

<b>Lesson Description</b>	<p>Martin Luther King, a national leader in the Civil Rights movement, was jailed during a demonstration in Birmingham, Alabama. In a famous letter written from prison, he explained his ideas of nonviolent civil disobedience to promote justice and equality for all. Many historians consider the "Letter from Birmingham Jail" to be the most important document of the civil rights era. It has been compared to the "Gettysburg Address" and "Washington's Farewell Address" in historical significance. This lesson will use King's letter to explore his beliefs, focusing on his arguments for the necessity of resisting unjust laws and his provocative contention that unjust laws are not truly laws at all.</p>
<b>Objectives</b>	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• explain Dr. King's idea that injustice done to anyone in one place threatens justice everywhere</li><li>• describe Dr. King's strategies for bringing about political change</li><li>• apply Dr. King's philosophy for non-violence to current struggles for equality</li></ul>
<b>Essential Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Under what conditions is civil disobedience justified?</li><li>• What reasons did Dr. King give to those who encouraged him to wait and be patient?</li><li>• How does a society determine when laws are unjust?</li><li>• What influence did other world leaders who engaged in non-violent civil disobedience have on Dr. King?</li></ul>
<b>Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Target standards)</b>	<p><b>USH (9)History. The student understands the impact of the American civil rights movement. The student is expected to:</b></p> <p>(B) describe the roles of political organizations that promoted civil rights, including ones from African American, Chicano, American Indian, women's, and other civil rights movements;</p> <p>(C) identify the roles of significant leaders who supported various rights movements, including Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, Hector P. Garcia, and Betty Friedan;</p> <p>(D) compare and contrast the approach taken by some civil rights groups such as the Black Panthers with the nonviolent approach of Martin Luther King Jr.;</p> <p>(E) discuss the impact of the writings of Martin Luther King Jr. such as his "I Have a Dream" speech and "Letter from Birmingham Jail" on the civil rights movement;</p> <p><b>(26) Culture. The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. The student is expected to:</b></p> <p>(A) explain actions taken by people to expand economic opportunities and political rights, including those for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as women, in American society;</p>

**(29) Social studies skills. The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:**

- (A) use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions;
- (G) identify and support with historical evidence a point of view on a social studies issue or event; and
- (H) use appropriate skills to analyze and interpret social studies information such as maps, graphs, presentations, speeches, lectures, and political cartoons.

**Texas  
Essential  
Knowledge  
and Skills  
(Pre-requisite  
standards)**

**8 (16) Government. The student understands the process of changing the U.S. Constitution and the impact of amendments on American society. The student is expected to:**

- (A) summarize the purposes for and process of amending the U.S. Constitution.

**(19) Citizenship. The student understands the rights and responsibilities of citizens of the United States. The student is expected to:**

- (F) explain how the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens reflect our national identity.

**Vocabulary**

- Non-violent resistance
- Civil disobedience
- Boycott
- Segregation
- Minority

**Time  
Required**

Two 45-minute class lessons

**Materials  
Required**

- One copy of Commitment Card
- One copy of Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King
- One copy of *Letter from Birmingham Jail*

**Engage**

To build background, the teacher will lead a discussion on the Birmingham Campaign, a movement led by Martin Luther King to end segregation laws in Alabama and the court injunction prohibiting public civil rights demonstrations in the city. <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1389>

To understand the concepts of non-violent resistance and civil disobedience, show the images located at <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/selma-montgomery-march/videos/montgomery-bus-boycott>

Ask students to read the Commitment Card which was the commitment to non-violence that each volunteer signed before participating in the Birmingham Campaign.

In groups or with a partner, have students brainstorm commitments they have made to their lives, e.g., homework, home rules, school rules, clubs and athletics. Ask each group to share.

**Explore and Explain**

Following the Engage activity, the teacher will explain that students will be reading two important documents from the civil rights era: a letter written to Dr. King by the white clergy of Montgomery, Alabama after he was arrested and jailed for organizing a parade without a permit, and King's response.

1. As they read the clergymen's letter, students will answer the following questions, citing textual evidence for their answers:
  - a. How do the clergy want Dr. King to solve the problems of racial inequality in Alabama?
  - b. What evidence do they provide that the methods used by Dr. King are not working?
  - c. Who do they believe has the responsibility to solve the racial inequities of Montgomery?

2. Dr. King uses the themes of justification (justifying his strategies for bringing about non-violent change) and admonishment (criticizing the clergy for not supporting the campaign to change laws) to respond to the letter from the white clergy. As students prepare to read King's response, the instructor displays the provided T chart (Activity 1) to the class with these directions:

Cite three examples of justification and three of admonition using textual evidence. Record your answers on the T chart.

See Activity sheet 1 with suggested answers.

3. Return to the text and respond to the quote, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." How does King defend this claim? Cite textual evidence in your response.

**Elaborate**

Students will connect the methods used by Dr. King in Montgomery to current world events.

Would Dr. King's message and actions of "non-violence" work in the world today? Why or why not? Complete the activity using the **value lines** strategy:

1. Ask students to form their opinion silently and think of an example either from a domestic or foreign issue.
2. Direct students to assign a number to themselves from 1-10 and to silently move to their place along an imaginary line in the classroom with 1 being a strong **yes** and 10 being a strong **no**.
3. Once the students have found their place, ask a few volunteers to state their positions and give their examples.
4. Next, bring the students together in pairs by folding the line in the middle, pairing the 1 with the 10 and so on.
5. Give each side 1 minute for its members to make their case to their partners on the opposite side, beginning with the **yes** column.
6. Call time and switch sides. The **no** column must summarize the reasons given by the **yes** side and then reply and give an example.

7. Students return to their seats and create a journal entry telling whether or not their position changed after hearing from their partner.

**Evaluate/End** Students will evaluate and discuss important questions raised in King’s letter through the strategy **four corners**. Each corner will be marked with a poster for “strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree.” Students will respond to statements posed by the teacher by moving to the corner of the room corresponding to their immediate reaction.

1. Citizens of a democratic country should generally obey laws, even those they disagree with.
2. It is easy or straightforward to determine which laws are unjust.
3. An appropriate response to an unjust law is to engage in nonviolent protest and demonstration.
4. An appropriate response to an unjust law is to engage in civil disobedience and intentionally break that law.
5. Those breaking an unjust law should accept the punishment given for breaking that law.
6. Prosecutors and juries have a responsibility to determine if the law they are given responsibility for enforcing is actually a just law.

The instructor will prompt students to discuss concrete reasons for their opinions. After giving the students a few minutes to discuss among themselves, the instructor will ask for volunteers or cold-call members from each of the four corners to give their views. The teacher may also wish to explore any contradictions or tensions that emerge. For instance, should the class generally agree with statement 1 but also generally agree with statement 4, it might make sense to ask the class whether those two beliefs are consistent, etc.

The following is a suggestion for a possible extension activity: Create a slogan for a campaign to change the status quo by using non-violence. Write a letter to the editor of the newspaper using the slogan as the theme for the campaign and cite examples from the methods used by Dr. King.

Activity 1

JUSTIFICATION	ADMONISHMENT

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Sample Response from the text:

<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	<b>ADMONISHMENT</b>
<p>. . . I am here because we were invited here. I am here because I have basic organizational ties here. I am in Birmingham because injustice is here.</p>	<p>Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. I am sorry that your statement did not express a similar concern for the conditions that brought the demonstrations into being.</p>
<p>. . . Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension that a community that has consistently refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. So the purpose of direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. We therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation.</p>	<p>. . . when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she cannot go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television. . . I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.</p>
<p>Let us turn to a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a majority inflicts on a minority that is not binding on itself. This is difference made legal. On the other hand, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow, and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal.</p>	<p>I have heard numerous religious leaders of the South call upon their worshippers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and the Negro is your brother."</p>