

THE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. CENTER
FOR NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE, INC.
BELOVED COMMUNITY TEACH-IN
FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS



**2025 LESSON PLAN 9-12:
HONORING LOCAL AND
NATIONAL HEROES OF
FREEDOM, JUSTICE, AND
DEMOCRACY**



Lesson Plan: Honoring Local and National Heroes of Freedom, Justice, and Democracy

Grade Level: 9-12

Cross-Curricular Connections: Social Studies, Civics, English/Language Arts, History, Art, Civic Engagement

Thematic Focus: Mission Possible: Freedom, Justice, Democracy

Lesson Duration: 4 days (45 minutes each)

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will conduct independent research on national and local figures who advanced freedom, justice, and democracy through nonviolent actions.
2. Students will critically analyze the historical significance of these figures, considering the social, political, and legal impacts of their actions.
3. Students will design and present a marker that symbolizes the figure's contributions to nonviolence and democracy.
4. Students will engage in reflective discussions on the relevance of these figures' legacies today, particularly in the context of current social and political movements.

Success Criteria:

1. Students demonstrate research skills by collecting and analyzing information about national and local civil rights figures.
2. Students actively participate in discussions, making connections between historical and contemporary struggles for freedom and justice.
3. Students produce thoughtful, well-researched markers that reflect an understanding of their chosen figure's contributions to nonviolence and democratic values.
4. Students reflect on and articulate how nonviolent principles can be applied in their own communities and lives today.

Essential Question:

How can we honor those who fought for freedom, justice, and democracy through nonviolent actions, and what lessons can their legacies teach us about continuing the fight for these values in modern society?

Takeaway Lesson:

By researching and creating a marker that honors a local or national figure who fought for freedom, justice, and democracy, students will gain a deep understanding of how nonviolence has been used to protect democratic values and will reflect on their role in upholding these principles today

Quote for the Lesson Introduction:

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*

Use this quote to introduce the lesson’s focus on justice, freedom, and democracy, emphasizing the role of nonviolence in securing true and lasting peace.

Day 1: Introduction and Independent Research (45 minutes)

Objective: To introduce the theme and have students begin independent research on national and local figures.

1. Introduction (10 minutes):

- Begin with Dr. King’s quote from *Stride Toward Freedom* and discuss its connection to modern struggles for justice and equality.

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*

- Tips to lead discussion on this quote:
 - Display the quote prominently. Ask students to read it carefully and write a reflection on its meaning.
 - Discussion on student reflections: After students share their thoughts about the quote, ask:
 1. What do you think Dr. King meant by “true peace”?
 2. How does this differ from simply having no conflict?
 3. Discuss: Peace (what does peace look like in your life? Is it just the absence of fighting?); Tension (can tension be productive? How so?); and Justice (What does justice mean in today’s society? How can we achieve it?)
 - If you have the time, divide students into small groups to discuss these questions and then share out:
 4. Can you think of a situation where peace was present, but justice was not?
 5. How can individuals or communities work to create both peace and justice?

- *See Appendix A for discussion points*

2. Transition to the Project (5 minutes):

- Introduce the concept of creating a physical or digital marker to honor figures who have contributed to the protection of freedom, justice, and democracy.
- Explain that the students will research a national or local figure, and their goal is to understand how nonviolent action was used to create lasting change.

3. Independent Research (30 minutes):

- Allow students to choose a figure (either from a national or local context) who played a significant role in advancing civil rights through nonviolent means.
- Provide research materials and suggest resources such as digital archives, academic databases, biographies, and primary sources.
- Encourage students to look for lesser-known local figures who fought for justice in their communities.
 - **Tip for teachers:** Contact local historical societies, civil rights organizations, or community elders to compile a list of relevant local figures that students can research.

Assessment: Evaluate students' research progress by reviewing their notes and providing guidance on finding credible sources and synthesizing information.

Day 2: Group Discussion and Analysis (45 minutes)

Objective: To critically analyze the figures' contributions and connect them to the theme of nonviolence, freedom, justice, and democracy.

1. Group Presentations (30 minutes):

- Divide students into small groups to share their initial findings. Each group member presents the key contributions of their chosen figure and explains how their actions aligned with nonviolence and democratic values.
- Encourage students to critically assess how their figure's work addressed systemic injustice and whether the solutions they proposed remain relevant today.

2. Class Discussion (15 minutes):

- Facilitate a class-wide discussion on the importance of nonviolence in promoting social change.
- Ask questions like: How did these figures redefine justice and democracy through their actions? How can the lessons from these historical figures be applied to today's challenges?

Assessment: Assess students' engagement in discussions, focusing on their ability to make connections between historical events and contemporary issues.

Day 3: Designing the Marker (45 minutes)

Objective: To create a marker that honors the selected figure, integrating their contributions to freedom, justice, and democracy into the design.

1. Marker Design (35 minutes):

- Students will work independently or in groups to design their marker. This can be a physical prototype, digital rendering, or a conceptual drawing.
- The marker should reflect their figure's nonviolent actions, featuring symbols, quotes, or images that capture the essence of their contributions to freedom, justice, and democracy.
- Students should write a one-page description of the marker explaining how the design honors the figure's legacy and why their contributions are still significant today.
- *See Appendix B for marker design ideas*

2. Design Tips:

- Encourage students to think about the impact their figure had on their community or nation. How can this be symbolized visually?
- Consider using historical symbols of justice, quotes from speeches, or imagery that connects to their achievements in advancing equality and democracy.

Assessment: Evaluate the depth of thought and creativity behind the marker designs, as well as the written descriptions of how the designs reflect the figures' nonviolent contributions.

Day 4: Marker Presentation and Reflection (45 minutes)

Objective: To present the markers and reflect on the enduring importance of the figures' contributions to freedom, justice, and democracy.

1. Marker Presentations (30 minutes):

- Each group or individual presents their marker to the class, explaining the choices behind their design and how it honors their figure's nonviolent contributions.
- Students will also read their written description, highlighting key points from their research and how these apply to current social justice movements.

2. Class Reflection (15 minutes):

- Lead a reflective discussion: How does the act of honoring these figures through a marker help us continue their work?
- Ask students to consider the following: How can nonviolence continue to be used today to address modern challenges? What actions can we take in our own communities to promote justice, equality, and democracy?

Assessment: Evaluate students based on the quality and depth of their presentations and their ability to make meaningful connections between their figures' legacies and present-day struggles for justice.

Condensing The Lesson into One 45-Minute Class:

If time constraints require the lesson to be condensed into a single 45-minute class, follow this structure:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):

- Use Dr. King's quote from *Stride Toward Freedom* to quickly introduce the theme of nonviolence and its connection to freedom, justice, and democracy.

2. Research Overview (10 minutes):

- Provide students with the research materials (pre-selected biographies, documents, or short readings) on national or local civil rights figures who promoted freedom, justice, and democracy through nonviolent means. Allow students to quickly review the material.

3. Marker Design (20 minutes):

- Have students work in small groups to quickly design a simple conceptual marker. Provide them with specific instructions to include symbols or quotes that reflect their figure's work for justice and equality.

4. Presentations and Discussion (10 minutes):

- Groups present their markers, followed by a brief reflection on how nonviolence remains a powerful tool in the fight for justice today.

This condensed version allows students to engage with the theme and create a quick, thoughtful marker while fitting within a single class period.

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