



Minnesota African American Museum--
Suggestions for:

CELEBRATING MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Subtopic: Martin Luther King, Jr.

Grade Level: 4th-5th

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Background:

Martin Luther King Jr. was one of America's greatest leaders. He felt very strongly about the rights of Black Americans. He felt that everyone, Black or White, should have equal rights. The right to work and make an honest living, the right to vote, the right to a good education, and the right to use all public places. Martin believed in using love instead of hate to settle disagreements. He was a very influential leader, one who will always be remembered and honored in this country. This is possible because in 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill declaring that beginning in 1986, the third Monday of every January would be celebrated as a national holiday known as Martin Luther King Day.

On January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta Georgia. Martin was always taught to treat other people with respect and to settle disagreements with love instead of hate. When Martin was very young, he noticed that some people did not treat others with respect. He saw that White and Black people were treated differently. Martin, his family, and Black friends could not drink out of the same drinking fountains or use the same public restroom as White people. Martin's best friend was a little White boy. They played together everyday. One day, the little boy's mother told Martin that her son could no longer play with him. Martin's mother explained that this was because he was Black and his friend was White. His friend's mother did not want her son playing with a Black boy. Martin was very sad and did not understand why the color of someone's skin should make any difference. Martin's mother held him on her lap and said, "You are as good as anyone." Martin never forgot what his mother told him.

Martin was a very good student and entered college when he was only 15 years old. He decided to become a minister like his father and grandfather. While in college, he began studying about Mohandas Ghandi. This was a man who had shown the people of India how to settle their disagreements peacefully. Martin liked this idea. He began to think about how the people of America could settle their disagreements with love instead of hate.

On June 18, 1953, Martin married a woman named Coretta Scott. She was studying music at the same college in Boston where Martin was studying to be a minister. They moved to Montgomery, Alabama where Martin became a minister. The people of Montgomery had been having problems between the Whites and Blacks for many years and Martin hoped to help solve these problems peacefully.

In 1955, Martin led a year long protest against the bus laws in Montgomery. He decided to do this after a Black woman by the name of Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat for a White man on a city bus. She was sitting in the front of the bus with the White people and not in the back where the Blacks were supposed to sit. Martin asked the Blacks to not ride the buses until this law was changed. It took a whole year for this to happen, but when the law was changed there were no more "White Only" sections on the buses and Blacks were not forced to give up their seat when a White person wanted it..

Dr. and Mrs. King decided to move to Atlanta in 1960. There Martin led many marches and peaceful protests against segregation. He wanted to change the laws that kept Blacks from using the same restrooms, waiting rooms, and lunch counters as the whites. He gave many speeches and always encouraged the Black people to protest in peace and love and to not get angry, even when they were treated unfairly.

In 1963, Martin led the biggest and most famous march of all - the March on Washington. Thousands of people attended the civil rights march and listened to Martin's speech. In his speech, Martin told the people about his dream. He said, "I have a dream that my four 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" (Hakim, 1991, p. 23). Many people agreed with Martin and were willing to change the laws, but some were not. Martin was arrested many times and had to spend time in jail. The people thought that if he was in jail, he could not give speeches and encourage people to change laws that would help the Black people. Although Martin always tried to inspire people to protest in peace, some of his followers did not listen and protested with fighting and violence. Sometimes Martin and his family were put in danger by angry people who did not want the laws against Blacks changed.

In 1964, Martin was given \$54,000 for winning the Nobel Peace Prize. This meant that his work for peace and equal rights was recognized all over the world. Martin gave the money to people working for civil rights.

Finally, the nation began to change. Laws were passed that forbade "White only" signs. Martin knew that he still had a lot of work to do but he was happy with what was happening. Some people were not happy. On April 4, 1968, Dr. King went to Memphis, Tennessee to lead a march for Black garbage workers who wanted the same pay as White garbage workers. While Martin was standing on the balcony of his hotel room, he was shot and killed by James Earl Ray, a man who did not want Blacks to have the same rights as Whites. People all over the world were sad and angry. Although they knew that Martin Luther King, Jr. was gone, they wanted him to be remembered for all

the good he did for the people of America. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill declaring the third Monday of every January as Martin Luther King Day.

CELEBRATING MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

People all over the world celebrate Martin Luther King Day. Many different activities and celebrations occur. Here is a list of some of the most common ways that people honor Martin Luther King, Jr. on this special day.

- *Study the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- *Put on plays about the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.
- *Make signs and paint pictures that tell what Martin's dream means to them
- *March in peace parades
- *Car headlights are turned on at noon
- *March at night with candles
- *Church bells ring
- *Fly the American flag
- *Let helium balloons fly up to fill the sky
- *Think of ways that we can live Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream of peace

References:

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Hakim, R. (1991). Martin Luther King, Jr. And the March Toward Freedom. Brookfield, Ct.: Millbrook Press.

Lowery, L. (1987). Martin Luther King Day. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Carolrhoda Books.

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Young, M. (1968). Martin Luther King, Jr..Glendale, California: Bownar.

Objectives:

*Students will recognize how Blacks were treated during Martin Luther King's life time.

*Students will demonstrate their understanding of civil rights.

*Students will identify ways that they can treat others more fairly, equally, and with respect.

*Students will recognize that one effective way to voice your opinion is through peaceful speeches and marches.

*Students will identify ways that they can help make Martin Luthers' dream of peace a reality.

Time Allotment:

Approximately 4 to 5 class periods plus homework will be needed to complete this mini-unit.

Resources Needed:

*At least one biography (written on a 4th or 5th grade level) on Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Textbook or other resource containing information on civil rights

*Old magazines, construction paper, glue, and scissors for collages

*Video showing Martin giving a speech and leading a march

*Materials for picket signs (poster board, markers, sturdy sticks etc.)

Procedures:

A. Brainstorm. Divide students into groups of three or four. Have students in each group write down all the holidays or celebrations they can think of. (Only give students 1-3 minutes to do this). Then have one person from each group share the results with the class while the teacher writes the holidays on the board. If students mention Martin Luther King Day, tell them that we are going to be talking about this man, some of the things he did in his life, and how his actions affect us today. If students do not mention Martin Luther King Day, tell them that they are missing a very important holiday and give them hints until they mention it.

B. Read-A-Loud. Read a biography on Martin Luther King, Jr. aloud to the students. (Martin Luther King, Jr. And the March Toward Freedom by R. Hakim is especially good.) Stop at appropriate times and discuss terms, feelings, and emotions. Make sure students understand what civil rights are (personal rights that citizens of a nation enjoy such as freedom of speech, freedom to vote, freedom of assembly, and freedom to attend public places.) Explain that Martin Luther King and other Blacks during his time were denied some of these rights. Allow children to express how they would feel if they were treated like these Blacks were.

C. Creative Writing. Give students the following writing assignment to be completed in their journal or as a separate, individual assignment: Pretend you are a Black fifth grader living in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. During the past week you have been treated very poorly by some of the White people in Montgomery. For instance, your best friend who is White has informed you that he/she can no longer play with you because you are Black. You and your family have been kicked out of your favorite restaurant because they no longer serve Blacks, and you had to give your bus seat up for a White person every day last week. (You may make up other things that have happened to you in the past.) Write a letter to Martin Luther King explaining your feelings. Show what you would like him to do to help you and what you are willing to do to help other Blacks.

D. Role Play. Review the term civil rights. Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Allow each group to choose a civil right from a hat that contains those civil rights that the Blacks were most obviously denied. Students should have several minutes to research the civil right using a textbook or other resource. Allow more time for students to put together some kind of role play demonstrating that right and how it was denied the Blacks. For instance, if one group was assigned the right of using public facilities, the students could role play a situation where a black child wanted a drink from a public water fountain but was denied by either his/her mother or white children playing in the same area. Other students in the class will then try to guess each civil right based on the role play. Discuss how each of these rights makes a difference in the students' lives today.

E. Discussion and Art Work. Review the fact that Martin Luther King always tried to treat others equally and with respect. He even did this with people who treated him unkindly. Have a class discussion about how the students can treat their classmates and others fairly, equally, and with respect. Stress that sometimes we may have disagreements, but that there are good and healthy ways to deal with these. Give examples from Martin's life when he settled disagreements in a good way. (He gave a speech on love and peace several days after his home was bombed.) Have students make collages (could use pictures from magazines or draw or cut out their own pictures) that depict people treating others equally and with respect. These should show instances that the students come in contact with and not necessarily the problems between Blacks and Whites during Martin Luther's time. Arrange the collages on a bulletin board. Allow students to come up with a title for the board.

F. Speeches and March. Review how Martin Luther King used peaceful speeches and marches to encourage people to help change the laws against Blacks. Explain that peaceful ways to state a view are almost always the most effective.

*It would be great if the students could view a video tape of part of a speech given by Martin Luther King, Jr. and a news clip of one of the marches led by him before giving this assignment.

Have the school principal come into the classroom and announce to the children that beginning next week, every student will be required to wear a uniform to school. Have the principal describe the uniform. (It is alright, and maybe even desirable, for students to realize that this is not really going to happen. Inform students that you needed a controversial topic for them to discuss and felt that this would be a good one.) Encourage or assign half of the students to be pro uniforms and the other half to be against. Divide the class into cooperative groups of six with each group containing three

pro-uniform and three anti-uniform. Allow each group to prepare and give a short speech (within their cooperative group, not in front of the class) stating their views. (If you had 24 students in your classroom, you would have four different groups giving speeches to each other around the room. Each group would contain three pro-uniform and three anti-uniform students. The purpose for doing it in this manner is only to save time. If time is not an issue, allow students to give their speeches in front of the entire class.)

Give all students time to prepare picket signs (both pro-uniform and anti-uniform) and allow them to have a peaceful march around the school chanting their views and opinions. (You will want to have each group have their march at different times.) After both groups of students have had their march, bring the class back together and have a class discussion. Discuss feelings about the speech and march activity and why they think that these are effective ways to voice an opinion.

G. Journal Writing. As a conclusion to this mini-unit, have students write in their journals (or as a separate writing assignment) their feelings about Martin Luther King, Jr. Have them explain what changes he made during his lifetime that affect us today. Also encourage students to explain what they can do to help Martins' dream of peace become a reality.

Assessment:

*Assess the creative writing assignment in journals. Check for understanding of how Blacks were treated during this time period.

*Assess students' role plays. Check for comprehension of civil rights.

*Assess individual collages and completed bulletin board. Check for understanding of how they can treat others more fairly, equally, and with respect.

*Assess speeches and march. Check for student realization that these are civil ways to voice an opinion.

*Assess journal entry about students' feelings on Martin Luther King, Jr. Check for ideas of how student can help Martins' dream become a reality.

Return to Celebrations Table of Contents