

# Screening Host Guide

In October  
1961, They  
Became the  
Smallest  
Pioneers of the  
Civil Rights  
Movement...



# The Memphis 13

# Hosting a Screening

*The Memphis 13* seeks to not only share an important and untold story of the Civil Rights Movement, but to challenge viewers to consider the ways in which the themes present during this historic moment remain present today. This guide is intended to aid in allowing viewers to continue a conversation about issues of inclusion, tolerance, and education that *The Memphis 13* seeks to begin. Thank you for taking the initiative to host a screening.

This guide includes some tips about hosting a screening, questions to guide or trigger discussion, and activities to deepen engagement with the film's themes. In addition to this guide, a more comprehensive curriculum – the film's "Classroom Discussion Guide" – with historical context and additional questions and activities is available through [www.thememphis13.com](http://www.thememphis13.com). Also available online are photos and videos and links to other resources on school desegregation in Memphis and elsewhere. Feel free to use whatever you think will work for your audience!

One additional resource that can make a screening extra special is to connect audience members directly to members of the Memphis 13 or Daniel Kiel, the film's director. If you are interested in connecting in this way, visit [www.thememphis13.com](http://www.thememphis13.com) for more information or contact [info@thememphis13.com](mailto:info@thememphis13.com). Whether by video conference or even in person, tapping into the experiences of the stars of the film directly adds a great deal to any screening.

Finally, share your hosting experience! Whether a suggestion for other hosts, a reaction to the film or the discussion afterward, or a new story of breaking a barrier, we would love to hear from you. The stories of the film are a part of history, but the challenges the students confronted in 1961 remain today. With the help of hosts like you, *The Memphis 13* can play some small part in enabling discussion of those challenges. Thanks!

Entering a new environment can be a challenge even under the best of circumstances. That challenge can be compounded when some element of our identity – for instance, our age, hometown, religion, gender, race, sexuality, or native language – marks us as different.

## Activity: The First Day of School

*What makes up your identity?* Consider all of the things that could answer the question “Who am I?” With this in mind, think back to a “first day” that you have experienced. It could be the first day in a new school or camp, the first day in a new neighborhood – any environment you were entering for the first time.

As you remember that experience, consider the following questions:

- What emotions did you feel? Were you frightened? Excited? Both?
- Why do you think you felt those emotions?
- What other people impacted that experience?
- Who made it either more successful or more difficult? How?
- What other factors made your experience successful or difficult?
- How long did it take for you to feel comfortable in the new environment? Did any of the emotions of your initial experience linger?
- Were there any elements of your identity that affected your first day? Were those effects positive or negative?

### *The Film in Context*

### *School Desegregation in General*

*The desegregation of Memphis City Schools was only one example of a nationwide struggle to remedy Jim Crow schooling after Brown v. Board of Education in 1954. Consider the following question about dismantling a segregated system of education:*

*In a democracy, what are the purposes of a system of public education? How, if at all, does segregation interfere with those purposes?*

*If students are subject to the same rules and regulations, is that equal even if they are separated by race?*

*How do you judge the equality of schools?*

*Is separation inherently unequal? If so, why? If not, under what circumstances might separation be equal?*

*Do the following words mean the same thing:*

*Desegregation – Integration – Non-discrimination?*

*Which, if any, should have been the goal following Brown v. Board of Education?*

*If you could ask one of the Memphis 13 a question, what would you ask? Why?*

*Choose a statement from the film that resonates with you: What did the speaker say?*

*How and why does it resonate with you?*

*What surprised you about the story of the Memphis 13?*

*What would you have changed about the way schools were desegregated in Memphis in 1961? Why?*

*Would you volunteer your child to participate in an event like school desegregation? Why or why not?*

### **Parents and Children**

In the film, Harry Williams's mother claimed that her son was not scared, but Harry contradicted this memory. "I was scared," he explained.

- Why do Harry and his mother have such different perspectives?
- What might have kept Harry from expressing fear to his mother?
- What might have led Harry's mother to believe that Harry was comfortable in his experience?

*How do the choices of individual actors impact historical narratives? For example, consider the motivations, options, and consequences of the choices made by the following actors who impacted the experiences of the Memphis 13:*

- |                                     |                            |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| •Parents, Black and White           | •Memphis Police Department |
| •Teachers                           | •White Students            |
| •Community Leaders, Black and White | •Local Media               |

*What is the proper role of children in social movements? What are the risks and benefits of using 1st graders to desegregate schools?*

*How should "success" be judged when it comes to the story of the Memphis 13?*

*At the time of the Memphis school desegregation, President John F. Kennedy complimented Memphis on its orderly school desegregation, stating that Memphis "reflected credit on the United States throughout the world. Would the students who experienced the event agree with the President's assessment? Do the differences between the two versions make either untrue? Is history that includes only the official or only the personal version of events complete?*

*Although state-mandated racial segregation in schools no longer exists, many schools remain segregated. Is this “de facto segregation” a problem? Why or why not?*

*Given continued racial segregation in public schools today, was the work of the Memphis 13 and other school desegregation pioneers worth it?*

*The Brown story involves pursuit of both racial justice and educational opportunity. Which should be the higher priority – school integration or school quality?*

*Although students no longer have to blaze the same paths that the Memphis 13 did, many students today are blazing new paths of their own as the “first” or “only” student on that path. What are some examples today of situations that are similar to the story of the Memphis 13? How are today’s situations similar or different?*

### Conflicting Lessons

When Harry Williams looked back upon his experience in first grade, he recognized that being a trailblazer had served him well when he later served as the only African American on his command in the U.S. Navy. In contrast, Clarence Williams recalled a very different lesson. “I learned that I was NOT equal,” Clarence explained.

- What causes such different interpretations of a similar experience?
- Who influences which lesson a participant takes from a formative experience?
- How should historians tell stories that are complex and conflicted?

## Activity: Gallery Walk

Some of the most effective conversations are the ones in which no words are spoken. In this activity, participants are invited to silently “discuss” elements of the film. Set up pieces of paper or posterboard around the room and write the following statements or questions on them – or select some of your own. With pen in hand, participants will silently walk around the “gallery” and write their responses, feelings, or questions triggered by the content at each prompt. As responses are added, participants can engage in silent conversations, responding not only to the prompts but to the thoughts of their peers. After allowing some time for this, small groups should form at each prompt and discuss the content of the responses before sharing with the larger group.

**-“Where are all the kids who look like me?”**      **-First Grader Pioneers**

**-“Everyone around was like a giant towering over us.”**

**-“You were kind of always alone.”**

**-“Being a kid, you don’t have a choice.”**