

Eleven Days in the Life of Dr. King

A Multitude of Martins



Grades K & up

Core Content Area Social Studies

Themes Teamwork, Debunking Hero Myth, Social Movements, Division of Labor

Materials Dry erase board and markers

Photos of Dr. King working with others (here are a few options):

- <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2018/02/02/martin-luther-king-jr-timeline/1061525001/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Martin-Luther-King-Jr-Timeline>
- <https://why.org/articles/remembering-ongoing-work-women-civil-rights-movement/>
- <https://www.biography.com/news/martin-luther-king-jr-black-activists-civil-rights-movement>
- <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/02/john-lewis-martin-luther-king-jr/552581/>
- <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/gwens-take-remembering-and-reimagining-august-28-1963>

Optional Materials Copy of Program from the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963)

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/official-program-for-the-march-on-washington>

Background

One of the challenges of celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as an individual is to risk putting one person on a pedestal instead of acknowledging a social movement fueled by *many, many* people. In fact, when we elevate a single individual as being a larger-than-life hero, we create distance from the rest of us “little people.” It can suggest that the work of social change belongs to heroic figures rather than everyday citizens of all ages. However, the point of *11 Days in the Life of Dr. King* is more about engaging students as the inheritors of the “11th Day” – that is to say, their role in the on-going work of justice.

Dr. King was a public face in a broad social movement where countless people played important roles. Who were the folks who recruited for the marches, printed the signs, fed the activists, called legislators, walked instead of taking the bus...the list goes on.

Similarly, while MLK was a visionary and strategic leader, he is one person in a generations-long struggle for racial and economic justice in the United States. Who were the activists and organizers in the eras before Dr. King and who are the ones who have picked up the mantle of civil rights in the proceeding generations?

This lesson challenges students to see figures like Dr. King and events like the March on Washington as the tip of an iceberg of monumental civic activism. It revolves around the central questions of:

- What are the many ways people can contribute to a movement?
- How can I make a difference by working with others?

For primary grades: Consider framing the conversation around all the different roles it takes to make a community event happen. What are the personal and operational networks that need to be in place for something “big” to happen?

For older grades: Use the “organizational” framework above or research more deeply various leaders and collaborators in Dr. King’s time (list at end of this lesson)

Lesson Procedure

1.) Show picture of Dr. King working with others or in front of a sea of people (see links above)

Frame conversation: We often celebrate Dr. King as an individual. But, can people really make change by themselves?

What does this picture tell you about how Dr. King worked with others?

Describe the people in the picture. Who might they be and what are they doing?

Aside from the people seen here, who else might be part of the story?

What are the different jobs that had to be done to get the people in the picture to this moment?

2.) PRIMARY GRADES: Map out an assembly at your school

Imagine your class was in charge of welcoming community leaders to come speak at your school. What would be all the steps in welcoming the speakers and organizing the assembly?

- Who would plan when and where the assembly would take place?
- Who would write the invitations to the speakers?
- Who would plan where everyone would sit?
- How would you publicize the assembly? Will you invite families?
- Would you offer hospitality or food to the speakers? Who would get that ready?
- Will students speak or perform?
- How will you make sure everyone can see and hear? Do you need technical support?
- How would the space be decorated and who would do it? Are there signs to make?
- Do you need student monitors or ushers?

3.) OLDER GRADES: Primary Source – Program from March on Washington

Older grades could also plan an event, though maybe it is not just an assembly but a demonstration or march. In addition, they can use an historical primary source to extrapolate all the roles involved. Use the copy of the program from the famous 1963 March on Washington as an example of the many different people and roles that were part of the movement alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The program is in the National Archives at: <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/official-program-for-the-march-on-washington>

While many people remember Dr. King’s iconic “I Have a Dream” speech from this event, there were many others who spoke and who labored to make the event happen.

- What was the full name of the event?
- Who organized it?
- What happened in addition to Dr. King's speech?
- Were there only speeches or other presentations as well?
- Who else spoke or presented? What organizations did they represent?
- More than 250,000 people attended the March on Washington in 1963: What other roles were necessary to manage so many people in one space, to make sure they could hear and participate, to get them to Washington D.C. and house and feed them?
- Who do you think those attendees might have been and how might they have been working for the social change called for in his speech?

OLDER GRADE EXTENSIONS

- View footage from the March on Washington, paying attention to some of the other speakers and their messages.
- Research some of the other speakers and their organizations (a good example is the late Congressman John Lewis, who was a student speaker/organizer in 1963)
- Read late journalist Gwen Ifil's personal story of the March on Washington. Consider how her father and family were extensions of the same movement represented by Dr. King. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/gwens-take-remembering-and-reimagining-august-28-1963>
- Research others from the network of peers during the Civil Rights Era. Following is a list of famous leaders and everyday proponents of the Movement:

Rosa Parks
 A Phillip Randolph
 Julian Bond
 John Lewis
 Mahalia Jackson
 Ella Baker
 Pauli Murray
 Fannie Lou Hamer
 Ernest "Rip" Patton, Jr.
 Bayard Ruston

Diane Nash
 June E. Johnson
 Jo Ann Robinson
 Dorothy Height
 Malcolm X
 Flonzie (Goodloe) Brown-Wright
 Whitney Young
 Harry Belafonte
 Winson Hudson
 Mae Bertha Carter