

Remembering Martin Luther King, Jr.

Overview

Students will explore the importance and relevance of Martin Luther King, Jr. to today's society and their individual lives, as well as examine the ways in which we remember and honor Dr. King by participating in a Socratic seminar based on an article and a song.

Grade

8

North Carolina Standard Course of Study

- Objective 7.04: Compare and contrast the various political viewpoints surrounding issues of the post World War II era.
- Objective 7.05: Evaluate the major changes and events that have effected the roles of local, state, and national governments.

Essential Questions

- Who was Martin Luther King, Jr., and in what ways did he affect society, past and present?
- How has society's interpretation of MLK and his views changed over time?
- In what ways has our society improved since the Civil Rights era? In what ways do we still need improvement?
- In what ways can citizens today affect their own communities and illicit change?
- How are MLK's views and work relevant to us today?
- In what ways does our present society remember and honor MLK?

Materials

- "King's Dream Everyday," article attached
- "Happy Birthday" by Stevie Wonder, lyrics attached
- Recording of the song "Happy Birthday" by Stevie Wonder
- Michael Eric Dyson on Martin Luther King, Jr., speech excerpt attached

Duration

45-70 minutes

Preparation

- Students must have read and annotated "Kings Dream Everyday"
- Students should have a common vocabulary regarding race, culture, civil rights, etc.
- Students should have a basic knowledge of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement

Procedure

1. Arrange your classroom in a circle prior to student arrival. Review your rules/expectations for a Socratic Seminar*, and instruct students to take out their copy of *Kings Dream Everyday* (attached), which they should have read prior to class. (While Socratic Seminar format is recommended, you may also use these same questions as part of a typical class discussion.)

2. As a warm up, hand out a copy of the lyrics *Happy Birthday* by Stevie Wonder. Play a recording of the song and instruct students to review the lyrics as they listen, thinking about Martin Luther King, Jr. and his legacy.
3. Begin the seminar with an opening question, such as:
 - What word/phrase would you use to describe race relations in our country today, as compared to the 1960s?
4. Move the seminar along with several **core questions**, which may include:
 - In your interpretation, what was Martin Luther King Jr.'s "dream?" Do you feel it has been reached? Explain.
 - MLK gave many speeches, yet he is most often remembered for "I Have a Dream." Why do you think this is?
 - Compare and contrast how MLK would have been viewed in the 1960's to how we view him today.
 - Why do you think some people in the 1960s were angered by MLK's ideas and messages?
 - After reading "Honoring King's Dream Every Day," what issue does Dana Williams have with the way we are sometimes educated about MLK? Do you agree or disagree with her opinion and why?
 - What is Williams' view of MLK day and the way he is "celebrated?" How does she think the day should be honored? Do you agree or disagree with her and why?
 - What is Stevie Wonder's purpose in the song, "Happy Birthday?"
 - In his song, Wonder sings of the "key to unity." What do you think is the key to unity? Explain.
 - Williams states, "So much of the racism, inequality, and violence Dr. King worked against continue to poison society. If we are truly to honor his legacy, we must work to end these ills each and every day." What do you think she means? How do we accomplish this?
 - Martin Luther King, Jr. was a person, a citizen, just like any of us sitting in this room. Yet, he was able to illicit change in the society in which he lived. What did MLK do and inhibit that changed the society in which he lived? In what way can we as individuals create change in our own societies?
 - How might our lives be different today if not for the work of MLK and fellow civil rights activists?
 - What other citizens have made a difference in their societies, simply by being active rather than apathetic, locally, nationally, and globally? Explain.
 - Why is it important to learn about MLK? Why is his work relevant to us today?
5. End the seminar with a **closing question**, such as:
 - If you could teach anyone about MLK, who would you teach and why (who needs to know about him)?
6. For homework, give students a copy of the attached excerpt from Michael Eric Dyson's speech regarding how America has dehumanized Martin Luther King, Jr., taking power from his "I Have a Dream" speech. Instruct students to read the excerpt and answer the questions posed underneath. Instruct students to compare and contrast these thoughts to those posed in the class seminar regarding why MLK is most remembered for "I Have a Dream." (This activity can also be completed as a partner or group discussion in class.)

Culminating Activities

- Any questions in the above lesson can be used as written response assessments.
- Instruct students to write a speech Martin Luther King, Jr. might give today if he were alive, based on current events. Students can also write an interview between a reporter from today and Dr. King, showing an interpretation of how he would respond to questions related to current events. Students can share their speeches or interviews out loud.

Honoring King's Dream Every Day
by Dana Williams

January 2004 -- As the nation prepares for the one-day holiday celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Tolerance.org's parenting columnist explores ways parents and caregivers can help kids honor his dream every day.

I was 9 years old when Ronald Reagan signed the legislation creating Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

But it would be many, many more years before my class, school, community and even state would come to embrace the day set aside to honor a man who dared to dream that America could one day fulfill its promise of freedom and equality for all.

I still remember teachers who merely sent us home with an MLK worksheet to color. I remember the textbooks that reserved a brief paragraph or two to "educate" us about the man who led this nation's charge for civil rights, for human rights. I remember the dash to squeeze a lesson or two on Dr. King into Black History Month, as though his teachings were neither important nor applicable the other 11 months of the year.

But I have other memories, too, memories for which I will always be thankful.

Growing up in Montgomery, Ala., I was raised upon hallowed civil rights ground. The exact spot where Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus, sparking the Montgomery Bus Boycott, was just across town. So was the church where Martin Luther King, Jr. served as pastor from 1954 to 1960.

And growing up black, I was raised in a family — immediate and extended — that always made sure I knew the importance of the values and causes Dr. King and other leaders of the movement championed. Holiday or no holiday, my family held his legacy and teachings in high regard.

I remember sitting on my grandfather's lap listening to stories of racism and oppression — like how he earned a college degree in 1953 but struggled for years to serve as something besides a cook. I remember my grandmother pointing out the shop where she bought my mother new Sunday shoes each year — the store owned by a local Jewish family who didn't refuse service to black customers.

And I remember riding in the backseat of my mother's car with my brother and sister, singing along to Stevie Wonder's "Happy Birthday", a song celebrating Dr. King and urging a holiday in his honor.

These memories symbolize my family's struggles, all our struggles, to overcome oppression, to work together as brothers and sisters and to sing in the midst of sorrow.

For me, they tie together the importance of all that Dr. King worked for. And they have helped me form the values that shape my own life and influence how I raise my son.

I am pleased that now, during my son's childhood, most of the nation has finally come to embrace the day set aside to celebrate the life of Dr. King. Still, there are many who not only resist this one-day observance, but also the dream it honors.

In fact, at my son's school, and many other Southern schools, the day also is reserved to honor Robert E. Lee, a hero of the Confederacy.

So much of the racism, inequality and violence Dr. King worked against continue to poison society. If we are truly to honor his legacy, we must work to end these ills each and every day.

Source: <http://www.tolerance.org/parents/kidsarticle.jsp?p=0&ar=18>

Happy Birthday, by Stevie Wonder

You know it doesn't make much sense
There ought to be a law against
Anyone who takes offense
At a day in your celebration
'Cause we all know in our minds
That there ought to be a time
That we can set aside
To show just how much we love you
And I'm sure you will agree
It couldn't fit more perfectly
Than to have a world party on the day you came to be

Chorus
Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday

I just never understood
How a man who died for good
Could not have a day that would
Be set aside for his recognition
Because it should never be
Just because some cannot see
The dream as clear as he
That they should make it become an illusion
And we all know everything
That he stood for time will bring
For in peace our hearts will sing
Thanks to Martin Luther King

Chorus

Why has there never been a holiday
Where peace is celebrated
all throughout the world

The time is overdue
For people like me and you
You know the way to truth
Is love and unity to all God's children
It should be a great event
And the whole day should be spent
In full remembrance
Of those who lived and died for the oneness of
all people
So let us all begin
We know that love can win
Let it out don't hold it in
Sing it loud as you can

Chorus

We know the key to unity of all
People
Is in the dream that you had so
Long ago
That lives in all of the hearts
Of people
That believe in unity
We'll make the dream become
A reality
I know we will
Because our hearts tell us so

Name: _____

Michael Eric Dyson on Martin Luther King

“Martin Luther King, Jr., kept getting up morning after morning, knowing they [the FBI and other government agencies] were after him, knowing they were possessed of this zealous intensity that was illegal and immoral! And so he was a danger to America. Why? Because he loved democracy so much he wanted to see it become real. He wanted to march democracy from parchment to pavement. He wanted to see it become a reality in this nation. That’s why he had a dream.

But America has frozen him. Now they freeze King in this posture of dreaming before the sunlit summit of expectation at the height of his national fame in Washington, D.C., where he said, “I have a dream.” He said more than that. We ought to have a moratorium on that speech for the next ten years. I don’t want to hear it no more! And if you’re gonna play the speech, play the other parts of the speech: “We have come to the nation’s capital to cash a check marked ‘insufficient funds.’ ” [In other words,] “Where’s my money?!” That’s the part we ought to play. Right? We ought to play the part where King says, “The foundations of this nation will continue to shake.” He said, “The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of this nation until the Negro is granted his full citizenship rights.” Play that part, too!”

1. How does Dyson feel about the frequent attention given to Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech?
2. Why is Dyson angry the media only focuses on a limited part of the “I Have a Dream” speech?
3. Why do you think the media chooses to play the section of the speech where MLK says “I have a dream...” more so than the other parts Dyson alludes to? How does the media effect the perception we gain of public figures?
4. Interpret what Dyson believes Martin Luther King, Jr.’s complete message was.

Source: <http://www.npr.org/search.php?text=michael+dyson> (Source Link not working)