

THE LOCKE SOCIETY

LIFE, LIBERTY & EDUCATION



Unit

Topic

**Civil Rights
Movement**

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Lesson Plan

Aim

To identify the pillars of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy of peaceful protest by analyzing his "I Have a Dream" speech and biography.

Rationale

Martin Luther King, Jr. is an incredible inspiration to people around the world today who suffer from injustice. His commitment to nonviolence made him an effective and esteemed leader of the Civil Rights Movement. Today, King is remembered for his remarkable strength, perseverance, and dedication to fighting for equality amidst setbacks and discouragement. His faith in humanity helped bring about the changes needed for a more just society. This lesson allows students to get to know Martin Luther King, Jr., and his philosophy, by recognizing the message behind his actions and words. As students think deeply about nonviolence, commitment, teamwork, respect, and empathy, they will learn about the value and ideology behind peaceful protests.

Student Learning Objectives

Students will be able to identify key ideas from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech by matching them to vocabulary that represents his message.

Students will be able to discuss the civics question of how one person can make a difference by using the example set by Martin Luther King, Jr.

Civics Connection

- How can one change, strengthen, or improve upon a social, political, or economic standing?
- Why is this topic one of particular importance for participation in a democratic society?

*See the *Civics Connection Through Questioning* guide in *Civics* for more ideas.

Vocabulary

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Protest

Civil Rights Movement
Equality

Justice
Nonviolence



Materials and Resources

Text: Martin Luther King, Jr.

Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr>

Text: “I Have a Dream” Speech Transcript [Note to teacher: Modify or remove some of the words of the speech to reflect acceptable language for the classroom.]

Source: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihaveadream.htm>

Handout: The Pillars of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Philosophy

Handout: The Pillars of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Philosophy [blank]

Procedure

Do Now:

Interpret the meaning of the following quote in your own words:

“Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.” -Martin Luther King, Jr.

Lesson:

The teacher will read the biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. and/or his “I Have a Dream” speech with students. The class should discuss King’s challenges and how he was able to overcome them. Then, the teacher will review the lesson activity with students, discussing its purpose and importance. The teacher will model one example of filling out a pillar on the handout by including a definition, its importance, and a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr.

Collaborative/Independent Work:

Students will work together to identify the main ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s philosophy from reading his speech and his biography. Students will agree on five pillars to identify and ensure they are supported through King’s message.

Share:

Students will share the pillars they identified. After each group shares, the class will create one class list of five pillars by identifying similar choices among the groups. *The teacher may also use this time to discuss one of the suggested civics questions.*

Close:

Which quote of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s stands out to you the most? Explain why this quote has resonated with you.

Modifications

Teachers may use either version of “The Pillars of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Philosophy” handout. One has suggested pillars filled in for student guidance, and one has left it blank for increased rigor.

Teachers may modify the “I Have a Dream” speech to a simplified version for younger students, still keeping King’s message and key ideas present.



Extension

Students will research monuments and museums dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr. They should identify the information that museums highlight along with how they define King's legacy through words and/or art.

Notes

**Use discretion for activities according to what is appropriate for your class.*

- When using Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech in the classroom, the teacher may want to modify select words to reflect acceptable language for the classroom. Be sure to read through the full speech and either remove or replace the word.



Martin Luther King, Jr.

An inspirational leader of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. set the precedent for effective protests. His peaceful approach to fighting inequality made him a highly respected figure, not just in America, but around the world.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, GA. His father was a pastor, and his mother was a schoolteacher. Growing up, King attended segregated schools. At 15, he was admitted to Morehouse College where he aimed to study medicine and law; however, after listening to his mentor who was outspoken about racial equality, King soon found his real passion. He earned a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, and later, he earned a doctorate in systematic theology from Boston University. In 1953, he married Coretta Scott, and they settled in Montgomery, AL.

In 1954, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus. Activists fought the injustice with a boycott that lasted 381 days. The Montgomery Bus Boycott put great economic strain on the public transit system and business owners. Martin Luther King, Jr. became the official leader of the movement; his inspirational words and guidance led them on a path of success. In 1956, segregated seating in buses was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

Once Martin Luther King, Jr. became a national figure of nonviolent protests, there were threats, intimidation, and assassination attempts that put him and his family in danger. Still, King remained dedicated to his faith in humanity and continued his fight for civil rights.

In 1957, King and other activists for civil rights founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) which advocated for full equality for African Americans through nonviolent protests. Their motto was "Not one hair of one head of one person should be harmed." As president of the SCLC, King traveled across the country and around the world speaking about peaceful protest, and meeting with other leaders.

In 1960, King and his family moved to Atlanta. Soon after, he participated in nonviolent protests in one of the most divided cities, Birmingham. The Birmingham Campaign of 1963 involved boycotts, sit-ins, and marches to protest the extreme inequality and injustice. On April 12, 1963, King was arrested for his involvement and sent to a Birmingham jail. There, on April 16, he wrote his famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail* in which he responded to criticism from clergymen for his actions. Reinforcing his nonviolence, responsible tactics, and the sense of urgency, this letter motivated the Civil Rights Movement even more. King was released from jail on April 19. On May 10, Birmingham announced desegregation of restaurants, stores, and schools. Although unrest continued in Birmingham, one month later, President John F. Kennedy proposed new civil rights legislation and recognized inequality as a moral issue.

In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his historic "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington. His heroic call for justice was a turning point in the Civil Rights Movement as his words resonated throughout the country, inspiring many to reflect on America's virtue and principles.

Tragically, on April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. President Johnson declared a national day of mourning. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation dedicating a U.S. federal holiday to honor King, which is observed the third Monday of January.

The legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of strength, unity, and power. He was an inspiration to those who heard him speak years ago, and he remains an inspiration to people around the world today.

Source: <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr>



The Pillars of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Philosophy

Martin Luther King, Jr. was, and continues to be, the role model for effective protest. His peaceful approach to combatting inequality allowed for society to improve itself through nonviolence. To remember Martin Luther King, Jr.'s approach to protest, create a list of pillars that will honor his legacy. Explain the meaning of each pillar, including how you define it and why it is important. Then, find the best quote said by Martin Luther King, Jr. that you think best represents each pillar.

Pillar	Meaning	Importance	MLK Jr. Quote
Nonviolence			
Commitment			
Teamwork			
Respect			
Empathy			



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