

CIVIL RIGHTS ELEVENTH GRADE LESSON PLAN

TITLE: SENDING A MESSAGE

GRADE LEVEL: Eleventh Grade

This activity encourages students to identify the formal and informal messages communicated through organized protest and other collective action related to the Civil Rights Movement mentioned in the Veterans & Visionaries *Quiet Activism* exhibit.

STANDARDS

SSUSH22. Explain the roles of major Civil Rights organizations and leaders, including Freedom Rides and the March on Washington.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will explain the protest strategies used by Civil Rights organizations.

Students will analyze messages regarding the Civil Rights Movement from leaders, activists, media, etc.

Students will identify instances of individual action that supported collective action.

MATERIALS

Veterans & Visionaries *Quiet Activism* exhibit

Veterans & Visionaries tablet OR QR code

Sending a Message Worksheet

WARM UP

Suggested Introduction: Welcome to the Veterans & Visionaries Exhibit, students! This exhibit shares the stories of men who served in World War II and took part in the Civil Rights Movement. These men are buried in veterans' memorial cemeteries in Georgia. We will use their stories to help us understand what we have been learning about in class.

EXHIBIT INTRODUCTION

Suggested Introduction: This panel tells us how and why this exhibit was created. It also has nine very important names – these are the men who served in World War II, took part in the Civil Rights Movement, and are buried in the memorial cemeteries. Their families told the researchers their life stories to help make this exhibit. Although the

Veterans are all buried in Georgia, their lives took them to many different places throughout the United States and throughout the world.

In class, we have learned about important events, people, and themes during the Civil Rights Movement. (answers for teachers to emphasize are in blue text).

What important people and events do you remember from our class discussion on Civil Rights history?

The Civil Rights Movement was shaped by influential leaders, important places, and major events that worked together to challenge racial segregation and discrimination in the United States. Key figures such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, John Lewis, and Malcolm X used different strategies—ranging from nonviolent protest to more radical advocacy—to demand equal rights for Black Americans.

Significant locations included Montgomery, Alabama, where the bus boycott began in 1955 after Rosa Parks' arrest; Birmingham, Alabama, the site of mass protests and police violence that drew national attention; and Washington, D.C., where more than 250,000 people gathered for the 1963 March on Washington, during which King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Pivotal events such as the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision, the Birmingham Campaign, the Selma to Montgomery marches, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked major victories in the struggle for equality. Together, these people, places, and events helped transform American laws and attitudes toward civil rights.

What do you think people were trying to communicate to each other and to society through these events?

Stay strong, keep hope, we deserve equal treatment, and other similar messages.

We will explore how some of these messages were communicated, and their effect, throughout this exhibit. In your worksheet, you will summarize the messages sent by collective action, and then create messages from the subjects of our exhibit based on what you know about their lives.

Suggested Action: Give students time to review all panels of the museum exhibit and complete their worksheet. Debrief as a class and discuss what they found in the conclusion section below.

EXHIBIT CONCLUSION

Suggested Introduction: In what panels did you find messages related to collective action? What do you think they were trying to say? What made their messages effective? (Suggested content for the teacher to emphasize is blue).

The “Here’s Democracy!” political cartoon on the Fighting Without Freedom is an example of a message. Political cartoons have played an important role in encouraging collective action by turning complex political issues into clear, powerful images that are easy for the public to understand. They use humor, symbolism, or exaggeration to expose injustice, criticize those in power, and spark emotional reactions that motivate people to discuss issues and act together.

There are many examples of non-violent protest mentioned throughout the exhibit: the image featuring NAACP picketers on the Coming Home panel, the description of the March on Washington on the Voting for the Future panel, and the information about boycotts of segregated buses on the Enduring Faith and Community Service panel. Nonviolent protests play a crucial role in collective action by allowing large groups of people to unite around a shared goal without the use of force. Through methods such as marches, sit-ins, boycotts, and peaceful demonstrations, nonviolent movements draw public attention to injustice while maintaining moral authority and broad public support. These sent messages that people were united for social change.

Now what messages do you think the subjects of the exhibit would have related to the Civil Rights Movement? What did they say or do that supports your idea?

Maner Bryant?

Maner Bryant’s message would probably relate to the importance of faith and the importance of dedication in your work, given that the panels mention his work as a bricklayer and his spiritual leadership.

Robert Lee Byas, Sr.?

Robert Lee Byas, Sr.’s message would probably relate to the importance of collective action. His efforts as a Freedom Fighter, providing transportation for those boycotting segregated buses, enabled people to take part in peaceful protests.

Ernest Christmas?

Ernest Christmas’ message would probably relate to the importance of education. The exhibit mentions that he always wanted to go to college and used the GI Bill as an opportunity to obtain his bachelor’s degree and launch a successful career.

Theodore Roosevelt Christmas?

Theodore Christmas’ message might focus on being willing to take risks. Moving across the country to California might have been a bit scary, but his daughter talked about how public spaces were not segregated, so it was probably a risk that paid off.

Angus Hardy Jamerson?

Angus Jamerson's message would probably echo themes of the importance of education, given that he also used the GI Bill, and the potential benefit of taking risks, given that his daughter mentioned that moving to California enabled his family to achieve their dreams. His message would also likely focus on the importance of helping others achieve economic freedom.

Robert Lee Merriwether?

Robert Merriwether's message might focus on the importance of making the best of your circumstances. He had to drop out of school during the Great Depression, but his mother still educated him at home.

Johnny Veal?

Like others, Johnny Veal's message would likely focus on the importance of education and making the most of opportunities, given that he took advantage of the GI Bill after the war.

William Unis Vinson?

William Vinson's message would focus on compassion and unity (his direct quote on the Fighting Without Freedom panel speaks to this). Voting was also important to him, as he would drive elderly friends and family to the polls during elections.

Eugene Waith?

Eugene Waith's message would likely focus on the importance of voting as a civic duty. His daughter's quote on the Voting for the Future panel states that no obstacle would keep him from getting to the polls during elections. He even inspired his daughter to work at polling offices.

These messages show us that even though organized collective action is very important, there are many smaller, individual steps that people can take to better themselves and their communities during difficult times.

Thinking of current times, what kinds of things do you think you could do to help yourself, your family, or your community? Any positive response could be emphasized, but things like hard work, education, community service, and building positive family relationships, connect to the themes of the Exhibit.

CONCLUSION

Suggested Introduction: This is the end of the exhibit. The people who made this exhibit want to understand what we know about this subject now that we have seen the entire exhibit. They also want to know if we liked the exhibit, so we will take a quick survey before we leave.

Suggested Action: The teacher/students should access the post-exhibit survey on their device (using the QR Code) or the Veterans & Visionaries tablet. They should complete the survey on behalf of the group (i.e., ask the group each question and select the most popular answer). If most students do not have their device, the teacher can take the survey on behalf of the group (selecting the most popular response) as a back-up plan.

Things to Highlight in Worksheet:

- Messages from the Veterans (empty thought bubbles with branch logos next to names)
 - Maner Bryant
 - Robert Lee Byas, Sr.
 - Ernest Christmas
 - Theodore Roosevelt Christmas
 - Angus Hardy Jamerson
 - Robert Lee Merriwether
 - Johnny Veal
 - William Unis Vinson
 - Eugene Waith