

Understanding the Role of Non-Violent Social Activism in American History

American History / Social Studies / Civics

By

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"A little rebellion now and then is a good thing. It is a medicine necessary for the sound health of government. God forbid that we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion."

Thomas Jefferson

"How can you kill people when it's written in God's commandment: 'Thou shall not murder'?"

Leo Tolstoy

"People try nonviolence for a week, and when it 'doesn't work' they go back to violence which hasn't worked for centuries."

Theodore Roszak

Objective: The goal of this unit is to familiarize Middle or High School students with the rich tradition of non-violent social activism in American History. In the introduction to Bill Moyer's, *Doing Democracy, The Map for Organizing Social Movements*, he writes,

“ . . . In the United States, the recognition of basic human rights- the abolition of slavery, the right of labor to organize, child labor laws, the right for African Americans and women to vote – came about through the efforts of engaged citizens.”

In this unit, students will explore the role that non-violent protests took in the formation of our democracy and the importance of social action to maintain a viable and a healthy democratic system.

Student actions include:

- Work in collaborative groups
- Conduct research
- Engage in persuasive and expository writing and speaking skills
- Be involved in small group and class discussions
- Give oral and poster presentations
- Investigate the impact that non-violent social activism has had on modern American rights
- Appreciate the concentration of non-violent protests that led to the American Revolution and how Americans exercise their rights to social action in modern America

Instructional Methods Used:

- Lecture
- Student Research
- Collaborative discussions
- Writing
- Poster reports
- Jig sawing or reciprocal teaching

Student Outcomes:

- Define differing levels of social action
- Comprehend the value of public voice in a democracy
- Empathize with historical movements
- Organize
- Locate

Equipment and Supplies:

- Computers with access to internet
- Markers
- Lecture hall
- Television / video pr DVD players
- CD player
- Cassette player – Record player?
- Poster Boards
- Individual student copies of the U.S. Constitution

DAY 1

OBJECTIVE: Determine what non-violent social movements are and in what forms they exist. Students will gain understanding of how the importance of social action in modern life.

ANTICIPATORY SET: The instructor mentions a few clubs, organizations, communities or affiliations to which she/he belongs and the purposes of these groups. Engage the class in a discussion of:

- clubs and/or organizations in the school
- identify the “mission” or purpose for each society

For 8 - 10 minutes - Separate students into small brainstorming groups. Have them make large “T” charts on poster paper listing the clubs, teams, or affiliations to which the students in each group belong and the “mission” or purpose of each group.

- Briefly discuss each group’s “T” chart in a whole class setting

PROCEDURE 1

- Through class discussions define each and list several examples from American History:
 - Social Movement or Social Activism
 - Civil Disobedience
 - Passive Resistance
- Ask student to debate whether **successful** American social movements have required violence or if non-violent protests have been effective? Require specific examples to substantiate arguments. Record these events adjacent to those already on the board.

PROCEDURE 2

- Assign students to small groups of 3 or 4. Assign one of the American Historical events that you list on the board to each student group. Each group should prepare a short written and oral report on one event. Have them address: (in essay form):
 1. When and where did this social act (or act of civil disobedience) occur?
 2. What events in government or society inspired that person or group to take action?
 3. Describe the protest taken
 4. What risks were taken to conduct this protest?
 5. Was the action or person successful?
 6. What social/political/governmental/cultural changes resulted from these actions?
 7. Were laws changed that impact us today? If so, explain new rights / laws that resulted from these historic actions.
 8. What part of the U.S. Constitution guarantees the right for these actions to occur in our democracy?
- Provide groups with computer or resources to begin research.

CLOSE/ASSESS/ASSIGN

- Before breaking for the day, assess student understanding of non-violent resistance.
- Determine that each group is clear on the homework assignment for Lesson #2

DAY 2

OBJECTIVE: Students listen to a variety of examples of social activism in American History. Students will determine that social activism takes many forms of expression.

ANTICIPATORY SET: Define on the board:

Social Movement or Social Activism - a loosely organized campaign designed to encourage change in social values or structures. It is often spontaneous in nature.

Civil Disobedience – refusal to obey laws or policies that one deems to be unjust. This includes a willingness to accept any penalties.

Passive Resistance – a method of non-violent protest against policies, programs, laws or behaviors in attempt to force change. (demonstrations, sit-ins, failure to pay taxes, etc)

PROCEDURE 1

- Ask each research group to present their report findings.
- After each presentation, entertain student questions and answers.
- After all of the presentations, stress that these are all ways or methods of making effective changes in our society

PROCEDURE 2

- In a whole class setting discuss whether violent revolutions or non-violent protests played more prominent role in America's history.
- On a "T" chart on the board, list the violent (French and Indian War, Boston Massacre, Revolutionary War, slave uprisings, etc.) and non-violent examples (Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, sit-ins, Boston tea party, etc.) given
- Ask students HOW an individual or group may engage in social activism.
 1. METHODS or TYPES of non-violent protest/dissent/rebellion

List as many as you can on board

ART - *music, graffiti, dance, plays, exhibits, songs, etc.*

WRITTEN WORD – *letters to editor, petitions, declarations, leaflets, pamphlets, letters, blogging, etc.*

SPOKEN WORD - *speeches, lectures sermons, radio and television advertising and programs, etc.*

ACTION - *recycling, protests, marches, sit-ins, boycotts (NIKE), lobbying, walk-outs, strikes, etc.*

ORGANIZATION / COMMUNITY EFFORTS – *organizing like-minded groups, meetings: Moms for Clean Air, TravelWise, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, etc.*

SERVICE - *holding public office, voting, becoming a member of student or civil government, school boards, jury duty, military or non military service, etc.*

CLOSE/ASSESS/ASSIGN

- Ask students to look through news papers, watch news, etc. and collect evidence of social action or civil disobedience in their community.

DAY 3

OBJECTIVE: - Students explore art (with a focus on music) as a method of social change through American History

ANTICIPATORY SET: Discuss and classify (and record on the board) the “evidence” of community social movements collected by students.

Music and Art as a method of non-violent protest. - The familiar song, "We Shall Overcome" was used as a protest song during the 1940s and again resurfaced in the 1960 to be used by Civil Rights advocates.

- So that all students can see and follow along, log on to:
<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/protest.html>

PROCEDURE

- Have ready a television hooked up to the internet or method (school availability) to project internet site for all students to see.
- Define a **protest song** as a song that becomes part of a movement for social change.
- Explain how protest songs are often metaphorical in nature. In our history, song (music AND other forms of art) was used to rally supporters during both violent and non-violent actions.

FOR EXAMPLE:

1. 1780s to 1900s Abolition (conducting the Underground Rail Road) Songs include: *Steal Away, Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)* and *Follow the Drinking Gourd*
 2. 1830 – 1900 Women’s Suffrage – *Get Off The track* by Hutchinson Family Singers *The Suffrage Song* by Julia Ward Howe
 3. 1900 – 1930 Labor Movements (Industrial Workers of the World, IWW) – *Solidarity Forever* by Ralph Chaplin
- Take time to explore lyrics and listen to audio samples on the web site.
 - Discuss social and political conditions during each era.

DAY 4

OBJECTIVE: - Students explore art (with a focus on music) as a method of social change through American History

ANTICIPATORY SET: Have a few protest songs ready to play for students. Display posters, political cartoons or protest art through room. Ask student to listen to music and determine:

- The era of American History
- Purpose of protest

Do the same for the art displayed in the room.

PROCEDURE 1:

Separate students into small groups (4 or less). Ask each group to investigate music and art (sculpture, architecture, painting, drama, etc.) from the protest areas listed below.

1930 – 1940 The Great Depression

1940 – 1950 War, Labor and Race

1960 – 1970 Civil Rights and Viet Nam War

1980-1990 Anti-Establishment

2000 – Present - Students should bring one protest song and clearly identify the issue addressed

For each era, student groups should prepare an oral presentation/poster report describing:

1. The socio-political conditions in America at the time
2. Name of one or more protest songs from the era
3. Written lyrics of at least one song
5. Interpretation of the song's meaning
6. If possible, play a recording of one song or perform a song
7. Short bio on the song writer
8. Display, photo or representation of protest art from the period
9. Student reflection on art and impact it had on the social movement

DAY 5 (May take more than one day)

OBJECTIVE: - Determine how pervasive and effective non-violent protests have been in American history

ANTICIPATORY SET: Project art on class screen from web site:

Art of the American Revolution: <http://lehrman.isi.org/catalog/resource/view/id/458>

PROCEDURE:

Students share their protest music investigations.

DAY 6

OBJECTIVE: - Students will evaluate non-violent activism that aided in forming the American Constitution

ANTICIPATORY SET: Set a variety of letters to editor / political cartoons / political opinions on student desks. Begin class by discussing each.

PROCEDURE:

- Remind students of the vast variety of METHODS of protest.
- Discuss America's long history of nonviolent protests. Begin with the colonist's protests over first winning land west of the Appalachian Mountains in the French and Indian War only to have King George grant the hard-won land to the natives. Heavy taxes were imposed on the colonists to help pay the expenses of a war that Britain waged overseas.
- Discuss contributions of:
 1. 1730s - John Peter Zenger's writings complaining about the King's governors resulted in our freedom of press and speech. (<http://www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/bookmarks/zenger/>)
 2. 1750 - Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die" poster and teachings
 3. 1770 – Angry Bostonians gather and taunt British soldiers (resulting in the Boston Massacre)
 4. 1773 - Boston Tea Party - Colonists **boycott** British tea
 5. 1775 - William Dawes, Sam Prescott, Paul Revere ride to warn
 6. 1776 – Thomas Paine publishes Common Sense
 7. 1776 - Letter to King George declaring that the colonies be independent (**Declaration of Independence**)
 8. Quakers' (The Society of Friends) refusal to pay taxes that supported war
 9. 1787 - Shay's Rebellion.

Although Shay's rebellion ended in violence, it began as a non-violent protest.

CLOSE/ASSIGN/ASSESS: Ask students to research and write an essay about Shay's Rebellion.

- What was it?
- When did it happen?
- What were the critical events leading up to the protest?
- What was one vital change in the new country that arose because of rebellions like Shay's?

DAY 7

OBJECTIVE: - Students evaluate non-violent social movements after ratification of the U. S. Constitution and analyze how protests changed or impacted the interpretation of existing laws.

ANTICIPATORY SET: Discuss what students discovered about Shay's Rebellion and how it led to the Constitutional Convention.

PROCEDURE:

- Instructor will briefly and selectively go over a few of the following social activists and social movements.
 1. 1808 - Abolitionists used slave ship diagram as a propaganda tool
 2. 1810 - 1850 - Underground Railroad conductors
 3. 1831 - William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator*
 4. 1840s - Mormon Pioneers flee New York
 5. 1848 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Declaration of Sentiments* at the first women's right convention
 6. 1850 - 1860s - Harriett Tubman
 7. 1849 - Henry David Thoreau wrote "Civil Disobedience"
 8. 1850s - Wendell Phillips, abolitionist and orator
 9. 1850 - Harriett Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
 10. 1866 - Stand Watie, negotiated the Cherokee Reconstruction Treaty
 11. 1869 - Mark Twain's writings begin to see success
 12. 1860-1960 - W.E.B. Du Bois, Civil Rights
 13. 1872 - Susan B. Anthony, arrested for voting
 14. 1904 - 1905 - Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*
 15. 1905 - Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) - Fight for free speech and labor rights
 16. 1935-1937 - The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) sit-downs and labor strikes
 17. 1940s - Congress of Racial Equality, freedom ride
 18. 1955-1956 - Rosa Parks, Montgomery Bus Boycott
 19. 1960s - Cesar Chavez, United Farm Workers Grape and Lettuce Boycott 1960 (*Exploring the United Farm Workers' History* by Clair Peterson and Susana Diaz)
 20. 1960s - Fannie Lou Hamer, voter registration
(http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/african_american_history/50953)
 21. 1960s - Viet Nam War protests
 22. 1960s - Civil Rights Movements - Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, etc.)
 23. 1977 - Harvey Milk, first outwardly gay elected politician

CLOSE/ASSIGN/ASSESS: Students should select from the list or another (instructor approved) social activist. (Many were not included in this suggested list so encourage students to find their own. For example, Eleanor Roosevelt, Joan Biaz, Father Daniel Berrigan, Howard Zinn, Cindy Sheehan, Dr. Benjamin Spock, etc. all played pivotal roles in non-violent social movements in America). An in-depth research paper will be assigned for the selected civil action or activist.

DAY 8

OBJECTIVE: - As students are conducting their own research paper, spend class time to investigate current activism in the community.

PROCEDURE: Mention the causes listed below and discuss what students know about each. Have any of these programs served to change their own lives? Discuss.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving
The Eagle Forum
Mothers For Clean Air
TravelWise
Common Ground
Greenpeace

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Save Our Canyons
Utahns Against Hunger
Utahns Against Prop 8
Wiser Earth

Brainstorm other current social movements.

End Unit after Expository papers are collected. Discuss

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Beller, Ken and Chase, Heather. 2008. *Great Peacemakers*. LTS Press: Sedona Arizona

Goodwin, Jeff and Jasper, James M. editors. 2003. *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*. Blackwell Publishing: Massachusetts.

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Moyers, Bill, McAllister, JoAnn, Finley, Mary Lou, and Soifer, Steven. 2007. *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*. New Society Publishers: Canada.

WEB SITES

Ballou High School Marching band DVD – NPR (urban high school students Darrell Washington & Casey Callister film producers) *Michael Patrei's 86 minute documentary* <http://www.balloumovie.com>

Chernus, Ira, ***Non-Violent Thought Through U.S. History*** <http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/0309ej.pdf>

Hamer, Fannie Lou. On Voter Registration.

(http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/african_american_history/50953)

Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. Web Site. <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1776-1800/paine/CM/sensexx.htm>

Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. Web Sites: <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/sinclair.htm> (background information on the author)
<http://college.hmco.com/history/us/resources/students/primary/meat.htm> (excerpt of meat-packing district)

Stowe, Harriett Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Web Sites

http://www.harpercollins.com/catalog/excerpt_xml.asp?isbn=0060806184

<http://www.palmdigitalmedia.com/product/book/excerpt/17197>

Civil Rights Music <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/strangefruit/protest.html>

