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Riding a Bus From the Bronx to New Cultural Horizons

by [ANDREW BORYGA](#)

Edgar Doñe, 12, lives on College Avenue in the South Bronx and likes baseball, swimming and math — not reading or history. He cannot recall the last book he read, and until recently, he was unfamiliar with Anne Frank. Asked about the Holocaust, he responded, “the holo-what?”

Last Tuesday, he was one of 10 children who boarded a bus on the Grand Concourse and headed to the [Anne Frank Center](#) in SoHo, where he received an answer to his question.

Edgar and company were part of a new summer program sponsored by the [Bronx Council on the Arts](#) called [Bronx Write Bus](#), which every Tuesday in a program ending next week has been providing young people from the Bronx transportation and admission to cultural events outside the borough, with writers coming along for the ride.

Bronx Write Bus’s director, Maria Romano, conceived the program — which also includes classes Wednesdays and Thursdays — to keep students academically stimulated during the summer and expose them to places outside the Bronx they otherwise might not visit. “In some ways, boroughs like the Bronx feel like a small town and you end up not leaving very often,” said Ms. Romano, who directs the council’s [Bronx Writers Center](#).

Reggie Hester, 12, of Jessup Avenue in the South Bronx, had never visited SoHo before — though he heard it resembled “a small China.” After spending the afternoon on Crosby Street, he concluded differently. “Not really China, just weird,” he said.

Every Tuesday, Bronx Write Bus students board a bus in front of the Bronx Museum of Arts and are handed a notebook, pen and sandwich before taking their seats. A writer related to the genre of the day’s cultural event joins them.



A writer, Liz Welch, speaking with Danyel Diarra, 13, as the Bronx Write Bus headed to Manhattan last Tuesday.
Photo: Librado Romero/The New York Times

Last Tuesday, Liz Welch, co-author of “[The Kids Are All Right](#),” a 2009 memoir about siblings who are sent to different homes after their parents die, stood at the front of the bus speaking on the writing process and dishing out quick writing assignments as it drove along the Edward L. Grant Highway north of Yankee Stadium.



Maureen McNeil, director of the Anne Frank Center USA, speaking to students who are participating in the the Bronx Write Bus program.

Photo: Librado Romero/The New York Times

On hard turns, she gripped the headrest while teetering up and down the row of seats, stopping every few minutes to peer over the shoulder of a scribbling boy or girl and chat about his or her sentences.

Along the West Side Highway, the bus descended toward Lower Manhattan, the Midtown piers providing a charming distraction from writing for students like Solen Washington, 13, who took a break after sensing motion sickness coming on, and Danyel Dirra, 13, who could not resist his bacon lettuce and tomato sandwich any longer.

At the Anne Frank Center on Crosby Street, the students listened to the personal account of Sally Frishberg, 77, a Jewish woman who survived the Holocaust as a child in Poland. Ms. Frishberg recounted escaping into the farmlands with her family the night before a train headed to a concentration camp was set to depart, and spending two years hiding in the attic of a farmer’s house, surviving with hay furniture, a bucket for a bathroom and a steady diet of boiled beans and potatoes.

On the ride back to the Bronx, students reflected on Frank’s and Ms. Frishberg’s stories, jotting down notes about their own personal stories they would be working on the following two days in class. Edgar was impressed with Ms. Frishberg’s story — particularly her hiding ability. “I probably would have made too much noise and gotten caught,” he conceded, adding later, “and I don’t like beans.” ■