ABOUT THE BEATING THE ODDS INITIATIVE

We’re celebrating the stories of people who beat the odds and made it to college. Roadtrip Nation teamed up with the ACT Center for Equity in Learning to send three young people who are in college (or on their way!) on a road trip around the country to talk to folks who have overcome obstacles of all kinds to finish their education. As these three roadtrippers travel coast to coast, they'll hear real stories and struggles, and get inspiration and lessons for the road ahead.

ABOUT ACT CENTER FOR EQUITY IN LEARNING

Roadtrip Nation Beating the Odds is made possible by ACT's Center for Equity in Learning. At ACT we have a simple mission: Helping people achieve education and workplace success. We work to close gaps in equity, opportunity, and achievement. We believe everyone, regardless of their circumstances, deserves a fair chance to learn and grow. For more information, visit equityinlearning.act.org.

BEATING THE ODDS VIEWING GUIDE

Whether or not you’re new to Roadtrip Nation, or have ever explored the many resources available on ACT’s website, this guide is a great way to connect youth to important college and career themes and resources. The activities and resources that follow are designed to be completed by participants along with their mentors, teachers, community leaders, friends, or family members in order to spark meaningful conversations about their future aspirations and how to achieve them. See you on the road!
HOW TO USE THE BEATING THE ODDS VIEWING GUIDE

This viewing guide is designed to be used during and after viewing the Beating the Odds documentary. Print a copy of the viewing guide for each of your participants beginning with the following page. Here are a few ideas on how to use the guide.

WATCH
This Viewing Guide should be filled in after watching the documentary as a whole; however, the documentary may be split into two viewings if needed.

Total running time: 60 minutes

TALK
Provide a Viewing Guide to each participant before screening the documentary. After participants have watched, or as they watch, have them complete the TALK section for several or all discussion topics. You may want to choose discussion topics relevant to your participants, allow them to choose one or more topics, or assign all topics. Participants should write down their thoughts first, then share through conversation. Conversations can take place immediately after viewing or during several small sessions.

Participants can discuss their thoughts in small groups, with adult mentors, or with family members. Encourage them to discuss any insights, ideas, or questions that they have during the viewing of the documentary or throughout your conversation.

Student Written Responses: 30 – 60 minutes

CONNECT & REFLECT
Direct participants to do some research using the links provided in each discussion. These links will introduce them to many useful academic, college, career, financial planning, social, and emotional resources.

Participants will need access to computers and the Internet to connect and reflect on the resources in each discussion section. They can connect and reflect during class time or at home. Invite them to share new information they discover as they connect to new resources. You can also encourage them to visit roadtripnation.com for more leader interviews and interactive tools.
Estephanie
Age 20
From The Bronx, NY

Estephanie is focused on growing into who she wants to be, and when something blocks her way, she finds a new way up. Raised in the Bronx by her mother, who worked seven days a week, Estephanie has been acting and performing for as long as she can remember, but arts education at her school was nonexistent. She got the spark she needed in an after-school arts program for inner-city students. Coming from a school where she’d been teased for trying and striving, she saw what a difference one opportunity could make. After finishing high school in Miami, she’s back in the Bronx, working full time, and commuting to college at Pace University, where she’s studying acting. Even through the stress of paying for school, the hard work is worth it if she can help other kids like her find that spark to become who they are too.

James “Ikie”
Age 21
From Boone County, WV

“There’s nothing that can keep me down,” says Ikie. He knows that now because, in his teens, he faced his biggest turning point and made it through. For his whole life, his parents struggled with drugs. When he was 15, both of his parents were arrested. The next year, his father died of an overdose. Surviving that time and getting to college has given him a different perspective on the programs and policies politicians talk about. That’s why he’s majoring in political science at Marshall University. Born and raised in the heart of West Virginia coal country, Ikie wants to get into politics to help start conversations and do something about the problems he sees at home. On this trip, he’s looking for inspiration from others who have come from small towns and gone on to make big changes.

Esther
Age 19
From Brookfield, WI

For Esther, theater was always a way to escape what was happening at home. And even when home changed, as she moved from an abusive household and bounced through the foster system, her love of acting persisted. At 13, when she and her brother were adopted into a big family, she gained 19 new brothers and sisters and a world of support. But every day is still a battle, even with her family by her side. The challenges she’s faced have made her stronger, and she’s determined not to let them limit her—or her opportunities. Theater, once an escape, is now her focus, along with elementary education. She’s planning on studying both next year at the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point. That’s why she wants to see how others pursued many passions and reached their goals, so she can learn and grow from their stories.
“YOUR LIFE MIGHT NOT MAKE SENSE TO YOU RIGHT NOW. BUT I’VE LEARNED... IF YOU DO THE RIGHT THING, I BELIEVE THESE EXPERIENCES YOU ARE HAVING, THEY’LL BECOME CLEAR WHY [THEY’RE] IMPORTANT IN MAKING YOU WHO YOU WANT TO BE. AT SOME POINT IN YOUR LIFE YOU’LL BE LIKE, ‘OH, THAT’S WHY.’”

Geoffrey Canada,
Education Reform Activist at Harlem Children’s Zone

TALK

As much as we may not want to admit it, our experiences (positive and negative) shape us into who we are. But these experiences do not have to define what you are capable of achieving. These leaders experienced obstacles and turned them into opportunities to make change in their own lives and in their communities.

1. Think about your own life experiences. Use the chart below to determine how to turn these circumstances into an opportunity.

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<th>EXPERIENCE</th>
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<td>“POSITIVE” EXPERIENCE</td>
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<td>“NEGATIVE” EXPERIENCE</td>
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“THERE WAS KINDA LIKE THAT PERIOD WHEN I DIDN’T HAVE ANYBODY, BUT I WAS STILL TRYING TO GO TO A GOOD HIGH SCHOOL AND MAKING SURE I WAS DOING EVERYTHING THAT I COULD SO THAT I COULD GET INTO COLLEGE BECAUSE I KNEW THAT WAS KINDA MY WAY OUT.”

Ikie, Roadtripper

CONNECT & REFLECT
Use the links below to begin exploring different perspectives and possibilities.

Learn How to Become
learnhowtobecome.org

1. Think about your own life experiences both positive and negative. How might you use the search features on the Learn How to Become website to create your own opportunities?

ACT National Exemplars
act.org/content/act/en/public-affairs/ccrc-national-exemplars.html
Explore videos of students who have overcome obstacles to discover college and career success.
“I GROW UP THINKING THAT I WAS ‘LESSER-THAN’ BECAUSE THAT WAS THE TREATMENT I RECEIVED. I’D ALWAYS FELT SUCH SHAME OF WHERE I’D COME FROM, AND OF MY BACKGROUND, AND OF BEING AN AMPUTEE. IN THAT MOMENT, I REALIZED I’M JUST AS POWERFUL; I’M JUST AS STRONG; I’M JUST AS BEAUTIFUL AS ANYBODY ELSE.”

Scout Bassett, Track Athlete & Team USA Paralympian

TALK

Before their road trip, Esther, Ikie, and Estephani express their struggles to accept that, even though they have had challenging upbringings and still suffer from some lingering self-doubt, they deserve the right to pursue a college education and achieve personal success. Throughout their interviews, many leaders explain how accepting themselves led them to gain the freedom to become the best version of themselves.

1. What you think influences how you feel and what you do. In other words, a positive or negative mindset can greatly impact your ability to reach your goals. Consider a goal you have for yourself, such as going to college. How can you create a positive mindset about being successful in college or reaching your career goals?
2. Mayor Robert Garcia explained that he had to accept himself first in order to achieve his political aspirations. Similarly, Ikie has to overcome the struggle with his own identity to fully embrace his purpose in life. How can self-acceptance give you the confidence to be successful in achieving your goals?

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“BEING ABLE TO STAND OUT AND SAY, ‘THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED TO ME,’ WAS POWERFUL BECAUSE THESE SCARS WILL ALWAYS BE HERE. I CAN EITHER BE ASHAMED AND EMBARRASSED BY THEM, OR I CAN JUST SAY, ‘THIS IS WHO I AM TODAY AND THIS IS THE PROGRESS THAT I’VE MADE.’”

Esther,
Roadtripper

CONNECT & REFLECT

What's my mindset? Use the link below to begin exploring different perspectives and possibilities.

What's My Mindset?
blog.mindsetworks.com/what-s-my-mindset

1. After exploring the link above, describe what you learned about your mindset.

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“I CAN'T ALWAYS CONTROL HOW I FEEL, BUT I CAN ALWAYS CONTROL WHAT I DO. DON'T DWELL, DO. FIGURE OUT HOW TO MOVE FORWARD.”

Ashley Rhodes-Courter, Social Worker, Author, Advocate, Speaker

**TALK**

In order to make it to the next step in life, you have to invest in yourself. The investment may be financial, physical, or emotional, but if you do not take the risk to invest in yourself, then you will never know what you are truly capable of achieving.

1. Investing in yourself can be hard, especially when it requires facing some of your deepest fears. Describe one of your biggest worries about college. What is stopping you from facing that fear?

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2. Estephanie is not alone. The cost of a college education is one of the most common roadblocks students face in regard to pursuing higher education. Investing in your education is the single most important financial decision you will make in your life. How are you feeling about paying for college? Write down some concerns or questions you have about paying for college. What resources can you use to learn more about how to address your concerns?

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CONNECT & REFLECT

What is stopping you from facing your fear? Use the links below to begin exploring different perspectives and possibilities.

ACT Financial Aid E-book
pages2.act.org/financial-aid-ebook.html
What’s inside:
- The basics of financial aid
- Where to find help paying for college
- How to apply for financial assistance
- Estimating and comparing the costs of your college choices
- Ways to reduce and pay for the costs financial aid doesn’t cover

ACT’s Financial Aid Need Estimator
webapps01.act.org/fane/docs/
The Financial Aid Need Estimator estimates what your family might expect to pay toward college costs and provides you with the basic costs of attendance at specific institutions.

1. List three important pieces of information that you found while exploring the ACT ebook and Financial Aid Need Estimator resources.

2. How might you use financial aid to assist you in overcoming the fear to investing in your future and pursuing your college degree?
“I REMEMBER BEING YOU AND NOT HAVING ANY SUPPORT OR ADVICE. SO MAKE SURE YOU’RE BRINGING PEOPLE ALONG WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY. I WANT YOU TO DO FOR SOMEBODY WHAT I’M DOING FOR YOU.”

Michelle Obama, Former First Lady of the United States

TALK

One common practice of successful individuals is their desire to go back to their roots and empower the people in the communities they came from.

1. Michelle Obama was the first in her family to attend college and the first African American woman to be First Lady of the United States. She was forced to create her own path to success. In her interview, she says that at every milestone in her life she asked herself, “Who’s coming with me?” What does she mean? How will you adopt this same mentality as you rise to success?

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2. As the roadtrippers continue their journey, they begin to understand their capacity to be support systems to their peers—even though they are still college students. How can you be a role model?

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“I CAN GIVE SO MUCH TO WEST VIRGINIA AND I CAN BE SUCH A FORCE OF GOOD FOR WEST VIRGINIA. WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION NOW TO START OPENING DOORS FOR OTHER PEOPLE. PULL ‘EM FORWARD. REACH A HAND BACK AND PULL ‘EM FORWARD. BE THAT PERSON THAT CHANGED YOUR LIFE.”

Ikie, Roadtripper

Connect & Reflect

What is your social responsibility in regard to giving back to your community? Use the links below to begin exploring different perspectives and possibilities.

Better Make Room
www.bettermakeroom.org/
Better Make Room is about creating a space for all the great things you’ll do next, staking a claim, forging a path, and lighting the way for others just like you. Get a better education, imagine a better future.

1. “Saying things out loud makes them happen.” List three college and career goals you have for yourself below. How will you take the first step to “make them happen”?

Volunteer Match
www.volunteermatch.org/
Everyone should have the chance to make a difference. That’s why we make it easy for good people and good causes to connect. We’ve connected millions of people with a great place to volunteer and helped tens of thousands of organizations better leverage volunteers to create real impact.

2. Volunteer work is a great way to give back to the community as well as boost your college application. What are some ways that you can volunteer and make a difference in your community?
“IN THAT ENVIRONMENT, WE AREN’T MADE TO ACCOMPLISH MUCH. I WON’T ALLOW PEOPLE TO DEFINE ME. I DEFINE MYSELF. MY ACTIONS DEFINE ME.”

Elaine Del Valle, Producer, Playwright, and Actress at Del Valle Productions

Talk

Description: “Shed the noise” means ignoring the negative comments and expectations of the “doubters” in your life. It’s not easy, but it is definitely worth it. These leaders showed the roadtrippers how having the courage to defy the “doubters” revealed their biggest strengths.

1. How does Elaine Del Valle’s quote, “I define myself,” relate to the roadtrippers’ life experiences? How would you define or describe yourself?

2. Estephanie explains that one of her biggest mistakes as a teenager was when she began acting “tough” to fit in with her peers. That time of her life was actually when she was the furthest from who she really wanted to be. It wasn't until Estephanie decided to ignore the expectations of others and “shed the noise” that she truly gained her strength. What noise have you experienced? How can you begin to shed your own noise? How will your life change when you do?
“ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT YOUR HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION GOT YOU TO COLLEGE, AND YOU DESERVE TO BE THERE.”

Michelle Obama,
Former First Lady of the United States

CONNECT & REFLECT

How do you define yourself? Use the links below to begin exploring different perspectives and possibilities.

ACT ebook - Planning for Your Future: 6 Easy Ways to Start Preparing for What’s Next
pages.act.org/eBook-Prepare-For-Whats-Next.html
This FREE ebook will help you take what you know about your interests, goals, and skills, then pair it with your GPA and ACT® test scores to make informed decisions about your future.

1. What steps can you take to plan for your future?

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You Belong: Yolanda Norman Inspires First-Generation College Students
equityinlearning.act.org/equity-in-action/belong-yolanda-norman-inspires-first-generation-college-students/
Yolanda Norman is an advocate for first-generation college students. In this article, she shares her experience about being the first in her family to attend college and how a change of mindset propelled her into finding her voice and belonging.

2. In the article, “You Belong,” (link provided), Yolanda Norman says that the “noise” associated with “...being a low-income, first-generation college student made me question my place on campus every chance I got.” Once you get to college, which pieces of her advice will you use to ensure that you have a smooth transition into college?

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FOR STUDENTS

You may not know what your plan for life after high school is today. Let ACT help you start that plan and achieve success. Start your plan today.
act.org/content/act/en/students-and-parents.html

Your Guide to Planning for College and Careers eBook.
pages.act.org/eBook-Prepare-For-Whats-Next.html
What’s inside:
• Self-discovery – assessing your interests, abilities, and values
• Exploring majors – finding academic programs that fit your interests
• Exploring careers – finding careers that align with your goals
• Exploring schools – discovering schools that share your values
• Measuring academic readiness – reviewing GPA and ACT test scores
• Estimating costs – understanding the cost of attending college

Your junior year eBook “Five Questions Students Must ask While College and Career Planning”
pages.act.org/eBook-5-Questions-While-College-Career-Planning.html
What’s inside:
• Why high school seniors are great mentors for college planning
• Why colleges and employers love extracurricular activities
• Which high school courses are crucial for getting into college
• Why it’s OK not to know your future goals
• What work skills you need if you choose not to attend college
• Which websites will help you pay for college

5 Questions Students Must Ask
WHILE COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANNING
JUNIOR YEAR EDITION
FOR STUDENTS

Want to learn how to set up, plan, and execute a successful campus visit? Get this Free Campus Visits eBook.
[pages.act.org/Campus-Visit-eBook.html]

Learn how to submit a Strong College Application That Gets You Accepted Into Your Dream College. Get The Ultimate Guide to Applying for College & University.
[pages.act.org/college-application-ebook.html]

[pages.act.org/eBook-Stages-of-Taking-a-College-Entrance-Exam.html]

Learn how to get discovered by colleges and find financial aid programs.
[pages.act.org/Get-Your-Name-In-The-Game.html]
Get Discovered by Colleges Infographic. 3 Big Reasons You Should Check Yes.


Avoid the Senior Slide, Finish High School Strong
[pages.act.org/ebook-how-to-avoid-the-senior-slide.html]

What’s inside:

- Which courses you need to be ready before graduation
- How to turn your time outside the classroom (sports, arts, volunteering) into financial aid
- The people to see—and questions to ask—during college visits
- How to decide which college or university is right for you (and how to pay for it)
- The biggest mistakes students make when applying for college (and how to avoid them)
- How to find a career path outside of college
FOR STUDENTS

I'm First!
imfirst.org
I’m First! was created by nonprofit Center for Student Opportunity in 2013 to provide students who lack a family history of higher education with inspiration, information, and support on the road to and through college and is now an initiative of Strive for College—a national nonprofit that also runs a national online mentoring program for college-bound students.

STAY INFORMED
Sign up to receive news, ACT test reminders and other helpful information to prepare for college and career.
act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/alerts-and-tips.html

FOR PARENTS

ACT Students and Parents
www.act.org/content/act/en/students-and-parents.html
Curious about how to help your child search for and select a college? Know where to find scholarships for your child? Find answers to these questions and more to help your child plan for the future.