

Mr. Anderson/Back of the Bus

by Bill Harley

In this performance piece, Bill and his band recall what it was like to ride on the school bus. Although it is a humorous piece, drawn very large, it highlights certain elements of school culture. While children (and teachers!) spend hours and hours in school, in class we rarely talk about what it is like. The story and song provide an opportunity to initiate that discussion.

The song "The Back of the Bus" is modeled after the Motown hits of the Sixties. It might be interesting to bring in some of those recordings to listen to and try to identify how they're the same. Bill particularly suggests the Temptations song "Ain't Too Proud to Beg" - "Back of the Bus" borrows the opening bass lines. For those of you musically inclined, the quarter note snare beats on the chorus are very typical of Motown, as well as the background vocals.

Mr. Anderson's character is central to what happens on the bus. So too, is that of the sixth grader and all the students. The bus serves as an interesting "between world" - not home, not school - where the rules are sometimes not so clear and the individual students are on their own. This can be terrifying, exciting, and also a relief from the rigors of home and school. Questions for discussion might include:

- 1) How accurate is the description of the bus? What is exaggerated? What seems real?
- 2) How much do you know about your bus driver? What other people in school do you see every day but don't think about?
- 3) What are the rules on your bus? What problems to students have on the bus?
- 4) Tell about something that happened on your bus. How could you use it as a starting point for a story?

Available on "Lunchroom Tales" (short version) and "From the Back of the Bus" (long version)