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ABSTRACT

This lesson plan teaches students about the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. Students listen to a brief biography, view photographs of the March on Washington, and read a portion of King's "I Have a Dream" speech. After studying Dr. King's use of imagery and allusion, students create original poetic phrases about freedom and illustrate them with symbols representing the forms of freedom that have yet to be realized in the United States. After its 6 lessons, students will have: (1) learned about the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr.; (2) observed and studied King's use of figurative language in his "I Have a Dream" speech; and (3) become aware of inequities that still exist in the United States. Intended for grades 3-5, the plan notes subject areas covered (language arts, literature, United States history and social studies), time required to complete the lesson, skills used and taught in the lesson, and the standards developed by professional associations or governments that are related to the lesson. Activities to extend the lesson and further resources conclude the lesson plan. (SR)

Let Freedom Ring: The Life & Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. [Lesson Plan].

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Let Freedom Ring: The Life & Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

Visualize the historic moment of Martin Luther King's stirring "I Have a Dream" speech through text and photographs. See the crowds, hear the words, and let King's powerful imagery awaken your students' thirst for justice in the world today.

In this lesson, students will learn about the life and work of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. Students will listen to a brief biography, view photographs of the March on Washington, and read a portion of King's "I Have a Dream" speech. After studying King's use of imagery and allusion, students will create original poetic phrases about freedom and illustrate them with symbols representing the forms of freedom that have yet to be realized in the United States.

For background information on the topics included in this lesson, see the resource list at the bottom of this lesson plan. Information is also available through the EDSITEMENT-reviewed [Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project](#) website.

Guiding Questions:

Who was Martin Luther King, Jr., and how did he fight for civil rights?
 What images and ideas did he draw upon in crafting his "I Have a Dream" speech?
 What parts of Dr. King's dream have or have not been realized in the present day?

Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students will have:

- learned about the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- observed and studied King's use of figurative language in his "I Have a Dream" speech
- become aware of inequities that still exist in the United States

Lesson Plan

1 Before the lesson, explore what students already know about Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students each. Have each group create a "bubble map" with Dr. King's name in the center bubble; in smaller bubbles around the center, have them write words and phrases that they associate with Dr. King. After the groups have completed their maps, go around the room round-robin style, asking one member from each group to call out a word or phrase from his or her group's map. Compile a master list of the students' ideas on the board.

Next, read the class a brief biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. A summary of the major events of King's life

SUBJECT AREAS >

[Literature & Language Arts: American](#)

[Literature & Language Arts: Poetry](#)

[History & Social Studies: United States: African-American](#)

[History & Social Studies: United States: Civil Rights](#)

GRADE LEVELS >

3-5

TIME REQUIRED >

Step 1: One 45-minute class period

Steps 2-3: One 45-minute class period

Steps 4-6: One to two class periods, 45 minutes each

Extending the Lesson: One 45-minute class period

SKILLS >

- observation and description
- comparing and contrasting
- critical thinking
- historical analysis
- map skills
- creative writing
- visual art
- collaboration
- Internet skills

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT >

be found on the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project](#) website. You may print this document out and read it to the class.

After you have shared this biographical information with the class, ask students what they now know about Martin Luther King, Jr. that they didn't know before. Add this new information to the master list.

2 Explain to students what the March on Washington was. Tell them that its full title was the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," that it was held on August 28, 1963, and that thousands of Americans from all walks of life attended it. Let students know that although Dr. King emphasized the struggles of African-Americans, he devoted his life to the freedom of all Americans. As long as even one of us was not free, he believed, none of us could be truly free.

In order to gain a sense of the magnitude and power of the march, as well as the wide diversity of Americans who attended it, students may view photographs from the extensive collection available through the EDSITEMent-reviewed Digital Classroom website. To access these images, follow these steps: Enter the [Digital Classroom](#). On the left-hand side of the screen, you will see a list entitled "Other NARA Sites for Primary Sources." Select [NAIL](#) from this list. Now click on [Search for Archival Holdings](#). Next, click on "NAIL Digital Copies Search." In the blank space next to the instruction "Enter Keywords," type in the words "March on Washington." Scroll down the boxed list titled "Media" and select "Photographs and Graphic Materials." Finally, click on "Display Results" to view more than eighty photographs from the March on Washington. Click on the button that says "More Hits" to move to the next page.

If you have limited computer access in your classroom, you may want to print out some photographs to distribute to students. To make a copy, click on the desired photograph and hold your cursor down until a list of options appears. After selecting "Copy this image," you may post the image into a word-processing document and print it out as you would any other document. You may also wish to share pictures from some of the print resources listed at the bottom of this lesson plan.

As they view the photographs, ask students to take special note of the variety of people represented. What do they think motivated each of these people to attend the March?

3 Ask students if they have ever heard Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, which he delivered at the March on Washington. Now have students read the final section of Dr. King's speech, the full text of which is available through the EDSITEMent-reviewed [Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project](#) website. After accessing the speech from the opening page of the website, scroll down to the final section of the speech, beginning with the words, "I say to you today, my friends [applause], so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream..." (In classes without Internet hook-up, teachers may print out the final section of the speech and distribute it to students. To facilitate students' understanding, the teacher might also choose to read the excerpts from the speech aloud to the class.)

After students have read and/or listened to the speech, ask them to write down 5-7 words or phrases of the speech that especially stood out to them. Then divide the class into groups of three students each. To emphasize the poetry and beauty of King's language, have each group create a "found poem" by combining into the form of a poem, in whatever order they wish, the words and phrases that were selected by each of the group's members. Upon completion, have one member of each group read the group's "found poem" to the rest of the class.

NCTE/IRA List of Standards for the English Language Arts

- 3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. ([more](#))
- 5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. ([more](#))
- 6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts. ([more](#))
- 8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. ([more](#))
- 12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information). ([more](#))

National Council for the Social Studies

- 2. Time, Continuity, and Change ([more](#))
- 3. People, Places, and Environments ([more](#))
- 6. Power, Authority and Governance ([more](#))
- 10. Civic Ideals and Practices ([more](#))

National Standards for Arts Education

Visual Arts

- 1. Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes ([more](#))
- 3. Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas ([more](#))

View your state's standards

4 Now turn to "My Country 'Tis of Thee" to show how Dr. King drew upon the language of this familiar song in crafting his own speech (much as the students drew upon the language of Dr. King's speech in crafting their "found poems"). Read or have students join you in singing the lyrics of the song:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.
Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside.
Let freedom ring!

Take note not only of how Dr. King quoted these lyrics directly in his speech, but also of how he alluded to the phrase "from every mountainside" with phrases such as "the red hills of Georgia," "the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire," "the mighty mountains of New York," and "the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania." Ask students to read out the other phrases about mountains that Dr. King included in the final section of his speech.

For further inspiration, you may wish to have students consider the words of "America the Beautiful," the poetic grandeur of which are also reflected in King's use of language:

Oh beautiful, for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountains' majesty
Above the fruited plain.
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee.
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea.

5 Next, have students make a list of the geographical locations mentioned in Dr. King's speech, and have them find these locations on a United States map. A large selection of maps is available in the "Atlas" section of the EDSITEMent-reviewed National Geographic Society Xpeditions website. In the Atlas section, go to North America and click on "United States" for a current map of the United States.

Ask students to take note of the specific geographical features of different regions, and then have them create new phrases that King might have used to refer to other states ("Let freedom ring from..."). In selecting places to represent on their posters, students might wish to consider some of the locations where other notable struggles for freedom have taken place (e.g., Plymouth Rock, Lexington and Concord, Philadelphia, Appomattox, Seneca Falls, Wounded Knee, Selma). Have each student write his or her phrase at the top of a sheet of poster paper.

6 Discuss with students some of the inequities that persist in American society today. (Students might note, for instance, inequities based on skin color, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, or gender.) Has Dr. King's dream been realized, or is it yet to come true? Which forms of inequality would King protest if he were alive today?

Finally, have each student create a symbol representing a form of freedom that has yet to be realized in

...erica, and add this symbol to his or her poster beneath the phrase he or she created in Step 5. These posters may become part of a bulletin board or classroom display with the title "Let Freedom Ring!"

Extending the Lesson

With adequate computer access and appropriate software, students can create electronic versions of the "Let Freedom Ring!" assignment. After completion of the lesson, have students access individual state maps, available through the [Atlas of North America](#) feature of [Xpeditions](#), and locate the sites of notable struggles for freedom (e.g., Plymouth Rock, Lexington and Concord, Philadelphia, Appomattox, Seneca Falls, Wounded Knee, Selma). After conducting web searches for information pertaining to these events, students may create a virtual tour of these "sites of freedom" in a word-processed document containing "live" URL links to relevant web pages and maps.

Students may also wish to visit the EDSITEment-reviewed website [We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement](#), which provides information about people and events connected to historic sites throughout the nation.



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