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## ABSTRACT

Martin Luther King, Jr. framed the goals and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement for a national audience, and with his message of nonviolent protest, he inspired ordinary African Americans to demand equal rights as American citizens. This lesson focuses on the individual men and women who embraced King's message and advanced the Civil Rights Movement on a local level. By researching these people and the now-historic places where they brought about change, students will discover how the simple act of sitting at a lunch counter in North Carolina could be considered revolutionary, and how, combined with countless other acts of nonviolent protest across the nation, it could lead to major legislation in the area of civil rights for African Americans. The lesson: provides an introduction; cites subject areas, time required, and skills developed; gives learning objectives; poses a guiding question; outlines in detail three suggested activities; suggests other activities for extending the lesson; lists selected Web sites; and addresses standards alignment. Attached is a sheet entitled "We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Right Movement." (NKA)

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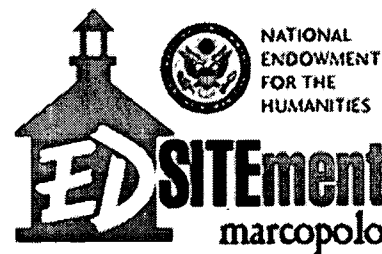
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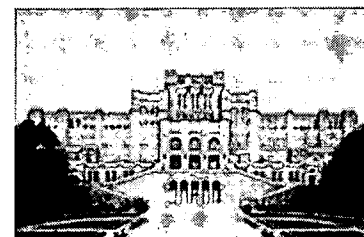
# Ordinary People, Ordinary Places: The Civil Rights Movement

*Let freedom ring...from every village and every hamlet*

--Martin Luther King, Jr.



GRADES 9-12



Little Rock High School

## Introduction

Martin Luther King, Jr., framed the goals and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement for a national audience, and with his message of nonviolent protest, he inspired ordinary African Americans to demand equal rights as American citizens. This lesson will focus on the individual men and women who embraced King's message and advanced the Civil Rights Movement on a local level. By researching these people and the now historic places where they brought about change, students will discover how the simple act of sitting at a lunch counter in North Carolina could be considered revolutionary, and how, combined with countless other acts of nonviolent protest across the nation, it could lead to major legislation in the area of civil rights for African Americans.

**Note:** Discussion of the Civil Rights Movement can elicit strong responses from individuals, even today. Teachers should be aware of this and closely monitor class discussion, particularly when addressing the derogatory language used to describe different groups of people during this time period. This language is present on some pages of the [We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights) website, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights>.

## Subject Areas

Literature and Language Arts

American

## Time Required

1-2 class periods for each numbered activity

## Skills

information gathering and analysis  
critical thinking  
interpretation  
public speaking and presentation  
Internet skills

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Analyze Martin Luther King's message of nonviolent protest discover how individuals adapted his message to their own communities and situations
- Identify several of the defining events of the Civil Rights Movement, the people who participated in them, and the historic places where these events occurred
- Understand how protest at the local level contributed to the success of the Civil Rights Movement as a whole.

## GUIDING QUESTION:

How did the contributions of ordinary men and women advance the larger movement for which King was a symbol and spokesman?

## Suggested Activities

### 1. Identifying the Need for Change

Begin the lesson by asking students to read the "Introduction" and "The Need for Change" on the [We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights) website, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights>. Also, ask students to read King's "I Have a Dream"

speech, which can be found at Great American Speeches: 80 Years of Political Oratory, <http://www.pbs.org/greatspeeches/timeline/index.html> (to find this document, go to the home page of this website, then click on the "Speech Archive" link. Scroll down the page to the "1960s" section. A link to King's speech, as well as helpful background, can be found under this heading).

First, discuss with students the need for change. Define segregation for the class, and ask students to imagine living during this time period. How would they react to drinking from separate water fountains and using separate restrooms, sitting in segregated sections of restaurants, attending different and often inferior schools, riding in the back of buses and entering through separate doors, or being denied voting rights, simply because of the color of their skin? Discuss these and other inequities. (See the "Introduction" section <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/intro1.htm> and "The Need for Change" link at the bottom of the "Introduction" page for background on segregation the events leading up to the Civil Rights Movement.) Ask students once again if they could imagine being denied basic rights under the constraints of segregation. Why was there a need for change in the United States?

Next, discuss Martin Luther King's role in the Civil Rights Movement. Explain to students that although King was a leader of the movement, he believed its success depended on the participation of ordinary men and women who shared his dream of equality. Ask students to analyze King's speech and identify the portions of the speech that reflect his idea of a collective movement and nonviolent protest. (For more background on King and nonviolent protest, please see the EDSITEMent lesson plan, Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Power of Nonviolence, and visit The Martin Luther King, Jr. website at [http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/.](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/))

## **2. Ordinary People in the Civil Rights Movement**

Divide students into four groups and assign each group one of the four sections of the We Shall Overcome site, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights>; the four sections are entitled "Players," "Strategy," "Cost," and "Prize." (To find these sections from the home page of the We Shall Overcome site, click on "Introduction." Links to the sections listed above can be accessed at the bottom of the "Introduction" page.) Depending on availability students may read from their computers, or they may read from handouts printed ahead of time. Students should identify the major points outlined in their sections, and present their findings to the class as a group, giving each member a chance to comment.

These brief presentations should develop into a larger discussion involving the entire class. Who were the players, and what did they want to accomplish? Again, emphasize the importance of ordinary men and women, and explain that the success of the Civil Rights Movement depended on a series of achievements at the local level by local people, several of whom will be discussed later in the lesson. Discuss the role of the church as a place of local activism, student involvement, and the roles of the opposition, namely the Ku Klux Klan and Southern whites. What was the strategy of the local people? Point out that although some groups, like the Black Panthers, advocated strategies other than nonviolent resistance, the Civil Rights Movement adopted nonviolence as a rule. What was the cost? Explain that nonviolent protest was often met with violent protest, and demonstrators regularly risked their lives to participate in the movement. Finally, discuss the immediate victories of the movement, such as African-Americans being served a meal in a restaurant, as well as the long-term prize embodied in the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

## **3. Historic Places in the Civil Rights Movement**

Ask students to form groups again, this time in smaller groups of two or three, and choose a historical site from the We Shall Overcome website, <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights/sitelist1.htm>. (Review each historical site and narrow the choices ahead of time to ensure discussion of the major sites, such as Little Rock High School, but allow for some lesser-known places to be researched. Also note that some of the places

listed may not necessarily be relevant to this lesson, such as the William Monroe Trotter House, because they relate to a different time period.)

Using the attached *worksheet*, ask each group to research its place by asking the same questions posed in the earlier discussion. Students should analyze their event and place in terms of the larger Civil Rights Movement. How did Martin Luther King, Jr. and his theory of nonviolence influence the people involved? What is important about the place where the event occurred? How did the people at this place influence the larger Civil Rights Movement? Again, ask the students to present their findings to the class in a short oral presentation.

When the presentations are complete, broaden the discussion to include the entire class, and compare and contrast the historical places presented by the students.

Which historic places were the most significant to the success of the movement? At which place was the strategy employed most successful? Least successful? At which place did the players suffer the greatest cost? At which places did Martin Luther King, Jr. play a direct role? At which places did he play an indirect role? Finally, reiterate to the students that the events that occurred at each of these historic places were significant in that 1) they were led by ordinary men and women who believed in equal rights for all Americans, and 2) they did not stand alone, but were successful as part of a collective, non-violent movement in which local activism translated into sweeping national change in the area of civil rights for African-Americans.

## Extending the Lesson

Ask students to conduct an oral history with a family member or other adult who remembers the Civil Rights Movement. Students can visit *My History is America's History* at <http://www.myhistory.org/> for more information on conducting oral history interviews and exploring their own family history.

Among the questions to ask:

- Do you remember what happened at the place I studied in school?
- Tell me what you remember about the events at Little Rock High School. What was your reaction to those events at the time? How did others react? How do you feel about those events looking back on them today?
- Do you recall what happened in your own town during the Civil Rights Movement? Did you participate in the movement in any way?
- What was your reaction to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech?
- Discuss the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement as explained in "The Prize" on the *We Shall Overcome website*. Was the Civil Rights Movement a success? Ask students to give examples of successes and failures. In what way are civil rights being discussed today? How have the events of September 11th brought the issue of civil rights back into the spotlight?

## Selected EDSITEMent Websites

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**American Memory.**

**Great American Speeches: 80 Years of Political Oratory.**

**My History is America's History.**

**We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement.**

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## Other Information

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### Standards Alignment

1. [NCSS-10](#)

Civic ideals and practices. Citizenship in a democratic republic. [more](#)

2. [NCSS-2](#)

Time, continuity, and change. The ways human beings view themselves in and over time. [more](#)

3. [NCSS-3](#)

People, places, and environments. [more](#)

4. [NCSS-6](#)

Power, authority, and governance. [more](#)

5. [NCTE/IRA-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](#)

6. [NCTE/IRA-3](#)

Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. [more](#)

7. [NCTE/IRA-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](#)

8. [NCTE/IRA-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](#)

**We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights Movement**

**Name of Historic Place:**

What important event of the Civil Rights Movement occurred at this place? What year did this event occur?

Who were the “players” at this location? List everyone involved, including demonstrators, opposition, police, etc.

Outline the goals of the players. Again, include all groups involved, including opposition.

What is important about the place where the event occurred?

How did Martin Luther King, Jr. and his theory of nonviolence influence the local protestors? Did they practice nonviolent strategies?

What was the strategy used at this place?

What were the costs, if any, at this location?

What was the prize? Which players achieved their goals? What were the short-term results? Long-term gains?

Finally, how did the people at this place influence the larger Civil Rights Movement?





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