

Eastside Literacy Talk Time Winter 2006

Topic: Martin Luther King, Jr. & Civil Rights

Let's get started...

Before you begin discussing today's topic, brainstorm a list of basic rights that you think all people should have.

New words and Idioms:

Civil Rights, Civil Rights Movement, discrimination, prejudice, segregation, desegregation, equality, protest, demonstration, boycott, nonviolence, peaceful, legal, illegal, justice, Affirmative Action, handicap, disability, diversity, racism, hate crimes, controversial, recognize, community service, sit-in, march, etc.

Background:

In the U.S. civil rights are usually thought of as the specific rights guaranteed by the Constitution: freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to due process of law and the right to equal protection under the law.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a very important leader in the American Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King promoted African-American voter registration, desegregation, and better education and housing throughout the Southern United States. He dedicated his life to achieving his belief that *all people had the right to equal treatment under the law*. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law. It guaranteed that "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination." In the US, we celebrate the life and achievements of Dr. King on the third Monday in January. This day is called Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

In many American cities before the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, African Americans and white Americans could not go to the same schools or eat in the same restaurants. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made segregation in public places and discrimination in education and employment illegal.



In pairs for 5 minutes, ask and answer these questions:

Martin Luther King, Jr. made a very famous speech called "I Have a Dream" in 1963. In his speech he said, "I have a dream that one day, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and girls and walk together as sisters and brothers."

How does this quote make you feel? Do you think that Dr. King's dream has come true? Why or why not?

Do you have dreams about the future? What are your dreams?

Share your partner's answers with the group.

Discussion Questions:

(Some of the discussion questions may be controversial. Our goal is for students and group leaders to be able to discuss issues freely and respectfully, and to recognize that every person is entitled to his or her own opinion.)

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Do you think that Americans have different rights from people in your native country? Which rights are different and which are the same?

What does freedom of speech mean to you?

What does the word "discrimination" mean to you?

Employment laws prevent discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, national origin, physical disability, and age. Can you think of an example of why someone might be discriminated against when applying for a job?

Have you ever been discriminated against? How did you feel? What did you do?

In the US, discrimination is illegal. Is discrimination legal or illegal in your original country?

Are people of different races, cultures, or religions segregated (separated) in your country? How do you feel about segregation?

Martin Luther King Jr. believed in trying to change society and its laws through nonviolent means. He studied the life of Mahatma Gandhi, a leader in India, who believed that no one should use violence to protest injustice. Do you think that peace, love and nonviolent demonstrations can be powerful weapons?

In 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, ending laws that sent African American and white American students to separate schools. Do students of different cultures in your country go to the same schools?

Do you think that Americans have different rights from the people in your native country? What rights are different? What rights are similar?

Do you think that all people should be treated equally? Why or why not?

Do you think that people are treated equally in your country? In the US?

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is a federal holiday, so all government offices and schools are closed. Some people believe that it should be "a day on, not a day off." Many people believe that Americans should spend the day doing community service or volunteer work.

What do you think?

Have you ever done community service or volunteer work? How did it make you feel?

How did you spend Martin Luther King, Jr. Day this year?

Did you celebrate a holiday in your country that is similar to Martin Luther King, Jr. Day? What is the name of the holiday? When is it celebrated? How is it celebrated?

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How does this quote make you feel? Do you think that Dr. King's dream has come true? Why or why not?