

African-American History: *Discussion Guide*

Overview

February is African-American history month, a good time to explore not only the many significant contributions of African Americans but also the long road to civil rights. A study of African-American history spotlights history as well as literature, language arts, and humanities.

Discover fascinating stories of courageous citizens, and be stirred by the powerful voices of poets, orators, writers, and musicians. A study of African-American history opens your students' minds to new understandings about our diverse culture.

Classroom Activities

Glossary

Introduce vocabulary specific to African-American history. Have students use dictionaries and definitions from the videos to create flashcards for new terms, including those below:

activism	de facto segregation	intimidation
civil disobedience	de jure segregation	nonviolent resistance
civil rights	discrimination	sit-ins

1. Show the video segment “Stories of the Civil Rights Movement” from *American History: Social Activism in the United States*.

- **Pre-Video Activity:** Ask students what they know about the civil rights movement. Then have students develop a three-column K-W-L chart, identifying “What I Know” and “What I Want to Know.” After viewing the video, ask them to fill in the “What I Learned” column.
- **Discussion:** Stimulate discussion by asking students these questions: What impact did the “stories” in the video have and why? What were the goals of the civil rights movement? How effective were civil rights efforts of the 1960s? Do injustices still exist? How does the civil rights movement serve as a model for other groups?

- **Mapping:** Have students map the locations of key events of the civil rights movement, including these mentioned in the video clip: Chicago (Emmett Till); Jackson, Mississippi (Medgar Evers); and Montgomery, Alabama (1963 church bombing and 1955 bus boycott). In addition, have students note the significance of these locations: Washington, D.C.; Selma, Alabama; Little Rock, Arkansas; and Birmingham, Alabama.
- **Timeline:** Have students create a timeline of the evolution of the civil rights movement, including the following events, the events mentioned above, and others they find significant:
 - Nat Turner Slave Rebellion (1831)
 - Harper’s Ferry (1859)
 - Civil War (1861-65)
 - Emancipation Proclamation (1863)
 - NAACP begins (1909)
 - Brown vs. Board of Education (1954)
 - Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955)
 - King Wins Nobel Prize (1964)
 - Voting Rights Act (1965)
 - Civil Rights Act (1964)
- **Mock Trial:** Present to students the significant facts in the landmark 1954 court case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, which outlawed school desegregation. Have them stage a mock trial in the case, presenting arguments for the plaintiff and the defense. Students should know that the Brown ruling struck down an 1896 case, Plessy v. Ferguson, which sanctioned “separate but equal” schools for African-American children.
- **History:** Highlight the Underground Railroad as a precursor to the civil rights movement. Have students demonstrate how this daring enterprise was set up, with lines, stations, conductors, and stationmasters, and introduce key figures such as Harriet Tubman and Thomas Garrett.
- **Songs:** Point out to students that music was one of the most powerful ways of educating people during the civil rights movement. Play songs of this era, such as “Freedom Train,” “A Change is Coming,” “Heritage of a Black Man,” “I’m Talkin’ About Freedom,” “Respect,” “When Will We Get Paid for the Work We’ve Done,” “In the Ghetto,” and discuss the point each makes. Finally, invite students to write their own civil rights songs and/or lyrics.
- **Presentations:** Ask students to make presentations about young people’s involvement in the civil rights movement. Note that children as young as eight years old were part of the fight for civil rights. For example, have students report on these events:

- The “Little Rock Nine” integrating a Little Rock high school and President Eisenhower sending in troops to protect them in 1957
- The Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963
- “Bloody Sunday”: voting rights march to Selma, Alabama, on March 7, 1965, with participants including children
- James Meredith’s attempt to enroll at the University of Mississippi in 1962
You may wish to show students “Civil Rights Movement: The Role of Youth in the Struggle,” from the video *Civil Rights: The Long Road to Equality*, which is available through *unitedstreaming*. Ask students if they were to choose a cause to devote themselves to, what would it be? Question them about how they think they can have an impact.
- **Chart:** Invite students to find out about organizations including the NAACP, SCLC, SNCC, and CORE. Ask: How do they differ in philosophy, and what effect have they had? Have them find out about contemporary organizations working on issues of equality. Have them compile their findings into a chart.

2. Show the video segment “Martin Luther King, Jr.” from *Heroes of American History*. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

- **Discussion:** Why does Martin Luther King, Jr. remain the most revered African-American leader? What set Martin Luther King, Jr.’s methods apart? Make sure students understand King’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance.
- **Internet Sites:** Introduce students to outstanding Web sites about Martin Luther King, Jr., such as www.thekingcenter.org. Invite them to listen to speeches and view photos.
- **Research:** Remind students of the many African-American leaders besides Martin Luther King, Jr. who contributed to American history. Assign each student to research and report on an African-American leader, such as one of the following people who have been outstanding in politics, culture, or the arts:

George Washington Carver
Mary McLeod Bethune
Thurgood Marshall
Ralph Abernathy
A. Phillip Randolph
James Farmer
John Lewis
Stokely Carmichael
Colin Powell
Ralph Bunche
Barack Obama

Booker T. Washington
W.E.B. DuBois
Rosa Parks
Ella Baker
Fannie Lou Hamer
Bayard Rustin
Malcolm X
Condoleezza Rice
Maya Angelou
Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Alex Haley

One resource for their research is the Thomson Gale Web site on African-American history: www.gale.com/free_resources/bhm/bio/. Encourage students to use visual aids in their presentations.

- **Bulletin Board:** As a class project, have students bring articles and photographs of important African Americans. Combine these to create a class collage for the bulletin board.
- **Mural Activity:** Display key events in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life through a classroom mural. Have each student contribute an element to the mural to show his key contributions and life events.
- **Literature:** Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy is rooted in the writings of Mahatma Gandhi and Henry David Thoreau. Have students read Gandhi's writings and Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience," which espouse peaceful resistance against unjust laws.
- **News Report:** Have students write news reports about the eventful day in August 1963 when Martin Luther King, Jr. made his "I Have a Dream" speech during the march on Washington, D.C. Play a recording of the speech, and show pictures of the event before having students write their news reports.
- **Letter Writing:** Read excerpts from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," and assign students to write a letter back to Martin Luther King, Jr.

3. Show the video clip "The African-American Soldiers in the Military of the Early United States" from *Buffalo Soldiers*. (Access to *unitedstreaming* is required.)

- **Diagramming:** Based on the video, guide students to develop charts to compare and contrast African Americans' service in the following wars: American Revolution, Civil War, World Wars I and II, Vietnam. Have them label two columns "War" and "Type of Service."
- **Discussion:** Discuss the types of prejudice that African-American soldiers experienced various times in history. In particular, discuss the "Tuskegee Airmen," African-American pilots who fought in World War II. (Tuskegee is a traditionally African-American college, founded by Booker T. Washington, where the airmen were trained by the AAF.) Ask: How did these pilots battle racism on both sides in the war? Students can do more research on site such as www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/history/prewwii/ta.htm.

- **Arts:** Display paintings or photographs of buffaloes, from which the term “Buffalo Soldier” originated. Then read aloud Native American poems about buffaloes. Discuss the respect for the buffalo in Native American culture.
- **Journal Writing:** Guide students to imagine that they are serving in the military as a “Buffalo Soldier,” and ask them to write a journal entry about events in their life.
- **Biography:** Introduce students to two female African-American pilots, Bessie Coleman and Lola Brown. Coleman trained in France to become the first licensed African-American pilot because flight schools in the U.S. would not accept African Americans, and after she died in a plane crash, Lola Brown continued her dream of opening the first government-approved flight school for African Americans. Invite students to read biographies of African Americans, and suggest books that might appeal to each student’s interests.

Academic Standards

This discussion guide addresses the following national standards:

National Council for the Social Studies

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>

- Culture
- Time, Continuity and Change
- People, Places and Environment

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

- Language Arts
 - Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Gathers and uses information for research purposes
 - Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts
 - Listening and Speaking: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
 - Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media
- History
 - Historical Understanding: Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns