



BIO: Martin Luther King, Jr. Classroom Guide

Introduction

Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Man and the Dream is a BIO special presentation which brings the epic story of one of the most important figures in American history to a new generation of viewers. This program commemorates the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., tracing his story from his boyhood through his tragic assassination in 1968. As he followed family tradition to become a minister, Dr. King established himself as an influential leader in the early Civil Rights Movement; from early on he seemed destined to become a major catalyst for change on the national stage. In this program, interviews with close confidants and those who lived through this tumultuous era provide rich insights into Dr. King's life, capturing his doubts and challenges alongside his victories and triumphs.

With his roots in theology, Dr. King developed an inspirational speaking style that mobilized Americans to fight against racial injustice and segregation. From the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955 to the historic 1963 March on Washington where he delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. King helped thrust the issues of racial equality onto the national agenda and motivated every day people throughout the nation to take up the cause for social justice. Even as he became a powerful leader, Dr. King drew enormous criticism from those who resisted the possibilities of change. This one hour BIO special presents a retrospective and insightful exploration of this extraordinary leader, retracing his journey and examining the indelible mark he left on the nation and the world.

Objectives and Curriculum Links

Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Man and the Dream would be useful for history, American culture, African American history, journalism, and political science courses. It is appropriate for high school students. It would be an excellent contribution to Black History Month lectures and events.

Vocabulary

- Bigotry
- Civil Disobedience
- Civil Rights
- Color-blind
- De facto
- De jure
- Integration
- Citizen
- Segregation

Discussion Questions

1. What were some events in Dr. King's youth which led to his decision to fight against discrimination and segregation?
2. In one of his earliest speeches, Dr. King said "If freedom is good for any, it is good for all." What do you think he meant by this quote, and how did he attempt to live up to this idea throughout his life?
3. Dr. King worked to achieve civil rights for African Americans in many different areas, such as voting rights. What were some of the other areas in which he and the participants in the Civil Rights Movement sought to secure equality? Which of these do you think was most important and why?
4. Why do you think J. Edgar Hoover was so determined to undermine Dr. King's work for civil rights? What are your thoughts on Hoover's actions?
5. How did Mahatma Gandhi influence Martin Luther King? What was his essential philosophy and how did Martin Luther King Jr. aim to embody his ideas in the United States?
6. What are your thoughts about the music and images in this documentary? How do the choices of sound impact the way you interpret the messages and themes?
7. What are some of the adjectives you would use to describe Dr. King's leadership style? Why do you think he was such a powerful leader?
8. Which of King's accomplishments in the Civil Rights Movement do you think had the most lasting influence on American society, and why?
9. Martin Luther King Day is a federal holiday observed throughout the United States. How would you describe the meaning and importance of this day?
10. If you had to describe the legacy of Dr. King to an elementary school student, what would you say? What do you think is the most important legacy he left behind?

Matching Activity

Match the following identifications in column 1 with its corresponding answer in column 2. (An answer key is at the end of this document.)

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|--------------------------|--|
| 1. March on Washington | A. Separation of races, either legally or by custom |
| 2. Segregation | B. Quote from MLK speech |
| 3. 1986 | C. Major civil rights protest in 1963 |
| 4. NAACP | D. The year King's birthday was declared a national holiday |
| 5. Civil disobedience | E. A method of achieving change by pushing the boundaries of law |
| 6. "How long? Not long." | F. Civil rights organization which played a role in the Montgomery bus boycott |

Primary Source

Birmingham, Alabama became a flashpoint for the Civil Rights Movement in 1963 when demonstrators protesting segregation were arrested for being in the streets without a permit. On April 12th of that year, Dr. King was arrested and put in solitary confinement. Alabama church leaders published a negative letter in The New York Times in the wake of these events, accusing King and his followers of creating chaos in the city. King penned his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in response, explaining his philosophy of social change. Below is an excerpt from this letter, followed by discussion questions.

LETTER FROM A BIRMINGHAM JAIL (excerpt)
by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

*"Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability... We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right."
(April 16, 1963. ©The Estate of Martin Luther King Jr.)*

Primary Source Questions

1. What do you think Dr. King meant when he wrote that time can be used destructively or constructively? Why did he believe that the Civil Rights Movement was an example of using time constructively?
2. How do you interpret the phrase "human progress never rolls on the wheels of inevitability"? Can you think of an example to support your answer?
3. Why do you think Dr. King decided to write this letter? Why do you think it is still remembered for being an important document?

Extended Activities

1. Martin Luther King Jr. was known for his famous oratory style and gift with words. Many of his speeches have been published and are available at libraries, on the Internet and in bookstores. Research his speeches and pick a paragraph that you find interesting. In a short essay, describe what you like about this paragraph and what it teaches about Dr. King's philosophies.
2. The Supreme Court determined that school segregation was illegal with the Brown v. Board of Education decision, prompting the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement to fight against segregation in schools, in transportation, and in public places such as restaurants. In small groups, investigate the efforts of Civil Rights Movement participants to eliminate racism and segregation in these different arenas. Each group should research one topic, such as city buses, lunch counters, etc. Present your findings to the class through oral presentations, PowerPoint presentations, or on a poster-board.

3. In addition to Dr. King, there were many people throughout the country who contributed to the Civil Rights Movement and helped bring about change. Research another participant or leader in the Civil Rights Movement using books or the Internet. Using PowerPoint or poster-board, create a visual biography of this person. You can include relevant dates, images, quotes and publications. Share your discovery with your classmates or group.
4. Dr. King's commitment to civil rights took him throughout the country. Though focused on the South, he later took his campaign to the North. Using your own research, chart the chronology of his travels. Then, get a map of the United States, pinpointing the places he went. You can also supplement this map by pinpointing the location of other important events from the post-1945 era of U.S. history and the Civil Rights Movement. You can add dates below the map or on the sides in order to keep track of when they occurred.
5. One of the most powerful ways to learn more about history is to talk to those who have lived through events from the past. Students can join efforts to collect and archive the personal stories of people who lived during the civil rights era. Ask students to locate someone in their family, neighborhood, or school who lived through this era and interview them about their memories of Dr. King and this time period in U.S. history.

Websites

BIO website on MLK, Jr.:

www.biography.com/blackhistory/featured-biography/martin-luther-king.jsp

The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute:

www.stanford.edu/group/King/index.htm

A speech archive from the University of California which includes an audio recording of King's "I Have a Dream" speech:

www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/historicspeeches.html

An MLK site with documents from the National Archives:

www.archives.gov/education/lessons/memphis-v-mlk/

Books

Branch, Taylor. Parting the Waters, America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (Simon & Schuster) 1989.

Hampton, Henry. Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s (Bantam Books) 1991.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. and James M. Washington, ed. A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr. (HarperCollins) 1990.

Levine, Ellen. Freedom's Children (William Morrow & Company) 1993.

Matching Activity Answer Key

1) C 2) A 3) D 4) F 5) E 6) B