

Apple Slide

One Serving of Learning

Letter from Birmingham Jail

Materials: copy of King's letter (full-length or abridged version, available on the Internet), newspapers, paper, envelopes and stamps.

Objective:

Students will actively participate in national, local, or state government by examining newspaper articles involving discrimination and writing a letter or attending a meeting to learn more and possibly effect positive change.

Procedure:

1. Students will read Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.'s Letter from a Birmingham Jail (either the full-length or the abridged version) and discuss what constitutes "just and unjust laws." The teacher should give the historical background surrounding this letter, written in 1963, nine years after the Supreme Court had found separate-but-equal schools unconstitutional.
2. Students should define "civil disobedience" and name individuals who have successfully practiced this method of protest to bring about changes in unjust laws that promoted discrimination. Role models would include Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, etc.
3. Over the course of a week or a month, students will find articles in their print or online newspapers that deal with issues of discrimination based on sex, race, religion, or national origin at the national, state or local level. Articles will be shared with the class.
4. Students should discuss and decide on actions that they can take to address the issues. Perhaps some may write letters to a state legislator, county councilman, school board, business, or editor of the local newspaper and share the responses that they receive. Others might attend an official public meeting and report back to the class.

—Adapted from a lesson submitted by Kim McDermott, English Instructor, Grade 11, Garrett Academy of Technology, North Charleston, SC

This activity addresses the following national learning standards:

Language Arts—#2 Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g. philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. #3 Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate texts. #4 Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language ... to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences. #5 Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. #7 Students conduct research on issues. ... They gather, evaluate and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, and people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience. #12 Students use spoken, visual and written language for ... learning, enjoyment, persuasion and the exchange of information. Source: National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association List of Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996. **Social Studies**—Strand II Time, continuity and change. Strand X Civic ideals and practices. (Curriculum Standards for Social Studies, National Council for the Social Studies, 1999.)