

Community Messages

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Overview

If Martin Luther King, Jr. is the first name that comes to mind when asked about the non-violent campaign of the Civil Rights Movement, then there's a chance that Bull Connor's name comes to mind when asked about the violence experienced during the Movement. Who can forget the images of Bull Connor's German Shepherd's snarling at protestors; his fire hoses plastering women and children against brick walls; or his military tank lurking threateningly down the streets of downtown Birmingham?

The interesting thing about these two men is that it's just as easy to see their differences, as it is to see their similarities – if we open our hearts and minds wide enough. The fact is, both Dr. King and Mr. Connor were only acting out the belief system that was instilled in them. We are all born into a world of socially constructed norms. Our families surround us with a select community filled with friends, schools, places of worship and media that support the beliefs, values and morals they wish to instill in us – whether it be good, bad or indifferent.

Oftentimes our communities are one-dimensional and do not represent diversity in race, economics, politics, faith, etc. This type of “in-group” living can lead to learned biases aimed against members of the “out-group.” The messages learned in our community could be overt (obvious with no intent to hide) or covert (hidden, concealed or disguised). While we may not be in control of our circumstances as children, with time comes age, wisdom and the liberty to act on free will. We can choose to limit ourselves to the frame of reference given to us as children, or we can broaden our scope by experiencing all that our world has to offer.

This lesson asks students to reflect on the messages they received growing up about both their in-groups and out-groups, and report on the messages that they now (or will) pass on to others based on their experiences.

Key Words

Bias, discrimination, stereotype, prejudice, covert, overt, norms

Grade Level

Middle and Upper Grades

Primary Learning Objective(s)

The students will:

- recognize community and family norms.
- uncover biases and identify them as being overt or covert.
- commit themselves to stand against discriminating behavior.

Approximate Duration of Lesson

One class period.

Materials and Equipment Needed

Community Message Chart; writing materials

Background/Preparation

The teacher will need to review the Community Message Chart provided at the end of this lesson and modify it as necessary and make copies for each student.

Procedures/Activities

- Ask students to tell you about some of their most memorable family customs or cultural traditions. You may want to get them started by revealing some of your own. For example, 4th of July Picnics, Easter brunch, Mother's Day BBQ, Bar Mitzvahs, First Communion, etc.
- Next, ask them to go into more detail about those special occasions and what it means to their family or community. Have them go into even more detail about what happens when we make these familial connections. Explain that these are all happenings within their "in-group."
- Now ask students if any of these occasions ever result in scandal or gossip. Warn them in advance that you are simply trying to make a point and be acknowledged; you are not soliciting personal stories. Tell students that sometimes they may witness elders express disappointment in others that don't "behave" according to family/cultural/community standards. For example, someone may come to the reunion with a low cut blouse and revealing shorts or bring a date that others disapprove of. Perhaps someone isn't working or had a child out of wedlock. What about the person that is in a same-sex relationship or is campaigning for an unapproved candidate? All of these issues could cause a riff in the family tree. Perhaps these issues have caused family to disassociate themselves with the person, forcing them to move from the in-group to the out-group.
- Point out to students that these are controversies within their close family unit – their in-group. If we are able to distance ourselves from those that we know and love – how easy would it be for us to distance ourselves, talk about and ridicule those we don't know or love?
- Tell students that for the rest of the lesson you will focus on members of the out-group. People that are "different" from us in one way or another. These differences could be political, social or religious. The differences could also be based on gender, race, class, age, size, ability, sexual orientation, etc.
- Ask students to take a moment and quietly reflect on frequently they come into contact with members of the out-group. What have their experiences been with these individuals? How do they treat members of the out-group? Ask students to reflect on how their parents, friends, family, community and religious leaders talk about and treat members of the out-group. Ask them to consider how members of their out group are treated in the media (movies, television shows, news programs, news papers, magazines, etc.).
- Write the following words on the board: stereotype, bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Ask students to share what they know about these words. Once they have exhausted themselves, share with them the fact that humans have a natural tendency to group others according to all of the differences we mentioned before (gender, race, class, etc.). Labeling others can sometimes help us, but it can also hurt us.
- Explain that labeling takes a negative turn when we use stereotypes – exaggerated beliefs or images – about a person or group to define everyone we associate to be a member of that group. Again, sometimes this can be positive (may not necessarily bring harm to the

individual or group) or negative (can result in direct harm or embarrassment). Ask students to give examples.

- Next, tell students that negative stereotypes can lead to prejudice – a prejudgment or attitude about a group or members within that group. Gone unchecked, prejudices can lead to fear and hate and are almost always aimed at people from the out-group based on their differences. Ask students to give examples of prejudice.
- So – labeling leads to stereotypes; stereotypes lead to prejudice; and now we learn that prejudice turns into discrimination. When we single people out based on perceived attitudes and judgments and think of them to be different, we begin to treat them differently – different from how we would want to be treated ourselves.
- Finally, explain that bias is somewhat synonymous with prejudice, and that sometimes our biases can be “hidden.” In other words, we may have been exposed to labeling, stereotypes and prejudice, but we do not outwardly exhibit any negative behaviors associated with these terms. However, sometimes we have unconscious or involuntary reactions to people from our out-group. We may clutch our purses as someone walks by. We may choose not to go on a particular side of town, even if we heard there was a good restaurant there or perhaps a play we wanted to see is at a theatre in that area. Hidden biases are also exhibited in our curriculum – when we inadvertently ignore certain truths or misrepresent (or even omit) the contributions of a particular people. This also comes in the form of images on TV and movies; what stories are being told or not told on the news; and how music is chosen for the radio.
- Distribute the Community Message chart to students. Tell them that they will work as individuals to complete the chart, filling in the message they received from their parents, friends, community and the media about a particular group. This can include their own group, as members of in-groups talk about themselves.
- Give students at least 15-20 minutes to complete the chart. Once they’re finished, put them into groups to complete the activity by discussing the following questions:
 1. How common or different were the messages that you received from your parents, the media, community and friends?
 2. Did you all find any common themes with regard to messages about particular subgroups?
 3. How accurate were the messages you received about the different groups? Were the messages based on stereotypes?
 4. Which group has the greatest impact on you in terms of the message received?
 5. How did your childhood message influence the message that you gave to others?
 6. How have these messages influenced the messages that you currently give to others?
 7. Are you where you want to be with regard to the messages that you give to others?
 8. What might you do differently?
 9. What messages would you like to create for your child (now or future)?
- Finish the lesson by having a discussion with the students about the impact labeling, stereotypes, prejudice and bias can have on our community – on our world. Ask them to

discuss ways in which we can change this bad habit. What can we do now as individuals?
As a class?

Assessment Strategies

The assessment should be based on classroom participation and critical thinking.

Extension

Have students write a reflection on the following quote by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What did Dr. King mean by this? Is this how Dr. King maintained his mission of non-violence? Was Dr. King able to forgive those who brought harm to him, his family and all those in support of equality during the Civil Rights Movement?

We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies.

Remediation

If students are uncomfortable or unable to have a group discussion, have them write a journal reflection about the role labeling, stereotypes, prejudice and bias has had on their lives and how they can or are making a difference in themselves and in future generations.

Additional Resources

Anti-Defamation League

http://archive.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/

Partners Against Hate

<http://www.partnersagainsthate.org/families/>

PBS: Precious Children

http://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/diversity/read_teaching.html

PBS: What is Race?

http://www.pbs.org/race/001_WhatIsRace/001_00-home.htm

References

Teaching Tolerance

www.tolerance.org

COMMUNITY MESSAGE CHART

To complete this chart, fill in the blanks with messages you received from the group across the top about the group in the far left-hand column.

Teachers, adjust the chart to fit concerns within your given community.

GROUP	PARENT'S MESSAGE	MEDIA'S MESSAGE	FRIEND'S MESSAGE	YOUR MESSAGE TO OTHERS
Blacks				
Asians & Asian Americans				
Hispanics or Latinos				
Whites				
Muslims				
Christians				
Jewish				
People with Disabilities				
Women				
Gays & Lesbians				
Interracial Couples				

Social Studies Course of Study Standards

FOURTH GRADE

Standard 14. Describe the social, political, and economic impact of the modern Civil Rights Movement on Alabama.

- Identifying important people and events of the modern Civil Rights Movement

Examples: people—Martin Luther King, Jr., George C. Wallace, Rosa Parks; events—Montgomery bus boycott, Birmingham church bombing, Selma-to-Montgomery march

- Identifying benefits of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act

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 12. 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.