



Module 1, Unit 2, Lesson Plan 4

The Selma Campaign (1965 Voting Rights Act)

(Grades 6-12)

Learning Targets/Objectives:

- Describes the message of Dr. King’s Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech
- Discuss the historical events of the Selma March
- Utilize Canva to create a historical illustration that reconstructs the Selma March
- Analyze a primary source for reading comprehension

Success Criteria:

- Create an infographic about the Selma March

Anchor Text:

- King, Martin Luther, Jr. “Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech.” December 10, 1964. Retrieved from <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/acceptance-speech/>
- *Simpson County News*. “Vote Your Intelligence...” August 12, 1965. 8.

Supplemental Resources:

- *Simpson County News* (Mendenhall, MS). “Vote Your Intelligence (not your emotions).” August 12, 1965. 8.
- Canva free infographic maker. Retrieved from <https://www.canva.com/create/infographics/>

Lesson Content Overview:

Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included provisions to strengthen the voting rights of African Americans in the South, these measures were relatively weak and did not prevent states from effectively carrying on with their discriminatory voting practices.¹ The Selma Campaign dramatized Alabama’s discriminatory voter registration policies by focusing national attention on a problem far beyond the state. The following events preceded and influenced the Selma marches.

- In 1963, civil rights activists began an effort to register Black voters in Dallas County, Alabama. Dallas County Voters League leader Amelia Boynton invited Dr. King and the SCLC to join the efforts already begun by the DCVL and SNCC to register voters in Selma. John Lewis was working with SNCC in Selma, but was not the point of contact for the SCLC, and Rev. Hosea Williams was an organizer in the SCLC.

¹ Nonviolence365 Online. The King Center eLearning Institute

- During 1963 and 1964, although activists brought potential voters by the hundreds to the registrar's office in the courthouse in Selma, they could not get them registered to vote.
- In January and February 1965, protests were held in Selma to bring attention to this violation of rights.
- Dr. King went to Selma on January 2, 1965; he spoke to over 700 people in Brown's Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal church about the right to vote. After a state trooper killed a young black man, Jimmie Lee Jackson, 26, in nearby Marion, activist Lucie Foster called for a march on the capital.

On February 18, 1965, at about 9:30 p.m. Jimmie Lee, his grandfather, Cager Lee, and his mother, Viola Jackson, were participating in a nighttime demonstration near the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marion, which was a very dangerous thing to do. Everyone was allowed to march at night because it wouldn't disturb the businesses. Police and state troopers surrounded the streets. When the police began to attack the marchers, all the streetlights went out. Cager Lee, 82 years old, was severely beaten by law enforcement and left bleeding. Jimmie Lee rushed him over to a café. When he tried to leave the cafe to take his grandfather to the hospital, state troopers pushed him back inside the café and began knocking out all of the lights and hitting those inside the café. When Jimmie Lee saw the trooper hit his mother, he attacked the trooper and was hit in the face by another officer and pushed against a cigarette machine. Then another officer pulled out a pistol and shot Jimmie Lee in the stomach. As he escaped the café, troopers chased after him, beating him until he fell unconscious. It was two hours later before Jimmie Lee was taken to the Good Samaritan Hospital in Selma because police officers arrested and charged him with assault and battery. His stomach had two bullet holes, one in the side and one in the front. Seven days later, on February 25, Jimmie Lee died from an infection caused by the shooting.

The funeral for Jimmie Lee was held in Marion on March 3. King spoke, calling Jimmie Lee, “a martyr in the crusade for human dignity and freedom.” King then led hundreds on a four-mile funeral walk in the rain from the AME Church down Highway 14 to the graveyard. At the graveyard, King offered a prayer and eulogy.²

On March 5, civil rights leaders informed President Lyndon Johnson of their plans to march from Selma to Montgomery.

Then, on Sunday, March 7, approximately 600 marchers started out on a five-day walk from Selma to the state capitol in Montgomery. The marchers departed Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church and walked through town and across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. King was not part of this march. Alabama Governor George Wallace declared the caravan a threat to public safety and equipped Alabama state troopers with riot gear. When the marchers arrived at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge's east end, on the outskirts of Selma, they were met by between 100 and 200 state troopers along with Sheriff Jim Clark and his deputies. The deputies were mounted on horseback and armed with tear gas, cattle prods, nightsticks, and bullwhips. Trooper Major John Cloud ordered the marchers to return to Selma immediately. When they did not turn back, the law enforcement officers attacked them. The air was filled with tear gas; the troopers beat several protesters with billy clubs, and others were whipped and trampled by the horses. Several hundred were arrested, and 17 were hospitalized. This event would later become known as “Bloody Sunday.”

² Rex Thomas. “King Leads Four-Mile Funeral Walk.” *Birmingham Post-Herald*. March 4, 1965. 3.

That evening, national news outlets showed the events on primetime television. Americans from all over the country began coming to Alabama by the thousands to participate in the marches. King arrived in Selma on March 8 despite Governor Wallace's stern order to state police that "there will be no march" and that they should use all necessary means to stop such marches that had "not been rescinded." Despite the threat, dozens of clergy members followed King to Selma from across the country. "We will not walk alone," King told people packed inside Selma's Brown's Chapel Church on the night of his arrival. "We will walk until the sagging walls of segregation are crushed by the battering ram of the forces of justice. We are going to have to suffer some more, but we must let them know if they beat one Negro, they will have to beat 100 or 1000. We will leave them spattered with the blood of their Negro brothers. We can't afford to stop for Alabama." He called the Selma campaign a "date with destiny."³

On March 9, Federal Judge Frank M. Johnson issued an injunction prohibiting the march. King, nevertheless, led a "symbolic" march, claiming no judge nor the President of the United States had the right to halt a peaceful demonstration. "Both the judge's injunction and the President's appeal reminded us of an action that condemns the robbed man rather than censuring the robber," he told the media.⁴ He vacillated that day, nevertheless. When the marchers reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge's top, they knelt for a short prayer before dispersing. King turned around and returned to the church, where another strategy could be planned. Some dubbed it "Turnaround Tuesday." King and the civil rights leaders did not want to jeopardize the protest by violating the federal injunction.

King and his supporters had filed a federal lawsuit requesting to be permitted to proceed with the march. On March 17, the courts overturned the ban on marches in Alabama. On March 19, President Johnson called the National Guard into service to protect the rights of American citizens to walk peaceably and safely from Selma to Montgomery. On Sunday, March 21, six days after President Johnson sent his voting rights proposal to Congress, about 3,200 marchers set out for Montgomery, walking 12 miles a day and sleeping in fields. This time the protesters were allowed to march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge and proceed to the state capitol. By the time they reached Montgomery shortly after 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 25, they were 25,000-strong. In Montgomery, a rally was held on the steps of the capitol building. Finally, the 54-mile march from Selma to Montgomery succeeded. "Our feet are tired, but our souls are rested," King told the crowd. ". . . Segregation is on its death bed."⁵

Less than five months after the last of the three Selma marches, on August 6, 1965, Dr. King witnessed President Johnson sign the Voting Rights Act into law. The effects of Congress passing the Voting Rights Act were wide and powerful. Between 1965 and 1990, the number of Black state legislators and members of Congress rose from two to 160. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibits discrimination in voting practices or procedures because of race and color. It made huge strides toward making voting rights a reality. The Act banned State literacy tests that had been used to prevent blacks from voting. Anyone over the age of 21 could legally register to vote. In 1964, poll taxes were also prohibited with the ratification of the twenty-fourth Amendment.

Instructional Sequence:

³ George Wallace and Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted in *Birmingham Post-Herald*. "Wallace vows 'There will be no march.'" March 9, 1965. 1.

⁴ Ibid. King. quoted in *Birmingham Post-Herald*. "Wallace vows 'There will be no march.'" March 9, 1965. 1.

⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted in Tom Mackin. "25,000 Converge on State Capitol, End 5-Day Protest Trek from Selma." March 26, 1965. 1-2.

Opener:

Students may read or watch MLK's [acceptance speech](#) for the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1964. After naming recent tragedies in the civil rights movement, King asks, "I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered and committed to unrelenting struggle; to a movement which has not won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize." In five sentences, and drawing on both the speech and prior knowledge, explain whether you believe King expresses a tone of victory or defeat.

- o **SEL Connection:** Write down or discuss a time that you doubted yourself. How did you overcome a self-defeating attitude?

Class Discussion:

The teacher will facilitate a discussion that moves students from King's Nobel Prize ceremony to the Selma March in March 1965. Use the political cartoon "US 80 Road Under Re-Construction" to engage students in the discussion. The teacher should include a timeline of events:

- In January and February 1965, protests were held in Selma to bring attention to the violation of voting rights for African American men and women in Alabama.
- January 2, 1965, Dr. King arrives in Selma to speak to over 700 people in Brown's Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church about voting rights.
- February 18, 1965, at about 9:30 p.m., Jimmie Lee Jackson is shot by a police officer while participating in a nighttime demonstration in Marion with his grandfather, Cager Lee, and mother, Viola Jackson.
- February 25, 1965, Jimmie Lee Jackson died from an infection caused by the shooting.
- March 5, 1965, civil rights leaders meet with President Lyndon Johnson to announce their plans for a march from Selma to Montgomery.
- March 7, , 1965, about 600 marchers were beaten by Alabama State Troopers at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge.
- March 9, 1965, "Turnaround Tuesday," Dr. King leads a "symbolic" march to the top of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, where he holds a short prayer before returning to Brown's Chapel.
- March 11, 1965, Rabbi James Reeb was murdered by white segregationists in Selma for his support of King's efforts.
- March 17, 1965, King and his supporters filed a federal lawsuit requesting federal protection for the march. The courts overturn a ban on marches in Alabama.
- March 21, 1965, 3,200 marchers set out for Montgomery, located 54 miles away, walking 12 miles a day, sleeping in fields.
- March 25, 1965, 25,000 marchers arrived in Montgomery, where a rally was held on the steps of the state capitol.
- March 25, 1965, Viola Liuzzo is killed by members of the KKK when shuttling marchers back to Selma.
- August 6, 1965, passage of the Voting Rights Act

Small Group Collaboration, Reading Comprehension:

Have students read the state of Mississippi's response to the [Voting Rights Act](#) and answer the following questions.

- The Mississippi [Simpson County News](#) editorial board called the Voting Rights Act, "not the edict of a dictatorial president or the questionable interpretation of a court; it is an

act of Congress!” Work together to write a short essay explaining why it’s important that the Act was passed by the legislative branch. What is the Voting Rights Act of 1965 [2 points]? What is the difference between the three branches of government (Executive, Judicial and Legislative) [3 points]? Which branch does the public feel best represents them [2 points]? Can you explain how this Mississippi newspaper will respond to the new Voting Rights Act [2 points]?

Formative Assessment:

- Small Group Collaboration: Students will research the Selma March. Using [Canva](#), they will create an infographic tour guide about the Selma March.

Adaptations for Student Needs

IEP:

- Sizes of student groups range
- Students team up with a peer partner, while others would prefer to work individually.
- There is a variety of small-group work
- Chunking information
- Visual cues and wait time
- Visual supports (maps, images, PowerPoint slides, handouts)
- Assessments will be modified, and students given extra time

ELD

- Modified/simplified reading material
- Content-related lists/handouts of key terms
- Text is supported by visuals and connected to real-life experiences