
Civil Rights Era || MLK and Nonviolent Resistance

Goals & Objectives

- Explain Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of nonviolent resistance and the role of civil disobedience within it.
- Articulate the primary concerns of the Alabama clergymen who rejected King's intervention in Birmingham's racial conflicts in 1963.
- Describe how King defended his nonviolent campaign to the Alabama clergymen.

California State Content Standards

11.10.4 Examine the roles of civil rights advocates (e.g., A. Philip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, Thurgood Marshall, James Farmer, Rosa Parks), including the significance of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and "I Have a Dream" speech.

Common Core Literacy Standards

Reading

2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

6. Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Writing

9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Driving Historical Question

Was King's nonviolent resistance to segregation laws the best means of securing civil rights for black Americans in the 1960s?

Lesson Introduction (Anticipatory Set/Hook/Accessing Prior Knowledge) || Time: 15 mins

To give students some background on the type of discrimination and segregation occurring at this time, students will be put into small groups (3-4) and given Birmingham Segregation Ordinances (1951) and Letter Martin Luther King from a Group of Clergyman (1963). Students will read these two short documents individually, then answer the critical thinking questions in their small groups (see Student Engagement section).

Vocabulary (Content Language Development) || Time:

Vocabulary acquisition will be incorporated into the main body of the lesson. As the primary source documents are broken down and analyzed, vocabulary will naturally be covered within that process.

Specific key terms to focus on:

Discrimination
Segregation
Clergymen
Self-purification
Sit-in
Unfettered
Gadflies
Zeitgeist

Content Delivery (Method of Instruction) || Time: 35 mins

Following the introduction, which focuses on the criticism of Martin Luther King Jr., the teacher has students think about this criticism from MLK's perspective. The teacher has students do a 90-second quick write response to MLK's criticism from MLK's perspective.

Students are then given King's reply to the Alabama clergymen, known as the "Letter from Birmingham Jail," which will be read together as a class in an adjusted Think/(Write)/Pair/Share format aimed at breaking up the large amount of text for students one paragraph at a time. First, a student reads the text with everyone following along. Students must highlight key terms and then write down 1-2 sentences about what they think of the paragraph. Students then pair up to share their reactions orally with each other. Finally, the teacher has one pair share their reactions with the whole class. The teacher then clarifies and summarizes the paragraph. Finally, the teacher has the students add on to their initial reaction. This process repeats until the class analyzes the whole document.

After annotating the document, students will answer the critical think questions regarding this document (see Student Engagement) individually. Any questions they don't finish becomes homework.

Student Engagement (Critical Thinking & Student Activities) || Time:

After reading primary source documents, students will analyze primary source documents in the course of groups discussion or the critical thinking questions that accompany each source.

For the two sources in the lesson introduction section, students will answer the following questions:

- In 1963, what two recommendations did a group of Alabama clergymen propose to resolve the racial conflict in Birmingham, Alabama?
- Identify two or three criticisms they gave of the political demonstrations and protests taking place in Birmingham.
- What praise did they give to "local news media and law enforcement officials" for their conduct during the demonstrations?

For the "Letter From A Birmingham Jail," students will answer the following questions:

- Does King consider himself an "outsider" by staging a civil rights protest in Birmingham? List three reasons he gives in response to this criticism.
- List and explain the four-step process King outlines for their nonviolent campaign. [Note: for an example of the nonviolent mindset King wanted to instill in his protest movement, have students read the Commitment Card that participants were asked to sign in preparation for the protest, which is located at the "Teaching American History" site]
- If King admits that breaking laws in order to change them is "a legitimate concern," how does he still justify civil disobedience? List two reasons for his defense of civil disobedience, and explain how King thought a law can be disobeyed without leading to anarchy
- How does King's appeal to "eternal and natural law" help him examine human laws?
- Explain why King thinks the tension stirred up by his protest movement promotes social and political reform.
- How does King respond to the charge that he is an extremist? Whom does he identify as the real extremists?
- Why is King hopeful about the prospects for equal rights for black Americans? Give specific examples and reasons he mentions to support your answer.
- What is King's response to the clergymen's approval of how the police kept order during the demonstrations?

Lesson Closure || Time: 3 mins

This lesson is set up for students to work on their critical thinking questions until class ends, so the lesson closure won't technically be the last three minutes of class. The real lesson wrap-up comes at the end of the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" breakdown. Once the class has finished annotating the entire document, the teacher helps students summarize the document as a whole by identifying the historical context, as well as MLK's perspective & purpose writing the letter.

Assessments (Formative & Summative)

Formative: The critical thinking questions, which students must answer after analyzing the primary source documents force students to search for answers to the essential questions within the primary sources.

Formative/Progress-Monitoring: The Think/Write/Pair/Share activity will keep students engaged with a lengthy primary source assuring the teacher that students are remaining focused on the activity at-hand.

Accommodations for English Learners, Striving Readers and Students with Special Needs

In order to support English Language Learners, Striving Readers and Students with Special Needs, the teacher will provide extra reading support to these students throughout the lesson. First, the teacher will provide a vocabulary bank for these students to reference during their reading. During introduction reading, the teacher will provide one-on-one scaffolding to help familiarize these students with the material before reading the text. Additionally, the teacher will pair these struggling readers with helpful and more proficient students during the Think/Write/Pair/Share.

Resources (Books, Websites, Handouts, Materials)

Birmingham Segregation Ordinances (1951)

<http://web.archive.org/web/20110406165646/http://xroads.virginia.edu/~PUBLIC/civilrights/ordinances.html>

Letter Martin Luther King from a Group of Clergyman (1963)

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/letter-to-martin-luther-king/>

“Letter from Birmingham Jail”

<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/letter-birmingham-jail>