

VOICES OF CIVIL RIGHTS

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Marching for civil rights near the Washington Monument on August 28, 1963.

OBJECTIVES:

Through viewing this program, students will broaden their knowledge of American life during the civil rights era. They will build their understanding of the important events during this era, and will gain particular insights into the personal experiences of those who lived through this period. Students will also think critically about the purpose of oral history and how to analyze oral histories for historical information.

CURRICULUM LINKS:

Voices of Civil Rights is appropriate for classes focusing on 20th-century American history, American culture, civics and oral history. This program is appropriate for 8th grade and above.

Due to some sensitive content and intense language, we recommend that teachers view the program before showing it to students.

Using a dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com) or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

Bigotry
Children's Crusade of 1963
Complicit
Exonerate
Freedom Rides
Ideology
Infallible
Injunction
Jim Crow

In the summer of 2004, journalists, photographers and videographers toured the country collecting thousands of stories from individuals who lived during the Civil Rights era of the 1940s - 60s. The project, *Voices of Civil Rights*, was a collaborative effort by the AARP, the Leadership Council on Civil Rights (LCCR) and the Library of Congress. It promises to be the world's largest archive of civil rights oral history. This Save Our History® documentary presents a sample of these stories and weaves them together into a poignant portrait of life in the United States during a tumultuous period of American history.

In this HISTORY® special presentation, Americans from many backgrounds, including Freedom Riders and segregationists, all speak from their own experiences to tell personal stories about the Civil Rights Movement. They share powerful recollections of growing up under segregation and taking to the streets in protest. Students are able to learn about this history directly from those who experienced it firsthand. While many students have read about the civil rights era, this program helps bring to life the central importance of this time period in American history and illustrates the ways Americans from all backgrounds became involved in the struggle for equal rights in American society.



Statue of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Kelly Ingram Park, Birmingham, Alabama.





The March Against Fear, June 1, 1966 in Jackson, MS

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

For the following discussion questions, encourage the students to support their answers with specific examples.

1. Refer back to the pre-viewing activity. How has this documentary made you think differently about the civil rights era? In what ways does this program affect your views of history and the ways it should be told?
2. How do you define civil rights? In light of your answer, what would you say are the beginning and ending dates of the civil rights era in the United States?
3. Some of the interviewees implied that during the civil rights era “there were two Americas.” Do you think this is an accurate description?
4. How do the interviewees in this film describe their experiences as students during integration? How does the social climate of your school compare/contrast to that of public schools during integration?
5. How does the theme of forgiveness appear in the stories?
6. In what tangible ways can you see the impact of the civil rights era in your community?
7. Historians often ensure historical accuracy via fact-checking. How could someone ensure the stories in this film are accurate? How is fact-checking for oral history similar to the process for printed documents? How does it differ?
8. Why are some “voices” readily heard in the historical record while others are not? In what ways can historians seek out unheard voices?
9. The stories in this program will be archived at the Library of Congress. What are some steps and technologies we can use to preserve these stories for future generations?



45th anniversary of the Selma-to-Montgomery Civil Rights March of 1965.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES:

- 1. Save Our History®** – Students can also be a part of the effort to collect and archive the personal stories of people who lived during the civil rights era. For some guidelines on conducting and transcribing an interview, consult this link from the Texas Historical Commission:

www.thc.state.tx.us/publications/guidelines/OralHistory.pdf

Some questions to answer as a class or group before conducting your interview include:

- Are there key questions everyone should ask his/her interviewee?
- How will you record the interview? (audiotape, videotape, both, etc.)
- How will you preserve these stories for future generations?

After you have completed your transcription, take 2-3 minutes from the interview that resonated with you and read it aloud to your classmates.

- 2. What is Your Story?** – Students can also become a part of the historical record by interviewing each other about civil rights in America today. Break up into pairs and follow the same instructions as in the activity above.

After you hear each story, answer such questions as:

- What was the process of interviewing and being interviewed like?
- How does the experience provide insight into the process for the producers and interviewees of this program?
- According to your stories, what does civil rights in America look like today?

- 3. The Singing Voice of Civil Rights** – Another voice of civil rights is the musical voice heard in marches, churches and sit-ins. Break up into groups. Each group should find and research one protest song from the Civil Rights Movement. See the Resources section of this study guide for sample audio CD compilations.

Answer such questions as:

- What are the origins of this song?
- Can you pinpoint when it was first sung as part of the struggle for civil rights?
- What specific parts of the song make it a protest/civil rights song?
- According to your previous answer, are there any modern-day civil rights songs?

Present your research findings to the class in a PowerPoint presentation. If you are musically inclined, write your own civil rights song and teach it to your classmates.

Recreating the 1965 civil rights event, Selma-to-Montgomery marchers arrive at the Alabama Capitol, the site of Martin Luther King's sermon.

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EXTENDED ACTIVITIES: (CONT.)

4. More Voices of Civil Rights - From the suffragettes to the American Indian Movement, there are many other groups of people who have fought for civil rights in America. Choose any cause or issue that is important to you and research their history. Use the library and as many primary sources as possible in your research. Present your research to your class in a PowerPoint presentation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Voices of Civil Rights:

Visit the official website of the Voices of Civil Rights project for more information about the bus tour and archive of civil rights oral history:
www.loc.gov/exhibits/civilrights

BOOKS:

Williams, Juan *My Soul Looks Back in Wonder: Voices of the Civil Rights Experience*. (Sterling, 2004).

Eskew, Glenn T. *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*. (University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

Koestler-Grack, Rachel A. *Going to School During the Civil Rights Movement*. (Blue Earth Books, 2001).

Levine, Ellen S. *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*. (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1993).

Lewis, John and Michael D'Orso. *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*. (Simon & Schuster, 1998.)

WEB LINKS:

Learn more about the Civil Rights Movement on History.com:
www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement

National Park Service Civil Rights sites:
www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/civilrights

Additional background on conducting oral histories: Shopes, Linda. *Making Sense of Oral History*.
historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral

Additional background from the NAACP:
www.naacp.org/pages/naacp-history

Additional background information from the American Memory project of the Library of Congress:
memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart9.html