

FEBRUARY ONE Lesson Plan

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The Greensboro Sit-Ins: A Continuing Tradition of Nonviolent Protest

Grade Levels: 8-12

Estimated time: Four class periods (three if you choose to assign the Assessment activity for homework)

Introduction:

The Greensboro Four were adamant that their lunch counter protest be nonviolent. They based this philosophy on the teachings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi, who received much of their guidance from the teachings of Jesus as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount in the Bible's New Testament. The success of their protest has been attributed in large part to its adherence to this nonviolent approach.

Students will learn more about the philosophy of nonviolence by reading a sermon given by Dr. King, two passages about Gandhi, and some verses from the Sermon on the Mount. They will view the FEBRUARY ONE program with the goal of learning about the nonviolent approach and seeing how this technique succeeded. They will also read the letter that the Greensboro Four wrote to people who were considering participating in the sit-ins. They will conclude the lesson by imagining that they're organizing a protest after the sit-ins and writing letters that explain the nonviolent method to people who are considering joining the protest.

It would be ideal if students have a general understanding of the Civil Rights Movement before doing this lesson.

Lesson Objectives:

Students will:

- Review some basic information about the Civil Rights Movement.
- Watch an excerpt from FEBRUARY ONE which provides a historical background to the Greensboro sit-ins and introduces the protest, and consider what they might do in a situation similar in which the Greensboro students found themselves.
- Discuss the concept of nonviolent protest, and list examples of nonviolent protests they've heard about.
- Watch a segment from the video about the philosophy of nonviolence, and read and answer questions about the nonviolent philosophies of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi.
- Read an excerpt from the Bible's Sermon on the Mount and discuss how these teachings of Jesus influenced Gandhi and King.



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- Watch the rest of the video and take notes about the methods and effectiveness of the nonviolent protest in Greensboro.
- Read a letter written by the Greensboro Four to other protesters in Greensboro describing how the protests were to be conducted.
- Imagine that they're organizing a subsequent protest in 1961, and write letters explaining the nonviolent method to people who are considering joining the protest.

Materials Needed:

- Computers with Internet access
- TV and VCR
- FEBRUARY ONE video
- Greensboro Four Letter, one copy for each student (**from the PDF entitled "Transparencies"**)
- Student Handout, one copy for each student

Standards (from <http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>):

National Civics Standards:

Standard 11: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society

Standard 13: Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life

National United States History Standards:

Standard 29: Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and for the extension of civil liberties



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Teaching Strategy:

1. Write the phrase "Civil Rights Movement" on the board, and under that phrase write the names and phrases listed below. Ask a few students to provide an overview of what occurred during the Civil Rights Movement. Make sure students have a general understanding of these people and terms, which they'll come across during the lesson:
 - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (African American minister who was one of the primary leaders of the movement)
 - Rosa Parks (woman who refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus and was arrested for this act of civil disobedience)
 - Boycott (refusing to purchase a product or service as an expression of protest or disapproval)
 - Ku Klux Klan (a white supremacist group known for wearing white robes with hoods and burning crosses to show their dislike for non-whites)
 - Cross burning (the burning of a wooden cross to intimidate non-whites; often associated with the Ku Klux Klan and other extreme white supremacist groups)
2. Show students the FEBRUARY ONE video from the beginning until 14:23. This segment introduces three of the four students who staged the Woolworth's sit-in and the historical context in which they decided to hold their protest. After students have viewed this excerpt, ask them what they think they would do if they were in a situation similar to the one portrayed in the program. Discuss their ideas as a class.
3. Write the phrase "nonviolent protest" on the board. Ask students to contribute examples of this phrase that they've either heard about or experienced in their lives, and list their ideas on the board. For example, they might mention a peace protest they saw on TV or a protest against injustices in their community.
4. Have students read the text at "What is Nonviolent Conflict?" (<http://www.pbs.org/weta/forcemorepowerful>). It may be helpful to read this as a class, either directly from computer monitors or from handouts you make by printing and copying this Web page. After they have read the page, ask students to look at their list on the board and make sure that each of the examples they've given truly represents a form of nonviolent protest. Also allow them to add more examples that they may be able to think of after having read about nonviolence.
5. Choose two or three examples from the list on the board, and ask the class whether they think nonviolent protest was the best strategy in each of

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these situations. Did the protesters accomplish their goals? Would they have accomplished their goals if they had used violent means? What would have been the consequences had they resorted to violence? Discuss these questions in a brief class discussion.

6. Rewind the video to 11:51, and show the program again from this point until 13:34. This segment discusses the impact that the philosophies and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi had on the Greensboro students. After showing the segment, discuss how Dr. King and Gandhi influenced the attitudes of the Greensboro students.
7. Have students go to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project Web site speeches page (<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speechesFrame.htm>), click "A Call to Conscience," and select the first speech on the list (5 December 1955: Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church). Ask them to read the speech and answer these questions on paper:
 - What had Rosa Parks done? Why did Dr. King say "And, since it had to happen, I'm happy that it happened to a person like Mrs. Parks"?
 - Upon what religious tradition does King base his call for protest?
 - Does Dr. King feel that the protesters are breaking the law? Why or why not?
 - What do you think Dr. King means when he says "And justice is really love in calculation... Justice is love correcting that which revolts against love"?
8. Have students read the text at these two Web pages:
 - The People (just have them read the paragraph about Gandhi): <http://www.pbs.org/weta/forcemorepowerful/india/people.html>
 - Gandhi and Satyagraha: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/forcemorepowerful/india/satyagraha.html>

Ask students to answer these questions on paper as they read the above excerpts:

- What did Gandhi protest against?
- According to Gandhi, what is the outcome of violent protest?

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- What steps did Gandhi believe were part of a typical nonviolent protest?
 - What is satyagraha, and how did Gandhi believe this concept could be a practical way to get the people in power to change their methods of control and oppression?
9. Discuss students' answers to the above questions as a class.
10. Explain that, as students read in the excerpt about Gandhi and heard in the video, both Dr. King and Gandhi were greatly influenced by the teachings of Jesus, particularly some of his statements in the Sermon on the Mount, which is described in the Bible's New Testament. Have students go to the Bartleby Web site for the Sermon on the Mount (<http://www.bartleby.com/108/40/5.html>) and scroll down to line 38, which begins "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye..." Ask students to read this line through line 47. Then discuss this question as a class: What lessons from the Sermon on the Mount did King and Gandhi take to heart in their promotion of nonviolent methods of protest?
11. Show the rest of the FEBRUARY ONE video to the class. As they watch, students should take notes to answer these questions:
- What nonviolent actions did the protesters take?
 - What tensions arose during the protest? Did the protests ever escalate into violence or near-violence? Why or why not?
 - How well did the students' behavior during the protest match the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi? What do you think these two famous leaders would have thought if they had read about the protests? (Dr. King undoubtedly did know about the Greensboro protests, but Gandhi had been killed in 1948).
12. Discuss students' notes from the video, particularly as they relate to the three questions in step 11.

Assessment:

Pass out a copy of the Greensboro Four Letter to each student. **(See PDF entitled "Transparencies")**

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Explain that the Greensboro Four wrote this letter and distributed it to people whom they thought might become involved in the protest.

Ask students to read this letter, paying particular attention to the instructions given to fellow protestors and the plea for nonviolent behavior.

Give students the Student Handout. Ask them to read the background and then follow the instructions on the page.

Extension Ideas:

- Have students research another nonviolent protest from more recent times, such as a protest against the war in Iraq. Ask them to write critiques of the protest, outlining the protestors' motivations and desires; describing how the protest was organized and conducted; assessing whether there were any acts of violence, and, if so, reporting on both sides of the story (e.g. police versus protestors); and stating their views on whether the protest was successful.
- Have students work in small groups to think of local issues they think would benefit from nonviolent protest. The issue could be anything from trying to change the menu in the school cafeteria to trying to prevent logging in a nearby national forest. Once they've listed several issues, have groups choose one and plan how they'd carry out a nonviolent protest on this issue.
- Ask students to conduct research to find out about other events of the Civil Rights Movement involving nonviolent protest. A good place to start is the Civil Rights and Non-Violence page at the PBS FEBRUARY ONE Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/februaryone/civilrights.html>). Assign each student or group of students to one protest activity or group mentioned on this page, and have them research the history, mission, and successes of this activity or group and report to the class on their findings.
- Have students read additional speeches and sermons by Martin Luther King, Jr. at The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project (<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King>). Ask them to find examples of King's support of nonviolent protest and to pay attention to the way in which King articulated his views (his language, analogies, etc). Have them write one- to two-page essays using examples from at least three speeches or sermons to answer the question "Why do you think Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches and sermons were so effective in helping mobilize people to participate in the Civil Rights Movement?"
- Ask students to work in groups or pairs and brainstorm and list possible answers

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to the question “How might the lunch counter sit-ins have ended differently if the protesters had not subscribed to the idea of nonviolent resistance?” Discuss groups’ ideas as a class. How do they think things might have been different if the protesters had not insisted on peaceful protest?

- Have students research movements within the Civil Rights and anti-war movements that chose not to practice nonviolence. A good place to start would be PBS: *Independent Lens: THE WEATHER UNDERGROUND* (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/weatherunderground/movement.html>). Ask students to find out and report on why some groups chose to use violent tactics to promote their cause and how effective these protests were.

Online Resources

A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict
<http://www.pbs.org/weta/forcemorepowerful>

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project
<http://www.stanford.edu/group/King>

Greensboro Sit-Ins: Launch of a Civil Rights Movement
<http://www.sitins.com>

International Civil Rights Center & Museum
<http://www.sitinmovement.org>

PBS: FEBRUARY ONE: The Story of the Greensboro Four documentary
<http://www.pbs.org/februaryone>

PBS: Bringing Down a Dictator
<http://www.pbs.org/weta/dictator/otpor/sharp/chapter5.html>

About the Author

Betsy Hedberg is a teacher and freelance curriculum writer who has published lesson plans on a variety of subjects. She received her Secondary Teaching Credential in social studies from Loyola Marymount University and her Master of Arts in geography from UCLA. In addition to curriculum writing, she presents seminars and training sessions to help teachers incorporate the Internet into their classrooms.

FEBRUARY ONE Lesson Planpbs.org/independentlens/februaryone***The Greensboro Sit-Ins: A Continuing Tradition of Nonviolent Protest*****Student Handout**

Imagine that you are a civil rights activist in 1961, a year after the Greensboro protests were staged. You and some of your friends have decided to organize a new nonviolent protest against race-related injustices in the South. You hold a meeting of potential participants, some of whom are “on board” with the idea of nonviolence but some of whom feel that more violent actions may be necessary. You have passed out the Greensboro Four Letter to all members of the meeting as an example of how a protest can be successfully conducted, and some of the skeptics in the group have posed the following questions:

- Why should we avoid violence? After all, many white people commit or promote violent acts toward us.
- Why do we need to dress up?
- Why should we carry a Bible to the protest?
- How can I keep a “cool head” when I’m being taunted?
- Has this ever worked in the past? If so, how?

Write an additional letter to the skeptics at the meeting. Your letter should address the above questions from the point of view of a civil rights activist who has observed and admired the success of the Greensboro sit-ins. Your letter should refer to the Greensboro Four, Gandhi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.