

Nobel Prize Lessons

Speaker's manuscript – Theme: Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement

Growing up in the south

- After the abolition of slavery in 1865, African Americans were given full citizenship and voting rights. In spite of this, African Americans continued to be subjected to violence and oppression.
- In the American South, new laws on segregation with respect to race affected nearly every aspect of life. These laws were based on the “separate but equal” doctrine and said that black and white people should be kept separate in public places such as parks, buses, trains, restaurants, cinemas and schools. Those who refused to obey these laws risked being arrested.
- African Americans also lived under the threat of being “lynched” (brutally murdered) by groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. The discriminatory society that this system created was where Martin Luther King Jr. grew up.



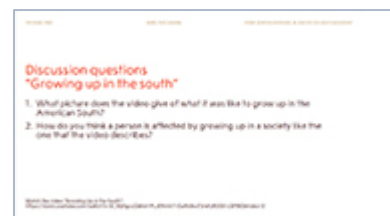
Martin Luther King Jr.

- Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929. He grew up in a wealthy but segregated part of the city. While growing up, he became increasingly aware of the racism and segregation in society.
- King began his college education at age 15 and eventually became a Baptist minister, like his father. As a student he learned about methods of civil disobedience and nonviolence that became important in his later work.
- During his theological studies, he met Coretta Scott, who later became his wife and the mother of their four children.



Discussion questions - “Growing up in the south”

- Watch the video “Growing up in the south”.
- Follow up the video by having your students briefly discuss these two questions in small groups:
- 1) What picture does the video give of what it was like to grow up in the American South?
- 2) How do you think a person is affected by growing up in a society like the one that the video describes?
- You are welcome to let each group provide feedback to the whole class.



Stride toward freedom

- Life in the South could have remained much the same, with segregation between black and white people. But changes were to come. Between 1920 and 1950, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – America’s largest civil rights organisation – worked relentlessly to put an end to injustices. For example, the NAACP lobbied for an anti-lynching law and the dismantling of segregated education.
- In December 1955, in Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks – a member of the NAACP – was arrested for having refused to give up her seat in a bus to a white man. Rosa Parks worked as a seamstress in Montgomery. As a protest, the African American community began a boycott of the city’s bus system. Martin Luther King Jr. was elected to lead the 13 month boycott, which ended with the US Supreme Court ruling that segregation on public buses as unconstitutional.



Discussion questions - "Stride toward freedom"

- Watch the video "Stride toward freedom".
- Follow up the video by having your students briefly discuss these two questions in small groups:
- 1) The civil rights movement’s demands for reform faced great opposition. Why do you believe there was such great opposition to change in the US during this period?
- 2) Why do you believe that the civil rights movement achieved successes during the 1950s, despite great opposition?
- You are welcome to let each group provide feedback to the whole class.



Why we can't wait

- An important source of inspiration of Martin Luther King Jr. was Mahatma Gandhi, whose nonviolent struggle had led to India’s independence from British colonial rule.
- In the early 1960s many nations in Africa gained their independence. King became increasingly convinced that the time was ripe for African Americans to be granted full and equal rights in their country.
- The years 1963–1965 would be an intensive period in the history of the civil rights movement. Protests and demonstrations based on Gandhi’s principles of nonviolence were organised, including the “March on Washington”.



Discussion questions – “Why we can’t wait”

- Watch the video “Why we can’t wait”.
- 2018 Follow up the video by having your students briefly discuss these two questions in small groups:
- 1) Why do you believe it was so important to Martin Luther King Jr. that the struggle for justice was pursued using nonviolent methods?
- 2) How do you believe that the two laws that prohibited segregation and racial discrimination in voting changed the lives of African Americans?



The Nobel Prize

- In 1964 Martin Luther King Jr. was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize – not as a reward for having completed a task, but for an ongoing struggle.
- The Nobel Peace Prize gave King an important opportunity to speak not only about race-related injustices and nonviolence, but also about poverty and war.
- The Prize helped call the attention of the world outside the US to the African American civil rights struggle.



Discussion question – “The Nobel journey”

- Watch the video “The Nobel journey”.
- Follow up the video by having your students briefly discuss this question in small groups:
- 1) What was the importance of the Nobel Prize to Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement?
- You are welcome to let each group provide feedback to the whole class.



Time to break silence

- As a Nobel Laureate, Martin Luther King Jr. gained an international status that enabled him to “break silence” about injustices and violations of human rights in other parts of the world. For example, King declared his opposition to US involvement in the Vietnam War.
- The proportion of African Americans serving in the Vietnam War was higher than in any earlier war. It would also turn out to be one of America’s most costly wars. King was adamant that the country’s economic resources would be better spent fighting against poverty in the United States.
- King appealed unsuccessfully to the US President and the United Nations. King’s public denunciation of the war was widely condemned, even by people in his own movement.



Discussion questions – “Time to break silence”

- Watch the video “Time to break silence”.
- Follow up the video by having your students briefly discuss these questions in small groups:
- 1) Why did Martin Luther King Jr. publicly oppose the Vietnam War?
- 2) The Black Power movement questioned nonviolent methods. Why? How do you believe the Black Power movement affected the struggle against racism in the US?
- You are welcome to let each group provide feedback to the whole class.



Reaching the mountaintop

- On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, which he was visiting because of a strike by primarily black sanitation workers. He was shot while standing on the balcony of his motel. At the time of the assassination, King was also in the midst of planning an “all-out war on...poverty”, as he had put it in his Nobel Lecture. After King’s death, his wife Coretta Scott King not only upheld his legacy but expanded it as well.



Discussion questions – “Reaching the mountaintop”

- Watch the video “Reaching the mountaintop”.
- Follow up the video by having your students briefly discuss these two questions in small groups:
- 1) What issues engaged Martin Luther King Jr. at the end of his life?
- 2) How can people living today be inspired by Martin Luther King Jr. and his struggle?
- You are welcome to let each group provide feedback to the whole class.

