The Civil Rights Movement: 100 Years in the Making

Exploring the long delay of “justice for all” for blacks in America
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Focus/Summary
This lesson, intended for high school American Literature or United States History students, will help students better understand the reasons why the Civil Rights Movement began and why it took so long following the end of slavery for blacks to achieve some form of equal rights. This lesson will act as an introduction to a unit in literature that will involve students reading memoirs of black Americans living in 20th century America.

Students will analyze a message from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Study a timeline of the events in 20th Century American civil rights, and view various photos of key events in the Civil Rights Movement to gain a better understanding of why the movement occurred, and more importantly, why full civil rights for black Americans (granted by the Civil Rights Act of 1964) were not realized until nearly 100 years after the 13th Amendment (ending slavery) was passed in 1865.

Vital Theme and Narrative
The American Dream: Can all people achieve the American dream? What political, economic, and social barriers stand in the way of this goal?

Habits of mind
See past events as they were seen during a specific time period.
Read and analyze a persuasive essay.
Study a series of photographs, making inferences about persons and attitudes depicted in them.
Discuss possible answers to the essential question: Why did justice for black Americans take 100 years?

Objectives
Students will gain a better understanding of the background of the Civil Rights Movement in America before reading a memoir written by a 20th century black American. Then, after reading the memoir, they will understand the causes and effects of the movement and its importance in American history.

Opening the Lesson—Brainstorming as a class to establish prior knowledge.

Ask students what they know about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. These “facts” can be listed on a chalkboard or overhead as students brainstorm.

Possible list: civil rights leader, activist, minister, father, husband, young man, southerner, honored by a holiday, assassinated, persuasive speaker...

As students tell what they know, the teacher can fill in missing items through prompting.

Continuing the Lesson—Reading aloud and analyzing the introduction to MLK J’s book of essays entitled Why We Can’t Wait. This reading will set the stage for the essential question. Student Volunteers will read aloud the 12-paragraph introduction as the rest of the class listens.

(See the document titled “MLKJrIntroduction.pdf”)
Introduction

It is the beginning of the year of our Lord 1963. I see a young Negro boy. He is sitting on a stoop in front of a vermin-infested apartment house in Harlem. The stench of garbage is in the halls. The drunks, the jobless, the junkies are shadow figures of his everyday world. The boy goes to a school attended mostly by Negro students with a scattering of Puerto Ricans. His father is one of the jobless. His mother is a sleep-in domestic, working for a family on Long Island.

I see a young Negro girl. She is sitting on the stoop of a rickety wooden one-family house in Birmingham. Some visitors would call it a shack. It needs paint badly and the patched-up roof appears in danger of caving in. Half a dozen small children, in various stages of undress, are scampering about the house. The girl is forced to play the role of their mother. She can no longer attend the all-Negro school in her neighborhood because her mother died only recently after a car accident. Neighbors say if the ambulance hadn’t come so late to take her to the all-Negro hospital the mother might still be alive. The girl’s father is a porter in a downtown department store. He will always be a porter, for there are no promotions for the Negro in this store, where every counter serves him except the one that sells hot dogs and orange juice.

This boy and this girl, separated by stretching miles, are wondering: Why does misery constantly haunt the Negro? In some distant past, had their forebears done some tragic injury to the nation, and was the curse of punishment upon the black race? Had they
shirked in their duty as patriots, betrayed their country, denied their national birthright? Had they refused to defend their land against a foreign foe?

Not all of history is recorded in the books supplied to school children in Harlem or Birmingham. Yet this boy and this girl know something of the part of history which has been censored by the white writers and purchasers of board-of-education books. They know that Negroes were with George Washington at Valley Forge. They know that the first American to shed blood in the revolution which freed his country from British oppression was a black seaman named Crispus Attucks. The boy's Sunday-school teacher has told him that one of the team who designed the capital of their nation, Washington, D. C., was a Negro, Benjamin Banneker. Once the girl had heard a speaker, invited to her school during Negro History Week. This speaker told how, for two hundred years, without wages, black people, brought to this land in slave ships and in chains, had drained the swamps, built the homes, made cotton king and helped, on whip-lashed backs, to lift this nation from colonial obscurity to commanding influence in domestic commerce and world trade.

Wherever there was hard work, dirty work, dangerous work—in the mines, on the docks, in the blistering foundries—Negroes had done more than their share.

The pale history books in Harlem and Birmingham told how the nation had fought a war over slavery. Abraham Lincoln had signed a document that would come to be known as the Emancipation Proclamation. The war had been won but not a just peace. Equality had never arrived. Equality was a hundred years late.

The boy and the girl knew more than history. They knew something about current events. They knew that African nations had burst the bonds of colonialism. They knew that a great-great-grandson of Crispus Attucks might be ruled out of some restricted, all-white restaurant in some restricted, all-white section of a southern town, his United States Marines uniform notwithstanding. They knew that Negroes living in the capital of their own nation were confined to ghettos and could not always get a job for which they were qualified. They knew that white supremacists had defied the Supreme Court and that southern governors had attempted to interpose themselves between the people and the highest law of the land. They knew that, for years, their own lawyers had won great victories in the courts which were not being translated into reality.
They were seeing on television, hearing from the radio, reading in the newspapers that this was the one-hundredth birthday of their freedom.

But freedom had a dull ring, a mocking emptiness when, in their time—in the short life span of this boy and girl—buses had stopped rolling in Montgomery; sit-inners were jailed and beaten; freedom riders were brutalized and mobbed; dogs’ fangs were bared in Birmingham; and in Brooklyn, New York, there were certain kinds of construction jobs for whites only.

It was the summer of 1963. Was emancipation a fact? Was freedom a force?

The boy in Harlem stood up. The girl in Birmingham arose. Separated by stretching miles, both of them squared their shoulders and lifted their eyes toward heaven. Across the miles they joined hands, and took a firm, forward step. It was a step that rocked the richest, most powerful nation to its foundations.

This is the story of that boy and that girl. This is the story of Why We Can’t Wait.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Atlanta, Georgia
January, 1964

After the first reading, students will take notes, listing or summarizing the complaints or issues raised in each of the 12 paragraphs. This could be accomplished by first pairing or grouping students and assigning a specific paragraph to each group followed by group discussion for the purpose of reaching a consensus.

Possible list:

P-1 vermin-infested apartment, garbage smells, drunks and drug addicts lurk, schools are segregated, father is unemployed, mother is not able to be there due to her job.

P-2 shack-like homes, dangerous roof, motherless children, improper education, segregated hospitals, impossibility of job advancement, segregated lunch counters.

P-3 constant misery upon the Negro, a curse of punishment despite their being patriotic, serving their country during times of war, and being born as Americans

P-4 inadequate school books, censored books, lack of acknowledgement of the black contribution to the history of the country: Valley Forge, Crispus Attucks, Benjamin Banneker, slave contribution to the commercial success of early America

P-5 Blacks limited to hard, dirty, and dangerous jobs.

P-6 Civil War and Abraham Lincoln led to the Emancipation Proclamation, yet there was no equality. 100 years had passed, yet the blacks were still not at peace.
Nations in Africa had broken out of colonialism. Crispus Atticks served in the revolutionary war, yet his great-grandson could not eat in a southern town. Even in Washington DC homes were terrible. Jobs were not available to the black man. Lawsuits were being won with no real change. White supremacists ruled.

The white-led news media LIED about reality. It had been 100 years since they were declared “free” but they were not free. They did not feel free.

Freedom was not real. Instead there was a bus boycott, sit-ins, beatings, imprisonment, freedom rides, dog attacks, and all arrests and enforcement done by white men because blacks were not allowed to hold jobs of law “enforcers”

It was 1963. Freedom was still not a fact.

A step, ONE STEP, had to be made. This step would cause great turmoil in the nation. Also implied: Faith in God was necessary.

The time has come. We cannot wait any longer.

Key questions in review of each paragraph:
   i. What is directly stated?
   ii. What is implied?
   iii. What rhetorical devices are employed?

Continuing the Lesson: Part II – Analysis of photographs depicting the struggle of blacks in America during the 20th century.

Students will be handed ONE of photos to think about by themselves. Looking at their list of issues from the first activity and analyzing the photo, they can then draw conclusions about the events depicted in the photo.

Key questions:
   i. What is happening in the photo?
   ii. What do you believe was the photographer’s purpose in taking the photo?
   iii. What are the possible thoughts of the person in the photo?
   iv. Who or what might unintentionally be depicted in this photo?
   v. What other details might some people miss?

After spending some time in thought, students will move about the room, finding others with their same photograph. They will then share their answers to the key questions in a brief discussion.

Finally, the photos will be projected on a big screen for better detail in viewing and a greater impact on the students as they view the photos. As the photos are shown, each group will report their ideas to the entire class.

http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Birmingham_campaign


Developing the Lesson –

Essential question:

Why did African-American citizens take nearly 100 years to accomplish the goal of gaining their civil rights?

Students will be asked the essential question and be allowed to respond through a brief discussion.
After offering theories on hindrances of African-American people, students will take notes on a timeline presented using Power point (see .ppt file titled “AFAM timeline”).

**Developing the Lesson (optional item 1)—**

Drawing on knowledge gained from reading the introduction, analyzing the photographs, and notes from the timeline, students will choose a memoir of an African-American writer to read with a partner. After reading the memoir, the students will create a presentation for the class showing how the memoir fits into the timeline of history from emancipation to the Civil Rights Movement.

Key questions to answer in the presentation of the memoirs:

1. **What highlights of the person’s life do we need to know in order to understand the person’s experience?** Include key people, circumstances, conflicts, and the resolution of the conflicts.

2. **Explain 2 techniques used by the author to portray the events and their impact on his or her life.** These techniques might include imagery, dialogue, sarcasm, rhetorical devices, or dialect. Be sure to read a passage aloud for each example.

3. **State what you believe to be the book’s central message or theme.** Also tell why you believe the book could be inspirational to others as well as any new paradigms that have been created for you as you read the book (“aha” moments, eye openers, or new culture awareness). Cite a passage in the book to illustrate the theme and to show the eye-opener.

4. **Provide an overall context for the memoir by telling us where it fits on the timeline of the 20th century and how it helped your overall understanding of the struggle for equality among blacks in America.**

The following is a brief list of annotated suggested titles and authors:

- **And Still We Rise** by Miles Corwin (USC professor and former reporter for NY Times) 410 pages
  
  Sociological study of 12 gifted inner-city students in the 1997 and how they faced diversity due to poverty and race. This book is divided into chapters by person. You do not have to read every chapter to get a feel for the book. I would suggest reading six of them.

- **Black Boy** by Richard Wright (1908-1960) 257 pages.
  
  This is an autobiography about a young boy who grew up in Memphis and on the streets of Chicago. He tells in PART ONE of his early years through the age of 19.

- **Black Like Me** by John Howard Griffin (1920-1980) 200 pages
  
  A white journalist undergoes a transformation to become a black man in order to experience the prejudice of the south firsthand. True story!

- **The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service** by David Hilliard (1942-) 152 pages
  
  Written by a founder of the Black Panther Party, this book explains the importance of the newspaper published by the party in communicating and rallying people together in the movement. Exploration of the pages (which include many reprints of original pages, political cartoons, and advertisements) help the reader see early motivations behind the party as well as the movement’s historical significance to the Civil Rights Movement.

- **By Any Means Necessary** by Malcolm X (1925-1965) 210 pages
This collection of speeches and writings captures the philosophy of Malcolm X and the inspiration he provided his followers before his assassination in 1965.

- **A Choice of Weapons** by Gordon Parks (1912-2006) 274 pages
  This is a Memoir of a Life Magazine photographer who chose a camera to show the injustice of poverty, racism, and discrimination. Parks tells about his own experiences in the south.

- **The Color of Water** by James McBride (1957-) 295 pages
  This book recounts the life of McBride as he recalls growing up black with a white mother in the 1940’s. He explores and reveals his mother’s past to discover his own identity as one of 12 siblings.

- **Coming of Age in Mississippi** by Anne Moody (1940-) 424 pages
  This is a telling autobiographical account of a young girl’s experience with life and times in the south for blacks. She describes many trials from seeing the hatred of the KKK to participating in sit-ins in Woolworths drugstore as she struggled for equality during the Civil Rights Movement.

- **Having Our Say** by Sarah L. Delany (1889-1999) and A. Elizabeth Delany (1891-1995) 299 pages
  These amazing ladies, who both lived over 100 years, recount an incredible life of changes for blacks in America. They recall stories from when slaves were first freed to the Jim Crow days and on through the Harlem Renaissance.

- **Honky** by Dalton Conley (1969-) 207 pages
  An interesting twist on race relations, Dalton Conley recounts his experience growing up white in a predominantly black and Puerto Rican neighborhood in NYC.

- **Life is So Good** by George Dawson (1899-2001) 260 pages
  The most amazing thing about George Dawson is not that he lived for over 100 years but that he did not learn to read until the age of 98. It was then that co-author Richard Glaubman helped him record the stories of his life.

- **Nigger** by Dick Gregory (1932-) 209 pages
  Though its title is rather abrasive, the content of this book is presented in a humorous way since Gregory worked as a comedian. He describes his early childhood and life up to the time that the Civil Rights Movement began.

- **Secret Daughter** by June Cross (1954-) 304 pages
  This book is about a young woman who hid her mixed-race daughter by sending her to live with a black family. The book is written by the daughter who has dealt with alienation, shame, and confusion about her real family and adoptive one.

- **The Souls of Black Folk** by W.E.B. Dubois (1868-1963) 330 pages
  A rival of Booker T. Washington, Dubois explores in his book the condition of being black at the turn of the century and the importance and roles of black leaders.

- **Unafraid of the Dark** by Rosemary Bray (1955-) 280 pages
  This book follows the struggles of Rosemary’s family, mainly her mother, who raised her and sent her to private school despite being on welfare. A Yale graduate, Rosemary describes the benefits of the system despite her poverty.

- **Up From Slavery** by Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) 330 pages
  The autobiography of Booker T. Washington tells of his rise from slavery to become a speaker, educator, and inspirational leader as president of the Tuskegee Institute.

- **Why we Can’t Wait** by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) 166 pages
  This collection of inspirational writings and speeches follows Dr. King’s struggles and journey through the height of the Civil Rights Movement.
Developing the Lesson (optional item 2, which can be done in class while books are being read independently for optional item 1 above)—

Drawing on knowledge gained from reading the introduction, analyzing the photographs, and notes from the timeline, students will choose a part of the timeline to research in further detail in preparation for a 3-5 minute presentation over his or her topic. Sources for research might include books or internet searches, and sources should be documented.

Key questions:
- Who were important people involved?
- What smaller events led to this key event (explain the conflict)?
- How did African-American people feel prior to and immediately after the event?
- How did this event either help or hinder the fight for Civil Rights?

Topics:
- See items on the Power Point timeline.

Assessing Student Learning –

Students will respond in the form of an essay test to the following Essential Question, presented at the beginning of the unit lesson plan:

Key question:
Why did it take so long after the emancipation of slaves for African American people to achieve equal rights?

Don’t forget:
- Write a clear thesis statement.
- Develop your essay with at least 3 and as many as 5 main points.
- Use specific examples from your notes taken in class over the timeline and the student presentations (either book presentations, event presentations, or both)

Concluding Activity – Open discussion of student thoughts on the movement:

Key questions:
1. Was the Civil Rights Movement necessary?
2. What aspects of the AFAM citizen’s struggles could only be solved with the CRM?
3. Are movements such as the CRM still needed today? Why or why not?
4. What smaller social movements are visible today?
5. What do you believe will become the next big movement in America?
1863: Emancipation Proclamation

• Frees slaves in CONFEDERATE territories
1865: 13th Amendment

• Abolishes Slavery in the US
• Freedmen’s Bureau is also established by Congress for newly freed slaves.
1866: Land rights granted

- Southern Homestead Act opens public land in AL, MS, LA, AK, FL to all people, regardless of race
1867: First Reconstruction Act

• Confederate states divided into districts
• Voting Rights for STATE offices granted to all males
• Enforcement gives blacks the majority vote in the south
1868: 14th Amendment

- Full Civil Liberties given to AFAM citizens
1870: 15th Amendment

- Voting rights granted regardless of race or former condition of servitude
- Women still cannot vote
1875: Civil Rights Act

• Prevents racial discrimination in employment

• Gives AFAM citizens the right to serve on juries
1881: Jim Crow Laws

- Tennessee is first to enact these laws
- Segregation of train cars
1894: Enforcement Act Repealed

• Congress allows for Black Codes

• States can more easily keep blacks from voting
1895: Booker T. Washington

- Delivers the Atlanta Compromise speech
- Wants to accept Jim Crow in exchange for economic advancement
1896: Plessy vs. Ferguson

• Segregation is constitutional if “separate but equal”

• Allows for more Jim Crow laws
1905: Chicago Defender

- First widely-read AFAM newspaper
- Current events and OPINION
- 250,000 readers by 1929
1909: NAACP

• Established by WEB Dubois (1895 Harvard grad)
• Publishes a magazine called *Crisis* in 1910
1911: National Urban League

• Trains AFAM men and women for social work
• Offers fellowships to students
1915: The Great Migration

• Mass exodus of AFAM people to north
  • Jobs: war-related, industrial
  • Chicago, DC, Philly, NYC
1919: “Red Summer”

- Race riots occur in 26 US cities
- Marcus Garvey starts the Black Nationalists (separatism & racial purity)
1920: Harlem Renaissance

• Cultural Flourish of ART-related fields in Harlem
• Recognition by and access to white audiences for music, art, writing
1926: Negro History Week

- Established by Educator and Historian Carter G. Woodson
- Recognizes accomplishments of blacks
1930: Great Depression

- Devastates blacks as it did all US citizens
- Setback for workers, both urban and rural
1933: New Deal

- Offers grants from the Federal Arts Project
- Starts a dialogue between the feds and AFAM officials
1936: Roosevelt reelected

• The majority of AFAM voters vote Democrat for the first time
• Mary McLeod Bethune appointed to Office of Minority Affairs
1941: WWII

- Roosevelt outlaws discrimination in the military
- Blacks can serve but are still segregated in some areas
1947: Jackie Robinson

- First AFAM baseball player to play outside of the Negro Leagues
- Brooklyn Dodgers
1952: No Lynchings

- No lynchings were reported in the US
1954: Brown vs. Board of Ed

- Racial segregation in any public school or facility is unconstitutional
1955: Rosa Parks & MLKJ

- Rosa Parks is arrested
- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. organizes the Montgomery Bus Boycott
- 368 days long
1957: Little Rock, AK

- Eisenhower sends 1,000 troops to protect 9 black students being integrated into a white school.
1958: Malcolm X

• CBS airs a Documentary titled “The Hate that Hate Produced.”
• Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam receive National exposure
1960: SNCC

• Student Non-Violence Coordinating Committee
• Used for civil rights efforts in the south
1961: Affirmative Action

• Legislation by President Kennedy

• Establishes equity in Government-based contracts
1963: Explosive Year

• NAACP activist Medgar Evers is murdered in MS
  • Police use high-powered hoses and dogs in AL
• 4 girls killed in a church bombing
  • MLK, Jr gives his famous “Dream” speech
1964: Civil Rights Act

• Passed by Congress
• Equal Employment and Equal Opportunity (Head Start and Upward Bound)
1965: More Turmoil, Coast to Coast

• Watts Riots in LA pit AFAM residents against Police

• Malcolm X is assassinated while speaking in Harlem.
1966: Black Panther Party

- Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale
- Oakland, CA
- Community Aide programs for AFAM
1967: Thurgood Marshall

• First black justice ever to serve on the United States Supreme Court
1968: MLK’s death

• Assassinated on the terrace of his hotel room in Memphis, TN
• James Earl Ray is convicted and sentenced to 99 years in prison