

# GOOD TROUBLE

**An Agitate Play experience for wee-ones and not-so-wee-ones**

**By: Brendon Allen**

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## **Note to the reader/performer & talking points for families**

**This play is dedicated to the life, work, words & courage of John Lewis.  
He coined the term “Good Trouble” and dedicated his energy to a lifelong  
battle for justice and equality.**

Let me start off by saying that I am a 40 (+) year old white man. I engage in these topics as an effort to spark anti-racist action in myself and to use whatever platforms I have to encourage shifts away from racism. I am not a specialist in this field. I am an artist, an educator and a father, which gives me three avenues in my life that require anti-racism work. These plays are ways towards doing this. I am not a specialist on deaf communities beyond having a father who is adapting to his own aggressive hearing loss and a mother who worked in the field of supporting the deaf community for a significant part of her career. The performance is meant to inspire discussions, activities and possibly some fun, as I try to hold up the wonder of what young people can bring to the discussion.

If you do not have access to a laptop or tablet that all the actors can read from, you can print as many copies of the script as you may need. This play works best with a cast of three or four, but can be done in any way you choose. The casting is flexible to allow for name changes, gender flexibility and ways to personalize to match your household. It is up to you. Each scene does not go beyond two characters speaking, so you can share all the parts, including reading stage directions.

This play presents the opportunity for the actors to engage in exploring discussions on Black Lives Matter, Indigenous Lives Matter/Native Lives Matter, protest, accessibility in schools, what back to school during pandemic can look like for students with hearing loss, and in general it embraces the spirit of John Lewis.

If you are engaging with this with your wee-ones, here some talking points and videos to help:

### **Black Lives Matter**

Engaging with discussions about racism can be challenging; however, it is an essential responsibility for parents and teachers. It is important that both home and school life address these topics to ensure a wholesome understanding. Here are some links that may assist in this journey:

[How to discuss the Black Lives Matter Movement and White Privilege with kids](#)

[Some anti racism books for kids and teens](#)

[An age by age guide anti racism education](#)

[Expanding the discussion on BLM with kids](#)

### **Indigenous Lives Matter or Native Lives Matter**

Many of the discussions around Black Lives Matter also including the Indigenous Lives Matter Movement, but there are also some specific differences. Here are some links that support this work.

[Connecting BLM to Indigenous Lives Matter](#)

[Call to action for Indigenous Lives Matter](#)

[Native Lives Matter](#)

[Indigenous Lives Matter](#)

[Indigenous Lives Matter from a Canadian perspective](#)

[Examples of how the youth are reconnecting with their elders and traditions](#)

### **How to make school more tolerable for students with hearing loss**

Our public schools are meant to be inclusive of to all our young citizens; however, some learning challenges may make it difficult for some students to learn in a busy classroom if they have specific needs due to how they move, how they see, how they focus, or how they hear. This is not a conclusive list and this play brings up specific discussions around how students hear. Often several students with varying levels of hearing loss must try to learn within spaces that are not appropriately designed. Imagine how it will be for these students in a word where masks are mandated with the class.

[Here are some adjustments that can be made for students with hearing challenges](#)

[Accommodations for teachers teaching students with hearing challenges](#)

### **Lessons from John Lewis**

Yes, John Lewis is an American politician; however, his legacy is extensive and his work started at the grassroots and stayed there as he became a congress person.

[Here are 5 things John Lewis taught us about good trouble](#)

[Links to the amazing “March” graphic novel series that details his early work with civil rights](#)

I hope you enjoy this Agitate Play experience. Break a leg!

### **CASTING**

**Charlie:** Is a young grade 5 student who is about to start at a new public school. Charlie can be cast as any gender. They are Black. They moved in January of 2020 and, due to their hearing loss, was not quite ready to start at their new school because the appropriate supports were not in place. Charlie was going to start school after March Break and then a global pandemic happened. This time away gave Charlie a chance to connect with several online schools for the deaf that had impressive programs. Charlie continues to be enrolled in these programs as an asynchronous student, but they wanted to connect with other young people in their neighbourhood, so they signed up for in-person school, too. This big neighbourhood school boasts specialized supports for students who are hard of hearing. Charlie is feeling very nervous about the coming year, but they also feel increasingly ready as they learn positive ways to engage as a deaf advocate and as a voice for the value of accessibility for all students.

**Morgan:** Can be cast as any gender you choose. A grade 7 student, who is Indigenous and is a very gifted artist. Over the time in isolation, Morgan started to expand their skills in the world of digital art. Morgan was encouraged by his parents to engage in some only Anishinaabemowin language programs and visual arts programs from an Ojibwe lens.

**Torez:** Is the surname of the principal at the school that Morgan and Charlie attend. Gender of Torez can be whatever you choose. Torez is two years into their work at this school.

**Crossing Guard:** This crossing guard has worked the crosswalk to the school for over 10 years. Can be any gender. They wear the fluorescent vest and carry the stop sign on a stick. They wear sunglasses and a hat.

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## SCENE 1:

*Charlie is outside their school on the playground. It is mainly pavement and they have brought their bucket of chalk and they are writing big words all over the pavement with occasional drawings of birds, flowers or rainbows. As they write the word, they say it out loud. Charlie wears a brightly coloured mask.*

**Charlie:** ... Kindness...(draws)... Community...(draws)...Respect.... (draws)...Acceptance.... (draws)...Passion...(draws)...

*Another student from this school, a few grades older, comes along dragging a stick. This is Morgan. They spend a bit of time watching Charlie's chalk work with a sense of interest. Morgan wears a dark mask with a red fist on it.*

**Charlie:** ...Teamwork...(draws)...

**Morgan:** (suggesting) Collaboration. Collaboration!...I said Collaboration!!

*Startles Charlie.*

**Charlie:** Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't hear you. What did you say?

**Morgan:** I said collaboration, it's a word they use a lot at school.

**Charlie:** Did you say collaboration? I'm sorry, my ears need some help (*points to their hearing aids*). You wanna write your word? You can use my sanitizer and then grab a colour. If I were to play psychic, I would say you are a blue chalk kind of person.

**Morgan:** I like blue. Sure. I can write some words. (*sanitizes hands, writes "Collaboration"*) What words are you picking anyways?

**Charlie:** Sorry, you're gonna have to speak right at me, so I can hear. When you're turned around like that, my aids can't pick up the sound. The mask especially makes it really hard.

**Morgan:** (*turns back to Charlie*) Sorry, I wanted to know, what words you were picking?

**Charlie:** I'm trying to think of words that make me stand up straighter when I read them. Words that when I feel nervous or scared, I could walk on the word and feel extra courage.

**Morgan:** Courage! That's a good one. (*Morgan draws*)

**Charlie:** Is this your school?

**Morgan:** Yeah. I'm going into grade 7.

**Charlie:** 7! Wow! That's exciting. I'm gonna be in grade 5.

**Morgan:** You're new right? I don't recognize you.

**Charlie:** Uh huh...I'm new to this neighbourhood.

**Morgan:** Can I sanitize another chalk colour?

**Charlie:** Sure, just wipe the one you're using before you put it back.

*Morgan takes out a new colour and writes "Get to know a new person in your grade"*

**Charlie:** Hey, I like that! Thank you.

**Morgan:** (*looking back at the school*) It's funny, cause this place feels new to me too. It's been so long since I was actually here.

**Charlie:** It's sorta like a pair of shoes that are too small.

**Morgan:** Or maybe too big. I liked the time at home...the quiet...(*feeling like they have said something wrong*)...I'm sorry, is that insensitive?

**Charlie:** Insensitive? What? To like quiet? Oh, no.

**Morgan:** (*turning back to the chalk*) I just, because of your...

**Charlie:** I can't hear you, you turned away. If you're worried about my hearing loss...I love quiet! Don't worry about it. It's not bad to like something. Especially quiet!

**Morgan:** (*looks back to Charlie with a sense of relief and starts writing*) Find your quiet....(*draws*)....calm breaths...

**Charlie:** (*starting to draw again*)...Make eye contact...(*stops drawing*) I like your mask.

**Morgan:** Are you writing that down?

**Charlie:** No, I just do. I like your mask.

**Morgan:** Thanks.

**Charlie:** It reminds me of Black Lives Matter.

**Morgan:** It's for Indigenous Lives Matter, some people say Native Lives Matter. I like your mask too.

**Charlie:** Are you Indigenous?

**Morgan:** Yes, I'm Ojibwe.

**Charlie:** I think you should write that down. I bet that gives you courage.

**Morgan:** It does (*writes it down in chalk*).

**Charlie:** (*Charlie writes down "Black Lives Matter"*) This gives me courage too.

**Morgan:** (*writes down "Indigenous Lives Matter"*) Do you think we can do this?

**Charlie:** Do what? You mean writing about the stuff that gives us courage on the ground?

**Morgan:** Yeah, I mean, is this okay? Maybe there's a rule about chalk or writing on the ground or something. Like graffiti?

**Charlie:** There's nothing wrong with words of courage and this (*Charlie draws a fist in white chalk*) is not a symbol or hate. You have it on your mask right?

**Morgan:** Yea, it doesn't mean anything bad, it means take courage, resist the wrong, and change the problem.

**Charlie:** Well, sanitize the red chalk and change the problem.

*Charlie hands the red chalk to Morgan with a wipe in her hand. Morgan draws a red fist. They both stand up and take a deep breath.*

**Morgan:** This building doesn't look so big anymore.

**Charlie:** Maybe we're just standing taller.

**Morgan:** I'm imagining a custodian being asked to come out and clean this up.

**Charlie:** Or rain washing it away.

**Morgan:** Or other kids writing on top or it or scratching this out.

**Charlie:** We're making *(does two signs with her hands for each word)* good trouble.

**Morgan:** You just did two signs. Can you teach me? Good trouble, right?

**Charlie:** The flat hand away from your mouth, like this *(does the gesture)* means "good." And with your hands like karate chops together twice in an "X" is "trouble" *(does the gesture)*.

*Morgan repeats the gestures*

**Morgan:** Like this?

*Charlie does the sign for "yes."*

**Morgan:** Does that mean "yes?"

*Charlie repeats the gesture and giggles a little bit.*

**Morgan:** I am still learning a lot of Anishinaabemowin, but a word I think fits is "animikeeg."

**Charlie:** Can you say it again?

**Morgan:** *(Really annunciating)* "a-ni-mi-keeg." It means "Little thunders."

**Charlie:** I love that! Animikeeg!

**Morgan:** That's a bit how I feel right now.

**Charlie:** No matter what happens with our *(signs)* good trouble, we are still Animikeeg.

**Morgan:** *(looks to their device in their pocket)* Oh! I have to go, I'm supposed to be running to the store for milk. I took the long way.

**Charlie:** Well, thanks for helping me make trouble.

*Morgan signs "good trouble"*

**Charlie:** Uh huh.

*Morgan goes off and Charlie continues drawing.*

## SCENE 2:

*Charlie is signing and talking to their online class. It is reflection time, and it is Charlie's turn.*

**Charlie:** *(very excited)* ...and then I went around the corner and I saw that the chalk we had drawn...it was bigger...it had grown. Other people, maybe grown-ups, maybe kids, maybe custodians, had added to it. Things about courage, things that made them strong. There were tonnes of drawings: butterflies, happy faces, peace signs, rainbows, other people wrote about Black Lives Matter and Indigenous Lives Matter. It felt so good, so big. I felt like I could breathe in bigger breaths of air. It made me think of my new friend and it made me wonder how tall they feel now. I bet taller than the trees, I bet as tall as thunder.

## SCENE 3:

*Morgan is explaining a digital piece of art to their online classroom. Morgan has accessed this group over the pandemic, it brings together indigenous students from across the province.*

**Morgan:** So, I looked it up and it turns out, there are lots of things in common between sit-ins and talking circles. And then I started thinking about chains. And then I started thinking about the circles on the ground at the grocery store. And then I started thinking about generations of families and then...and then I took a breath. I thought about the knowledge keepers that have been guiding me. I got out my digital brush and this piece that I call "Bubbles to Circles" came to me. I think that my new friend has things to teach me too. I've been thinking about how hard it'll be to be in a new school when you have hearing problems. With everybody in masks, with desks laid out in grids, teachers unable to walk around. And now, I think I'm into a little good trouble of my own.

## SCENE 4:

*Someone has remixed a clip of a local news interview with the principal from Morgan and Charlie's school. It has become a bit of a viral hit. This is not the original transcript of the interview, this has been sampled and set to some digital music.*

**Torez:** you know we are trying to get ready...trying to get...ready...ready  
...ready...blast...off...testing... there will...be testing...wash your hands...wash your  
hands....testing...washing your hands...washing your...masks...washing your...friends...  
keep your distance...but...washing your...friends...is important...unprecedented...testing...  
don't be afraid...be afraid of...testing...be afraid of...your friends...be afraid of...your teachers...  
This school is perfectly...unsafe...be afraid...washing your...school...is...unprecedented...  
Washing your...desks...washing your...classmates...is a challenge...washing your...report  
cards...will be a priority...you can...wash your hands...and you can...wash your...friends...but you  
cannot...wash your...friends...report cards.

## SCENE 5:

*It's the first day of school and a local reporter is checking in with the crossing guard. The question is, "how did the first morning of school go?" The guard stands at the corner and we can hear traffic zooming by.*

**Crossing Guard:** It was unlike anything I've ever seen. Normally, I report to my post at about 10 minutes to 8, and usually the street is still a ghost town. But, gosh, I'll never forget it. My chair, which is usually folded up and stashed in the fence, was open and it had been painted all sorts of bright colours. And the colours didn't stop there. The whole pedestrian crossing lane leading to the school had been decorated with chalk. There was the message "Black Lives Matter" and "Indigenous Lives Matter" woven into a beautiful mural of birds, flowers, rainbows and all this positivity. In all my years here making sure the kids get to school safely, I've never seen anything like it. I started by trying to get people not to walk on it...I mean, it was a piece of art. Parents were taking photos and the like. Then this student came up to me and said "It's okay if people walk on it, it's not a forever thing." There was such wisdom in this kid's voice and I watched them walk across the street with the rainbow of colours sticking to the bottoms of their school shoes. It was clear to me that they were right. This kind of message on the ground doesn't have to be kept here perfect forever because it travels with them as they go in, doesn't it. I think they're gonna need it. But I am happy to say that the design on my chair was with paint, so that'll stick...It's like a piece of history that I can hold on to for awhile.

## SCENE 6:

*This is a follow up to the local news interview with Principal Torez. This one is not sampled, it's exactly as they spoke it. It's a bit different than the last one. This takes place on Friday morning, the end of the first week of school.*

**Torez:** When you're relatively new to a school community, you need to be aware of the impression you're making. It was challenging, to say the least, to have the first words from me that truly reached this community be the remixed version of the last time we spoke on the news. I was at a loss because I didn't get the joke and I felt like I was being mocked. By the time I became aware of the video and its popularity, it was very much out of the bag. I remember being approached by a member of the front office staff who is pretty engaged on social media, I felt like I had been suckerpunched. What was I supposed to do? If I tried to respond, I'm sure the clever person behind the video would just have more material to work with. It is a very tough time to have a sense of humour, especially when the message you're sharing is flipped around like that. I sat there pretty deflated in my office. School opening was coming quickly and we were trying to deal with all the moving pieces and now there was this slanderous explosion out in the world. And that's when I opened my inbox and I saw a new name that had never shown

up there before. The email had an extensive series of beautiful posters with electric statements that could not have come to me at a better time.

*As Torez reads the statements, the corresponding poster is held up and we can see the beautiful images that have been included to make the messages pop.*

Stay calm, this is wacky for everyone  
Smile with your eyes!  
Annunciate before raising your voice  
Communicate with gestures  
Make eye contact as much as possible  
Classroom noise can make it hard for everyone to hear: be considerate  
Names are important: learn them  
Laugh more, it's contagious too!  
Learn some sign language  
Be patient, we're all having our first day of school  
Wash your hands and change your mask regularly  
How can your mask speak for your passions?  
Sitting in a circle is the best way for everyone to be seen  
You may be 6 feet away, but you're still present  
Meet someone new every day  
Making a community takes work  
If you see something that bothers you, tell the right people  
Look at the person you're talking to  
Speak clearly and listen actively  
Hold the door for others, it saves hand sanitizer and it's pretty awesome

The message was simple. I could get caught up in trying to kill an online video, one that was actually pretty catchy, if I'm being honest. But this student, the one who emailed all the messages, they talked about meeting a new hard of hearing student who will be gracing our halls this year. This was after I walked into a school that has now been tattooed by all sorts of positive messages and drawings, like a yellow brick road of positivity. These simple messages coming from the hands and hearts of students, both incredibly creative, could mean a lot to make our new students feel welcome. This art would make everyone feel welcome in this time. So, I extended a request to a local printer, who not only agreed but agreed to do it for free and twice the size. As the posters say, communicate with gestures. I realized that this student, the artist who created these posters, had the wisdom we needed to start the year off right. The walls of our school are singing with messages of inclusion and of being heard. I think after almost 7 months of this pandemic, I think we are all doing our best and it is about using our schools as a place to model kindness, safety and inclusion. To the parents who have expressed concerns about the political nature of the chalk pieces around the school. I think it is time we acknowledge that schooling is political and I have socially distanced sit-ins of students spending their lunch times talking about ways to make our halls a place of connection for all genders, sexualities,

cultures, and levels of accessibility. This may scare you, but it doesn't seem to scare them, and I think you should really think about why it might make you uncomfortable. They're out talking together in nature, and as I keep my distance and observe, it's obvious that it's exactly in their nature to listen together too. There are good kinds of trouble happening all around the school and I am happy to report that this has nothing to do with Covid-19 and has everything to do with gathering together. You know...I hope this interview gets sampled, but something tells me it won't.

## **SCENE 7:**

*This scene is a mix of asides representing the voices in their heads and a brief encounter in the halls of the school at the end of the first week back between Morgan and Charlie. Morgan is walking one way, following the arrows on the floor and Charlie is walking the opposite way following the arrows in that direction.*

**Morgan:** *(aside)* Is that Charlie? Are they wearing an "Indigenous Lives Matter" mask? *(to Charlie)* Hey Charlie, how's it going?

**Charlie:** Morgan! I heard about your mask initiative, so I thought I would make my own. *(aside)* Should I say thank you for the posters? Is that lame?

**Morgan:** *(signs "Good Trouble" to Charlie)* That means a lot.

**Charlie:** *(signs "Good Trouble" back)* I'm starting a calm corner initiative for classes and I was doing some research on sacred hoops...we should talk. *(Aside)* Just ask them to come to the sit-in today. They probably don't even know anything about it.

**Morgan:** Maybe we can chat about it at your accessibility sit-in today. I think something like that will really help students address anxiety. I know I could use it.

**Charlie:** I made two new friends today. *(Aside)* Oh, my gosh, I must sound like such a kid, *(mocking themselves, still aside)* "I made two new friends today."

**Morgan:** That's so awesome, see, not so tough! *(aside)* I want to tell you that I was so nervous last week about heading back to school, and meeting you has made my personal passions bridge to my life at school in a way I thought wasn't possible. *(no longer aside)* I knew you could do it.

**Charlie:** I love the way you had people designing BLM & ILM mask stamps out of cut potatoes.

**Morgan:** It just so happened to be the only thing I had at home, turned out pretty good and now people are stamping all sorts of stuff on their masks.

**Charlie:** Little thunder!

**Morgan:** Before you go, I want to show you something.

**Charlie:** Sure, what is it?

*Morgan spells out Charlie's name in ASL and then applauds by waving their hands in the air. Charlie waves their hands too, touched that Morgan learned how to spell in ASL. They both give each other the "Good Trouble" sign and then they continue down the hall in the opposite directions.*

The End

**Get in good trouble, necessary trouble...**  
**Sometimes change calls for a little trouble.**  
John Lewis (1940-2020)