



Re-Framing the Civil Rights Movement

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Introduction:

The African American Freedom Struggle, more commonly referred to as the Civil Rights Movement, is often viewed as a struggle that arose in the 1950s and was led by Martin Luther King Jr. with *only* African American support. These misconceptions cause students to view this 300 year struggle in a highly simplified manner. African Americans did not *suddenly* decide to fight against social injustices in the 1950s. They have been fighting ever since they were captured in their native lands and involuntarily brought to the shores of North America in 1619. Furthermore, Martin Luther King Jr., while instrumental in maintaining the strength of the African-American Freedom Struggle, could not have done it by himself. Thousands of African Americans – young, old, poor and rich – became the backbone of the movement. They were also not alone; white allies also rose in support of the struggle and joined African Americans in the various marches and campaigns.

In this unit, students will debunk the traditional misconceptions of the Civil Rights Movement, better reframed as the African American Freedom Struggle and understand three important ideas:

1. African-Americans have been fighting for their rights for several centuries. The Civil Rights Movement did not occur *out of the blue* in the 1950s and should therefore be more accurately renamed the African American Freedom Struggle.
2. The success of the African American Freedom Struggle depended not only on the actions of its leaders but more importantly on the contributions of ordinary people.
3. The African American Freedom Struggle was not only a movement supported by black people, but also by white people who understood the importance and power of multi-racial alliances.

Grades: 9-12

CA State Standards: 11.1, 11.10

Essential Question:

How did the Civil Rights Movement, more accurately referred to as the African American Freedom Struggle, begin and become a movement?

Sub Questions:

1. Why is “African American Freedom Struggle” a more accurate and appropriate term than “Civil Rights Movement”?
2. What were the goals of the African American Freedom Struggle and who was responsible for implementing them?



3. How important were multi-racial alliances during the African American Freedom Struggle? Why are they important in today's context?
4. Why do so many misconceptions about the African American Freedom Struggle exist? What purpose could these misconceptions be serving?

Unit Parts:

1. Struggle Then, Struggle Now
 2. The Heart of the Movement
 - a. The Beloved Community
 - b. Awakenings: Emmett Till and Rosa Parks
 - c. The Power of Children: *Ain't Scared of Your Jails*
 - d. Fighting for the Ballot: Then and Now
 3. Assessment
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Part One: Struggle Then, Struggle Now

Introduction:

The purpose of this introductory lesson is to allow the teacher to become familiar with students' knowledge and definitions of the African American Freedom Struggle. The lesson also aims to transform traditional understanding of the Civil Rights Movement as a historical period that began and took place from 1954 – 1968 to viewing it as one of many periods of struggle African Americans faced in their movement towards personal and political freedom. The teacher will illustrate this perspective by having students create an African American Freedom Struggle Timeline on a classroom wall.

Materials Needed:

- Large KWL chart for classroom use
- Large poster paper titled, “What is the Civil Rights Movement?”
- Classroom Timeline (1619 to present)
- **Handout A: Think, Pair, Share** (end of lesson)
- Copies of John Lewis' Foreword from “Eyes on the Prize” study guide for homework

Activities/Instructions:

1. **Opening Activity:** Ask students to fill out a KWL chart on what they know about the “Civil Rights Movement” and what they want to know about it.
Note: Towards the end of the unit, students will fill out the last column of the chart on what did they learn about the “Civil Rights Movement.” This activity can be used as an individual assessment.
2. Ask Students to pair up with an elbow partner and share their responses to ‘what do you know’ and ‘what do you want to know.’
3. Ask students to Share Out Loud what their partner said while you record their responses on a large sheet of poster paper with a KWL chart on it.
4. Ask students to define what they believe the Civil Rights Movement is on a Post-It. Student put their name on it and stick it to a big piece of poster paper with the following question: What is the Civil Rights Movement? This will be used later in the unit.
5. Students Share Out Loud their responses to the question: “What is the Civil Rights Movement?”
6. Post a large blank timeline that begins in 1619 and goes through 2009/the present. Use your discretion for the beginning date of the timeline. Ask students to fill out the timeline with important events that occurred in African American history. Suggested format:
 - Divide the class into groups of 4-6.
 - Each group receives a set of visuals (a picture, drawing, illustration, map, primary source or graph) along with a handout of descriptions explaining the visuals and noting when the represented incidents occurred. Most of the visuals should depict events the class has already learned about i.e. Turner Rebellion, Underground Railroad, the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, W.E.B. DuBois, Buffalo Soldiers, etc.
 - Each group's task is to match the visuals and the descriptions.



- Once you have approved each group's matching, students will post the incidents on the timeline.
7. Facilitate a discussion about what the "Civil Rights Movement" is and when it started, using the information on the timeline and the guiding questions below.
 - What do you notice about this timeline? List at least 5 things you notice. (This is an excellent opening discussion question since there is no right or wrong answer).
 - Why is this period referred to as "a movement"? What is a movement? (Address the definition of a movement with the class).
 - What do you think triggered the "Civil Rights Movement"? Ask students to refer to the timeline.
 - When did this movement begin? Is it accurate to say that the "Civil Rights Movement" began in the 1950s?
 - Was the "Civil Rights Movement" inevitable in the 1950s? Explain why or why not, using evidence from the timeline. (If needed, define "inevitable" with the class).
 - What are civil rights? Address the definition of civil rights.
 - Instead of the "Civil Rights Movement," what can be another more appropriate title that describes what you see in the timeline?

If you need to prepare students for the discussion, use a Think, Pair, Share Handout in which they write down the QUESTION posed, note what they THINK, then PAIR up and write down what their partner thinks, and finally write down responses the class SHARES. See sample Handout A.

8. Students will answer the questions – What did you learn today? What are you confused about? on a blank piece of paper. They will turn these reflective questions in before the bell rings.
9. Go over the homework. Ask students to apply Talk to the Text (TTTT) to Representative John Lewis' Foreword to the *Eyes on the Prize* study guide from Facing History and Ourselves. Talk to the Text is a reading strategy in which students write down what they think as they read. Students should be prepared to discuss the reading in the next class.



Part Two: Heart of the Movement

Introduction: The purpose of this and the next lesson is to have students become aware of *who* was involved in the African American Freedom Struggle during the 1950s. In the first section, students will discuss the purpose of the African American Freedom Struggle by going over the reading they had for homework – John Lewis’ Foreword to the *Eyes on the Prize* study guide. In the next four sections, students will then learn about the following events and people:

- The murder of Emmett Till in Money, Mississippi
- The beginnings of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, including the role of both young and older women in starting and organizing the boycott that propelled Martin Luther King Jr. to the forefront as the leader of the African-American movement.
- The Children’s March featuring the actions taken for freedom by young children in Birmingham, Alabama.
- The Freedom Summer and Selma March campaigns that focused on registering African Americans to vote

(Teachers can choose to focus on different events that took place in this time period to highlight the impact of ordinary people. For example: Little Rock Nine, Freedom Riders, college student lunch counter sit-ins, Brown v. Board of Education, etc.)



2a. The Beloved Community

Materials Needed:

- Copies of **Handout B: Sharing My TTTT** (end of lesson)
- 6-9 large pieces of poster paper
- List of events (with dates) that took place from 1954-1968 in the African American freedom struggle

Activities/Instructions:

1. Students share the TTTT they completed for homework with an elbow partner by filling out Handout B: Sharing My TTTT.
2. Facilitate a discussion on what students did not understand and what questions they have about the reading. Inform students of John Lewis’ contributions to the African American freedom struggle.
3. In groups of 4-6, students will use John Lewis’ reading to create a poster that indicates the purpose of the civil rights movement. Student groups will be given a large piece of poster paper with a table featuring the following questions:

<p>As a group, decide what you think John Lewis’ “Foreword” is about. What is the purpose of his “Foreword”? Use your own words.</p>	<p>What is the “Beloved Community”? Write what your group thinks the Beloved Community means <i>and then</i> draw a picture of the Beloved Community.</p>
<p>List at least 3 direct quotes from John Lewis’ “Foreword” that illustrate Lewis’ purpose for writing it.</p>	<p><u>Let’s Take a Poll!</u> Do you think the Beloved Community will ever exist? Why or why not? Below write down the names of your group members and have each respond to the question next to their name. You can draw a chart to organize your responses.</p>

If you choose not to pre write the questions on the poster paper, write them on the board or provide them in a handout and ask the students to write the questions on their posters themselves.

4. Upon completion, paste the posters on the walls and have students do a Gallery Walk. Then facilitate a discussion on John Lewis’ “Foreword” to ensure that students understand the concept of the Beloved Community.
5. Transition into giving an overview of the civil rights movement by handing students a list of dates with events that occurred during the movement. Students will cut out the strips of information and paste them chronologically on a piece of construction paper.
6. Students will choose 5 events from their timeline to research online and print a picture to paste on the timeline.

Activities 5 and 6 can be assigned as homework, depending on time and internet access available in students’ homes.



2b. Awakenings: Emmett Till and Rosa Parks

Materials Needed:

- Episode 1 “Awakenings,” *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series
- Class set of copies of Anne Moody’s excerpt from her autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi*
- From *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Movement*, a study guide written by Facing History and Ourselves.
 - “Rosa Parks Remembers” (pp. 20-21)
- From *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader* edited by Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill et al.
 - “A Letter from the Women’s Political Council to the Mayor of Montgomery, Alabama” (pp. 44-45)
 - “Interview with Rosa Parks” (pp. 45-47)
 - “The Movement Gathers Momentum” (pp. 47-48)
 - “Resolution of the Citizens’ Mass Meeting” (pp. 54-56)
 - “The Violence of Desperate Men” (pp. 56-57)
 - “Desegregation at Last” (pp. 57-60)
- [Flyer distributed in December 1955](#) by members of the Women’s Political Council of Montgomery
- From *Freedom’s Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories* by Ellen Levin
 - Interview with Claudette Colvin

Activities/Instructions:

1. Ask students to use the timeline completed for homework to do a free write on how they think African Americans would react to the picture of Emmett Till after he was brutally murdered. Ask them to list all possible reactions. (Show students the image of Emmett Till after he was murdered – available through a Google Images search – if they have yet not come across it.)
2. Explain to students that they will be watching the first half of the first episode from the documentary series *Eyes on the Prize* to learn about the first major events that propelled the “civil rights movement.” Only show students the story on Emmett Till; Rosa Parks’ story will be viewed later.
3. As the episode is playing, have students write down questions or aspects that confuse them. Then have students pair up and share their questions and confusions. Let them know in advance that they will share out loud with the class what their partner shares with them.
4. Facilitate a discussion on the movie. Write down students’ questions or thoughts on a poster paper to keep track of the discussion and for future reference.
5. Pass out Anne Moody’s excerpt from her autobiography *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. Students take turns reading out loud. Students simultaneously Talk to the Text (TTTT) while they follow along. The purpose of this reading is to give a first-hand perspective of



how people reacted to the Emmett Till case and how it helped launch the “civil rights movement.”

6. Now transition into studying Rosa Parks. Have students look at their timelines and notice how much time passed from the killing of Emmett Till to Rosa Parks’ refusal to give up her seat.
7. Have students Think, Pair, Share about what they know about Rosa Parks. Ask students to share out loud. Record students’ responses on a poster paper.
8. Make groups of 4-5 students. Give each group a complete set of all the primary sources listed in the **Materials Needed** section. These can be accompanied by photographs or other visuals to help students have a better understanding of the context.
9. Explain to students that their group’s goal is to gather as much information as they can from the primary sources. Their task will be to present to the class a case that shows what happened before and after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. Teacher can present this activity as a case that was re-opened because new information has been found. As detectives, students must present a case of what *really* happened with evidence from the primary sources. The following questions can serve as a guide: Who was involved in the boycott? Why did the boycott happen? Where and when did it take place? How long did it last? What were the goal(s)?
10. After groups present their cases, students watch the second half of the first episode from *Eyes on the Prize* to see which group’s description of the boycott case was most accurate.
11. Have a discussion with students centered on the new information they learned about organizing to create change.



2c. The Power of Children: *Ain't Scared of Your Jails*

Materials Needed:

- Documentary, [*Mighty Times: The Children's March*](#) (2004)
- **Handout C: Assessment for use after viewing *The Children's March*** (end of lesson)
- Class set of copies of pg. 30-35 of Sara Bullard's *Free At Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle*

Activities/Instructions:

1. Before watching the documentary *Children's March*, ask students to complete a free write on the following question: "Do youth have power? Why or why not?"
2. Ask students to share out responses and facilitate a discussion.
3. Introduce the documentary *Children's March*. Be sure to explain to students that the Children's March was another event of the African American freedom struggle.
4. Ask students to write down any questions they have as they watch the documentary.
5. Facilitate a discussion by asking students to reflect on their responses to the free write and whether or not their opinion on the power of youth has changed after watching the documentary.

As an assessment, have students reflect on their freewrite by answering the relevant guiding questions in the box in Handout C that is most applicable to their experience. Have students share out loud their responses to the questions, time permitting.

7. Wrap up the discussion by introducing how people fought for their right to vote.
8. Give students the following reading on the fight for the ballot: Pages 30-35 from "Free At Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle," written by Sara Bullard. Ask students to Talk to the Text on this reading for homework and be prepared to discuss it in the next class.



2d. Fighting for the Ballot: Then and Now

Materials Needed:

- Sample voter registration form, preferably one used in the 50s or 60s
- Episodes 5 and 6, “Mississippi: Is This America?” and “Bridge to Freedom,” *Eyes on the Prize* documentary series
- Class set of copies of autobiographical handouts, excerpted from the book *Free At Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle*
- Documentary, [Home of the Brave](#) (2004)

Activities/Instructions:

1. **Opening Activity:** Tell students they have a “pop quiz.” Give each student a copy of a voter registration form and have them fill it out to the best of their ability. The goal is to try to reenact the conditions African Americans faced in trying to register to vote.
2. Facilitate a discussion on how students felt about registering to vote. Was it easy? Do they think they passed? Was it fair?
3. Show students parts of episode 5 and 6 from the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary. Ask them to complete the “Documenting My TTTT” handout while they watch the documentary.
4. After watching the documentary, facilitate a discussion on students’ reactions to the material, asking them to share what they have written on their handouts.
5. Using the reading assigned for homework, have students quickly make two lists: one of people involved in the *fight for the ballot* and another of obstacles African Americans faced in registering to vote.
6. Create groups of 4. Give students autobiographical handouts, excerpted from the book *Free At Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle*, one to each group. The handouts feature the stories of the many people involved in the movement to achieve voting rights.
7. In groups, students read about the people involved in the struggle to achieve voting rights. Have each group create a poster about the person they studied.
8. Each group gives a presentation to the class on the person they studied, what he or she did in trying to fight for the ballot, and how he or she died.
9. After the presentations, introduce *Home of the Brave* (2004), a documentary about Viola Liuzzo.
10. Have students fill out the “Documenting My TTTT” handout while watching the documentary.
11. After the documentary is over, facilitate a discussion focusing on the involvement of non-African Americans and the importance of those alliances.
12. Have students write a reflection on whether or not they think multi-racial alliances during the African American freedom struggle were helpful and whether or not they believe such alliances are important today. This reflection can be done in class, time permitting, or for homework.



Part Three: Assessment

Materials Needed:

- Access to Youtube or another recording of the song “[We Shall Overcome](#)”

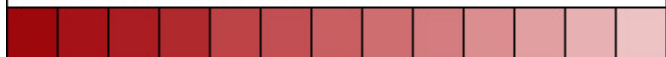
Activities/Instructions:

1. For the final assessment, play the song “We Shall Overcome” or any other popular song used during the African American freedom struggle.
2. Facilitate a discussion on the importance of music in the African-American freedom struggle.
3. Inform students that as a final assessment, they will create a freedom song of their own reflecting on what they have learned about the African American freedom struggle.
4. The song should address or make a reference to at least two of the following questions:
 5. Why is “African American Freedom Struggle” a more accurate and appropriate term than “Civil Rights Movement”?
 6. What were the goals of the African American Freedom Struggle and who was responsible for implementing them?
 7. How important were multi-racial alliances during the African American Freedom Struggle? Why are they important in today’s context?
 8. Why do so many misconceptions about the African American Freedom Struggle exist? What purpose could these misconceptions be serving?
 9. What struggles do you face? How might they connect to the values and goals of the African American freedom struggle?
5. Prepare a rubric and review it with students. For example, consider mandating that the song should have 5 stanzas and a chorus. Try to explain what the song might look like by citing songs about social issues as examples.



Handout A: Think, Pair, Share

Question	Think	Pair	Share
(Write down the question being addressed)	(Write down what you think)	(Write down what your partner thinks)	(Write down what the class shares out loud)
Ex: What do you notice about this timeline? List at least 5 things you notice.			



Handout B: Sharing my TTTT

Words I Do Not Understand	Key, Major, or Important Ideas (√)	Things that Surprised Me or Made Me Think (!)	Questions I Have on the Reading or Things that Did Not Make Sense (?)



Handout C: Assessment for use after viewing *Children’s March*

	You believed Youth Have Power	You believed Youth Don’t Have Power
After watching the documentary, you believe Youth Have Power	Describe the kind of power youth have today. What will you do with that power? What problem(s) will you address and how will you address them?	Explain why you changed your mind after watching the documentary by giving at least 2 specific examples from the movie. Describe the kind of power youth have today. What will you do with that power? What problem(s) will you address and how will you address them?
After watching the documentary, you believe Youth Don’t Have Power	Describe why you believe that youth do not have power after watching the documentary when you originally believed that they did. What in the documentary made you change your mind? Make sure to give specific examples from the documentary.	Explain why you believe that youth still do not have power after watching the documentary. What obstacles stand in the way of youth having power? What would need to change in order for youth to have power?

Write your answers to the questions in the box most applicable to you on a separate sheet of paper.