

**Living History:
Local Voices of the Civil Rights Movement**

Overview

Through the completion of an oral history project, students will compliment their classroom unit on the Civil Rights Movement by exploring local resident’s memories of the 1950s-1960s. Students will gain an understanding of the way local, “everyday” citizens and engaged community members fought against injustices, thus leading to changes in local law, policy, and social behaviors/norms.

Grade

8

NC Essential Standards for 8th Grade Social Studies

- 8.H.1.1: Apply historical thinking to understand the creation and development of North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.2.2: Summarize how leadership and citizen actions influenced the outcome of key conflicts in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.H.3.3: Explain how individuals and groups have influenced economic, political and social change in North Carolina and the United States.
- 8.C&G.1.4: Analyze access to democratic rights and freedoms among various groups in North Carolina and the United States
- 8.C&G.2.1: Evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches used to effect change in North Carolina and the United States
- 8.C&G.2.2: Analyze issues pursued through active citizen campaigns for change
- 8.C&G.2.3: Explain the impact of human and civil rights issues throughout North Carolina and United States history.
- 8.C.1.3: Summarize the contributions of particular groups to the development of North Carolina and the United States

Essential Questions

- Why is it important to study the past?
- What impact have the actions of past citizens had on us today?
- Compare and contrast local life in the 1950s-1970s to that of today.
- What was the Civil Rights Movement, and how did its participants affect our local community?
- What was life like in our city/county during the Jim Crow Era?
- Compare and contrast the engagement level of young citizens of the 1950s-1970s to that of today.
- What can the history of the Jim Crow Era and Civil Rights Movement teach us about the present?

Materials

- “Local Voices of the Civil Rights Movement” assignment sheet; attached

Duration

1-2 hours of class time; up to 2 weeks of occasional homework time

Preparation

- Jim Crow and segregation are sensitive topics to discuss with students, and can likewise be sensitive topics for students to discuss with community members who witnessed and experienced this history first hand.

Just as it is important for students to be prepared for such study with clear expectations of respect, tolerance, open-mindedness, and civil conversation, they must likewise be prepared on how to respectfully request and conduct interviews with people about such divisive history. Students should be reminded that the point of studying this period of difficult history is to examine hate and injustices experienced out in the open so that they can learn why it is detrimental to a society, appreciate the sacrifices of those who fought against such hate, and work to be engaged community members themselves who refuse to tolerate aspects of hate today.

- For resources on establishing a safe classroom with clear expectations of respect, open-mindedness, and civil conversation, see the Carolina K-12's "Activities" section of the Database of Civic Resources (www.civics.unc.edu/resources).

Procedure

1. As a warm up, project the following quote from Maya Angelou and discuss:

"History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced
With courage, need not be lived again."
~Maya Angelou

- What message is Maya Angelou trying to convey?
 - Do you agree or disagree with her message? Explain.
 - Why is it important to study the past? What impact have the actions of past citizens had on us today?
 - How might our lives be different if we did not "face history" as Maya Angelou advises?
 - In what ways can we learn from the experiences of the individuals who have lived through particular historical time periods?
2. Hand out the assignment sheet "Living History: Local Voices of the Civil Rights Movement." Reiterate to students that within their own community, many citizens participated in varying degrees in the Civil Rights Movement or experienced first-hand the societal inadequacies of the Jim Crow south. Explain this project will be about discovering these local residents and learning from them through their first hand experiences.
 3. Go through the assignment sheet, allowing for questions. Often, students don't recognize how recent the Civil Rights and Jim Crow era was, thus they automatically assume that they'll never be able to find anyone with first hand knowledge or experiences. Encourage them to begin asking around that evening, talking to everyone they know (be it a family member, a neighbor, a parent's co-worker, a local senior center, etc.) and their excitement will grow as they return to class with the understanding that there are many people right in their own community who experienced what they have learned about in class.
 4. If time permits, allow students to start brainstorming possible interviewees and/or interview questions.
- **Teacher Note:** While students work on this project throughout your unit on Civil Rights and Jim Crow, it is advised to invite one or more community members who experienced Civil Rights/Jim Crow to speak to the class and be interviewed by the class as a whole. This will give students a practice experience creating appropriate, open-ended and sensitive questions.

Culminating Activities/Assessments

- Your students can host a reception for their interviewees, where interviewees are thanked for sharing their memories and honored for their experiences. Students can deliver a presentation about their interviewee at this event.

- Work with your local historic preservation society to set up a citywide or countywide oral history project, or to have your student’s work documented as part of an existing oral history collection.

Differentiation

Students with special needs

- Modify the project guidelines as needed, allowing students to work with a partner on this project if needed.

AIG Students

- Expand the project to include photography. In addition to taking photos of their interviewee, students can also be assigned a theme such as “Equality Today” to document with photography and supplement their project. Photos and narratives could be shared at an evening community event.

Name: _____

Living History: Local Voices of the Civil Rights Movement

Assignment:

You encounter many people each day, many of whom have untold stories of heroism and valor. People right in your own community experienced the Jim Crow era, segregation, and integration. Many were active, engaged citizens who fought against these injustices by participating in varying degrees in the Civil Rights Movement. Your goal is to find someone willing to share their memories of the 1950s and/or 1960s in regards to segregation and civil rights. Once you have found someone willing to share their experiences, set up a formal interview and allow them to bring to life a time period of turmoil and triumph. You will then share what you learn from your interview with the class.

Actions:

1. **Brainstorm interviewees and schedule an interview** with an appropriate individual about his or her participation in and/or memories of any of the following topics:
 - **Civil Rights Movement:** Did they attend meetings? Participate in sit-ins, protests, “fill up the jails,” marches, boycotts, etc.? Organize? Speak out? Get involved politically? Stand up for the rights of themselves or others?
 - **Jim Crow Era:** Do they have memories of local segregation and/or integration? Memories of experiencing or witnessing such laws? Can they share their understanding of how the Jim Crow South operated or affected society; etc.
 - **Physical characteristics of your town/city/county:** Can they describe the stores, schools, parks, that were segregated? Where did Civil Rights events take place and their outcome? What have been the changes in the physical community since the Civil Rights Era?
 - **Primary Sources:** Does your interviewee have any old newspapers, photos, recordings, brochures, etc. that relate to this time period in some way?
2. **Schedule an interview** via phone or in person, calling to remind the interviewee of the appointment several days before the interview takes place.
3. Prepare for your interview by **creating solid, open ended questions** to ask. Remember, some people may have experienced painful things during this period, so it is important your questions are sensitive and respectful.
4. **Take detailed notes** when interviewing your source. With prior permission from the source, you may also record, video, or photograph the source. If you need to check equipment out from the library, arrange this a week before your interview.
5. Compile your notes and learned knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement and Jim Crow era into a 2 page **narrative**. The narrative should:
 - a. **Summarize** the interviewee’s memories and experiences along with related facts you have learned in class or via research.
 - b. **Compare and contrast** living during the 1950s-1960s to today. What things have changed? What things have stayed the same? How is our society today impacted by this history?
 - c. **Reflect** on your understanding of the time period and ways that individuals worked to change their flawed society.
6. In addition to turning in your written report, you will present a 5 minute **oral report** based on your interview in small groups on the project’s due date. You should explain who you interviewed, that

person’s experiences, and your reflections on this process. Be prepared to answer questions your group mates may have.

- You will turn in your written **notes from the interview**, the **2 page narrative**, as well as any additional materials (photos, old newspapers, etc.) on the project’s due date.

Timeline for Completion

Date	Action
	Receive assignment and begin investigating interview possibilities
	Choose your interviewee and schedule the interview
	Bring a first draft of open ended questions to class for review & revision
Several days before your interview occurs	Call or e-mail your interviewee to remind them of your appointment
	Your interview must be completed by this date
	Review your interview notes and create a first draft of your narrative. Bring the first draft to class for a revision workshop.
	Final project due (notes, typed narrative, any visual accompaniments, and oral summary of your project and the experience)
	Send a thank you note to your interviewee

Points to consider for your interview process:

- Ask questions:** People who experienced/participated in the Civil Rights Movement are everywhere in your community. A person does not have to have marched with Dr. King to qualify as a great interviewee. Sometimes the simplest of stories are the most interesting and beautiful. Explain your assignment to the adults you encounter (i.e. family members, community members, etc.) and ask if they know someone who might be good for you to speak with. Remember, this is your way to honor people in your community by hearing their memories!
- Time Period:** Your interviewee should have memories of life in the 1950s-1960s, so make sure your candidates have stories they are willing to share of the 1950s-1960s. (North Carolina wasn’t fully integrated until the 1970s, so memories of the early 70s will work as well.)
- Experience level:** Ask a few preliminary questions before scheduling an interview to ensure your candidate has enough to share about first-hand accounts (participating in a sit-in, attending a segregated school, experiencing bussing or integration, listening to Dr. King on the TV or radio, attending a march or rally, etc.) It is also important to respect an individual’s sensitivity to this topic. You might find some people are not comfortable speaking about this time period, thus you should continue your search to ensure a successful interview.
- Time:** Make sure that your interviewee has the time to give you about an hour for an interview, and let your interviewee know you may need to call him or her back for further details or follow up questions.

- The success of your interview depends largely on you having good, **open ended questions** (questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no are NOT good). We will work together in class to ensure you have adequate questions. For example:
 - What is the most vivid memory you have of the Civil Rights Movement?
 - What events (local or national) can you remember from this time?
 - How does life today compare to life in the 1950s-1960s?
 - Do you remember being frightened of anything during that time?
 - Can you describe what your neighborhood and school like at that time?
 - What events during the 1950s-1960s do you remember as most important to you?
 - What do you remember about segregated schools? Did you attend one? If so what was that experience like?
 - In your opinion, what did it take to bring about change?
 - What was most challenging about this time period?
 - As you reflect on desegregation and the Civil Rights Movement, what positive impact do you believe this had on our country?
 - Who were your heroes or role models as a child? What about today?
 - What improvements does our society still need today?
 - What things do we still need to do to promote freedom, social justice, equality, and human possibility in our city?
 - Considering the history you have experienced first hand, what advice would you give to younger generations?

Points to consider in your narrative:

1. Who did you interview (intro paragraph)?
2. Why did you choose this person to interview (intro paragraph)?
3. Summarize the important parts of the interview and relate them to historical events learned in class and in your research. Use quotes at various points (detail paragraph).
4. What did you find most interesting about this person's past (detail paragraph)?
5. Do you think people your age today would participate in such a movement, as young people did during the Civil Rights Movement? Why or why not? What do you imagine your response would be to experiencing Jim Crow laws and segregation (don't forget the risks involved in speaking out)? What is your opinion of the way your interviewee responded? (detail paragraph)
6. What can the Civil Rights movement teach us about the present? (detail paragraph)
7. How is life today similar to life during the movement? How is it different? (detail paragraph)
8. Summarize this experience and comment on what impact you think this person and the era as a whole had on local history (concluding paragraph).