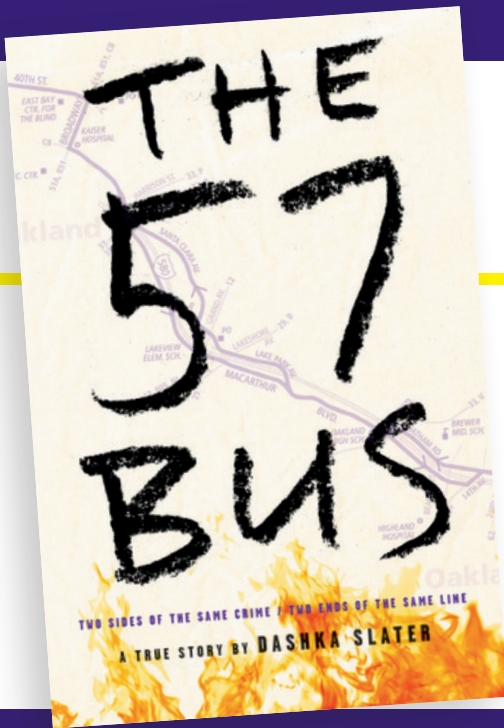


Common Reading

BOOK GUIDE

2018



A TRUE STORY BY

DASHKA SLATER



Northern Vermont
UNIVERSITY

NorthernVermont.edu

Dear First-Year Students:

Welcome to Northern Vermont University-Johnson and Johnson's Common Reading Initiative, an interdisciplinary endeavor that creates opportunities for engagement through a carefully chosen reading selection that inspires thinking about a unique aspect of North American culture. This year's choice, *The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives*, asks us to consider a violent crime perpetrated against a gender-nonconforming person as well as penal racism in the U.S. Juvenile Justice System through an examination of identity, community, and justice.

I invite you to take what you have learned from your reading and accompanying experiences and to think about the implications for our campus and local communities, bringing your energy and wisdom to bear on these very important societal issues facing us today. This may mean finding ways to strengthen your social connections through service, leadership, helping others in need, or supporting a cause that reaches beyond the individual.

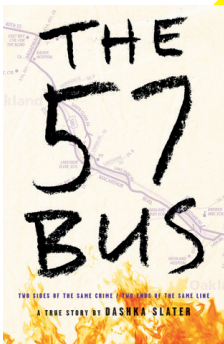
In the fall, you will have many opportunities to discuss this provocative text with your peers, faculty, and staff. Additionally, Northern Vermont University-Johnson will be hosting the author, Dashka Slater, on September 24, 2018. This will be a very special event that you will not want to miss! Please make it a point to review the background material presented in this guide, so that you will be well prepared.

In closing, I look forward to getting to know each of you and sharing this very special learning community. I challenge you to do your best and we will be there to support you every step of the way. Be sure to take advantage of the array of services designed to help you as you adjust to a new learning environment. Again, welcome to Northern Vermont University-Johnson!

Best wishes for a great start,

Elaine C. Collins

Elaine C. Collins, Ph.D.
President



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in part by Jane White, class of 1971.**

NVU's Common Reading Initiative is a program
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Dewey Hall | 802-635-1474

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GETTING STARTED

This guide is intended to help us open the door to positive and productive conversations about gender, sexuality, race, class, and the criminal justice system, among other topics. By reading this book, engaging in discussions, and attending events on campus, we hope to:

- Cultivate open, honest, and respectful conversations about multifaceted and challenging issues
- Raise and increase awareness and understanding about the topics listed above, among others
- Promote and increase empathy
- Inspire and sustain action and activism directed at creating a better campus climate and society

Gender, sexuality, race and class are complex and multi-layered topics. We chose *The 57 Bus*, in part, because we believe that Dashka Slater’s journalistic account of a real story involving two teenagers, is layered, compelling, and raises a host of questions worth considering.

In approaching conversations about this text, we intend to bring our best selves to create a space for dialogue that is constructive and unifying, regardless of differences of opinion. In order to do this important work, we look to our core values for guidance. At Northern Vermont University-Johnson, we believe the success of a community depends on a shared commitment to our Core Values. Northern Vermont University (NVU) is a thriving learning and living community dedicated to honoring the diversity of its students, faculty, and staff, and investing in their commitment to lifelong learning, personal well-being, and success. Demonstrated through our actions and beliefs, we are committed to:

- A community where freedom of expression is protected; differences in others’ ideas, values, and experiences are respected; and where civility is positively affirmed.
- A community where curiosity, critical thinking and thoughtful questions are celebrated as meaningful contributions to the learning environment.
- A community that demonstrates compassion and responsibility through service and involvement within our campuses and our surrounding communities.
- A community where individuals accept their obligations to the group and respect the rights and property of others.

We are grateful to NVU-Johnson community members for honoring these principles in conversations about *The 57 Bus* and when engaging with related programming.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

and the book



“What I hope, is that kids who are like Sasha will see themselves, kids who are like Richard will see themselves, and kids who are not like either one of them will feel some connection and empathy for somebody that maybe they had written off... and start thinking more critically about either/or narratives in general.” - Dashka Slater

Dashka Slater is an award-winning journalist whose articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Mother Jones*, among other publications. She has been honored by the California State Bar, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, and the California Newspaper Publishers Association, among others; in addition, she has received industry awards: a gold Azbee, two Maggies, and a Media Alliance Meritorious Achievement Award. Slater is also a novelist and children’s book author.

The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives starts with Slater’s account of a fateful moment on November 4, 2013 in Oakland, California. That afternoon, the paths of two teenagers—Sasha Fleischman and Richard Thomas—crossed on the city’s 57 bus. Sasha, a white, middle-class, agender (identifies as neither male nor female) student was traveling home from their (Sasha’s preferred pronoun) small, private high school. Richard, a black student from a large public school, who lived in a crime-plagued neighborhood, was also making the journey home. And, as their lives intersected on that bus, Richard made the choice to set fire to Sasha’s skirt. *The 57 Bus* unfolds from there, diving deeply into the backgrounds of both students as well as the way their friends, family, the broader community, and the criminal justice system responded to the event. In recounting this true story, Slater asks the reader to see Sasha and Richard as complex and multifaceted human beings and she challenges simplistic thinking about right and wrong, good and evil.

AUTHOR TALK & BOOK SIGNING

Dashka Slater

Monday, September 24 | Dibden Center for the Arts | 8pm

Join us for an evening with Dashka Slater, the author of this year's Common Book. Slater will share her experiences researching and crafting *The 57 Bus* and will answer questions about this compelling story. Bring your copy of the text and gather in the lobby afterwards to get your book signed.

ADDITIONAL UPCOMING EVENTS

MENDING MASCULINITY

September 18 • Stearns Performance • 7 pm

Mending Masculinity is a collaborative spoken word tour featuring poets Kavi Ade & Vision. Through performance poetry and critical dialogue, the duo utilizes their separate lenses (as a Transgender Queer person and as a Cisgender Heterosexual person) to cultivate a conversation that encompasses all forms of masculinity, the performance of gender, and the inherent toxicity of gendered binaries in a patriarchal world.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY WORKSHOP

Best Practices for Making NVU a safe place for Transgender, Gender-Nonconforming, and LGBTQ members of the NVU Community

October 16 • Stearns Performance • 11:30 am

The goal of these one-hour training sessions is to help make NVU-Johnson an inclusive and safe place for transgender, gender-nonconforming, and gender creative students, staff, and faculty. Participants will discuss how to navigate language related to gender identity and expression, and learn strategies for creating safe classrooms, offices, and dorms. Topics to be explored include: Preferred Gender Pronouns; Confidentiality; Name changes; Class rosters; Visibility; Being an ally; and Gender-neutral bathrooms.

SARAH GEORGE

October 2 • Bentley 207 • 5 pm

Chittenden County State's Attorney Sarah George is known for her unconventional solutions and progressive stance on community justice. George will speak to issues of criminal justice reform, particularly focusing on those aspects, such as race and class, which relate to *The 57 Bus*.

ART AND LETTERS EXHIBIT

August - December • Dewey Hall

View and reflect on artwork and letters crafted by people who are currently, or were formerly, incarcerated in Vermont. The exhibit will be up for the entirety of the semester just outside of the Office of First-Year Experience.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WORKSHOP WITH THE LAMOILLE RESTORATIVE CENTER

TBD • TBD • TBD

The Lamoille Restorative Center is a local non-profit that works to keep people out of the criminal justice system by empowering them to make good choices and connect positively to their community. Executive Director, Heather Hobart and additional LRC employees will facilitate a workshop on restorative justice tools, particularly focusing on Circles of Support and Accountability.

Sex, Gender, Sexuality:

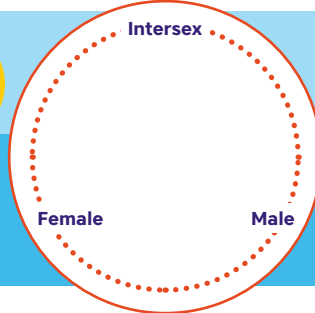
SOME TERMS

Please see p.33-35 in *The 57 Bus* for additional definitions

SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH

Organs, hormones, and chromosomes

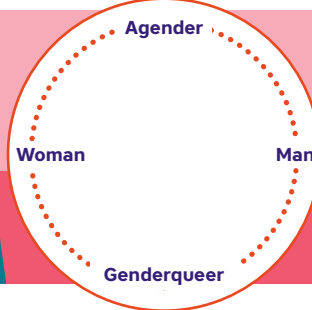
The physical sex characteristics one is born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair, hormones, chromosomes, etc.



GENDER IDENTITY

How you think about yourself

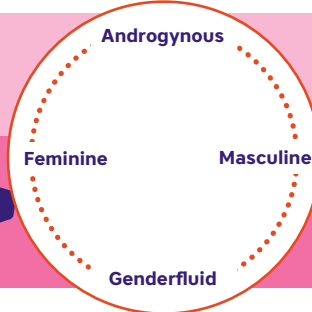
A person's internal perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their birth sex.



GENDER EXPRESSION

How you demonstrate your gender

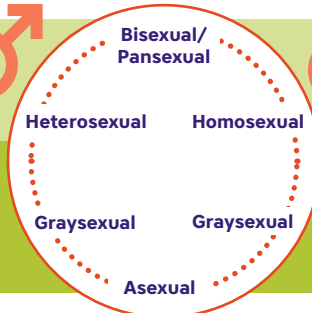
Gender expression is the way in which each person manifests masculinity or femininity externally. It is usually an extension of one's gender identity, the sense of being male and female.



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Physical and sexual attraction

A person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are sexually attracted.



LOCKED UP FOR LIFE: THE FACTS ON JUVENILE INCARCERATION IN THE U.S.



The United States is the only country in the world that sentences children to life in prison with no possibility of parole for crimes committed under age 18.



Nearly half of the youth sentenced to life without parole did not actually commit murder.

Nationally, 59% of juveniles sentenced to life without parole are first-time offenders—without a single crime on a juvenile court record.



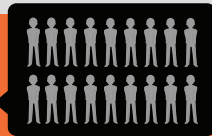
Child development researchers widely agree that young people who commit crimes have a better chance at rehabilitation than adults.



Youth sentenced to prison with no opportunity for release are often left without access to programs and rehabilitative services while in prison.

The number of youth in the U.S. sentenced to life without parole:

2,570



The U.S. will spend more than \$4 billion to incarcerate these youth until they die.

4 BILLION



READ | REFLECT | EXPERIENCE

Connect with Your New Community

You are not alone in this assignment – quite the opposite!
Over 400 people in the NVU Community are reading *The 57 Bus* this summer

We all have this book as a shared experience.

Designate a Time for Reading.

Make it happen.
Create a relaxed and focused pace.
Get your book out and get going...one page at a time!

Mix It Up

You don't always have to read in the same place.
If it's a nice day, try reading outside – on the beach, in a hammock, or in the shade of a tree.
Rainy days are perfect for reading inside the house, inside a tent, or on a porch.

Win a Hammock!

Send us Instagram pics of you reading *The 57 Bus*.
Tag your pictures #NVU57.
One lucky winner will be selected!
Be creative! Have fun! Read!

Bring *The 57 Bus* With You

You never know when an opportunity to read might arise.

Make Notes IN Your Book

Go ahead! Write or diagram your thoughts and questions on the pages of *The 57 Bus*.
Make this book yours.

We look forward to your return in August and our continued discussions.

Questions? Feedback? Don't hesitate to contact us!

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