

Go beyond the dream to discover the man.

# KING



**A SPECIAL PRESENTATION**



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think Dr. King means when he says that time can be used destructively or constructively? Why did he believe that the Civil Rights Movement was an example of using time constructively?
2. How do you interpret the phrase “human progress never rolls on the wheels of inevitability”? Can you think of an example to support your answer?
3. Why do you think Dr. King decided to write this letter? Why do you think it is still remembered for being an important document?

The following document is an excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech, delivered at the March on Washington on August 28, 1963. On this day over 250,000 people had gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in the nation’s capital. This speech, and the March on Washington overall, is considered the high water mark of the Civil Rights Movement, illustrating the incredible momentum for change that was building throughout the United States. Ask students to read the excerpt below and respond to the questions which follow. Students may also want to locate an audio version of this speech online and compare their experience with listening to the speech versus reading it.

### I HAVE A DREAM

by DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

“In a sense we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.” But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. ...So we have come to cash this check – a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.”

©The Estate of Martin Luther King Jr.

## PRIMARY SOURCE QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think MLK decided to reference the Constitution and Declaration of Independence in this speech?
2. What do you think Dr. King means when he says that African Americans have been given a check marked “insufficient funds”? What does this metaphor reveal about inequality in 1963?
3. Dr. King references a “sacred obligation” in this paragraph. What do you think this obligation is, in his view? How do you think that obligation could be achieved?
4. Why do you think Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is remembered as one of the most significant speeches in U.S. history? What other quotes or references do you remember from this speech, or another speech by Dr. King?

## WEB RESOURCES

The History™ *Save Our History*® *Voices of Civil Rights* website:  
[www.history.com/classroom/voices/](http://www.history.com/classroom/voices/)

The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute:  
[www.stanford.edu/group/King/index.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/index.htm)

A speech archive from the University of California which includes an audio recording of King’s “I Have a Dream” speech:  
[www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/historicspeeches.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/historicspeeches.html)

An MLK site with documents from the National Archives:  
[www.archives.gov/education/lessons/memphis-v-mlk/](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/memphis-v-mlk/)

## BOOKS

Branch, Taylor. *Parting the Waters, America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (Simon & Schuster) 1989.

Hampton, Henry. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (Bantam Books) 1991.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. and James M. Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (HarperCollins) 1990.

Levine, Ellen. *Freedom’s Children* (William Morrow & Company) 1993.

“WE MUST COME TO SEE THAT THE END WE SEEK IS  
A SOCIETY AT PEACE WITH ITSELF, A SOCIETY THAT CAN  
LIVE WITH ITS CONSCIENCE.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (March 25, 1965. Montgomery, Ala.)

## INTRODUCTION

**King** is a special two-hour documentary presentation which brings to life the epic story of one of the most important figures in American history for a new generation of viewers. Hosted by veteran journalist Tom Brokaw, this program commemorates the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the fortieth anniversary of his death. **King** re-lives his remarkable journey for civil rights, from the moment he reluctantly joined the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, through his rise as a world figure, to his tragic assassination in Memphis in 1968 at age 39. Conversations with close confidants including Andrew Young, John Lewis, and Harry Belafonte, together with rare interviews with family members, provide rich insights into his life, capturing his doubts and challenges alongside his victories and triumphs.

With his roots in theology, Dr. King developed an inspirational speaking style that mobilized Americans to fight against racial injustice and segregation. From the bus boycott of the late 1950s through the historic 1963 March on Washington where he delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech, Dr. King became a key catalyst for change, driving the campaign for civil rights onto the national scene. **King** presents a retrospective and insightful exploration of this extraordinary leader, retracing his story and examining the indelible mark he left on the nation and the world.

## CLASSROOM LINKS

**King** would be useful for History, American Culture, African American History, and Political Science courses. **We recommend that teachers view this program in its entirety before screening it to students. It is appropriate for high school students.** It addresses the following themes outlined by the National Council for History Education: 1) Civilization, cultural diffusion, and innovation; 2) Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions; 3) Conflict and cooperation; and 4) Patterns of social and political interaction.



## VOCABULARY

Using a dictionary ([www.merriamwebster.com](http://www.merriamwebster.com)) and an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

BIGOTRY

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

CIVIL RIGHTS

COLOR-BLIND

DE FACTO

DE JURE

INTEGRATION

CITIZEN

SEGREGATION

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were some events in Dr. King's youth which led to his decision to fight against discrimination and segregation?
2. In one of his earliest speeches, Dr. King said "If freedom is good for any, it is good for all." What do you think he meant by this quote, and how did he attempt to live up to this idea throughout his life?
3. Dr. King worked to achieve civil rights for African Americans in many different areas, such as voting rights. What were some of the other areas in which he and the participants in the Civil Rights Movement sought to secure equality? Which of these do you think was most important and why?
4. Why do you think J. Edgar Hoover was so determined to undermine Dr. King's work for civil rights? What are your thoughts on Hoover's actions?
5. How did Mahatma Gandhi influence Martin Luther King? What was his essential philosophy and how did Martin Luther King Jr. aim to embody his ideas in the United States?
6. What are your thoughts about the music and images in this documentary? How do the choices of sound impact the way you interpret the messages and themes?
7. What are some of the adjectives you would use to describe Dr. King's leadership style? Why do you think he was such a powerful leader?
8. Which of King's accomplishments in the Civil Rights Movement do you think had the most lasting influence on American society, and why?
9. Martin Luther King Day is a federal holiday observed throughout the United States. How would you describe the meaning and importance of this day?
10. If you had to describe the legacy of Dr. King to an elementary school student, what would you say? What do you think is the most important legacy he left behind?

## MATCHING ACTIVITY

Match the following identifications in column 1 with its corresponding answer in column 2.

(An answer key is at the end of this document.)

### Column 1

1. March on Washington
2. Segregation
3. 1986
4. NAACP
5. Civil disobedience
6. "How long? Not long."

### Column 2

- A. Separation of races, either legally or by custom
- B. Quote from MLK speech
- C. Major civil rights protest in 1963
- D. The year King's birthday was declared a national holiday
- E. A method of achieving change by pushing the boundaries of law
- F. Civil rights organization which plays a role in the Montgomery bus boycott

## VIEWING CHART

### Early Years

- Born: January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia
- Family roots in the Baptist church
- King graduated from Morehouse College at the age of 19
- Married Coretta Scott King in 1953
- Studied theology at Crozer Theological Seminary and received his PhD from Boston University in 1955

### Questions

1. Martin Luther King Jr. grew up in what neighborhood in Atlanta?
2. Who influenced King to become a minister?
3. Dr. King moved to \_\_\_\_\_ to start his career as a minister and political activist.

### The Civil Rights Movement

- Became Pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church
- Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus, 1955; King elected President of the Montgomery Improvement Assoc.
- King founds the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957
- Civil rights campaign in Birmingham, 1963
- March on Washington, summer 1963
- Civil Rights Act, 1964; Voting Rights Act, 1965
- March from Selma to Montgomery, 1965
- King travels north, starts the Poor People's Campaign in 1967
- Assassinated April 4, 1968 in Memphis, TN

### Questions

1. In 1956, the \_\_\_\_\_ Court declared that the segregated buses in Montgomery were illegal.
2. Martin Luther King learned about non-violence from Mahatma Gandhi, a leader in what country?
3. When Martin Luther King was 35, he was awarded the \_\_\_\_\_ Peace Prize.
4. What American leader is shown making a speech in this program after King's death?

### The Making of a Holiday

- In the wake of Dr. King's death, the debate about civil rights continued
- After much debate, the House and Senate both passed a bill making Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a national holiday; signed into law on Nov. 2, 1983
- Martin Luther King Day was celebrated for the first time on Jan. 20th, 1986 and is observed every year on the third Monday in January

### Questions

1. \_\_\_\_\_ was president when Dr. King's birthday was declared a holiday.
2. Write down a short quote Dr. King states in this program or that you have heard before.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

Birmingham, Alabama became a flashpoint for the Civil Rights Movement in 1963 when demonstrators protesting segregation were arrested for being in the streets without a permit. On April 12th of that year, Dr. King was arrested and put in solitary confinement. Alabama church leaders published a negative letter in *The New York Times* in the wake of these events, accusing King and his followers of creating chaos in the city. King penned his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” in response, explaining his philosophy of social change. Below is an excerpt from this letter, followed by discussion questions.

“Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.”

– April 16, 1963. ©The Estate of Martin Luther King Jr.

## EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. Martin Luther King Jr. was known for his famous oratory style and gift with words. Many of his speeches have been published and are available at libraries, on the Internet and in bookstores. Research his speeches and pick a paragraph that you find interesting. In a short essay, describe what you like about this paragraph and what it teaches about Dr. King’s philosophies.



2. The Supreme Court determined that school segregation was illegal with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, prompting the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement to fight against segregation in schools, in transportation, and in public places such as restaurants. In small groups, investigate the efforts of Civil Rights Movement participants to eliminate racism and segregation in these different arenas. Each group should research one topic, such as city buses, lunch counters, etc. Present your findings to the class through oral presentations, PowerPoint presentations, or on a posterboard.
3. In addition to Dr. King, there were many people throughout the country who contributed to the Civil Rights Movement and helped bring about change. Research another participant or leader in the Civil Rights Movement using books or the Internet. Using PowerPoint or posterboards, create a visual biography of this person. You can include relevant dates, images, quotes and publications. Share your discovery with your classmates or group.
4. Dr. King’s commitment to civil rights took him throughout the country. Though focused on the South, he later took his campaign to the North. Using your own research, chart the chronology of his travels. Then, get a map of the United States, pinpointing the places he went. You can also supplement this map by pinpointing the location of other important events from the post-1945 era of U.S. history and the Civil Rights Movement. You can add dates below the map or on the sides in order to keep track of when they occurred.
5. One of the most powerful ways to learn more about history is to talk to those who have lived through events from the past. Students can join efforts to collect and archive the personal stories of people who lived during the civil rights era. Ask students to locate someone in their family, neighborhood, or school who lived through this era and interview them about their memories of Dr. King and this time period in U.S. history. For instructions on conducting and transcribing an interview, consult the History™ oral history guidelines online at: [www.historychannel.com/classroom/oralhistguidelines.pdf](http://www.historychannel.com/classroom/oralhistguidelines.pdf).

AN UNFORGETTABLE TWO-HOUR EVENT  
**SUNDAY, APRIL 6th 8/7c**

