

Finding Answers with Founding Documents...

Letter from Birmingham Jail

by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Social Studies: 11th Grade United States History

Essential Questions:

- How does this letter continue the theme of promoting the founding ideals of freedom, equality, AND justice in America?
- If Americans share a love for the same basic set of values (freedom, equality, justice), why were so many barriers placed to deny some the equal opportunity to enjoy these ideals?

Standards:

1. ACOS 11th Grade U.S. History I, Standard #12
 - Describe major initiatives of the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson Administrations.
2. ACOS 11th Grade U.S. History I, Standard #14
 - Trace events of the modern Civil Rights Movement from post-World War II to 1970 that resulted in social and economic changes, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, the March on Washington, Freedom Rides, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, and the Selma-to-Montgomery March.
3. ACOS 12th Grade U.S. Government, Standard #6
 - Analyze the expansion of suffrage for its effect on the political system of the United States, including suffrage for non-property owners, women, African Americans, and persons eighteen years of age.

- Analyzing the black codes, the Jim Crow laws, and the Selma-to-Montgomery March for their impact on the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Alabama)
4. ACOS 12th Grade U.S. Government, Standard #14
 - Describe the role of citizens in American democracy, including the meaning, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship...
 5. ACOS Appendix C, Literacy Standards #1, #2, #4, and #5
 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social studies.
 - Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

Objectives:

1. Identify and explain the ideals and principles expressed by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail."
2. Establish the context for "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by determining how it relates to America's founding and where it falls on the historical timeline relative to other pivotal moments within the Civil Rights Movement.
3. Discuss the legacy of Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" on the Civil Rights Movement and America's pursuit of racial equality and justice.
4. Acknowledge positive strides that have been made in recent history that expanded the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice.

Identify areas for continual improvement within the realms of freedom, equality, and justice along with possible solutions.

Materials:

1. Bell Ringer Activity: Printed or projected copy of Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" annotated document page.
2. Before Activity: Printed copies of "Putting the Letter in Context" activity sheets.
3. During Activity: Printed copies of "Letter from an Alabama High School" activity sheet.
4. After Activity: Printed copies of "Debrief" activity sheet.

Procedures:

1. Bell Ringer strategy: Bell Ringer Question based on a selected excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail"
 - a. Students will analyze the selection and annotations from Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" document and answer the question at the top: "How does this letter continue the theme of promoting the founding ideals of freedom, equality, AND justice in America?"
2. Before strategy: "Putting the Letter in Context"
 - a. After studying the content of the document on the Bell Ringer sheet, students read over the list of important events and developments associated with The Civil Rights Movement. The students should then match the description that correctly summarizes each event/development. The descriptions provide enough detail and context clues to help the students determine the correct match, but they may use a textbook or other academic resources to help them.

- b. Then, using the context clues within the descriptions, the students will determine when each event/development took place and write the events/developments next to the appropriate year or day/month/year (multiple events for 1863 and 1865) on the timeline at the top of the next page.
 - c. Some images from the Civil Rights Movement have been displayed on the second page to illustrate the experiences, emotions, and some of the key events identified in this activity.
3. During strategy: “Letter from an Alabama High School” activity
- a. Students will read the directions at the top of the first “During Activity” handout page, consider what progress has been made, and what changes can still be made in order to promote or better protect the shared ideals you’ve been contemplating in these lessons: 1) freedom, 2) equality, and 3) justice.
 - b. In order to complete the activity, students will pretend they are writing a letter to a civic or business leader OR a community, state, or federal representative. They are encouraged to follow the example set by Dr. King and communicate in a very respectful tone.
 - c. Students should draft a letter that respectfully identifies areas of progress, things that need to change (or improvements that can be made), and possible solutions that may bring about positive change in the realms of freedom (blue box), equality (green box), AND justice (yellow box). The color coding and prompts in the margin of the letter are there to help you organize your thoughts and the direction of your letter.
 - d. An example has been provided in the “Sample Answers” section to give you and/or the students some ideas.
4. After strategy: “Debrief”

- a. Instruct students to reflect on previous lessons and review the materials in this lesson, especially the Founding Document (“Letter from Birmingham Jail”), in order to answer these debriefing questions.
- b. Each answer should be between 1-3 sentences.

Background Information

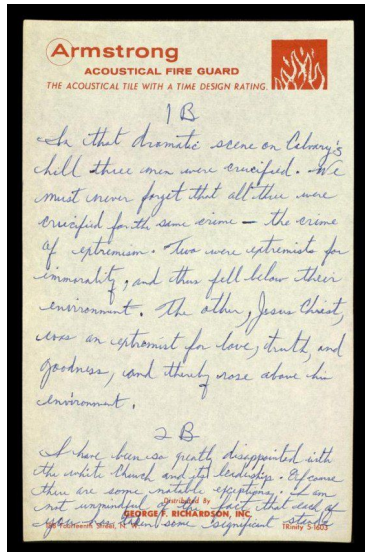
Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. "

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" just days after his arrest for leading a demonstration in spite of the recent injunction issued by Circuit Judge Jenkins to prohibit "parading, demonstrating, boycotting, trespassing, and picketing" in the Birmingham area. Dr. King began writing his

letter in the margins of a local newspaper that featured an article entitled, "A Call for Unity." The article was written by eight white clergymen who were very critical of King's tactics in what had become known as the Birmingham campaign. The clergymen echoed the same sentiment that Dr. King and other reformers before his time had heard for decades, if not centuries... "Just wait, and be



patient." Dr. King's response was an eloquent and emotional piece of rhetoric that explained "Why we can't wait!"



King's letter was dated April 16, 1963. It had been 100 years since President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was passed and 98 years since the 13th Amendment was ratified to abolish slavery. It had been 95 years since the 14th Amendment was ratified for the primary purpose of extending the liberties and rights, guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, to the former enslaved population. It has been 93 years since the 15th Amendment was ratified to prevent states from

denying voting rights for reasons such as race, color, and previous servitude. In spite of these legal protections, the failures of Reconstruction in the late 1860s



and 1870s allowed Jim Crow laws to discriminate, segregate, and impose barriers on the voting rights of African Americans in the South. When segregation in public schools was challenged in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the U.S. Supreme Court established the “separate but equal” clause to protect the status quo of discrimination and segregation.

Given the momentum of migration to other parts of the country and the celebrations of African American culture during the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, it felt as though a civil rights movement was on the verge. Then, the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s once again put African Americans in the position of waiting. The 1940s brought WWII and gave countless African Americans the opportunity to distinguish themselves in battle and receive medals for their valor.

Nevertheless, they often threw up the “Double V” symbol to acknowledge the fight against fascism in Europe and racism back home. Many were American heroes who, in spite of all of their sacrifices to defeat the forces of hate and oppression, returned home



only to be disillusioned by the intolerance of their surroundings. Thankfully, the seeds of change were planted in the camaraderie forged by soldiers of all skin color who left the war with a different impression: “We all bleed the same blood.” By this point, generations of African American citizens were growing increasingly tired of patiently “waiting” for change. What else did they have to prove?

Finally, the United States Army began the integration process in 1948 with President Truman's Executive Order 9981. Then, the emergence of the "Warren Court" in 1953 signaled that change was coming at the highest level of the judicial system. After years of "chipping away" at the Plessy decision, NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall spearheaded a victory in Brown v. Board of Education (1954) when the U.S. Supreme Court declared the "separate but equal" standard to be unconstitutional. Activists seized the opportunity to demand further equality and justice. Southern racism responded with threats, violence, and even legal injustice as demonstrated by the tragedy surrounding the Emmett



Till murder and the acquittal of the suspects. Nevertheless, organizers like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference emerged and claimed a great victory in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Dr. King, SCLC, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) championed nonviolent civil disobedience to

garner sympathy and sway support within the opposition through higher messages of morality featuring love and compassion.

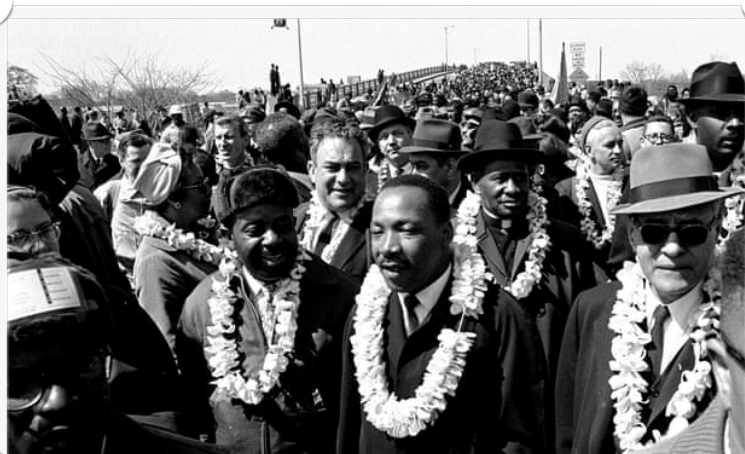
There were more successes and some failures. When the SCLC and SNCC failed to accomplish a victory in the Albany Movement (1961-1962), Dr. King pivoted to Birmingham in desperate need of a victory to restart the momentum. The forces of racism and opposition were strong in Birmingham thanks to the political platform of Governor George Wallace and the aggressive nature of Birmingham Commissioner of Public Safety "Bull" Connor. King believed the opposition in Birmingham might just go far enough to vividly display the evil face of racism to a candid audience of American people who were watching news coverage of the events of Birmingham from their living rooms. This culminated in his arrest and the response from the clergymen.

As the words of his letter echoed the same message sent by Rosa Parks and so many others that had come before, Dr. King set the stage for a culminating moment of the Civil Rights Movement that would transpire on the streets of Birmingham. Since authorities in Birmingham were throwing demonstrators in

jail and putting economic pressure on families who couldn't afford for the breadwinners to be out of work and in jail, Dr. King organized the Children's March. The young people met in front of the 16th St. Baptist Church for two consecutive days in May of 1963. They marched, were attacked by police dogs, hosed by high velocity firehoses, and were arrested in large numbers...as the American public watched in horror from their living rooms around the country. Due to the events of Birmingham and Governor Wallace's infamous "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door" at the University of Alabama, President Kennedy went on national television on June 11, 1963, and announced his commitment to "ask Congress of the U.S. to act, to make a commitment it has not fully made in this century to the proposition that race has no place in American life or law."



Other key events would follow, such as the triumphant March on Washington and the horrific bombing of the 16th St. Baptist Church, but Dr. King's resilient letter captured the gravity of the moment and explained why justice was long overdue. The letter was published throughout the country in the summer of 1963. A major victory was achieved the following year with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to legally prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. In the following year, due largely to the events in Selma, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed to prohibit racial discriminatory practices in voting. Justice could not be denied!



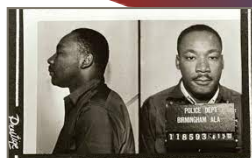
Bell Ringer Model Answer:

This letter is motivated by the LONG denial of equality, justice, and to a degree freedom. Dr. King reminds the clergymen that these ideals cannot be fully realized or enjoyed by African Americans who fall victim to segregation and discrimination. Their rights of justice have been long denied, thus it's long past time to right the wrongs and deliver the ideals championed in the Declaration of Independence.



Context:

Dr. King had just been arrested for violating AL's law against mass public demonstration and was responding to the criticism published by 8 Birmingham clergymen.



King's campaign was built on civil disobedience and nonviolent protest. Here, he breaks down the steps and reminds the clergy that all steps had been taken.



Our history confirms King's claim!

For nearly 100 years since emancipation, African Americans had been told to be patient and WAIT for civil rights.

Bell Ringer:

How does this letter continue the theme of promoting the founding ideals of freedom, equality, AND justice in America?



Selections from...

Letter from Birmingham Jail (1963)

by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

priests or ministers

"While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities '*unwise and untimely*'.... I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. **Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere**. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. **Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly**.... In any **nonviolent campaign** there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community.... We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was '*well timed*' in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. **For years now I have heard the word 'Wait!' It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.'** We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that '*justice too long delayed is justice denied*'.... Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the **deep fog of misunderstanding** will be lifted from our **fear drenched communities**, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their **scintillating** beauty."

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!!!

An injustice that affects someone else today might affect you tomorrow. King is not from Birmingham, but the issues that existed in 1960s Birmingham had an impact on others around the country. We all have a mutual interest in justice; thus is the nature of being part of a **SOCIETY**.



King believed that civil disobedience was a peaceful way to bring a civil law into conformity with a natural right or divine law.



Attributed to William Gladstone (19th century MP in the UK), this concept echos our right to a speedy trial.

King doesn't attack people for the injustice and inequality...he targets "misunderstanding" and "fear" as the culprits of prejudice and racism.

Sparkling or gleaming



Before Activity: Putting the Letter in Context

Directions: In order to fully grasp the gravity of Dr. King's letter, it needs to be placed within the greater context of the Civil Rights Movement. This activity contains a matching and timeline component:

- For the matching component, use what you've learned in school and any academic resources allowed by your teacher to match each Civil Rights event/development to its correct description by simply writing the letter of correct description in the blank next to the event.
- Then, use the information in the descriptions to help you complete the timeline. For each date or range of dates, write the event/development that occurred or was signed on that date.

Matching

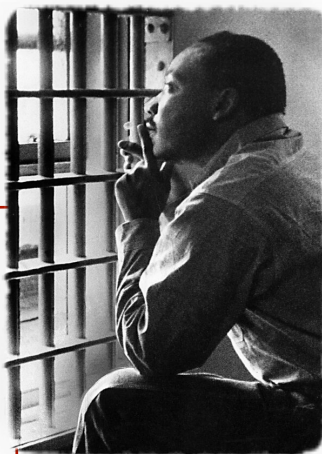
1. Birmingham Children's March/Crusade ____
2. Selma March ____
3. March on Washington ____
4. *Brown v. Board of Education* ____
5. Passage of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* ____
6. Passage of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965* ____
7. Bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church ____
8. Montgomery Bus Boycott ____



- a) This landmark Supreme Court ruling reversed over 50 years of "Separate but Equal" (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896) and held that state laws enacting segregation in public schools were unconstitutional; often celebrated as the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.
- b) In retaliation to the successes of the Birmingham marches, a white supremacist terrorist bombing claimed the lives of four little girls after a bomb exploded under the steps of the same church where many children had assembled to march during the Children's Crusade.
- c) After earlier attempts were thwarted by Alabama State Troopers (including the brutality of "Bloody Sunday" as marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge), Dr. King led this 4-day march from Selma to Montgomery with the support of U.S. Army troops and the Alabama National Guard as a celebration of President Johnson's support for a new voting rights bill.
- d) After the arrest of Rosa Parks for her refusal to give in to segregation laws and give up her seat on a Montgomery bus, this 13-month boycott featured the rise of the young preacher from the Dexter Ave. Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the origins of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; it ended when the Supreme Court ruled that segregated busing was unconstitutional.
- e) This federal legislation was passed to prohibit racial discrimination in voting.
- f) This federal legislation was passed to outlaw discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, or national origin; it effectively ended "Jim Crow" laws and forbade race-based hiring, promoting, and firing within the workforce.
- g) Famous march that occurred when about 250,000 people gathered to advocate for the passage of what would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and featured Dr. King's famous "I Have a Dream" Speech.
- h) In an attempt to end racial discrimination in Birmingham and avoid the negative economic impact on African-American families when adult protestors are arrested, SCLC staged these marches as a new tactic; when Commissioner of Public Safety "Bull" Connor ordered the use of fire hoses and police dogs on the young demonstrators, the nation watched the coverage in horror as the scenes of brutality against the innocent became a major tipping point for Civil Rights support across much of the nation.

Timeline

April 16: Dr. King wrote his
“Letter from Birmingham Jail”



A horizontal timeline with tick marks for the years 1954, 1955-1956, 1963, 1963, 1963, 1963, 1964, 1965, and 1965. A red bracket is positioned above the first 1963 tick mark, spanning the interval between the 1963 and 1964 tick marks.

May 2-3

August 28

September 15

March 21-25 August 6



During Activity: Letter from an Alabama High School

Directions: Consider what progress has been made and what changes can still be made in order to promote or better protect the shared ideals you’ve been contemplating in these lessons: 1) freedom, 2) equality, and 3) justice. Pretend you are contacting a civic or business leader OR a community, state, or federal representative. Notice how respectfully Dr. King addressed the clergymen even though they had really disappointed and even hurt him emotionally. Draft a letter that respectfully identifies areas of progress, things that need to change, and possible solutions that may bring about positive change in the realms of freedom (blue box), equality (green box), and justice (yellow box). The color coding and prompts in the margin of the letter are there to help you organize your thoughts and the direction of your letter.

Dear _____,

Relative to
Freedom:
Identify
Progress

Identify
Change
Needed

Offer
Solution

Relative to
Equality:
Identify
Progress

Identify
Change
Needed

Offer
Solution

Relative to
Justice:
Identify
Progress

Identify
Change
Needed

Offer
Solution

Respectfully, _____

After Activity: Debrief

Directions: Reflect on previous lessons and review the materials in this lesson, especially the Founding Document (“Letter from Birmingham Jail”), in order to answer these debriefing questions. Each answer should be between 1-3 sentences.

1. Considering all the people that Dr. King could have addressed in this letter, why do you think he chose to address the clergymen of Birmingham?
2. Examine when this letter was written within the greater context of the Civil Rights Movement timeline (it was written in April of 1963 and originally published in May of 1963). What impact do you think this letter/document had on the movement and the events that transpired?
3. In response to the events in Selma and after a long history of voter discrimination, President Lyndon Johnson uttered these words on March 15, 1965 as part of his efforts to ask Congress to draft and pass what would become the Voting Rights Act of 1965:

There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem.

Part 1 There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans--not as Democrats or Republicans--we are met here as Americans to solve that problem....

This was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded with a purpose. The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart, North and South: "All men are created equal"--"government by consent of the governed"...

Part 2

Those words are a promise to every citizen that he shall share in the dignity of man. This dignity cannot be found in a man's possessions; it cannot be found in his power, or in his position. It really rests on his right to be treated as a man equal in opportunity to all others. It says that he shall share in freedom, he shall choose his leaders, educate his children, and provide for his family according to his ability and his merits as a human being. To apply any other test--to deny a man his hopes because of his color or race, his religion or the place of his birth--is not only to do injustice, it is to deny America and to dishonor the dead who gave their lives for American freedom.

Part 3

- a) In consideration of the section marked “Part 1” above, how do these words echo the same sentiments Dr. King expressed in his Letter from Birmingham Jail?
- b) In consideration of the section marked “Part 2” above, how does this movement in the 20th century relate to the founding document from the 18th century (Declaration of Independence) on which this series of lessons began?
- c) In consideration of the section marked “Part 3” above, how do King’s and Johnson’s words both promote our shared ideals of freedom, equality, and justice.

Before Activity: Putting the Letter in Context

Directions: In order to fully grasp the gravity of Dr. King's letter, it needs to be placed within the greater context of the Civil Rights Movement. This activity contains a matching and timeline component:

- For the matching component, use what you've learned in school and any academic resources allowed by your teacher to match each Civil Rights event/development to its correct description by simply writing the letter of correct description in the blank next to the event.
- Then, use the information in the descriptions to help you complete the timeline. For each date or range of dates, write the event/development that occurred or was signed on that date.

Matching

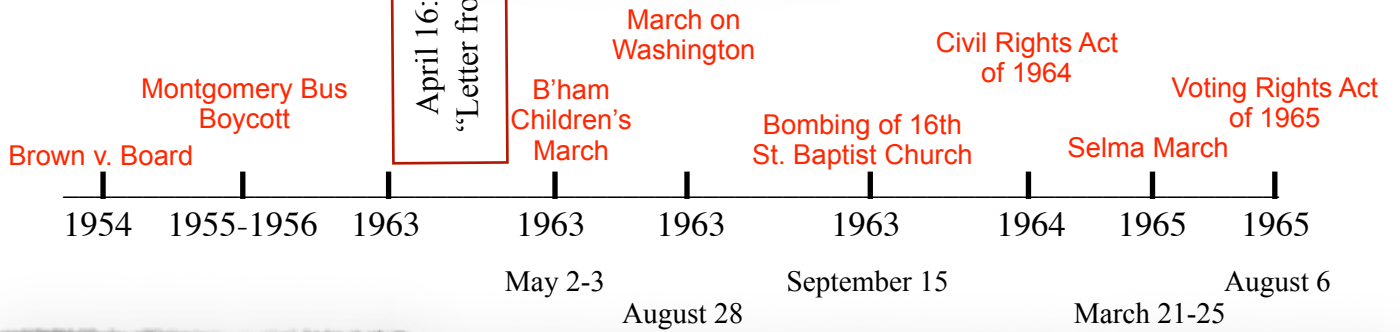
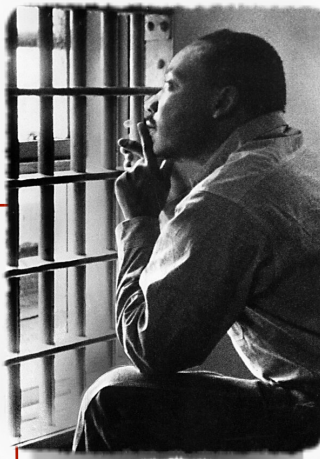
1. Birmingham Children's March/Crusade h
2. Selma March c
3. March on Washington g
4. *Brown v. Board of Education* a
5. Passage of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* f
6. Passage of the *Voting Rights Act of 1965* e
7. Bombing of 16th Street Baptist Church b
8. Montgomery Bus Boycott d



- a) This landmark Supreme Court ruling reversed over 50 years of "Separate but Equal" (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896) and held that state laws enacting segregation in public schools were unconstitutional; often celebrated as the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.
- b) In retaliation to the successes of the Birmingham marches, a white supremacist terrorist bombing claimed the lives of four little girls after a bomb exploded under the steps of the same church where many children had assembled to march during the Children's Crusade.
- c) After earlier attempts were thwarted by Alabama State Troopers (including the brutality of "Bloody Sunday" as marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge), Dr. King led this 4-day march from Selma to Montgomery with the support of U.S. Army troops and the Alabama National Guard as a celebration of President Johnson's support for a new voting rights bill.
- d) After the arrest of Rosa Parks for her refusal to give in to segregation laws and give up her seat on a Montgomery bus, this 13-month boycott featured the rise of the young preacher from the Dexter Ave. Baptist Church, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the origins of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; it ended when the Supreme Court ruled that segregated busing was unconstitutional.
- e) This federal legislation was passed to prohibit racial discrimination in voting.
- f) This federal legislation was passed to outlaw discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, or national origin; it effectively ended "Jim Crow" laws and forbade race-based hiring, promoting, and firing within the workforce.
- g) Famous march that occurred when about 250,000 people gathered to advocate for the passage of what would become the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and featured Dr. King's famous "I Have a Dream" Speech.
- h) In an attempt to end racial discrimination in Birmingham and avoid the negative economic impact on African-American families when adult protestors are arrested, SCLC staged these marches as a new tactic; when Commissioner of Public Safety "Bull" Connor ordered the use of fire hoses and police dogs on the young demonstrators, the nation watched the coverage in horror as the scenes of brutality against the innocent became a major tipping point for Civil Rights support across much of the nation.

Timeline

April 16: Dr. King wrote his
"Letter from Birmingham Jail"



During Activity: Letter from an Alabama High School

Directions: Consider what progress has been made and what changes can still be made in order to promote or better protect the shared ideals you've been contemplating in these lessons: 1) freedom, 2) equality, and 3) justice. Pretend you are contacting a civic or business leader OR a community, state, or federal representative. Notice how respectfully Dr. King addressed the clergymen even though they had really disappointed and even hurt him emotionally. Draft a letter that respectfully identifies areas of progress, things that need to change, and possible solutions that may bring about positive change in the realms of freedom (blue box), equality (green box), and justice (yellow box). The color coding and prompts in the margin of the letter are there to help you organize your thoughts and the direction of your letter.

Dear Representative X,

Over the last several decades, the freedom of self-expression has been expanded thanks to the Internet and social media platforms. More people are able to cross barriers, access information, and publish their thoughts. However, these freedoms have also created problems. Private information and financial information has been stolen and many have taken advantage of free expression and resorted to cyberbullying or posing dangerous threats to others. We need additional regulations such as older age restrictions or more severe penalties to promote safer Internet use.

Relative to
Freedom:
Identify
Progress

Identify
Change
Needed

Offer
Solution

Relative to
Equality:
Identify
Progress

Identify
Change
Needed

Offer
Solution

More students in this country have greater access to education services than ever before, even though some come from poverty-stricken backgrounds. Financial aid, additional scholarships, online education services, and federal funding have helped so many young people gain an equal footing into a competitive job market. Nevertheless, more can be done. We need additional broadband access, free community college tuition, and salary incentives for proven educators to go teach in poverty-stricken school districts.

Relative to
Justice:
Identify
Progress

Identify
Change
Needed

Offer
Solution

Supreme court decisions and new laws have been applied to protect the rights of the accused, the interests of children, and the well-being of persons with developmental disabilities. These individuals have more protection in the justice system today than at any point in our history. That being said, the justice system itself takes way too long and forces too many people to put their lives on hold. As Dr. King and others have said, "Justice too long delayed is justice denied." Whether it's funding to expand the number of courts, judges, or court access or measures to promote efficiency, we must do better.

Respectfully, Student Name

After Activity: Debrief

Directions: Reflect on previous lessons and review the materials in this lesson, especially the Founding Document (“Letter from Birmingham Jail”), in order to answer these debriefing questions. Each answer should be between 1-3 sentences.

1. Considering all the people that Dr. King could have addressed in this letter, why do you think he chose to address the clergymen of Birmingham?
He probably felt hurt and saddened that fellow clergymen would not be more sympathetic to the cause. He probably also understood their influence within the Bible Belt and local communities and wanted their support.
2. Examine when this letter was written within the greater context of the Civil Rights Movement timeline (it was written in April of 1963 and originally published in May of 1963). What impact do you think this letter/document had on the movement and the events that transpired? This letter eloquently expressed why SCLC and others were “agitating” the status quo. It positioned the words and justification behind what the nation was watching on their television sets. The events in B’ham and Selma inspired congressional action largely because public support was growing.
3. In response to the events in Selma and after a long history of voter discrimination, President Lyndon Johnson uttered these words on March 15, 1965 as part of his efforts to ask Congress to draft and pass what would become the Voting Rights Act of 1965:

There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem.

Part 1 There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans--not as Democrats or Republicans--we are met here as Americans to solve that problem....

This was the first nation in the history of the world to be founded with a purpose. The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart, North and South: "All men are created equal"--"government by consent of the governed"...

Part 2

Those words are a promise to every citizen that he shall share in the dignity of man. This dignity cannot be found in a man's possessions; it cannot be found in his power, or in his position. It really rests on his right to be treated as a man equal in opportunity to all others. It says that he shall share in freedom, he shall choose his leaders, educate his children, and provide for his family according to his ability and his merits as a human being. To apply any other test--to deny a man his hopes because of his color or race, his religion or the place of his birth--is not only to do injustice, it is to deny America and to dishonor the dead who gave their lives for American freedom.

Part 3

- a) In consideration of the section marked “Part 1” above, how do these words echo the same sentiments Dr. King expressed in his Letter from Birmingham Jail?
Just as Dr. King said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” We ALL stand to lose if justice is not preserved. An injustice that affects some today will grow to impact others tomorrow.
- b) In consideration of the section marked “Part 2” above, how does this movement in the 20th century relate to the founding document from the 18th century (Declaration of Independence) on which this series of lessons began?
The Civil Rights Movement was yet another step in the right direction to deliver the promises set by the Declaration. African Americans weren’t treated equally and this movement sought to expand the shared ideals of equality/justice to these American citizens.
- c) In consideration of the section marked “Part 3” above, how do King’s and Johnson’s words both promote our shared ideals of freedom, equality, and justice.
They both are ultimately concerned about human dignity. They both acknowledge that issues of freedom, equality, and justice are all at stake in this important matter. They also imply that the rights of citizens are fully guaranteed and not determined by race. Those who fought with honor and died for this country (white, black, brown, etc....all colors have died for this country) paid the ultimate sacrifice so that others could inherit the shared ideals of freedom, equality, and justice. We call them “shared” ideals for a reason. They are not exclusive to any one group, race, gender, religious group, etc.