

## **Albert Einstein – Fighting Racism Beyond the Lab**

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### **Overview**

Did you know that Albert Einstein – *the* Albert “ $e = mc^2$ ” Einstein – Nobel Prize winning physicist, creator of the Theory of Relativity, was also an anti-racist activist taking a stand for social justice. His fight did not begin when he immigrated to the United States in 1933, no, in fact, Einstein spoke out from his native Germany on behalf of African Americans in 1931 when “the Scottsboro Boys” of Alabama were falsely accused and sentenced to death for raping two white women. In 1937 when the famous African American opera singer, Marian Anderson, was denied access to a Princeton hotel, Einstein invited her to stay with him in his home – she continued to do so each time she performed in the area.

Albert Einstein says that the African American plight was reminiscent of how Nazi Germany treated his fellow Jewish people – the very struggle that caused him to flee his homeland. When Einstein moved to Princeton for a faculty position at The Institute for Advanced Study, he chose to live on the edge of the all-Black neighborhood of Witherspoon. He was known for spending time on the front porch of his neighbors’ homes and inviting them into his own. Albert Einstein became close friends with W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson, both famous African Americans fervently involved in the fight for equality. In fact, Einstein and Robeson co-chaired an organization called The American Crusade to End Lynching.

According to authors Fred Jerome and Rodger Taylor, in 1946 Einstein travelled to the historically Black Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, the alma mater of Langston Hughes and Thurgood Marshall, to receive an honorary doctorate degree from President Horace Mann Bond (the late father of civil rights pioneer, Julian Bond). While Einstein received hundreds of offers for the honorary doctorate, the Lincoln invitation was one of few he ever accepted. Historians note that while visiting Lincoln, Einstein gave a speech in which he told a campus-wide audience, “My trip to this institution was on behalf of a worthwhile cause. There is separation of colored people from white people in the United States. That separation is not a disease of colored people. It is a disease of white people. I do not intend to be quiet about it.” Einstein later gave a rare lecture on relativity to the Lincoln students (see pictures at the end of this lesson).

Through this unit, students will research other non-Blacks who were staunch supporters and allies of the American Civil Rights Movement, keeping in mind Dr. Martin Luther King’s sentiments expressed in his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*: “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

### **New Words/Terms**

Theory of Relativity, mutuality, inescapable, physicist, reminiscent, Nazi, flee, fervently, lynching, crusade, alma mater, honorary, doctorate degree, audience, sentiment

### **Grade Level**

Middle to Upper Grade Levels

## Primary Learning Objectives

The Students Will:

- Recognize Albert Einstein's contribution to anti-racist activism.
- Acknowledge the contributions non-Blacks made to the Civil Rights Movement.
- Devise a plan to become an advocate for change.

## Approximate Duration of Lesson

One class period.

## Materials and Equipment Needed

Computer with Internet access, writing materials

## Background/Preparation

The teacher should become familiar with Albert Einstein's work as an anti-racist ally for African Americans and gather all necessary materials for the lesson. The teacher may also want to read and print out one of the biographies listed in the Additional Resource section of this lesson.

## Procedures/Activities

- Begin by asking students if they know who Albert Einstein is. You may want to write down the formula,  $e = mc^2$  and ask if they recognize it. Ask them about the Theory of Relativity.
- Next, ask students what they think Albert Einstein has to do with civil rights history.
- Share Einstein's story with students. Allow them to share their thoughts. Ask why it was any business of Einstein to get involved with an issue that seemingly impacted Blacks.
- Now read the quote by Dr. King written in the introduction of this lesson aloud to the class. Ask them to share their thoughts about his words. Ask students to relate Dr. King's quote to Einstein's efforts.
- Read the following quote from Dr. King as well, it also comes from his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*:

I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still too few in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some – such as Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, James McBride Dabbs, Ann Braden and Sarah Patton Boyle – have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have languished in filthy, roach-infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as “dirty n----- lovers.” Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful ‘action’ antidotes to combat the disease of segregation (1963).
- Ask students to share their reflection on this statement made by Dr. King.
- Next, share one of the biographies of a white journalist and ally that Dr. King mentioned in the previous quote. Ask students what it would take to stand up for someone else's rights.
- Now ask students to sit down and work on the following question:
  - What is one of the greatest social dilemmas we currently face?

- What can you do to change it?
- What risk would be involved in making a change?
- Would you be willing to take that risk?
- Why or why not?
- Once students finish, have them write a reflection about what it must have been like to be a presumed “outsider” (whether by race, religion, region, socioeconomics, etc.) serving as an ally for those targeted by hate.
- Finally, have them go back to their reflection about themselves and thinking back to the second Dr. King quote that lists some of his white allies, ask students if they can add allies to their reflection. Who would help them fight the social ill they previously named? How would they help?

### **Assessment Strategies**

Students should be assessed on their ability to think meaningfully about the questions asked and writing meaningful responses.

### **Extension**

Students could research each of the allies Dr. King mentioned in the quote from the *Letter from Birmingham Jail* and create a profile for each of them with their picture, brief biography and the contribution they made to social justice.

### **Additional Resources**

Ralph McGill

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2769>

Lillian Smith

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-463>

Harry Golden

<http://www.answers.com/topic/harry-golden>

James McBride Dabbs

[http://dabbscrossroads.blogspot.com/2011/07/james-mcbride-dabbs-second-son\\_13.html](http://dabbscrossroads.blogspot.com/2011/07/james-mcbride-dabbs-second-son_13.html)

Anne Braden

[http://www.ket.org/civilrights/bio\\_braden.htm](http://www.ket.org/civilrights/bio_braden.htm)

Sarah Patton Boyle

[http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Boyle\\_Sarah\\_Patton\\_1906-1994](http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Boyle_Sarah_Patton_1906-1994)

### **References**

Einstein on Race and Racism

<http://www.einsteinonrace.com/authors.htm>

Nobel Prize: Albert Einstein Biography

[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/physics/laureates/1921/einstein-bio.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/physics/laureates/1921/einstein-bio.html)

Einstein: Civil Rights Activist

<http://ikimme.blogspot.com/2009/08/einstein-civil-rights-activist.html>

The Hidden Half Life of Albert Einstein: Anti-Racism

<http://sdonline.org/33/the-hidden-half-life-of-albert-einstein-anti-racism/>

Letter from Birmingham Jail

[http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](http://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)



Einstein Addressing Students at  
Lincoln University, May 1946



Einstein with Paul Robeson in his  
Princeton Home, 1952



Einstein Receiving Honorary Doctorate from Lincoln  
University of Pennsylvania President Horace Mann Bond  
(Father of Civil Rights Pioneer, Julian Bond) May 3, 1946

# Social Studies Course of Study Standards

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## SIXTH GRADE

**Standard 13.** Describe the role of major civil rights leaders and significant events occurring during the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Examples: civil rights leaders—Rosa Parks; Martin Luther King, Jr.; events—Brown versus Board of Education; Montgomery bus boycott; student sit-ins; march on Washington, D.C.; Freedom Rides; Civil Rights Act of 1964; Malcolm X; voter registration efforts; Selma-to-Montgomery march.

## SEVENTH GRADE – Citizenship

**Standard 11.** Describe examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence of groups, societies, and nations, using past and current events.

- Tracing the political and social impact of the modern Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to the present, including Alabama’s role. *Extension to consider the impact.*

## ELEVENTH GRADE

**Standard 14.** Trace events of the modern Civil Rights Movement from post-World War II to 1970 that resulted in social and economic changes, including the Montgomery bus boycott, the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School, the march on Washington, and the Freedom Rides.

- Tracing the federal government’s involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement, including the abolition of the poll tax, the desegregation of the armed forces, the nationalization of state militias, Brown versus Board of Education, the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Explaining contributions of individuals and groups to the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Martin Luther King, Jr., James Meredith, Medgar Evers, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)
- Identifying people and events in Alabama that influenced the modern Civil Rights Movement, including Rosa Parks, Autherine Lucy, John Patterson, George C. Wallace, Vivian Malone, Fred Shuttlesworth, *the Children’s March*, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing, and the Selma-to-Montgomery march
- Describing the development of a Black Power movement, including the change in focus of the SNCC, the rise of Malcolm X, and Stokely Carmichael and the Black Panther Movement
- Describing the impact of African-American entrepreneurs on the modern Civil Rights Movement Examples: S. B. Fuller, A. G. Gaston

## English Language Arts Course of Study - Appendix D:

### Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

#### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

**Standard 7.** *Integration of information from Walking Tour, sculptures, and original photographs.*

**Grades 6-8.** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

**Grades 9-10.** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts).

**Grades 11-12.** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

### Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12

#### Research to Build and Present Knowledge

**Standard 7.**

Grades 6-8. Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

Grades 9-10. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Grades 11-12. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

## English Language Arts Course of Study

### Speaking and Listening Standards

#### Comprehension and Collaboration

**[SL.6-12.1]** Engage [initiate and participate – grades 9-12] effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade-level topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

*Information from Walking Tour, sculptures, and original photographs.*

**[SL.6.2]** Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.

**[SL.7.2]** Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study. *With extensions to lesson plan.*

**[SL.8.2.]** Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluate the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation. *With extensions to lesson plan.*

**[SL.9-12.2]** Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), [in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, - grades 11-12] evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source [and noting any discrepancies among the data – grades 11-12]. *With extensions to lesson plan.*

## **Language Standards**

### **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use**

**[L.6-8.6].** Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.