

Lesson Plan: The Unfinished Business of the March on Washington and the Civil Rights Movement

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Featured resource

[KQED's The Lowdown: Would Martin Luther King, Jr. Be Satisfied Today?](#)

Opening quick write prompt:

"What good is having the right to sit at a lunch counter if you can't afford to buy a hamburger?" –Martin Luther King, Jr.

What does this quote mean? Do you think there is a connection between civil rights (the desegregation of restaurants, in this case) and economics (the ability to afford a meal at a restaurant)? Do they go hand in hand? Or should they be separate? Explain your answer.

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.



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Objective

- Students will analyze the goals and outcomes of the March on Washington in 1963.
- Students will analyze current economic data and evaluate which goals of the March have succeeded and in what ways Dr. King's dream has yet to be achieved.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What is the relationship between civil rights and economics? What has changed for the better since the March on Washington? What economic discrepancies still exist between white and black Americans?

The March on Washington is one of the most famous events of the Civil Rights Movement. Almost all of us have seen clips of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech. But the demonstration, formally called the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, also had economic goals. This lesson explores those specific goals and asks students to analyze what's changed since King's momentous address more than 50 years ago.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Discrepancy (n.)	A difference between two or more things
Disproportional (adj.)	A difference in the size or amount, often in a way that is not fair or expected
Partake (v.)	To join in an activity, to participate
Prominent (adj.)	Important, well-known or easily noticed and seen
Seminal (adj.)	Having a strong influence on ideas or events, important, influential

Direct instruction and guided practice

Part 1

- Discuss the quick write prompt to discover what students think about the connections between civil rights and economics. Then ask: Were you surprised that Dr. King talked about black people not being able to afford the food at the restaurants they were trying to integrate? Why or why not? (Note: If your students are already aware of the economic goals of the March on Washington, skip to Part 2.)
- Ask: What do you already know about the March on Washington and the “I Have a Dream” speech? Make a list of what students know.
- Explain that the March on Washington’s formal name was the “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom” and had clear economic goals as well as civil rights goals (see lesson context).
- As a class, in small groups or individually, students read the first eight paragraphs of The Lowdown post: [Would Martin Luther King, Jr. Be Satisfied Today?](#)
- As a class or in small group, make a list of the political and economic goals of the March on Washington.
- Ask: Why do you think the March on Washington had both political and economic goals? Why were the economic goals important to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement?

- Transition to Part 2 by asking: How do you think we are doing as a country in achieving these economic goals today?

Independent practice

Part 2

- As a class, in small groups or individually, students explore the graphs in The Lowdown post: [Would Martin Luther King, Jr. Be Satisfied Today?](#)
 - If needed, review reading line graphs. Most of the graphs have the year on the x-axis and a percentage or dollar amount on the y-axis.
 - Model reading a line graph using any of the graphs, identifying the data points for whites and African Americans AND the times when the gap widened or narrowed. In other words, look at the two lines AND the space in between.
- Students prepare responses to the questions below. If students are interested in exploring the economic differences between other racial/ethnic groups, that data sets are available [here](#).
 - What was the largest gap in life expectancy between white and African Americans? What year was this gap? When was the life expectancy gap the narrowest?
 - In what decade did the percentage of African Americans living below the poverty line decrease the most? In which decade did it increase the most? What year in recent history did the lowest percentage of African Americans live below the poverty line?
 - What year marked the highest percentage of homeownership for both African Americans and white Americans? What year was the lowest home ownership percentage for both groups?

Discussion/reflection

- If he were alive today, do you think Dr. King would call the March on Washington a success? Why or why not?
- Based on the graphs, which gap or gaps do you think our elected representatives should prioritize closing? Why? (Ex: *We should focus on closing the life expectancy gap because _____.*)

[Circle chats](#), small-group discussions and [think-pair-share](#) provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension activities

Define your dream in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Dr. King had a dream about how he hoped American society would change. Using a poster-making or presentation tool such as [Prezi](#), [Easel.ly](#), [Piktochart](#), [Infogr.am](#), students create a poster or graphic that describes their dream about how American society should look, politically, economically and in other ways they choose. Consider sharing these posters or graphics with your local elected officials.

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.7	Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g. charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.