

Martin Luther King, Jr. | Lesson Plan

How did Martin Luther King, Jr. become one of the most prominent leaders of the American civil rights movement in the 1960s?

Students will learn that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a prominent civil rights leader and activist whose dream was to live in a world where people would “not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Students will understand the importance of standing up for what is right.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain how Martin Luther King, Jr. became a prominent civil rights leader and activist in the American civil rights movement of the 1960s.
- Identify how black Americans experienced racism and discrimination during MLK’s time.
- Examine what objectives the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 achieved in gaining civil rights for black Americans.
- Identify ways Martin Luther King Jr. fought peacefully against injustice.
- Apply the moral principles of Martin Luther King Jr.’s story to practical examples today.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Discrimination:** The unjust treatment of different people based on their ethnicity, age, gender, etc.
- **Racism:** The discrimination and prejudice against people based on their race or ethnicity.
- **Segregation:** The separation of people based on a characteristic like race or gender.
- **Civil Rights:** Personal rights and opportunities guaranteed and protected by the U.S. Constitution regardless of race, gender, religion, or other characteristics.
- **Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965:** Laws that banned legal segregation, outlawed discrimination based on race, and made voting possible for every legal citizen.
- **Civil Rights Movement:** A series of nationwide protests and campaigns led predominantly by Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers, aiming to end racial discrimination and segregation in the United States. Martin Luther King Jr. emerged as the most iconic leader of the movement, advocating for justice and equality through nonviolent resistance.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.3, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.6, CCRA.W.4, CCRA.R.7, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.4, CCRA.W.2

Academic Subject Areas: Biography, Racism, Historical Figures

What You’ll Need

- Video: *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Peaceful Civil Rights Leader* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Peaceful Civil Rights Leader* (Click [Here](#))
- Pictures or video clips of Martin Luther King, Jr.



Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

Warm-Up: (10 minutes)

1. Initiate a class discussion on standing up for what is right in the face of adversity. Encourage students to think of famous examples from history of people who stood up for what was right even when it was difficult to do. Invite students to share examples aloud and brainstorm together.
2. Ask students if they know what holiday we celebrate every January in honor of a famous person who stood up for what was right.
3. Display a copy of “Leo & Layla: Martin Luther King, Jr. Worksheet” and pass out individual worksheets to students.
4. Instruct students to complete the “Making Predictions” prompt in the Warm-Up Activity. Students will write why they think we celebrate MLK Jr. Day each year.
5. Once completed, instruct students to write down everything they already know about MLK Jr. on the “Know” section of the KWL chart. Once completed, students will fill out the “Wonder” section with 3-5 questions or things they wonder about MLK Jr. and his story.
6. Read over the rest of the worksheet as a class so students know what to listen for during the video.
7. If students don't know too much about MLK, provide them with a brief introduction:
 - Martin Luther King Jr. was an American Baptist minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, King is best known for advocating for civil rights using nonviolent methods.
 - He led the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, helped found the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, and was a key figure in the iconic marches and demonstrations of the 1960s, such as the March on Washington in 1963, where he delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. This speech is considered a defining moment in the fight against racial segregation and for the creation of a more just and equitable society.
 - King's efforts not only led to significant legislative changes, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but also helped foster a greater awareness of racial inequality and the need for change in America. His legacy teaches us about the importance of persistence, courage, and standing up for what is right.
8. Set the stage for the upcoming video by highlighting the theme of courage to stand up for what one believes is right or true. Encourage students to look for ways throughout the video that MLK Jr. peacefully fought against injustice. Instruct students to complete the “Learn” section of the KWL chart as they watch the video.

Watch and Complete: (15 minutes)

1. Watch the video.
2. Assist students with completing the worksheet alongside the video, encouraging note-taking in the “Learn” section of the KWL chart and active listening.
3. Pause throughout the video to allow students to answer questions—especially short answer responses. If necessary, model short answer responses, restate the question, and write a complete sentence.

Wrap-Up: (20 minutes)

1. Allow students 10 minutes to complete the worksheet independently.
2. Collect as formative assessment or discuss in class.
3. Ask students to read aloud their responses to the “Making Connections” section.
4. Conclude with an open-ended prompt for students to reflect on how Martin Luther King Jr. inspires them to peacefully fight against injustice and stand up for what is right, even if it’s not the popular thing to do.

Don’t have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (15-20 minutes)

Distribute the worksheet and allow students to complete it while they follow along with the video.