Lesson Plan: Nonviolent Resistance

Registering to vote and attending mass meetings were central aspects of the African American Freedom Struggle
Drawing by Evan Bissell

Introduction
In partnership with Beacon Press, we've created a series of six lessons as a companion to A Time to Break Silence: The Essential Works of Martin Luther King, Jr., for Students. This lesson, Nonviolent Resistance, focuses on Dr. King’s “The Sword that Heals” and asks student to listen to interviews with veterans of the freedom struggle as they discuss the role of nonviolent direct action.

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Subject: English Language, U.S. History
Grades: 6-8, 9-12

Essential Question
Is it possible for nonviolent direct action to transform a community?

Lesson Activities
Part One: Primary Source Analysis
Part Two: “The Sword That Heals”
Part Three: Philosophy or Strategy?
Part One: Primary Source Analysis

King and Bayard Rustin address a group of Watts district residents in Los Angeles, California on 18 August 1965. Dr. King spoke only a few blocks away from the worst damage left in the wake of the 1965 Watts Riots.
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Instructions

Split the class in half. Each half will receive either a copy of Six Principles of Nonviolence or Six Steps for Nonviolent Direct Action. In pairs, ask students to read and analyze the handout. Encourage them to write their thoughts and questions in the margins. After they have finished, have each pair seek out another pair with the other handout. Ask them to teach each other about their handout so that by the end of the activity everyone is familiar with both "The Six Principles of Nonviolence" and "The Six Steps on Nonviolent Direct Action."

Materials

- Handout: Six Principles of Nonviolence
- Handout: Six Steps for Nonviolent Direct Action

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Part Two: “The Sword That Heals”

Instructions
1. Read the selection, “The Sword That Heals,” from A Time to Break Silence: The Essential Works of Martin Luther King, Jr., for Students. Ask students to identify quotes that connect with the “Six Steps for Nonviolent Direct Action.”
2. Ask students to research other direct action campaigns: Montgomery Bus Boycott, Birmingham Campaign, Mississippi Freedom Summer, Greensboro Lunch Counter Sit-ins, Freedom Rides. The King Encyclopedia is a good place to begin. Many of these events are found in the “Tactics of the Movement” theme on the Freedom's Ring: King's "I Have a Dream" Speech. Encourage your students to think beyond the Civil Rights Movement and choose current issues important to them.
3. Identify the steps of each of these events based on the “Six Steps for Nonviolent Direct Action.”

Materials
- Freedom's Ring: King's "I Have a Dream" Speech
- Handout: Six Steps for Nonviolent Direct Action

Part Three: Philosophy or Strategy?

Instructions
1. Read about and listen to reflections of direct action campaigns from Freedom's Ring: King’s “I Have a Dream” Speech. Start with the phrases “soul force” and “to dramatize.”
2. Discuss the following question: Did activists see nonviolent direct action as a successful strategy or a way of life?

Materials
- Freedom's Ring: King's “I Have a Dream" Speech