

It Takes Courage to be Weak

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

TIME ALLOTMENT: Two 45-60 minute sessions, or one session plus homework

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students begin by analyzing quotations about activism and social change, and rewriting them in their own words. Students view video segments from *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* to learn about the philosophy of non-violence and about the role of nonviolent protest in the Civil Rights Movement. They conclude by writing first-person accounts from the point of view of a civil rights protester in 1950s and 1960s America.

***NOTE TO TEACHERS:** These segments of *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* contain authentic archival footage of the struggle between African-Americans and white Americans during the Civil Rights era. They include some violence and the use of derogatory racial epithets. Before teaching this lesson, please preview the video segments and assess their appropriateness for your students.*

SUBJECT MATTER: Social Studies

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain the strategy of non-violent passive resistance as a mechanism of social change.
- Describe the role of non-violence in the Civil Rights movement, listing the types of actions that were undertaken by nonviolent protesters.
- View the actions of key individuals such as Rosa Parks in the context of the larger social movement that supported them.
- Report on the role of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and of college students in desegregation efforts in the American South in the 1950s and 1960s.

STANDARDS

From the Common Core Standards: English Language Arts, available online at <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>:

Common Core Standards, now adopted in over 40 states, are designed to help educators prepare students for success in college and careers by focusing on core knowledge and skills. The English Language Arts standards reflect the need for young people “to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas” including history/social studies. This curricular resource developed to accompany THE AFRICAN

AMERICANS: MANY RIVERS TO CROSS aligns most closely with the following Common Core Standards:

RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

From the National Standards for United States History for grades 5-12, available online at <http://www.nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/us-history-content-standards>:

Era 9: Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s)

Standard 4: The struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties.

Standard 4A: The student understands the “Second Reconstruction” and its advancement of civil rights.

Grades 7-12: Analyze the leadership and ideology of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X in the civil rights movement and evaluate their legacies. [Assess the importance of the individual in history]

Grades 5-12: Evaluate the agendas, strategies, and effectiveness of various African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and Native Americans, as well as the disabled, in the quest for civil rights and equal opportunities. [Explain historical continuity and change]

MEDIA COMPONENTS

Video

The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross, selected segments.

Access the video segments for this lesson at the Video Segments Page.

Segment 1: “Rosa Parks”

Rosa Parks was a seasoned activist whose actions on the Montgomery bus were well planned.

Segment 2: “Ruby Bridges”

Six-year-old Ruby Bridges’ entry into a formerly all-white school provoked outbursts of hatred that mobilized the movement.

Segment 3: “Preparing for the Sit-In”

Non-violent passive resistance required much preparation and mental strength.

MATERIALS

For the class:

- Computer, projection screen, and speakers (for class viewing of online video segments)

For each student:

- “In Your Own Words” Student Organizer
- “Non-Violent Protest” Student Organizer
- “The Sit-In” Student Organizer
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s article on “Nonviolence and Racial Justice,” available here:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/sources/ps_nonviolence.html (or direct students to the reading online)

PREP FOR TEACHERS

Prior to teaching this lesson, you will need to:

Preview all of the video segments used in the lesson. Prepare to watch them using your classroom’s Internet connection.

Print out and make copies of the “In Your Own Words” Student Organizer, the “Non-Violent Protest” Student Organizer, and “The Sit-In” for each student. Also make copies of “Nonviolence and Racial Justice” if the students will not be accessing it online.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

1. Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students and distribute the “In Your Own Words” Student Organizer to each student. Explain that the organizer asks them to read several famous quotations and to rewrite them in their own words, distilling the main points of each statement. Ask the students to work in groups to complete Part I of the organizer, deciphering the quotations and reinterpreting them in their own words. They should write down their group’s reinterpretation below each quote. (You may either have the whole class rewrite all three quotations, or divide them among the different groups in the class).
2. Reconvene to discuss the class’ interpretations of the quotations and to discuss any discrepancies that emerged in the class’ renditions. If the quotations were divided among different groups in the class, have the students complete any blank sections of Part I with the help of the other groups.
3. Ask the class to continue to Part II of the organizer, where they compare the commonalities between the three quotations.
4. Review the students’ answers for Part II orally. Make sure the students understand that all three quotations have to do with justice and social change.

5. They speak to factors that are important to struggles against injustice: to examine the root causes of the injustice (Baker), to raise community consciousness of injustice by standing up against unjust laws (King), and to persist in taking action, no matter how small, toward justice (Gandhi). All three authors were important activists for social change. If needed, help the class define “activist” (a person who actively engages in efforts to achieve social or political change).
6. Briefly discuss the authors and the struggles for social change that they were most famously involved in (King and Baker: Civil Rights for African-Americans; Gandhi: India’s freedom from British colonial rule).

LEARNING ACTIVITY

1. Explain that one powerful form of activism, that was extremely important to the Civil Rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s in the US, was “non-violent protest.” In this activity, students will learn more about the philosophy and method behind this strategy of achieving social change.
2. Distribute the “Non-Violent Protest” Student Organizer to each student. Go over the instructions as a class (you may also want to make a list of the actions/goals on the board as you go along).
3. Before viewing the first video clip, “Rosa Parks,” probe the students on who Rosa Parks was and why she was famous (she occupied a seat in a whites-only section of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955). Ask the students if they think Rosa Parks had prepared herself to occupy the seat, and if so, how she might have gone about doing so. (Accept all answers.)
4. Play Video Segment 1, “Rosa Parks.” After the segment has concluded, review the question you posed (in fact, Rosa Parks had been working with civil rights activists for many years, and was carefully chosen for this role. She had also undergone training before taking her stand on the bus). The students should begin filling out their “Non-Violent Protest” Student Organizer, e.g. by listing the action of “occupying a whites-only seat on a segregated bus” with the (immediate) goal of bringing attention to the injustice of segregation, and the (ultimate) goal of desegregating the buses. They may also list boycotts.
5. Before playing video segment 2, “Ruby Bridges,” explain that even though laws banning segregation had been passed, it sometimes required non-violent protest to make sure that those laws were enacted. If the students have previously studied the *Brown v. Board of Education* settlement, you may ask them to recall this landmark Supreme Court decision. Play “Ruby Bridges” and have the students continue filling out their organizer. *(NOTE to teachers: this segment ends with archival news footage of a white woman explaining to a news reporter that “we don’t want n****s in this school – this is a nice school.” You may wish to follow the viewing of this segment with a discussion of the entrenched attitudes and stereotypes that civil rights activists, including six-year-old Ruby Bridges, were up against when they tried to desegregate schools and other institutions. For more on this topic, see “Who Was Jim Crow?,” available online at*

6. <http://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/bf10.socst.us.indust.whowasjim/who-was-jim-crow/>).
7. Proceed to Video Segment 3 “Preparing for the Sit-In.” Before viewing the video, review the concept of a Sit-In and help students understand that it consists of non-violently (although sometimes unlawfully) occupying a particular establishment to draw attention to a cause. Play the segment. Afterward, lead a discussion on the philosophy of nonviolence – is this strategy also “non-confrontational”? Is it aggressive? Ensure that the students understand that the philosophy of non-violent protest requires only that the protesters remain nonviolent, not the members of the establishment’s status quo (e.g. business owners, police, and the general public). In fact, the actions of non-violent protesters often knowingly invited violence; non-violent passive resistance was actually seen by other civil rights leaders as an aggressive and confrontational strategy. Briefly discuss the mental and emotional strength that was evident among the protesters in the video.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

1. In class or as homework, the students will explore the mental, physical, and emotional challenges inherent to the strategy of non-violent passive resistance. Distribute the “Sit-In” Student Organizer to the students (along with the “Nonviolence and Racial Justice” handout, if the students are not going online to read it).
2. Go over the instructions. First, the students will read excerpts from a 1957 article written by Martin Luther King, Jr. They should underline phrases that convey the philosophy of non-violent passive resistance. With this manifesto as a background, the students will imagine that they are one of the students taking part in the 1960 Nashville lunch counter sit-ins. They will write a first-person account of their role in the event, as if they were describing the experience in a letter to a close friend. How did they manage to stay passive in the face of the threats, violence, and hostility shown to them?
3. Collect the “Sit-In” letters to assess student learning.