period, including one in Central Park on April 17, 1989, just two days before he attacked the jogger.

Reyes was arrested in August 1989, when one of his victims managed to escape. When the police interrogated Reyes, they failed to connect him with the Central Park Five attack. Although a detective in Central Park on the night of the jogger’s rape had stopped and questioned Reyes, he was not taken into custody. Reyes walked away listening to the headset he’d stolen from the jogger.

While in prison in 2002, Reyes ran into Korey, who he had met when Korey was first awaiting trial, and said he could “feel the man’s pain.” Reyes began to talk to other inmates indicating that he was the one who attacked and raped the woman that Korey Wise was indicted and imprisoned for attacking. Soon, Reyes confessed to authorities that he alone had attacked the jogger, and that the five teens were innocent.

There’s no clear reason why Reyes chose that moment to confess. Some suggest he was hoping to get a transfer and special privileges for confessing to the attack. Others claimed that he craved media attention. Hearing his harrowing words during the film, what do you think was his motive for confessing?

Reyes’ confession put everything the prosecution did into question. Their reputations on the line, the prosecutors and police each decided to re-examine their own actions rather than calling in a neutral outsider. The two resulting reports examined the same information, but came up with opposite conclusions—and neither acknowledged any hint of possible error.

The prosecution declared the boys innocent based on their findings:

• Reyes gave very specific correct details that hadn’t been released to the public and that the kids didn’t mention.

• Reyes insisted he was the lone attacker.

• Reyes’ DNA was found by a factor of one in 6,000,000,000 as the only source found on the jogger. None of the boys’ DNA matched.

• That night’s timeline—as constructed by the prosecution—suggests that the youths could not have raped the jogger because they were elsewhere in the park.

• The track in the ground made when the woman was dragged into the ravine was far to narrow for it to have been made by more than one person.

The Police investigation put forth that Reyes and the boys were all guilty:

• The police timeline indicated that both the boys and Reyes could have either simultaneously or consecutively attacked the jogger.

• Although Reyes’ DNA matched that on the woman, it could be that none of boys’ DNA was left on her.

• The police declared that Reyes was a manipulative liar, and only his word proved that he acted alone.

• According to the police panel, Reyes could have confessed in order to bargain for a transfer to a more desirable prison and/or a new media spotlight.

The judge set aside the guilty verdict for all five young men, ruling that if the evidence and Reyes’ confession had been available at trial the boys would not have been convicted.

Antron’s mother said, “You don’t know how good it feels.” Yusef’s mom declared, “Victory today is mine.” But at the public housing complex where three of the five men live, the reaction was split. One woman was delighted: “They [had] indicted this whole community. This is glorious for everyone, but especially those boys.” However, support was not unanimous. Another neighbor believed the men shouldn’t have been cleared, claiming that they had to have had some involvement in the attack and citing that one person could not have dragged the woman 100 yards into the secluded wooded area where she was found.

“But I brought a lot of stuff with me I didn’t even know existed…I had this aggression. If I was in a room with too many people I [could] talk to you, but I [wouldn’t] give you eye-to-eye contact…I [was] too busy watching the room” for potential danger.

—Raymond Sanatana

Stigmatized as a registered sex offender, people wouldn’t hire him. Spiraling into depression and hopeless, Raymond decided he had no other option: “I’m contributin’ nothing [to the household]. I can’t function...So I said ‘you know what…I’m gonna just get in the drug game,’” which led him straight back to prison.

After their harrowing years locked away, Korey, Yusef, Antron, Kevin, and Raymond came out without any skills to navigate daily life. The world had changed; they didn’t know how to use Metro cards, handle money, or interact socially. Produce and post a short video about what it must have been for the men. Include what advice the five men might give to other newly released prisoners.

PROSECUTION REPORT CONCLUSION: NOT GUILTY

POLICE PANEL’S CONCLUSION: GUILTY

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Coping When The World Has Passed You By

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2b

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1d

Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.
THE FILMMAKERS

Ken Burns was born in Brooklyn in 1953, graduated from Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, and is one of the most celebrated and well-known documentary filmmakers of our time. Over his 30-year career, his projects have included The Dust Bowl, Prohibition, Baseball: The Tenth Inning, and many other documentary series and films. For him, “race is at the heart of this national narrative, whether we want to admit it or not.” He says that no matter what subjects he tackles in his work—whether it’s baseball or jazz, Mark Twain or the Civil War—they always seem to boil down to two things: race and place. Sarah, Ken, and David have given many interviews about making the film, which you can explore for deeper insight into the project and process at “The Family Business” and “Director Interview” and “About the Filmmakers.”

The Central Park Five was a completely collaborative effort. Ken Burns says, “It defined our lives.” All three filmmakers conducted some of the interviews, and during the editing process debated and discussed what direction they wanted the film to take.

Sarah Burns worked on the film for over a decade. It was her passion project. Sarah teamed up with her father and husband as producer, writer, and director of what would become her first film. She believes it’s been “a real learning experience from the filmmaking side of things, but I think that it’s all about the story. The most important thing in a good film is finding a good story to tell.” The team is working together again on their next project, which is about Jackie Robinson. Sarah and David live in Brooklyn with their daughter.

David McMahon has worked with Ken Burns on a number of acclaimed documentaries as a producer and writer. He also worked with PBS’s public affairs series Frontline and at National Geographic Television and Film. David was in charge of the day-to-day aspects of making The Central Park Five. He says, “Ultimately The Central Park Five is about human dignity. It is about five young men who lose their youth but maintain their dignity in the face of a horrific and unimaginable situation.” He grew up in Clarence, New York, and graduated from the University of Michigan.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Film Critics’ Response

“Central Park Five is at first discomforting, then enraging, then illuminating.”—The New Yorker

“Measured in tone and outraged in its argument, it is an emotionally stirring, at times crushingly depressing cinematic call to witness.”—The New York Times

Read poignant reviews at Voices: The US, New York City, and The Central Park Five—Then And Now. Then, survey five people who’ve seen the film about their response to a criticism of the documentary as “a ‘one-sided’ version of events.” New York City’s legal department made that comment, though the department chose not to participate in the making of the film. Afterwards, write your own movie review for friends that uses specifics from the documentary to support you opinion, and encourages them to watch it themselves.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
THE YOUNG MEN: THEN & NOW

Raymond Santana, Jr, age 14
Before: Meet Raymond, a bit of a “ladies’ man” attracting the girls with his humor. Although good at sports, he prefers taking art classes and sketching in his free time. Born in the United States, his family came from Puerto Rico.
Now: Raymond lives in the same apartment in Harlem where he grew up, and has a daughter who was born in 2004. In addition to working for one of the city’s largest unions he participates in the Innocence Project because of his deep commitment to sharing his life journey with young people.

Yusef Salaam, age 15
Before: Tall and reed-like, Yusef has an artistic soul, which he expresses through drawing, jewelry making, and wood sculpture. Yusef has gone to a number of schools including the LaGuardia High School of Music and Art until he was dismissed when a knife was found in his locker. His friends, however, describe him as friendly and unaggressive. Yusef lives with his mom and is in the Big Brother/Big Sister program.
Now: After his release, Yusef felt the sting of being a registered sex offender. He’s now a proud dad, poet, and activist for a remarkable number of social issues from amending police interrogation techniques to policy changes in the welfare and prison system.

Antron McCray, age 15
Before: Don’t be surprised if Antron doesn’t greet you like a long-lost friend. Even though he’s painfully shy, Antron fully participates in life. He lives with his mom and stepdad, who also coaches Antron’s quite successful baseball team. Academically, Antron does pretty well at the Career Academy.
Now: Antron’s married and has six children. After prison, he moved away and legally changed his name in order to find work. Ironically, despite having been completely cleared of his conviction, both the police department and prison system have turned down Antron’s applications to work with them. He’s searching for a solid job while paying the bills as forklift operator in a warehouse.

Kevin Richardson age 14
Before: Kevin’s mom and four sisters love to dote on him; he’s the youngest, and only boy in the family. Kevin plays the saxophone and dances with the hip-hop troupe at Jackie Robinson High School. He’s a good athlete and dreams of making the team at Syracuse University. With a round baby face, Kevin’s quiet, respectful, and his teachers say he’s got a strong moral fiber even though he struggles some academically.
Now: Although glad to have stable work in a geriatric center, Kevin craves a more satisfying career. Not surprisingly, he remains incredibly close to his family who all get together quite regularly.

Korey Wise, age 16
Before: Korey suffered from the side effects of physical abuse at home when he was a little kid. Korey was also molested as a child during an amusement park field trip. He’s decided to live in a foster care group home, but recently chose to return to the apartment with his mom and brothers.
Now: Considered an adult by the court system, Korey served his entire term in a maximum-security facility. He still struggles at times with speech, and makes ends meet with his Social Security disability benefits.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

Profiles With An Artistic Punch

Decide how you would create an intimate “close-up” of each of the five boys. Would you use visual art, music, poetry, spoken word, drama, video montages? Now, consider how the directors of The Central Park Five created a powerful impact with techniques like the one you chose. Which sections moved you most while you were watching the film? Why?

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.7 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).
RESOURCES


The “Central Park Five” in the Classroom Includes links for Educational Themes | Discussion Guide | Additional Resources

Click here and then look in the right hand column for “NYT Archive: Key Articles” about the “Central Park Jogger Case,” or put in “Central Park Five” in the search engine. The enormous archives can be arranged from oldest to newest or vice versa.


THE RACE PROJECT: SIX-WORD ESSAY

National Public Radio’s partnership with The Race Card Project explores a different kind of conversation about race. We ask people to think about their experiences, observations, triumphs, laments, theories or anthem about race or cultural identity. Then they take those thoughts and distill them down to one six-word sentence.

Thousands of people have shared their six-word stories and every so often NPR Host/Special Correspondent Michele Norris will dip into the trove of stories to explore issues surrounding race and cultural identity for “Morning Edition.”

You can find hundreds of submissions and submit your own stories at www.theracecardproject.com

THE CENTER PARK FIVE

organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted individuals through DNA testing and reforming the criminal justice system to prevent future injustice.

The Center on Wrongful Convictions of Youth

The CWCY is a joint project of the Center of Wrongful Convictions and Children and Family Justice Center at Northwestern University School of Law’s Bluhm Legal Clinic. It is the only innocence project in the country that focuses exclusively on individuals who were convicted or accused of crimes when they were adolescents or younger.

The Innocence Network

The Innocence Network is an affiliation of organizations dedicated to providing pro bono legal and investigative services to individuals seeking to prove innocence of crimes for which they have been convicted and working to redress the causes of wrongful convictions.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

This publication of the American Civil Liberties Union addresses what rights you have when you are stopped, questioned, arrested, or searched by law enforcement officers.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Ferris State University: Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia “Using Objects of Intolerance to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice”

Library of Congress Guides for Analyzing Primary Resources

Library of Congress Guides for Using Primary Resources: Motion Pictures, Photographs, Sound Recordings, Sheet Music and Songs, Political Cartoons, Prints, Oral Histories, Manuscripts

JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS

The Innocence Project

The Innocence Project is a national litigation and public policy
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BAM Education & Humanities

The mission of BAM Education & Humanities is to ignite imagination and ideas through programs that enrich the audience experience, spark conversation, and generate creative engagement.

BAM Education connects learning with creativity, engaging imagination by encouraging self-expression through in- and after-school arts education programming, workshops for students and teachers, school-time performances, and summer arts programs.

After-School Programs & In-School Residencies:

Young Film Critics
Arts & Justice
Dancing Into the Future
Shakespeare Teaches Students
Shakespeare Teaches Teachers
Young Shakespeare
AfricanDanceBeat

About the Writer
Abby Remer is an education consultant who has worked with institutions including museums, libraries, botanical gardens and nature conservancies, historical societies, and community organizations, and the like for 30 plus years. She has also worked for over a decade in the youth development field, helping youth gain in-depth educational experiences that help support success in their lives.

Remer provides a wide range of services including evaluation, program planning, curriculum writing, and professional development. She has worked with adults, families, teachers, students, and professionals in a wide variety of fields. Abby Remer is also a published author of three books about art and culture and has contributed to many textbooks and publications on a wide range of topics. See her website for more information at www.virtualforum.com/areme

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