

Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

<p>Title of Lesson: Dr. King’s Leadership in the Aftermath of the Bombing of Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church</p>		
<p>Lesson By: Debbie Toran</p>		
<p>Grade Level/ Subject Areas: Middle School/Social Studies</p>	<p>Class Size: May be modified for any class</p>	<p>Time/Duration of Lesson: 2 55 minute periods –can be modified</p>
<p>Guiding Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. use his leadership to help with healing? • After the bombing at Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, what helped Dr. King and thousands of African Americans avoid bitterness, or retaliatory violence? • How did Martin Luther King use his philosophy of nonviolent protest after the deaths of the church girls? 		
<p>Lesson Abstract: This lesson has students analyze the courage that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers had after the bombing at Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, which killed four girls. Students will contemplate how Dr. King and other African Americans were able to continue on, keeping the focus on nonviolent protest and avoiding hatred, bitterness, and retaliatory violence after this tragic and violent act.</p>		
<p>Lesson Content:</p> <p>Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was a significant leader in the struggle for civil rights for millions of African Americans and people of color during the twentieth century. Dr. King was highly inspired by the beliefs of Mohandas Gandhi in the use of nonviolent protest. Gandhi led thousands of Indians in nonviolent protests against British colonial rule. He believed in ahimsa, nonviolence in thoughts, words, and actions. Gandhi led protests to unjust taxes and laws, with marches, fasts, and acts of civil disobedience. All of these actions were inspiring to Martin Luther King. He decided to take a sojourn to India, which inspired him even further in his hope for a brighter, more equal future for all Americans. “I left India more convinced than ever before that nonviolent resistance was the most potent weapon available to the oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.” (Carson 134)</p> <p>On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his moving “I Have a Dream” speech to the thousands who had participated in the March on Washington, a declaration of a need for equality in jobs and civil rights. His historic speech inspired and empowered many in the quest for equality. Sadly, weeks later a church bombing almost crushed the spirits of those that were just uplifted.</p> <p>On September 15, 1963, approximately 400 people filled the pews at Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church for Sunday services. The Sunday school lesson entitled, “The Love That Forgives”, came from the fifth chapter of Matthew in the bible (Time, 17). At 10:22 a.m. a</p>		

bomb exploded, sending stone chunks, bricks, glass, and metal debris into the air (Time, 17). Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley all lost their lives from this senseless and hateful act. All but one was at the young age of fourteen. Denise was only eleven. A woman stood in the street with her feet covered in glass, crying out, "In church! My God, you're not even safe in church!" (Newsweek, 21)

Frank Newton, chairman of Birmingham's Community Affairs Committee, said, "The bombing of the church brought us to the lowest point that could be reached" (U.S. News and World Report, 39) King spoke to reporters that Birmingham was now "in a state of civil disorder," an "emergency situation" (Garrow, 292). King contacted President John F. Kennedy requesting a meeting with Birmingham black leaders immediately. Kennedy made a statement denouncing the church bombing, stating, "Public disparagement of law and order has encouraged violence which has fallen on the innocent." (Garrow, 292)

On January 30, 1956, Martin Luther King's home had been bombed, so he knew from a personal standpoint the feeling of this type of victimization. However, his wife and daughter were fortunately not hurt or killed in the blast. Addressing the angry crowd that had gathered at his home that night, King responded, "We believe in law and order. Don't get panicky. Don't do anything panicky at all. Don't get your weapons. He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword" (Carson, 80).

A month later in the New York Times, King further expressed his beliefs in nonviolence. He said, "If we are arrested every day, if we are exploited every day, if we are trampled over every day, don't ever let anyone pull you so low as to hate them. We must use the weapon of love. We must have compassion and understanding for those who hate us. We must realize so many people are taught to hate us that they are not totally responsible for their hate. But we stand in life at midnight, we are always on the threshold of a new dawn (Carson, 81).

The deaths of the four young girls truly tested the community. Regardless of this violent act upon innocent lives, Martin Luther King still held true to his nonviolent beliefs. Dr. King spoke at a funeral for three of the girls. A family of one of the girls did succumb to the bitter feelings that Martin Luther King preached against, and chose not to be a part of the services (King, 226).

Before Martin spoke at the funeral, author John Killens stated, "Negroes must be prepared to protect themselves with guns." In response, Denise McNair's father said, "I'm not for that. What good would Denise have done with a machine gun in her hand?" (King, 226)

In the eulogy, King said, "These children-unoffending, innocent, and beautiful-were the victims of one of the most vicious, heinous crimes ever perpetrated against humanity. Yet they died nobly. They are the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity...So in spite of the darkness of this hour we must not despair. We must not become bitter; nor must we harbor the desire to retaliate with violence." (Washington, 221-222)

A nonviolent campaign took a great deal of thought and planning. Dr. King believed in six steps to an effective nonviolent campaign:

1. Information Gathering
2. Education

3. Personal Commitment
4. Negotiation
5. Direct action
6. Reconciliation

(Washington, 290)

King also believed in six principles of nonviolence:

1. Nonviolence is a Way of Life for Courageous People.
2. The Beloved Community is the Goal.
3. Attack forces of Evil, Not Persons Doing Evil.
4. Accept Suffering without Retaliation for the Sake of the Cause to Achieve a Goal.
5. Avoid Internal Violence of the Spirit as well as External Physical Violence.
6. The Universe is on the Side of Justice.

(King, 71-81)

Dr. King led thousands of Americans in nonviolent protests, including marches, sit-ins, jail, and boycotts. He continually preached nonviolence when acts of violence were thrust upon himself, his family, and many others in the African American community. Through Dr. King's efforts, sacrifices, leadership, and inspiration, he uplifted and healed so many, leaving behind a lasting legacy in the quest for equality and justice for all.

California Content Standards:

- 6.7.6 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures in the development of Rome, in terms of the origins of Christianity in the Jewish Messianic prophecies, the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as described in the New Testament, and the contribution of St. Paul the Apostle and later St. Augustine to the definition and spread of Christian beliefs (e.g., belief in the Trinity, resurrection, salvation)
- 7.2.2 Trace the origins of Islam and the life and teachings of Muhammad, including Islamic teachings on the connection with Judaism and Christianity.
- 7.9.2 Describe the theological, political, and economic ideas of the major figures during the Reformation (e.g., Desiderius Erasmus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Tyndale)

Materials Needed:

- History text
- Paper
- Pencil/pen
- Copies of Eulogy for the Martyred Child
- Fishbowl observation sheet

Suggested Teaching Activities:

*After teaching the content, have students reflect, write about, and discuss the following questions:

1. From your history text, books, news articles, video footage, or movies/television, find common experiences of individuals who stood strong in their values in the face of adversity. What struggles did they face? What kept them from giving up?
2. Considering the specific experiences and sacrifices that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. faced, what would be the most difficult challenges for you (mental, physical or both) to handle and remain strong as a leader regardless of the challenge? Could you have done the same if you were in any of his situations?
3. Consider the challenges and sacrifices individuals experienced in order to protect their rights and honor their beliefs. Are there rights and beliefs that you would be willing to endure suffering and sacrifices for?
4. Considerable planning and strategizing went into the many nonviolent protests put on by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and thousands of his followers. What action plan would you take to uphold your rights and beliefs?
5. Make comparisons of leadership in the face of adversity. Compare and contrast the actions and reactions of Dr. King with other leaders in trying situations that you have learned about this year: Jesus, Muhammad, Joan of Arc, and Martin Luther.

*In partners, have students write a dialogue between two people that begins in a confrontational manner and ends nonviolently. Have partners share their dialogues with the class.

*Form students into groups of three or four. Give each group one of King's six principles of nonviolence written on an index card. Depending on the number of students in your class, you will need to give more than one group the same principle. Have each group discuss the meaning of the principle that they have. Students can work together to write a paragraph response of that principle in relation to the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Have each group read their response aloud.

*Have students read the eulogy for the four girls that were killed in the church bombing. Have a fish bowl discussion. Form a large circle with the whole class. Students count off "1", "2" around the whole circle. Have all of the ones bring their chairs to the center of the circle, forming a smaller inner circle. Add one additional "hot seat" chair. All of the twos stay in the outer circle. Each person in the outer circle chooses someone in the inner circle to observe. On an observation sheet, s/he checks off when the person speaks, interrupts, looks at other speakers, uses gestures, engages in side conversations, etc. A two can speak as well, if s/he sits in the extra "hot seat" chair. If conversation wanes, ask a question for the group to respond to. At some point have the two circles switch places so students experience both discussion and observation activities.

*Have students pretend they are living during 1963 in Birmingham, Alabama. They need to

write a letter to a friend or relative who is filled with anger and ready to react with violence, explaining the justification for a nonviolent response to the church bombing. They should explain the purpose behind King's philosophy of nonviolent protest. They should make predictions of what would happen if the community was encouraged to react violently.

Bibliography:

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The Birmingham church bombing occurred on September 15, 1963, when a bomb exploded before Sunday morning services at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama—a church with a predominantly Black congregation that also served as a meeting place for civil rights leaders. Four young girls were killed and many other people injured. In the aftermath of the bombing, thousands of angry Black protesters gathered at the scene of the bombing. When Governor Wallace sent police and state troopers to break the protests up, violence broke out across the city; a number of protesters were arrested, and two young African American men were killed (one by police) before the National Guard was called in to restore order. The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing was a white supremacist terrorist bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, on Sunday, September 15, 1963. Four members of a local Ku Klux Klan chapter planted 19 sticks of dynamite attached to a timing device beneath the steps located on the east side of the church. Described by Martin Luther King Jr. as "one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity", the explosion at the church killed four girls and injured many others. The Birmingham church bombing became a galvanizing event in the civil rights movement.

Birmingham's "Fifth Girl": The story of Sarah Collins Rudolph. Ms. Collins Rudolph simply wanted to do what so many other little girls across Alabama were doing—attend a church service, reads the letter from Rudolph's attorneys, who are working pro bono, to Alabama Gov. The 16th Street Baptist Church had become a staging ground in early 1963 for a campaign to desegregate the city led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and local minister Fred Shuttlesworth. That May, Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor had directed his forces to sic dogs on the young civil rights demonstrators and blast them with fire hoses during the Children's Crusade near Kelly Ingram Park. The 16th Street Baptist Church was repaired and reopened for regular services on Sunday, June 7, 1964. Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. A week later, the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church would bring Birmingham's summer of hate to a deadly peak. The Church Bombing. Aftermath and Investigation. Soon after the bombing, the streets around the 16th Street Baptist Church filled with thousands of black protesters. Violence broke out around the city after Alabama Governor George Wallace, who had promised voters, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," sent 300 state troopers and 500 National Guardsmen to break up the demonstrations. Dozens of protesters were arrested and one young black man was killed by the police. Dr. King's demonstrations and boycotts, by shutting down the city's business district, showed that segregation was impractical. The deaths of the children galvanized the consciences of many Southern whites and forced them to admit segregation was also immoral. On the day that the 16th Street Baptist Church was bombed, I was a student at an all-white Methodist college located 24 blocks from the church. In the years that followed, the 16th Street church case would become one of the enduring interests of my career as a reporter. Over and over, I kept returning to the crime and its aftermath, picking up scraps of information that whetted my appetite to know the whole story.