



Beacon Press Teachers' Guide

Why We Can't Wait Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Guide written by Kimberly N. Parker, Ph.D.

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A Note to Teachers

Why We Can't Wait finds Martin Luther King, Jr. confident, poised and prepared to combat segregation in Birmingham, AL. In this account, MLK details the brutality of mayor Bull Connor, infamous for turning water hoses on unarmed protestors, and the bravery of ordinary citizens who were undeterred in their commitment to justice. This volume contains "Letter from Birmingham Jail," one of MLK's most famous declarations about racial inequality. MLK also notes the wisest decision he made during the Birmingham struggle, that of involving young people who invigorated the protests and reminded everyone about the importance of involving youth in working for social change. Drawing on the importance of youth enables teachers to make visible the lineage between advocating for racial and social injustice from 1963 to today, and the power-and importance-of young people to assume that mantle.

Why We Can't Wait is useful for all curriculum units, discussions, and investigations that grapple with the issues of justice and injustice, and this text encourages students to think deeply about what it means to pursue nonviolence in words and in action. Though written in the 1960s, it is impossible to read *Why We Can't Wait* and not draw parallels to today. It is relevant for today's students, as they find their way and seek to add their own voices to the world. *Why We Can't Wait* provides a compelling rationale for helping students think through how to effect substantive change.

How to Use This Guide

Why We Can't Wait is appropriate for grades 9-12, and for the English and History classrooms. This guide is divided into four parts: pre-reading activities; summaries of the chapters and teaching suggestions; post-reading activities; and resources. Pre-reading activities are intended to build students' prior knowledge and provide points of entry prior to reading the text. Summaries and teaching suggestions include what happens in the chapter as well as various activities that teachers can use to engage students in critical thinking about the chapter. Post-reading activities are designed to help students synthesize their reading and make connections to other aspects of their learning. Finally, resources are included for extended study about the text. Teachers can break up the reading based on their allocated time periods. The chapters can be broken up to be adapted to classroom instructional time.

Pre-Reading Activities

1. Predictions: Visit the Birmingham, AL Civil Rights Institute online (<http://www.bcri.org/index.html>) and select 10-12 images from the resource gallery. In pairs, students will look at the images and predict connections between the images and the text.
2. Writing Prompt: Ask students to write what they know about Martin Luther King, Jr. Teachers can ask additional questions: How did they learn about MLK? Do they think he is still important today? Allow students to share their responses in small groups and/or whole class discussions.

3. Analysis: Teachers will give students a copy of a freedom song (see Bernice Johnson Reagon's reflection about freedom songs on the PBS website Eyes on the Prize: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/reflect/r03_music.html) and ask students to analyze the song for meaning. Additional questions teachers might ask: why would a group of people sing this song? If you were singing this song, how would it make you feel, particularly if you were singing it with a group of your friends? Would it make you feel brave? Afraid? Teachers might also choose to play the song for students to accompany their reading of the song.
4. Setting the Scene: Teachers and students will read Birmingham segregation laws (available at: <http://www.crmvet.org/info/seglaws.htm>). Teachers will ask students to either discuss or write their reactions to the laws and discuss their responses.
5. Concept Map Activity: In groups of four, students discuss the relationships among these words: justice, nonviolence, boycott, racism, segregation, freedom, and resistance. What connections do these words have with one another? Students will create a visual to show how these words interact.
6. Technology Incorporation: Using either Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net/>) or Tagxedo (<http://www.tagxedo.com/>), teachers may copy and paste parts of the text into a program. Once the words are displayed, teachers will lead students in a discussion and exploration about which words are displayed the most and what that might suggest about the text.

Language

The text contains words that teachers might use to assist students in their vocabulary development. A list of words, including page numbers, is included in the appendix of this guide. Some ways teachers might incorporate these vocabulary words include:

1. Selecting words and grouping in "families" encourages students to learn the words on a continuum. Teachers are encouraged to help students understand the meaning and relationship of the words in connection with each other.
2. Decide which words are crucial for students' understanding of the text and pre-teach those words.
3. Relate the new words to ones students might already know. Teachers might press students to explain the connection between the words.
4. Teachers might want students to learn what the word means as well as what it does not mean.
5. Teachers might also encourage students to actively use the words they are learning (i.e. in writing assignments, during discussions, etc.) to increase their comfort and familiarity with the words.
6. Teachers might encourage students to use a vocabulary journal for the new words they learn. Potential journal entries could include word, part of speech, usage, synonyms, antonyms, sentences, etc. Teachers should encourage students to draw on their vocabulary journal regularly.

Summaries and Teaching Suggestions

Ongoing Activities

Throughout the reading of the text, it is important to help students keep track of the names and locations mentioned throughout the text. The following activities can be used to help students deepen their understanding as they read.

1. **Timeline:** Instruct students to keep a timeline of events as they read. Teachers might wish to provide students with a graphic organizer that allows them to keep track of times and dates, or else students can be instructed to keep track independently. The teacher might also want to create a bulletin board where students can add events, pictures, newspaper clippings, etc. that helps them make connections between the text and the present.
2. **History/Story Maps:** Teachers may advise students to keep history maps as they read to improve their understanding of events. These maps ask students to identify key historical events, what caused the event, the important people involved, and how the event was resolved.
3. **Problem-Solution Charts:** MLK discusses several reasons he chooses nonviolent action and civil disobedience. Teachers may assign students to create a chart (two-column notes) where they list the problems on one side and solutions on the other side to provide students with a visual representation of consequences, causes and solutions.
4. **Summarizing:** Teachers might encourage frequent comprehension checks for students as they read the text. Some summarizing strategies include think-write-pair-shares, quick writing, turning passages from the text into summaries that are concise and accurate, etc.
5. **Double Entry Journals:** Students use a notebook to record textual impressions of what they read. Using two columns, the student records a quotation in the left hand column and responds to the quotation in the right-hand column.
6. **Document Analysis:** Students can be taught to critically evaluate the images included in the text. The National Archives has several different handouts for teachers to help students with the analysis (<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/>).

Introduction by Dorothy Cotton (ix-xiii)

Summary: Dorothy Cotton authors the introduction to the text. Cotton, who worked closely with King, was the Education Director for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and explains being present when King decided to proceed with a protest that would land him in prison. Cotton notes, "Martin's decision to go to jail was a crucial turning point for the civil rights struggle." Yet, as King himself explains, the decision to be incarcerated allowed him to demonstrate his belief in the importance of freedom and justice. Cotton explains how Freedom Songs bolstered the hope of her and other supporters, and concludes with the assertion that the messages from *Why We Can't Wait* are relevant and as urgent today as they were in Birmingham in 1963.

Discussion Questions

1. Cotton is a woman who was involved in the Civil Rights Movement (CRM). What does it suggest about her role, and her importance, that she authors this introduction rather than one of the male voices of the CRM?
2. Think about the relationship that Cotton describes between freedom songs and the decision of MLK to press forward with the boycott and go to jail. How did she, and others, draw strength from these songs?

Critical Thinking Activities

1. Research Dorothy Cotton. What was her connection to MLK? Why is she appropriate to write the introduction?
2. Create a glossary of people who are mentioned in each chapter and research their importance. Contrast what you learn in your research about them to King's comments and interactions with them.
3. Watch the Spike Lee documentary *Four Little Girls* (1997). Write a review of the documentary that also expands on the ideas from *Why We Can't Wait*.
4. Cotton discusses how freedom songs sustained nonviolent efforts. Listen to a selection of freedom songs (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=2269>). What do you notice? What words are repeated frequently? What do you notice about rhythm? How do you feel listening to the songs? How might those who sang these songs regularly have felt, particularly as they prepared for upcoming challenges?

Introduction by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1-4)

Summary: MLK sets the stage for Birmingham, Al in 1963. He describes the racial disparities besetting African Americans in the United States and argues, "Equality had never arrived. Equality was a hundred years late" (p. 3).

Discussion Questions

1. Why does MLK evoke an image of a boy and a girl when he talks about racial disparities? What effect does this have on the reader? Why doesn't he talk about men and women instead?
2. Compare the problems MLK outlines in 1963 to our current world. What similarities and differences do you notice, particularly in your own community?

Chapter I: The Negro Revolution: Why 1963? (5-19)

Summary: MLK makes the case for why African Americans are ready to demand equality. King provides important historical context for the upcoming nonviolent action through detailing the failure of *Brown v. Board of Education* to end segregated schools because of the Pupil Placement Law. He concludes that despite empty promises, African

Americans had been denied equality for too long, and the only way to create that equality was to demand it and use nonviolence resistance as the tool.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the mood that MLK creates in the beginning of this chapter when he talks about the summer? How does he contrast the pleasantness of the summer to the Negro Revolution?
2. How does MLK build suspense and tension in this chapter? What words do you find particularly powerful? Why?
3. Why were most White Americans unprepared for a Negro uprising?
4. Consider how MLK contrasts personal life-threatening injury to national violence. Are his comparisons more powerful because they are more personal? Why or why not?
5. Describe how states were able to use the Pupil Placement Law to avoid integration.
6. What did states and the federal government do to avert African American equality? Explain the different excuses these entities gave and MLK's responses to their hedging.
7. Why was nonviolent resistance the best action to use, according to MLK?
8. Describe MLK's outlook at the end of this chapter. Is he reluctant? Hesitant? What does his outlook suggest about the struggle ahead?

Critical Thinking Activities

1. Research *Brown vs. Board of Education*. What were the major points of the case? What was supposed to occur as a result of the case? Why was the phrase "all deliberate speed" difficult to enact?
2. Then and Now: MLK describes the conditions of African Americans in 1963 that demanded attention. What are the current conditions of African Americans in the United States? Create a two-column chart that depicts the differences and similarities between the two time periods. What can you determine based on what has changed and what remains the same?
3. Venn Diagram: MLK also discusses the lack of economic opportunities that beset African Americans. Create a venn diagram that records the challenges to African Americans in 1963 to those challenging African Americans today. What similarities and differences can you extract based on your diagram? How much has changed? What accounts for changes? What accounts for factors that remain unchanged? As an extension, what similarities do you notice about current economic conditions for working-class adults, African American men, older adults, and adolescents in comparison to 1963?
4. Begin to create a timeline of events. The first events should include historical events that MLK mentions prior to 1963. Update this timeline as you read.

Chapter II: The Sword That Heals (21-45)

Summary: MLK begins with a description of ways African Americans were thwarted in their attempts for parity, and then moves to an examination of different leaders who attempted to uplift Blacks. Despite efforts by Black Muslims to use violence, MLK contends that nonviolent resistance, accompanied by legal action, was the most appropriate method of assuring change. He concludes that because Birmingham remained one of the most segregated cities in the country, it was the best place to stage a nonviolent resistance movement.

Discussion Questions

1. List the different ways some attempted to "keep the Negro in his place" historically. What do you think would be some of the psychological effects from these attempts on African Americans?
2. Explain how police brutality functioned as a threat to African Americans. How did African American youth subvert police intentions? What was the message these young people delivered with their actions?
3. What is "soul force"? How did soul force differ from physical force? Why did MLK contend that soul force was more important to have than physical force?
4. What is tokenism? Why did MLK find it unacceptable?
5. MLK describes three men-Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey-who combated racial inequality. What does MLK think are the flaws of each man's goals?
6. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) assumed prominence in this chapter. Describe the significance of this organization, particularly as related to the challenges as described by MLK.
7. MLK explains his rationale for nonviolent resistance (NVR). What are the pros and cons of nonviolence? Why was NVR difficult for some to accept?
8. How does MLK tie NVR to military protest? How does he link it to Christianity? What do these associations do for his argument? Who is his audience? What do such associations also suggest about his skill as an orator and as a leader of a movement?
9. What is the difference between a violent army and a nonviolent army? Why does MLK say a nonviolent army is more powerful? Do you agree?
10. For what reasons did NVR fail to achieve national acceptance? What does this failure suggest about the movement, the leadership, the message? Do you think that the movement was unsuccessful? Support your reasons with evidence.
11. What lessons did MLK learn from previous NVR efforts in Albany? How did those successes and challenges from Albany influence his actions in Birmingham?
12. MLK writes, "The united power of southern segregation was the hammer. Birmingham was the anvil" (p. 45). Why was Birmingham an appropriate location for NVR?

Critical Thinking Activities

1. Research Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey. Create a graphic organizer that compares and contrasts each man's accomplishments.
2. Explore Jim Crow laws (<http://academic.udayton.edu/race/02rights/jcrow02.htm>). Select one law to closely examine. Summarize the law. Next, consider what rights the law limited. How would you have felt living with such law?
3. Research the Black Muslims. Produce a short presentation (PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.) that informs an audience about this group and includes why this group was opposed by MLK. Think, too, about MLK's indictment of militancy. For what reasons did he consider militancy an unsuccessful tactic?
4. Debate: Define violent action and moral force. Which is more powerful: violent action or moral force? Are there situations would one be more powerful than another?
5. Extension: Read (or reread) or watch *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, paying particular attention to the character of Atticus Finch. Why is he an example of moral force? Write a short response that demonstrates your answer to this question.
6. Examine the lyrics to Phil Ochs's song, "Talking Birmingham Jam" (available here: <http://www.metrolyrics.com/talking-birmingham-jam-lyrics-phil-ochs.html>). What is the vision of Birmingham that Ochs portrays in his song? What similarities do you notice between Ochs's song and MLK's words? Evaluate song as an effective medium for delivering a political message.

Chapter III: Bull Connor's Birmingham (47-61)

Summary: MLK describes the setting of Birmingham, under the rule of segregationist mayor Bull Connor. Connor wanted to limit national exposure that would inform others about the injustices that occurred, but MLK and Fred Shuttlesworth moved forward with integration efforts. MLK notes, "This city had been the country's chief symbol of racial intolerance" (p. 56). The chapter concludes with a thorough description of the strategies MLK and supporters incorporated in preparation for ending segregation in the city.

Discussion Questions

1. As MLK details the inequalities in Birmingham, he focuses on the plight of children. Why do you think he makes children the focus of his appeal?
2. Discuss the role of fear. What effect did it have on action (i.e. what did fear do to influence how White and Black citizens advocated for change in Birmingham?) and what effect did fear have on shaping citizens' response to segregation?
3. Analyze the role of Fred Shuttlesworth in agitating for social change. How did he help citizens mobilize against Connor's efforts to stop integration?
4. Chart the steps Shuttlesworth and MLK took before deciding to move to a combined-action campaign.
5. Why was Birmingham such an appropriate location for NVR?
6. What was "Project C"? What were the goals of this initiative?

7. How did MLK and his supporters learn from their mistakes in Albany? What changes did they make in Birmingham as a result of what they'd learned?
8. The initial focus of NVR was on the business community, specifically stores with lunch counters. Why were these places selected first?
9. Evaluate the Project C strategy. What were the strengths and challenges?
10. How were boycott plans changed by the elections? Why did the plans have to change?
11. Discuss how MLK and the SCLC garnered national support. Why was Harry Belafonte so important?
12. What did MLK do in the time between the election and the run-off?

Critical Thinking Activities

1. In the first part of this chapter, MLK recounts what it was like for a child to accompany his/her parents on segregated outings in Birmingham. Select one of these "outings" for a journal entry. Be sure to write from your five senses and accurately and thoroughly describe your outing, including interactions with White residents of Birmingham.
2. Research Bull Connor. Who was he? What was his background? How did he become mayor of Birmingham? Create a web page that includes information, video footage, and a critique of his leadership.
3. Select one of the many people mentioned in this chapter for further research. Present your findings in a Power Point, short speech, or podcast about their importance bringing integration to Birmingham.
4. Wyatt Walker was another integral member of the movement in Birmingham. Make a chart that lists his responsibilities. Then, determine how important his role was to the overall efforts.
5. Harry Belafonte was an integral supporter for MLK. Find out more about his Civil Rights contributions and his artistic performances and present in a Wiki.
6. The run-off election is scheduled for April 2. MLK and Shuttlesworth have sent out word about a meeting for all volunteers to prepare for launching a direct-action campaign. Write a journal entry from the perspective of MLK, Shuttlesworth, one of the people who attended the meeting or one of the people who received word but did not attend the meeting.

Chapter IV: New Day in Birmingham (63-84)

Summary: Despite an unclear resolution about who was going to be the new mayor, MLK galvanizes volunteers and begins a direct-action campaign to end segregation in Birmingham. Through extensive training and bolstered by Freedom Songs, MLK and his supporters prepared themselves for arrests and opposition. In a planned act of civil disobedience, MLK and Fred Shuttlesworth are arrested and MLK was placed in solitary confinement. After intervention from President Kennedy and Harry Belafonte, MLK is freed, and realizes the strength of his faith.

Discussion Questions

1. How did the two governments threaten MLK's attempts?
2. Discuss the strategies and actions of the direct-action campaign. Focus on the amount of planning required for these actions.
3. Who were the people who organized and sustained the effort? What were their roles?
4. As you read through the people involved, what omissions do you notice? Where are the women, for example? What do you think of these omissions?
5. Why was a nonviolent army different from a traditional army?
6. What did training sessions entail? Why was this training necessary?
7. How did MLK involve everyone in NVR, even those not able to demonstrate? What does this ability to find roles for everyone suggest about his leadership and the importance of involving many people within the movement?
8. Read the Commitment Card (p. 69). Which of the Ten Commandments do you think would be easiest for you to follow? Would you have been able to sign the card?
9. Why did MLK face opposition from other African Americans in Birmingham? How did this opposition impact MLK and SCLC efforts to organize? How does MLK regard the Black leaders who opposed him? How does MLK detail the opposition, and what explanations does he offer? How did they rebuild/regain support?
10. What is an outsider? Explore MLK's contention on page 74. Do you agree or disagree with his contention?
11. The lunch-counter sit-ins were only the first forms of NVR. What were some others? How did these multiple forms of resistance strengthen MLK's efforts?
12. How did Bull Connor attempt to respond to the arrests of Black protesters? Why was this response out of character for him?
13. Discuss how the injunction was an attempt to end NVR. How did MLK subvert the one issued by Bull Connor?
14. What is civil disobedience? Describe MLK's use of civil disobedience, his decision to employ it, and the impact of his use of it.
15. How does MLK convince himself that, despite having no money for bail, he must go to jail?
16. What happened when Coretta King intervened? What does this suggest about how MLK was regarded nationally?
17. How is MLK reassured that he is really not in solitary confinement?

Critical Thinking Activities

1. Conduct research on "freedom songs." What was their importance? Why was singing freedom songs such an important part of the movement? Present your findings and include songs that were sung.
2. You are 21-years old and have a sister who is a year younger. You have been selected to demonstrate, but your sister has not. She is saddened, making you

- question if you should accept the offer to begin the training. What do you do? What advice do you give to your sister?
3. Write a dialogue that might have happened between MLK attempting to convince one of the Birmingham business and professional people to support him.
 4. MLK's faith is tested in this chapter and he recounts feeling "alone in that crowded room" (p. 80) when faced with the possibility of not having enough money for bail. Write an interior monologue that captures MLK's worry.
 5. Find the lyrics of "We Shall Overcome." Write an analysis that draws parallels between the lyrics and the use of the song by MLK and his supporters.
 6. MLK describes the march that landed him in jail on page 81. Write a "You Are There" account as a participant in what MLK called "a beautiful march."
 7. As an extension, read excerpts from Thoreau's essay "On Civil Disobedience" and compare to MLK's reasons for invoking civil disobedience. What similarities and differences do you notice?

Chapter V: Letter from Birmingham Jail (85-109)

Summary: "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is one of MLK's most famous entreaties. Written while awaiting bail on the margins of a newspaper, MLK, who addresses his fellow clergymen, details his reasons for nonviolent action in Birmingham. He broadens his appeal to include the larger importance of justice and injustice, and strengthens his claims and rationale by invoking history. Additionally, MLK expresses his disappointment with White moderates and the White church, noting the dearth of White allies before concluding with a hope for solidarity and healing upon his release.

Discussion Questions

1. One of MLK's most famous lines is on page 87, when he declares, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." What does this line mean, and why is it still relevant?
2. What rhetorical devices are at work in this letter? How does MLK garner support for his cause?
3. MLK explains the four principles of a nonviolent campaign on page 87. How was each step enacted in Birmingham?
4. How does MLK explain the need for direct action?
5. What is "violent tension"? Why does MLK say it is necessary?
6. Read the paragraph on pages 91-92 aloud. What effect does reading it aloud have? Look closely at the punctuation. What is the impact of using semicolons rather than periods?
7. What is required to break an unjust law? Why is breaking an unjust law "expressing the highest respect for the law"?
8. How does MLK strengthen his claims about civil disobedience by invoking history? Do you think these invocations strengthen or weaken his argument? Explain.
9. Why is MLK disappointed with White moderates?

10. Think about how MLK describes time on page 98. How is time used as a metaphor? Do you find this use of time effective?
11. How does MLK reconcile himself to being labeled an extremist? What other extremists does he name? On page 101, he writes, "So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be." Reflect on this statement.
12. Why would MLK commend the police for brutality?
13. MLK draws on the weak and innocent (children, Black women) to evoke sympathy. What are the reasons he does this?

Critical Thinking Activities

1. Socratic Seminar: What is the difference between a just and an unjust law? Are there examples of just and unjust laws today? Explain.
2. Select 3-5 quotations from this chapter and illustrate them. Find examples that relate to Birmingham and today.
3. Write an essay that contrasts conditions in MLK's letter to an issue and its conditions within your world. If you were to create a form of nonviolent resistance to address those conditions, what would you do?

Chapter VI: Black and White Together (111-128)

Summary: Released from incarceration, MLK ratchets up the intensity of civil disobedience and NVR by involving young people, citing it as "one of the wisest moves we made." He details "D" Day, May 2, when more than 1,000 young people demonstrated and went to jail in the Children's March. Violence escalates in this chapter, and MLK details how protestors marched against vicious dogs, fire hoses and police opposition, placing Birmingham firmly in the national spotlight. With a tentative agreement to end segregation finally forged, White opposition returns before being defeated, leaving MLK to remark, "Once on a summer day, a dream came true. The city of Birmingham discovered a conscience" (p. 128).

Discussion Questions

1. Did MLK want to come out of prison? What ultimately compelled him to leave?
2. Explain MLK's decision to involve young people.
3. How were students recruited?
4. Think about the young people who participated in the movement. What words can you come up with to describe their importance? What character qualities do you think they had?
5. Describe the various ways young people got involved. Be sure to note the ages of young people.
6. What role did humor play in the youth's nonviolent resistance? Why was humor important for MLK to note?
7. Bull Connor was losing support from White citizens. Why was this loss of support so amazing? What were the reasons? What did White neutrality indicate?

8. Describe civil contempt. Why did MLK define it as "figuratively hold[ing] the jailhouse keys in the palm of your hand"?
9. Why was Burke Marshall surprising and significant?
10. How did the song "We Shall Overcome" calm MLK and others in the aftermath of the bombing? What does this ability suggest about the power of song? Of this particular song?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. This chapter addresses the reality of what happens when young people are involved in effecting social change. What other contexts can you find in which young people were integral in organizing for change? Present your findings.
2. Bull Connor intensified his attempts to end protests. Create a photo montage to accompany the descriptions of the brutality protesters faced (potential images: <http://www.viscom.ohiou.edu/oldsite/moore.site/Pages/birmingham1.html>).
3. Watch a segment from Eyes on the Prize to give students a visual image of the brutality protesters endured.
4. Visit the archives of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and listen to oral narratives from protesters (http://www.bcri.org/archives/oral_history_project/Introduction.html), Civil Rights Movement Veterans (<http://www.crmvet.org/index.htm>), Take Stock Photos (<http://www.takestockphotos.com/imagepages/collections.php>) and the photography of Charles Moore (<http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/features/moore/mooreIndex.shtml>). Ask students to use what they've learned to inform their understanding of MLK's accounts. If accessing the Take Stock Photos, ask students to explore other freedom struggles and note similarities.
5. Watch the documentary *Mighty Times: The Children's March* (available free to teachers from Teaching Tolerance <http://www.tolerance.org/kit/mighty-times-childrens-march>).
6. Recreate the conversation between MLK and his brother on page 125. Be sure to incorporate the emotion described by MLK.

Chapter VII: The Summer of Our Discontent (129-148)

Summary: MLK broadens his reflection about the freedom struggle of African Americans in Birmingham. Opposition and resistance to integration continued, with increasing violence. He notes the achievements of the movement while reminding that numerous challenges remained, leading up to the March on Washington near the end of the summer.

Discussion Questions

1. MLK begins the chapter with a graphic description of a young Black man killed by poison gas. Why begin with such a haunting image? How does the image set the tone for the chapter?

2. MLK writes on page 131, "In the summer of 1963, the Negroes of America wrote an emancipation proclamation to themselves." What does he mean?
3. What was the response to the settlement by White citizens? What did these responses indicate about the settlement? Who does MLK implicate in his condemnation of the response by White citizens?
4. MLK often locates events in Birmingham within a larger historical context, often of resistance. What is the effect of drawing on history in his argument? Does it strengthen or weaken his argument? What is the relationship between the historical events he recounts and Birmingham?
5. Is MLK optimistic near the end of the first section (pg. 135)? What does this paragraph suggest about him as a leader? As a part of the movement?
6. What is the difference between a social movement and a revolution?
7. MLK describes the remaining challenges on page 138. Have the goals been adjusted? Describe his outlook regarding the remaining work to be accomplished.
8. Why were moderates another form of resistance?
9. MLK uses the word "our" on page 143. How does the use of this word extend the cause to others?
10. Why was the March on Washington successful?
11. Why was the participation of the White church significant?

Critical Thinking Activities

1. Research the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. What were the primary aims of the legislation?
2. List the results of the movement on page 139. Which results do you find most effective? Do any of these results remain today? Why or why not?
3. Explore the March on Washington, noting the debate held by MLK and his supporters in section 4 of this chapter. Visit the NPR website (<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/march40th/>) for coverage of the 40th anniversary of the March as well as information about lingering issues.
4. Who was A. Philip Randolph? Research and present information about this important leader. Visit the A. Philip Randolph Institute (<http://www.apri.org/ht/d/Home/pid/212>) for information, pictures and videos.

Chapter VIII: The Days to Come (149-182)

Summary: MLK addresses the scars of racism that remain after Birmingham. He stresses urgency and reminds readers that African Americans cannot be denied equal rights based on what they learned through participation in nonviolent resistance. Refusing to allow efforts to wane and to allow African Americans to regress in their efforts for civil rights, MLK rejects compromise and resolves that all will continue fighting for what is owed Blacks in the United States. He continues that America must atone for injustices suffered by Blacks, including economic opportunities. He proposes a Disadvantaged Bill of Rights as well as details alliances necessary to assure progress. Finally, he articulates the implications of the Civil Rights struggle on a national and international scale and the legacy of nonviolent resistance.

Discussion Questions

1. What parallels does MLK draw between slaves who purchased their freedom and 1963?
2. MLK describes the difficult economic conditions of African American workers in 1963. How do these conditions compare to African American workers today?
3. MLK provides an answer to the question, "What more does the Negro want?" How does he answer this query?
4. What is a compromise? What does it mean? Why does MLK call compromising "profane and pernicious" (p. 155)?
5. Why did some try to create division among Blacks? Why did MLK say these efforts would be unsuccessful?
6. Reflect on the statement "Someone once wrote: 'When you are right, you cannot be too radical; when you are wrong, you cannot be too conservative'" (p. 158).
7. What is atonement? What would atoning for injustices suffered by Blacks entail?
8. What examples of programs for the deprived does MLK provide? How did these programs benefit particular groups?
9. What is the Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged? Who would benefit?
10. What is the condition of the White poor? Why would they also benefit from a Bill of the Disadvantaged?
11. Why is Southern acceptance of racial equality slow to come?
12. What will the freedom movement need to do to continue its progress?
13. What similarities does organized labor have with Black civil rights? Why does MLK say Blacks need to make alliances?
14. What is the role of the federal government?
15. How does MLK implicate everyone in JFK's death? Why? Do you think MLK is justified?
16. Why does MLK want Blacks to form political alliances?

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Design a response that answers this question, "How then can he [the Negro] be absorbed into the mainstream of American life if we do not do something special for him now, in order to balance the equation and equip him to compete on a just and equal basis?" (p. 159).
2. Research the debate about reparations. What are they? Who wants them? Who opposes them? How are reparations similar to what MLK suggests for African Americans? Stage a debate about whether or not reparations are needed, and, if so, what those reparations would entail.
3. Research the Wagner Act to understand why MLK wanted a similar plan.
4. Compare the legislation of Eisenhower to John F. Kennedy.
5. MLK notes a number of unsolved crimes of civil rights leaders. Who are these people? Conduct research and create a presentation that details the people and updates your audience on the status of solving their murders.

Culminating Essay Topics

1. Young people were an important catalyst in the efforts for equality in Birmingham. Evaluate the importance of their role and decide if you think involving young people was, indeed, the wisest decision MLK made.
2. What are the requisite skills needed to create social change? Are they inherent, or can they be cultivated? What are the most important skills one must have?
3. What problems could be addressed by nonviolent action? Select one issue and propose how nonviolent action could be used to solve it. Be sure to incorporate technology and other modes of communication you use frequently, as well as a rationale for how and why you would use each aspect of nonviolent resistance. In addition, propose an appropriate audience to present your proposal. If possible, work with your teacher and peers to present your proposal to that audience for feedback and to demonstrate what you've learned.
4. What are the larger contributions of the Civil Rights struggle? What evidence suggests that the Civil Rights struggle was a success? Was it a success? What must be done to continue the Civil Rights struggle today? What are the issues that need attention in your world?

Vocabulary

abhorrent (182)	disenchanted (33)	intransigent (121)	redress (144)
abysmally (48)	dismantling (137)	invigorate (65)	reiterate (102)
accord (122)	disperses (34)	jubilant (126)	renowned (139)
adamant (121)	disquieting (155)	judicious (42)	replete (155)
adamantly (132)	disunity (37)	lamentably (90)	repose (176)
adherents (145)	divest (33)	languish (40)	reprisals (123)
admonish (103)	doctrine (29)	latent (100)	repudiated (99)
adulation (65)	dormant (29)	laxity (104)	resilient (121)
adverse (116)	duchy (166)	leonine (156)	resolution (116)
agitators (22)	edict (10)	litigation (29)	resurgence (29)
alacrity (42)	egress (58)	luminous (15)	retaliation (34)
allegiance (32)	eloquence (139)	magnitude (17)	reticence (176)
amity (171)	elucidate (27)	maim (35)	retrogress (158)
annihilation (10)	elusive (28)	maliciously (77)	sacrosanct (6)
antebellum (137)	embroiled (136)	malignant (16)	scintillating (109)
antidotes (102)	eminent (172)	manumission (149)	secular (103)
apparatus (165)	emulate (99)	meticulously (58)	sociodramas (68)
apportion (151)	enjoining (49)	militated (132)	spasmodic (137)
apprehensive (51)	eradication (181)	minstrel (147)	spontaneity (135)
armament (120)	espousal (155)	mockery (23)	spurn (26)
aspirant (173)	ethos (34)	monolithic (168)	stratum (165)
asunder (157)	eventuate (142)	moratorium (54)	stringent (118)
atonement (132)	exhortation (39)	nullification (104)	stultified (166)
audacious (53)	extol (73)	oligarchy (133)	stupor (17)
auspices (126)	extremist (98)	ominous (55)	sublimely (95)

autocrat (157)	exuberance (112)	ordinance (64)	suppressed (35)
automation (17)	fallacious (39)	ostracism (51)	suppression (21)
axiom (30)	fervor (6)	palpable (158)	surlly (82)
barbarous (136)	forestall (54)	paradoxical (93)	surreptitious (34)
blithe (5)	formidable (67)	pendulum (10)	tactical (41)
bombast (43)	frenetic (5)	perilous (35)	tawdry (150)
burnish (36)	gainsaying (87)	pernicious (155)	tenacious (165)
callous (150)	gallows (129)	pessimistic (32)	thwarted (22)
capitulating (124)	galvanized (65)	phalanx (36)	tokenism (10)
carbine (36)	grapple (17)	pious (103)	transmute (35)
caste (28)	guise (29)	placid (5)	truce (120)
chattel (149)	harried (127)	poignant (150)	tumultuous (6)
chivalry (124)	harrowing (42)	populace (97)	turbulent (6)
clarion (104)	impertinent (158)	potentates (14)	tyranny (51)
cognizant (86)	impetus (54)	precepts (35)	unmalicious (24)
complacent (150)	implacable (44)	precipitate (97)	unswerving (10)
concoct (92)	imponderable (127)	precipitously (32)	vacillated (171)
conjoined (18)	impotent (36)	prevalent (51)	valiant (134)
connote (158)	impunity (50)	profane (155)	vanquished (134)
conspicuous (14)	incantations (65)	profundity (108)	veritable (121)
convocation (144)	incommunicado (81)	pugilistic (130)	vigorous (17)
corroboration (22)	incorrigible (99)	pugnacious (66)	vindicates (37)
countenance (140)	indomitable (52)	quelled (36)	vindictive (33)
counteract (28)	ingress (58)	query (90)	virulent (142)
cowed (51)	insinuate (117)	quixotic (32)	zeitgeist (100)
credo (34)	intangible (137)	radiant (147)	
deplore (16)	interposition (104)	recalcitrant (134)	
derivative (164)	interred (133)	recant (118)	
diminutive (124)	interspersed (81)	recourse (29)	

Resources

Print

- Grooms, Anthony. (2002). *Bombingham*. One World/Ballantine.
- Magoon, Kekla. (2010). *The Rock and the River*. Aladdin.
- Mayer, Robert H. (2008). *When the Children Marched: The Birmingham Civil Rights Movement*. Enslow Publishers.
- Partridge, Elizabeth. (2009). *Marching for Freedom: Walk Together Children and Don't You Grow Weary*. Viking Juvenile.
- Weatherford, Carole Boston. (2007). *Birmingham 1963*. Wordsong.

Web

- Civil Rights Digital Library contains digital video archives and a virtual library, including political cartoons: <http://crdl.usg.edu/>

- Citizen King Website by PBS details MLK's life after Montgomery. The site includes an interactive map of Civil Rights hotspots as well as more information on his philosophical influences: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/mlk/index.html>
- Encyclopedia of Alabama has useful information about Montgomery, integration, people involved, as well as ample pictures: <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Home.jsp>
- King Institute: contains numerous links related to and information about MLK and nonviolence; created and maintained by Claybourne Carson: <http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php>
- Back to Bombingham: Essay by Adam Cohen that details a return to Birmingham: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,986714,00.html>
- Teaching Tolerance has an array of teacher resources and teaching ideas appropriate for continuing to integrate principles of nonviolence and social justice into curriculum: <http://www.tolerance.org>

About the Author of This Guide:

Kimberly N. Parker, Ph.D. currently teaches English at Newton North High School in Newton, MA. She holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Illinois-Champaign Urbana and has expertise in literacy and African American young men. Dr. Parker has taught in urban public schools in Boston and has published articles and given professional development about the literacy practices of young people of Color.