

Lesson Plan: Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.



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ENGLISH

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Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.

[1] Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Black American leader. He is known as one of the most powerful speakers in U.S. history. King believed that people could change the world through **courage** and the power of speech.

[2] In 1929, when King was born, Black Americans faced **discrimination**. In many places, laws stopped Black Americans from voting, going to school, or even drinking from the same water fountains as White Americans. In 1955, Rosa Parks, a Black woman, was put in jail because she did not give up her seat on the city bus to a White man.

[3] At the time, King was a young man, just 26 years old. But he was a pastor at a church in the city where Rosa Parks lived. He **stood up for** Rosa Parks, leading a **protest movement** to end discrimination on buses.

[4] During the 1950s and 1960s, King led thousands of people in powerful yet peaceful forms of protest, such as **marches**. These protests were shown on TV around the world. People everywhere could see how badly Americans wanted **civil rights** for everyone in the U.S.

[5] King was known for **inspiring** people through his powerful words. His voice had rhythm, emotion, and hope. His words led people to join the movement for civil rights.

[6] In 1963, Americans from all over the country went to Washington, D.C., for a civil rights march. That day, King spoke to a crowd of 250,000 people. His speech, “I Have a Dream,” became one of the most well-known speeches in American history.

[7] In his speech, King said he dreamed, or hoped, that one day his children would “not be **judged** by the color of their skin but by the **content** of their **character**.” He wanted people to be treated fairly and be valued for what they did — not how they looked.

[8] In 1964, King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the civil rights movement. One year later, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was signed into law, protecting the voting rights of all Americans, including Black Americans.

[9] Three years later, King was killed in Memphis, Tennessee, while helping workers ask for fair pay. He was killed because he was a powerful leader in the civil rights movement. His life showed that courage and strong voices can change a nation.

Overview

In this 90-minute lesson, students will learn about Martin Luther King, Jr., and his role in the civil rights movement. Students will consider the role of communication in creating change and practice verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

Goals

Students will:

1. Practice reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.
2. Strengthen 4Cs skills (collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking).
3. Learn about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision and impact.
4. Practice speech-making/oratory skills.

Lesson Materials

1. Printed or projected copy of the photo at the beginning of this lesson.
2. Printed or projected copies of the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. reading included with this lesson.
3. Printed or projected copy of the "I Have a Dream" Phrase Bank handout included with this lesson.

Preparation

1. Read through this lesson in its entirety.
2. Consider the appropriateness of the lesson for your context. The article included with this lesson refers to a sensitive topic (political violence).
3. Determine whether you will need to activate students' prior knowledge, pre-teach, or otherwise provide scaffolding, or support, for your students beyond the suggestions in the Procedures section.
4. Consider if, or how, you will adapt or change this lesson to better meet your students' needs.

Vocabulary from the Reading

- **courage** (noun) – The ability to do something even when you feel afraid.
- **discrimination** (noun) – Treating someone unfairly because of who they are.
- **stood up for** (phrasal verb) – Helped or protected someone.
- **protest movement** (noun) – A group of people who work together to ask for change in their country or community.

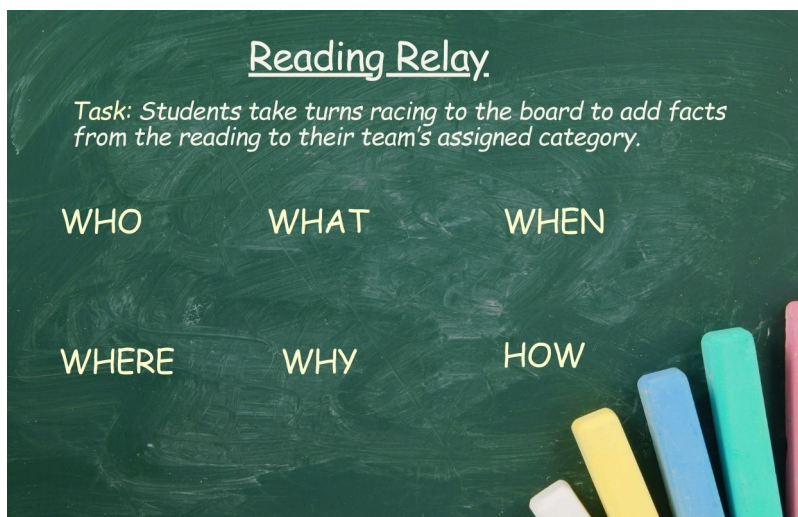
- **marches** (plural noun) – Events where people meet together in public places, such as streets, to show they want change.
- **civil rights** (plural noun) – The basic rights all people should have, like fair treatment.
- **inspiring** (adjective) – Making someone feel hopeful.
- **content** (noun) – What something includes or is made of.
- **character** (noun) – How a person is on the inside, especially whether they are honest, kind, or fair.
- **judged** (verb) – Rated, graded, or evaluated.

Procedures

Nonverbal Communication Activity and Warm-Up: Statue Maker Game (5 to 10 minutes)

1. Show students the photo for this lesson.
2. Ask students to physically imitate the pose they see in the photo of the statue of Martin Luther King, Jr.
3. Discuss as a class: What does this body language show or communicate?
4. Play music. Ask students to move around the room while stretching, bending, jumping, or dancing.
5. Call "Freeze!" Students must stop and hold their current pose.
6. Ask students to look at the pose they are holding and think about it.
7. Discuss: What feelings or ideas does your body language show right now?

Reading and Writing Relay Activity (20 to 25 minutes)



1. Write the question words *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* on the board.
2. Divide the class into six groups. Assign each group one question word.
3. Ask students to read the article included in the lesson.
4. Give groups time to discuss the article and look for information that matches their assigned question word.
5. Set a 7-minute timer to begin the relay.
6. During the relay, students take turns quickly coming to the board to write one piece of information under their category. They may use information from the article or their prior knowledge.
7. Encourage groups to add as much information as they can before the timer ends.
8. Lead a whole-class discussion using the information students wrote on the board.

Listening Activity: “I Have a Dream” (15 to 20 minutes)

1. Play the six-minute **audio clip** of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s speech. You may show the transcript on a projector or create print handouts if you prefer.
2. Ask students to use the transcript to follow along as they listen. Students may not know all of the words. This is okay. They can listen for the emotion in the words.
3. Play the clip more than once if needed. Encourage students to notice King’s pace, pauses, volume, rhythm, and repetition.
4. Lead a brief discussion about what students observed about his speaking style. How was this speech similar to, or different from, other speeches they are familiar with, either in English or another language?

Speaking, Listening and Nonverbal Communication Activity (15 to 20 minutes)

1. Divide students into small groups.
2. Explain that each student will take a turn delivering quotations from King’s speech.
3. Assign each student a sentence from the “I Have a Dream” Phrase Bank handout.
4. Model the activity first with a volunteer. Demonstrate how a partner can coach the speaker on volume, cadence, pacing, pauses, and body language/gestures. You may want to write some coaching phrases on the board, such as:
 - a. Speak more slowly
 - b. Stand up tall
 - c. Try saying this softly
 - d. Try saying this loudly
 - e. Make a big gesture
 - f. Pause here
 - g. Use emotion in your tone of voice

5. In groups, ask students to take turns speaking. After each turn, group members give simple coaching or suggestions.
6. Remind students that the goal is not to imitate Dr. King exactly, but to explore how different choices change the sound and feeling of a speech.
7. Circulate around the room to support groups, help with coaching language, and encourage participation.

Writing Activity: Turning Negative Statements into Positive Visions (15 to 20 minutes)

1. Ask students to write a list of things they would like to change in their life, community, or country.
2. Provide sentence starters on the board, such as:
 - a. Stop...
 - b. Get rid of...
 - c. No more...
3. Ask students how they feel after writing these statements. Invite a few short responses.
4. Next, ask students to choose one item from their list and rewrite it using the sentence starter “I have a dream...” For example, “Stop litter” becomes “I have a dream that the streets are clean.”
5. Tell students to describe what that dream looks like in a few sentences. For example, “I walk down quiet, peaceful streets. I see a woman throwing a paper cup into a trash can. Pretty flowers are blooming in gardens. Neighbors are sweeping the sidewalk. I can tell how much everyone cares about the neighborhood.”
6. Ask students again how they feel after writing the new, positive version.
7. Lead a short discussion about how describing a vision in positive terms can be more powerful and persuasive than only listing problems.
8. Invite volunteers to share some of their “dream” sentences with the class.

Closing Activity: Sharing Dreams and Nonverbal Communication

1. Ask each student to choose one pose or gesture that matches the “dream” sentence they wrote. For example:
 - a. If a student’s sentence was “I dream of a school where everyone treats each other kindly,” the student might place their hand on their heart while speaking.
 - b. If a student’s sentence was “I dream of a huge soccer park where everyone can play,” the student might do a kicking gesture or pose like a soccer star in a photo.

2. Give students a few minutes to practice saying their dream sentences out loud while holding or using their pose or gesture. Their dream sentence and gesture should take only about 30 seconds to say.
3. Put students into pairs. Ask them to coach each other, focusing on pace, volume, pauses, and body language.
4. Ask all students to line up and stand in their chosen poses. You may photograph or record this moment if appropriate.
5. One at a time, ask each student to step forward, state their dream, and use their pose/gesture.
6. After each student speaks, invite the rest of the class to cheer or clap to encourage a supportive atmosphere.

Variations and Extensions

In addition to or instead of studying King’s speech, students could work as individuals or in small groups to find videos of people they admire making speeches. The speeches may be in English or another language.

Students may study these speeches and practice saying some of the lines. Then, as a class, students can come together to compare different speaking styles and discuss what makes a speech effective.

In addition to or instead of focusing on King’s speech, students can explore the quotes displayed at the [Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial](#) in Washington, D.C. Working in small groups, students may review the quotes and choose one to study and learn more about.

Each group can rewrite their chosen quote in their own words and tape their paraphrased version to the classroom wall, creating a shared “quote wall.” Students may also include quotes or ideas from other leaders they value.

“I Have a Dream” Phrase Bank – Phrases from King’s famous Speech

Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.

I have a dream today!

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Free at last! Free at last!

I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Now is the time to make justice a reality.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.”

Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream.

Little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

If America is to be a great nation, this must become true.