



Teaching Guide

SEGMENT 8, WEBISODE 14

Please note: Each segment in this Webisode has its own Teaching Guide



Segment Overview

Birmingham, Alabama's largest city in the 1960s, was an entrenched stronghold of segregation. In early April 1963, local activists joined with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Martin Luther King, Jr., to begin a series of demonstrations to force downtown businesses to integrate their lunch counters and hire black sales clerks. The first two stages, a peaceful march and a "kneel-in" at city hall failed to gain the attention needed to force change.

On May 2, 1963, the third and most controversial stage of the protest began. Activists, decided to use thousands of people who would not suffer an economic crisis by losing their jobs. Over six hundred young people ranging in age from six to eighteen marched from Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and were promptly arrested by police chief Bull Conner.

The following day, when another thousand children began a peaceful march, Conner attacked them with police dogs and fire hoses. While children were thrown against buildings and rolled down the street by high pressure fire hoses, television cameras broadcast the scenes to living rooms across the country. Americans were horrified and ashamed.

Teacher Directions

1. Display the following quotation from "A Letter from a Birmingham Jail." Inform students that Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote this famous defense of civil rights demonstrations in response to criticism from white clergy who thought that African Americans should not demonstrate, but rather should negotiate and wait for justice.

Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States...Negro leaders sought to negotiate with city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation... So the purpose of direct action is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation.

2. Students, in their small teams, read the quotation and discuss the following questions.
 - How does Dr. King describe Birmingham?
 - What does Dr. King mean when he refers to a "crisis-packed situation"?
 - What does he hope will result from creating a "crisis-packed situation"?



Let's Discuss

Let's Discuss, Cont.



History Sleuth

3. Teams share their answers with the entire class. Make sure the students understand the following points in discussing the questions.

Dr. King notes that Birmingham is one of the most segregated cities in the country where all attempts to negotiate with city officials failed. The demonstrations and marches brought about crisis-packed situations because segregationists and the city police reacted violently. When this violence received national attention in newspapers and on television, public opinion forced the federal government and Birmingham officials to bring about changes in racially discriminatory policies.

Teacher Directions

1. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Crisis-Packed Situation Cards*, one set to each team. Students cut apart the cards and place them on the desk so that the bordered sides face up.
2. Students take turns choosing a card and reading the situation. The team predicts what will happen. The reader then turns over the card and reads what actually happened. Students discuss what they would have thought and done had they been part of this crisis-packed situation.
3. Students continue the process until they have read and discussed all the cards.
4. Ask students to assess the outcome of the Birmingham demonstrations. What did they accomplish? What did they fail to accomplish?

Teacher Directions

1. Introduce the poem "Ballad of Birmingham" to students by explaining that it was written in response to the bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, on September 15, 1963, which killed four small girls. The black church was at the forefront of the civil rights movement, and those who planted the bomb hoped it would discourage the civil rights campaign against segregation in Birmingham.
2. Read the poem "Ballad of Birmingham" by Dudley Randall to the students (available on the web sites <http://www.samford.edu/schools/artsci/history/uccp101/ballbham.html> or <http://library.thinkquest.org/12111/church.html> and also in many anthologies).
3. Discuss the poem with the students.
4. Ask the students to predict: How did people respond to the bombing and to the poem?



What do you Think?

5. Explain that the bombing shocked and disgusted the nation and rallied support for the civil rights movement.

Teacher Directions

1. Display this prediction, which Martin Luther King, Jr., made in “A Letter from the Birmingham Jail.”

“I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are presently misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom.”

2. Students decide whether Dr. King was correct in his prediction and write brief paragraphs containing several examples to support their stance.
3. Students discuss how the incidents in Birmingham moved our country toward freedom.

Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Local History — Students interview someone who remembers the events in Birmingham. Students write a summary of the interviewee’s experiences. How did that person feel during this time? How did the movement affect his or her daily life? Was he or she involved in the movement in any way?

Language Arts — Students write their own poems about an aspect of the civil rights movement.

Language Arts/Library — Students read about the Nobel Prize that Martin Luther King Jr., received for his work in the civil rights movement.

Art — Students draw a poster or create a mural of events, people, and places of the civil rights movement.

Language Arts/Library — Students read the first-person accounts of those involved in the Birmingham and Washington marches. See *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Right Movement* by Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, Bantam Books.



Moving Toward
Freedom



Connections

A Crisis-Packed Situation

In April, 1963, protestors demonstrate to force Birmingham businesses to integrate lunch counters and hire black clerks.

A Crisis-Packed Situation

Protestors ask Martin Luther King, Jr., to come to Birmingham to help with demonstrations.

A Crisis-Packed Situation

Singing hymns, protestors march to city hall to stage a “kneel in.”

A Crisis-Packed Situation

Protest leaders recruit students and train them to demonstrate peacefully in the face of violence. Six hundred children start their march from a church.

A Crisis-Packed Situation

In May, 1963, a thousand children begin a peaceful march.

A Crisis-Packed Situation

White clergy in Birmingham criticize King for leading demonstrations and tell him to wait.

A Crisis-Packed Situation

In December, 1961, the Birmingham City Commission closes the city’s 67 parks, 38 playgrounds and 4 golf courses rather than integrate.

A Crisis-Packed Situation

In May 1963, the city signs an agreement to desegregate stores, restaurants, and schools.

A Crisis-Packed Situation

In September 1963, a bomb explodes at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church killing four African American girls.

**Fifty-two
protestors are
jailed, including
Martin Luther
King, Jr.**

**Martin Luther
King, Jr., comes to
Birmingham. That
summer, a bomb
goes off in his
motel room.**

**Many protestors
are arrested.**

**Dr. King writes “A
Letter from a
Birmingham Jail”
explaining that
waiting will never
bring justice.**

**Birmingham police
release dogs and
turn fire hoses on
the children.**

**Six hundred
children are
arrested.**

**Violence erupts
throughout the city
and two African
American boys are
killed in hate
crimes. The
bombing receives
worldwide
attention.**

**In July,
Birmingham
repeals its
segregation
ordinances.**

**African Americans
begin peaceful
protests to end
segregation in
Birmingham. Some
white citizens and
people from other
parts of the
country join them.**