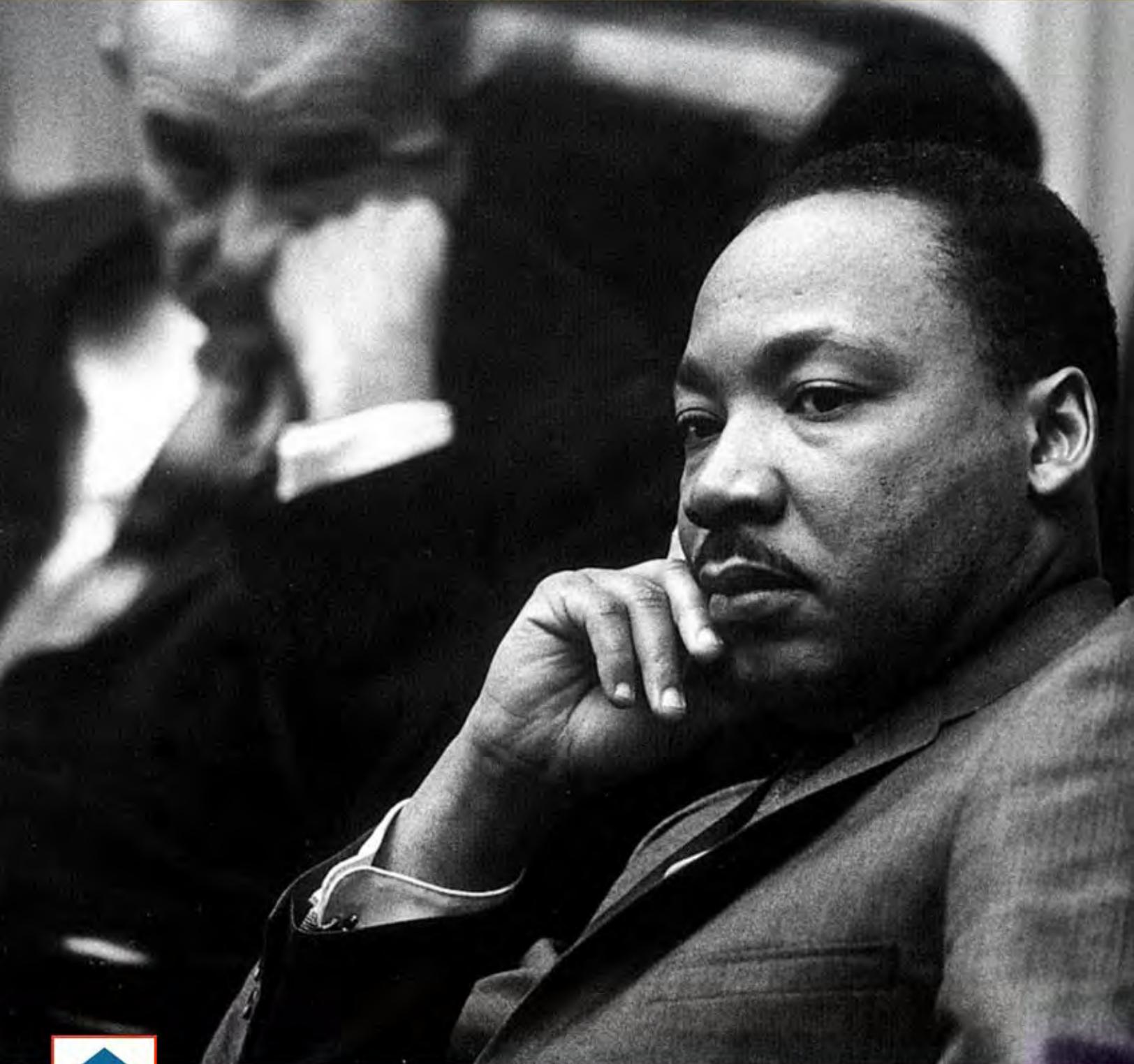


MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. UNIT STUDY



© HLN FAMILY.COM, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

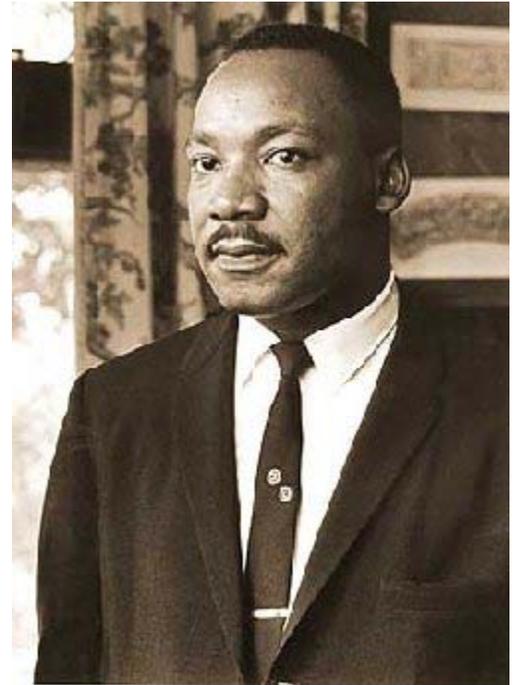
Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15, 1929. Both his father and grandfather were Baptist ministers and civil rights leaders. Young Martin grew up believing that black people deserved a life of dignity and equality, and his vision and values inspired him to strive for-and win-a better life for all black people. Join HLN in this extensive lesson on the life and accomplishments of Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King's Father

Martin Luther King Sr. was the son of sharecropper. He and his 10 brothers and sisters worked hard tending crops and, going to school a few months a year. Martin Sr. excelled at arithmetic, and soon began to notice the inequality of the mathematics of sharecropping. His family of 12 worked twice as hard as the boss and yet the boss got everything they raised each year. Not only that, the boss lived in a fine house and they lived in a rickety shack-that didn't seem quite right to Martin.

One year, when Martin Sr.'s father turned in their crop to the boss, after "doing the figuring" on piece of paper, the boss declared them "even." This meant that their crop was equal in value to the food and supplies they had purchased on credit from the boss's store that year. It also meant that they would receive no money for a whole year's toil. Martin Sr.'s father couldn't read or do math, but Martin Sr. could. He noticed a rather significant error in the boss's figuring. Several bags of seed worth almost a thousand dollars had not been counted. When young Martin Sr. pointed this out, the boss threatened to kick his family off the land if he continued to be so "uppity."



Martin Luther King

When Martin Sr. was 15 years old, he left the farm and moved to Atlanta where he worked and went to school at night. It took him 11 years, but he graduated from high school at the age of 26. He went on to Morehouse College, became a minister, and married Alberta Williams, the daughter of a Baptist Minister. Martin Luther King Jr. was 2 years old when his grandfather died and his father took over as minister of the Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Martin Luther King Sr. raised his family in a spacious 12-room house in the "colored district" of Atlanta. Though it was a much nicer place to live than the sharecropper's shack that he had grown up in, it still bothered the elder King that he was required to live in that neighborhood, and that neighborhood alone. He felt the inequalities of life in the South and was determined to help make it a better place for black people. He passed this determination on to his children, especially to his firstborn son, Martin.

Singing in the Choir

When Martin Jr. was 4 years old he sang so sweetly that he was asked to sing solos in the church choir. Soon churches from all over were asking him to come and sing for them. People were so taken by Martin's voice that they gave generously when the offering plate was passed around. Young Martin was proud that he raised money that would help repair the church roof, feed the needy in his congregation, and buy new clothes for the poor children in his neighborhood to wear to school.

Growing up in the South

One of Martin's best friends as a young child was a white boy. When Martin was about six years old and getting ready to start school his friend's mother told them that could not play together any more because Martin was

black. His friend started school in the "white" school and Martin was sent to the "colored" school.



An example of a "Jim Crow" law.

African American people did not have the same rights as whites in the South. Even after the civil war won supposed freedom for Southern blacks, laws known as "Jim Crow laws," unfairly kept black people down. Under these laws, blacks were not allowed to vote, had to ride in the backs of buses, live in special neighborhoods, eat in different restaurants, drink from different water fountains, attend different schools, and could not use the same public restroom as the more privileged whites. Blacks were often arrested or beaten for breaking these rules.

An Outstanding Student

Martin was an excellent student and skipped the first, ninth, and eleventh grades. During seventh and eighth grade, he was enrolled in a special laboratory school at Atlanta University conducted to show that black children could learn as well as white children if given the opportunity. It was at this school that

Martin learned about the great Negro freedom fighters (who were not mentioned in the school textbooks of that time). He was inspired by stories of Harriet Tubman and Nat Turner. He dreamed that one day he would stand on a platform like Fredrick Douglass and give passionate speeches to create a better life for his people.

He also learned that no new laws had been passed to help protect the rights of black people since the emancipation proclamation of 1863, and that the United States Supreme Court had ruled that separating or segregating black and white children in schools was illegal. Martin knew that nearly all schools in the South were segregated.

College and Graduate School

Graduating at age 15, Martin went on to Morehouse College where he studied English and sociology. He chose sociology to learn how people behaved and English so that he could become a great orator like Fredrick Douglass. He didn't yet know what his career would be, only that he wanted to help his people.

In college Martin learned about Henry David Thoreau's Civil Disobedience. Eighty years earlier in Concord, Massachusetts, Thoreau had refused to pay a tax for voting. He felt it was unjust and demanded to be taken to jail-the required punishment for not paying the tax. As Martin read the ideas of Thoreau, he realized that civil disobedience could be used to protest the unfair and unjust laws against blacks in the South.

As he thought about the idea of using civil disobedience, Martin realized that he would need to get his ideas across to as many people as possible. He decided that the best way to do this would be as a minister. The following year, when Martin was 18 years old, he was ordained and became the assistant pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Martin graduated from Morehouse College and entered Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania-a mostly white school in the North. At Crozer, Martin learned about the work of the great Indian civil rights leader Mohandas Gandhi who had also been inspired by the writings of Thoreau and had used nonviolent civil disobedience to win independence and freedom for the Indian people from British oppression. Gandhi had taken Thoreau's ideas further. His people actively broke laws and accepted arrest and even beatings from the British police without resistance. He taught love in the face of oppression-not hate.

Martin graduated from Crozier at the age of 21 as valedictorian and went on to pursue a doctorate at Boston University. It was here that he met Coretta Scott. They were married on June 18, 1953. In 1954 Martin received

a Ph.D. and accepted a job as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. Martin Luther King Jr. was now "Dr. King."

Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Montgomery, Alabama, was a town well known for its harsh treatment of blacks and Dr. King knew it would be a good place for him to begin his work. He began preaching about nonviolent protest and civil disobedience. He talked to other ministers and civil rights leaders.

The time soon came to test his ideas. On December 1, 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks, an African American seamstress, was riding the bus home from work. She was tired from a long day of work, and tired of discrimination. When she was told to give up her seat to a white passenger, she refused and was arrested.



The Montgomery bus boycott

Dr. King and the other leaders decided to start a protest. They asked African American residents of the city to boycott the bus company by walking and driving instead. Mrs. Parks was arrested on a Friday so they had the weekend to prepare. They distributed leaflets asking people not to ride the buses. The local paper published the entire leaflet on the Saturday front page. On Sunday, ministers around the city talked to their congregations.

Monday morning came and the buses were empty! Usually 17,500 blacks rode the buses, but not on that day and not for many days to come. Blacks walked to work, black taxi drivers gave rides at bus fare prices, and carpools were formed. Boycott leaders started The Montgomery Improvement Association and unanimously elected Dr. King as president. They drew up a simple set of terms to end the boycott: courteous treatment from drivers, seating on a first-come first-served basis, and the employment of black bus drivers.

The bus company and the city would not agree to the terms and began a "get tough" policy, arresting black drivers on any charge they could think of, revoking drivers licenses, and canceling insurance, but the boycotters remained firm. Dr. King's house was bombed, but still the buses remained empty. The Montgomery Grand Jury ruled that the boycott was illegal and 100 boycotters and leaders were arrested. They happily surrendered and went to jail. Dr. King, hearing the news, hurried back to Montgomery to get arrested too.

This was what they had been waiting for! Soon reporters from all over the world swarmed into Montgomery to cover the event. After a 4-day trial, Dr. King was found guilty of "violating the state's anti-boycott law", fined \$500, and sentenced to 386 days in jail. The sentence was immediately appealed to the federal court where not only the boycott law, but also the segregation laws governing buses were ruled to be unconstitutional. The City of Montgomery appealed to the Supreme Court who upheld the lower court's ruling that segregation laws were unconstitutional! Montgomery was forced to let blacks have the same rights as whites. It was a huge victory.

We Shall Overcome!

A new organization was formed called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) with Dr. King as its leader. The SCLC organized sit-ins of blacks at white lunch counters, freedom rides where blacks would ride in the fronts of buses, and protest marches in cities all over the South. Protesters sang "We Shall Overcome." Dr. King was called upon to speak to huge crowds in many cities. Many people were moved by his words, black and white alike. He had become the great orator of his dreams. Dr. King was arrested many times and several attempts were made on his life and still he worked on.

Early in 1963, Dr. King went to Birmingham to lead a children's protest march against segregation laws. The police loosed attack dogs and turned powerful fire hoses on the children as they peacefully walked through the city. Thousands were arrested. Television news cameras filmed the event and for the first time the world

witnessed firsthand the brutality that blacks in the South had been enduring.

I Have a Dream



On August 28, 1963, The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was held at the Lincoln Memorial to mark the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. It drew the largest crowd ever to gather in Washington, D.C. More than 200,000 people came from all walks of life and many countries to hear Dr. King. He stood before the crowd and gave his most famous speech in which he said:

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood...

The March on Washington gave the civil rights movement importance in the eyes of the nation and the world. That year Dr. King was chosen as Time magazine's "Man of the Year" and President Kennedy introduced important civil rights legislation to Congress. The following year Dr. King was awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace prize. Selma to Montgomery

On the March 7, 1965, Dr. King organized a march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital in Montgomery to demand voting reforms. Alabama governor George Wallace banned the march and called out state troopers. Dr. King tried to postpone the march, but the marchers were impatient and went ahead without him. Six hundred marchers left Selma crossing the Edmund Pettus bridge. They were attacked by state troopers with clubs, whips and tear gas while on the sidewalks whites cheered. Two ministers, one white and one African American, were killed. Over 70 others were injured and 17 hospitalized.

A federal court order allowing the march was issued and 2 weeks later the ranks swelled to 25,000 marchers as they entered Montgomery, singing "We Shall Overcome." On August 6, 1965, a voting rights bill was passed by Congress guaranteeing African Americans the right to vote.

A Nation Mourns

Dr. King felt that an integral part of true freedom was freedom from poverty and in the late 1960s he began to campaign for workers' rights. He was invited to Memphis in April 1968 to support a sanitation workers strike. Previously, violence had erupted at Memphis demonstrations and Dr. King hesitated about going back, but decided to go. On April 3rd he gave a prophetic speech that seemed to foretell his passing. The following day he was assassinated.



His funeral, held on April 9, 1968, was attended by the Vice President, 3 U.S. Senators, several governors, and 35 representatives of foreign lands. President Johnson ordered that all flags be flown at half-mast-a national hero had died. In 1983 Congress voted to make the third Monday in January a federal holiday-Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Learn More!

General Resources about Martin Luther King

Online Resources

- [The Martin Luther King Papers Project](#)
The Project is a cooperative venture of Stanford University, the King Center, and the King estate to assemble and disseminate historical information concerning Martin Luther King Jr. and the social movements in which he participated.
- [MLK Photo Gallery](#)
From the Seattle Times
- [The music to "We Shall Overcome"](#)
. From the American Memory site.
- [Martin Luther King Jr. Classroom Crafts:](#)
Projects include black and white collages, milk carton buses, a picture quilt, and more (Grades K-3)
- [Music To Celebrate And Remember](#)
Familiar tunes have new lyrics to commemorate Dr. King and his life. (Grades K-2)
- [Martin Luther King Jr. Timeline:](#)
This page was made by a first grade class and is fully illustrated.
- [Powerful Days In Black And White:](#)
Use this powerful photo essay with middle and high school students to inspire creativity in the form of poetry and artwork.
- [The Civil Rights Movement - 1955 - 1965](#)
A great place to research events like the Montgomery bus boycott and the March on Washington.
- [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In The Classroom:](#)
Several activities and projects.
- [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)
A listing on A-Z Teacher Stuff.
- [October 1960: The Untold Story of the Jackson Civil Rights Movement](#)
A special section of the Jackson Sun Web site.

Books

- Adler, David A. *A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Holiday House. ISBN: 0823408477
- Friskey, Margaret, and Margot Parker. *What Is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day?.* Children's Press. ISBN: 0516437844
- Lowery, Linda. *Martin Luther King Day.* Scholastic. ASIN: 0590423797
- Millender, Dharathula H. *Martin Luther King, Jr.-Young Man With a Dream.* Aladdin Paperbacks. ISBN: 0020420102
- Levine, Ellen. *If You Lived at the Time of Martin Luther King.* Scholastic Trade. ISBN: 059042582X
- Sterling, Dorothy. *Tear Down the Wall! A History of the American Civil Rights Movement.* Doubleday. ISBN: 0385094361
- Bray, Rosemary. *Martin Luther King.* Mulberry Books. ISBN: 0688152198
- King, Martin Luther Jr. *I Have A Dream.* Scholastic Trade. ISBN: 0590205161
- Haskins, James. *The Day Martin Luther King Jr. Was Shot: A Photo History of the Civil Rights*

Movement. Scholastic Trade. ISBN: 0590436619

- Clayton, Ed. *Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior*. Archway. ISBN: 0671732420
- Rappaport, Doreen. *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Jump at the Sun*. ISBN: 0786807148
- Johnson, Charles; Bob Aldeman, and Robert Phelan. *King: The Photobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Viking Press. ISBN: 0670892165
- Washington, James Melvin (Editor). *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Harper San Francisco. ISBN: 0060646918
- King, Coretta Scott, et al. *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Companion: Quotations from the Speeches, Essays, and Lectures of Martin Luther King, Jr.* St. Martin's Press. ISBN: 0312090633
- King, Martin Luther Jr. *The Measure of a Man (Facets)* Fortress Press. ISBN: 0800634497
- Dyson, Eric Michael. *I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* Touchstone Books. ISBN: 068483037X
- King, Martin Luther Jr. *Strength to Love*. Fortress Press. ISBN: 0800614410
- King, Martin Luther Jr. *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.* Warner Books. ISBN: 0446675547
- King, Martin Luther Jr. *Why We Can't Wait*. Signet Classic. ISBN: 0451527534
- Carson, Clayborn (Editor). *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Warner Books. ISBN: 0446676500



LESSON 1: Jim Crow Laws

Concepts:

You will learn about Jim Crow laws of the post civil war South.

Lesson:

Jim Crow laws were introduced when reconstruction after the Civil War was coming to an end and the rest of the nation was no longer paying attention to events in the South. These oppressive laws started in the 1880s and lasted until the 1960s.

To learn more, [send your students to this Jim Crow Laws WebQuest](#). Below is a list of the sites used in the WebQuest. [Answers to the questions can be found here](#).

WebQuest Resources

- [Jim Crow laws denied blacks dignity, vote](#)
- [PBS From Swastika to Jim Crow](#)
- [Creation of the Jim Crow South](#)
- [Examples of Jim Crow Laws](#)

Other Resources

- [Virtual Jim Crow Museum](#)
- [First Years of Freedom, 1865-1945](#)



LESSON 2: Dr. King's Life and Times

Concepts:
You will learn about Martin Luther King's life and times.

Lesson:
How much do your students know and understand about Martin Luther King and the events that surrounded his life? Below are two pages with excellent and thought provoking discussion questions that can be either assigned as short essay starters, or used in a family or group discussion.

- [Martin Luther King Jr. Discussion Topics](#)
- [MLK Study Guide](#)

Encourage your children to do deeper research into Dr. King's life by using the Other Resources listed below or by researching in the public library. Once they feel they have learned about Dr. King, have them take this [Martin Luther King Jr. Interactive QUIZ](#)
For an extra challenge, ask your children to write a poem or song about Dr. King's life and illustrate it.

Other Resources

- [The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.](#)
- [African American Journey-Martin Luther King Jr.](#)
- [D. Martin Luther King, Jr. Chronology:](#)
- [The Civil Rights Movement-1955-1965](#)



LESSON 3: The Montgomery Bus Boycott

Concepts:
You will learn about the Montgomery bus boycott.

Lesson:
The Montgomery bus boycott is where Dr. King got his start as a civil rights leader. The success of the protest was a significant turning point in eradicating Jim Crow laws and segregation in the South.

Here is an excellent lesson plan that uses primary source documents to explore the Montgomery bus boycott: [Riding the Bus-Taking a Stand](#)

For more background information, have students read this essay. [What was the Montgomery Bus Boycott?](#)

Additional Resources

- [The Montgomery Bus Boycott Page](#)
- [Montgomery Bus Boycott](#)



LESSON 4:

Letter from Birmingham Jail

Concepts:

You will learn about Dr. King's convictions regarding the importance of fighting a peaceful battle for black people to gain true freedom.

Lesson:

Dr. King faced opposition not only from racists in the South, but also from people who agreed with his ideas. Many felt that his use of civil disobedience was inappropriate for a Christian minister. While Dr. King was in jail in Birmingham, Alabama, for defying a court order against demonstrating he wrote a letter to his critics.

In this lesson students will read an excerpt from Dr. King's [Letter from Birmingham Jail](#). To begin the lesson, have your children look up the definitions to this [set of vocabulary words](#) used in the excerpt. For a challenge, have them write the words on another piece of paper in alphabetical order. For fun let the children do this [wordsearch](#) with the vocabulary words in it. The answers for the vocabulary are [here](#) and the wordsearch page answers are [here](#). These vocabulary words can also be used for composition and spelling exercises.

Once they have a good grasp of the new words, have them read the excerpt. Discuss the way Dr. King used words and the images he created with them. Have them pick out metaphors, such as "ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky" and ask what they think these metaphors mean.

For a challenge, ask artistic children to illustrate one of the images from the excerpt.

Next, use this lesson plan, [Birmingham 1963](#), to help your children learn more about the event through examining primary source documents.

Additional Resources

- ["Letter from Birmingham Jail"](#) - The complete 11-page text in Adobe Acrobat format.
- [The Watson's Go To Birmingham-1963](#) (John Newberry Award-winning juvenile novel)
- [The Watson's Go To Birmingham Webquest](#)



LESSON 5: I Have a Dream

Concepts:

You will learn about Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and you will have a chance to think about your own grand dreams.

Lesson:

During the March on Washington, Martin Luther King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and gave one of his most eloquent and oft repeated speeches. He spoke of the terrible suffering of black people under slavery, and their continued suffering under unjust and unequal laws. His words were filled with metaphors and poetic images that captured listeners in the raw emotion of his message of freedom and equal rights for all.

The most famous part of the speech is the section from which it draws its name.

I still have a dream. It is deeply rooted in the American Dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal".

I have a dream...

For this lesson, print out a copy of [Dr. King's address at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#) for your children to read.

Let the older children read it on their own first, then go back over it with them. Read it with younger children asking them to take special note of the metaphors and poetic language Dr. King used. Ask them to paraphrase the poetic passages in ordinary language and then notice the difference in the sound. Which one catches their interest more, the poetic or the ordinary?

Let the children listen to these RealAudio clips of excerpts of Dr. King's "[I Have a Dream](#)" Speech.

Next ask them to think of the kinds of things they dream about that would make the world a better place? Print out this [I Have a Dream worksheet](#) and ask them to fill in the blanks with their dreams for the world, their country, their community, their family, and themselves. Encourage them to use poetic language and metaphors to express their dreams like Dr. King did.

For an extra challenge, ask students to find a way to begin to help make the dreams they wrote down for community a reality. Or have them and think of something that they can change, and start or join a community

service project.

Younger students can do these [Martin Luther King Activities](#).

For older kids use the following lesson plans to help them examine the literary devices and figures of speech Dr. King uses in this speech.

- [I have a Metaphor](#) (Grades 5-9)
- [Critical Thinking Strategies](#) (Grades 9-12)



LESSON 6: Selma to Montgomery

Concepts:

You will learn about the Selma to Montgomery March for voter's rights.

Lesson:

The Selma to Montgomery March was one of the bloodiest in the history of the American civil rights movement and marks an important turning point in the deconstruction of the Jim Crow style legal system of the South. Six hundred peaceful marchers were attacked and beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge by Alabama state troopers.

For this lesson have your children read these [1965 articles](#) about the first march that was attacked by Alabama State Police.

Next have them read this story, "[The Detroit Housewife who Moved a Nation Towards Racial Justice](#)," about a white woman who came down from the North to participate in the march and was murdered by Ku Klux Klan members.

To complete the lesson, use the [Marching for Justice-Selma to Montgomery](#) lesson plan examining primary documents related to the march.

Additional Resources

- [National Voting Rights Museum, Selma, Alabama](#) - Celebrates the sacrifices made by civil rights workers whose hard work and endurance led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



LESSON 7: Memphis-The Final Conflict

Concepts:

You will learn about The Memphis Sanitation Workers Strike where Dr. King was assassinated.

Lesson:

In April 1968 Dr. King went to Memphis, Tennessee, to help the sanitation workers who were on strike. On April 4, 1968, as he was leaving his motel room Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed. .

Many people know the story of his death, but few have really delved into what he was fighting for that day. Here is an excellent lesson plan from the National Archives and Records Administration that teaches about the Memphis strike and why it was important to Dr. King to be there.

[Court Documents Related to Martin Luther King, Jr., and Memphis Sanitation Workers Resources](#)

Additional Resources

- ["I Have Been to the Mountaintop"](#) - Dr. King's last speech, on April 3, 1968