

The Power of Words: First Amendment Freedoms and Non-Violent Change

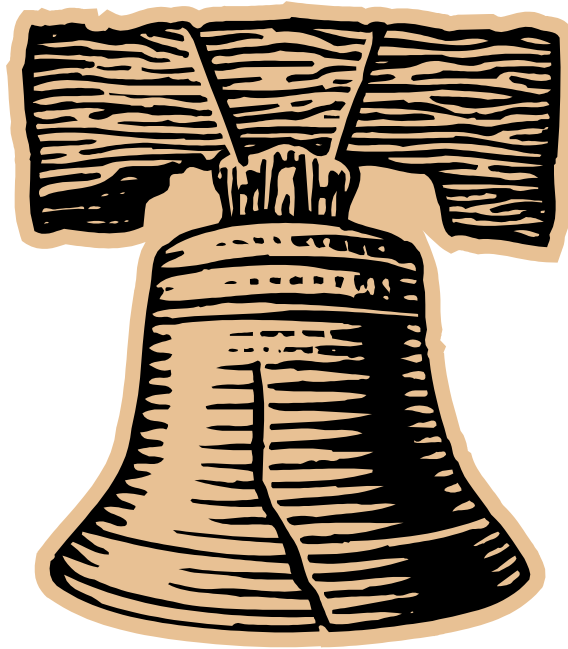
Purpose: This lesson introduces students to the concepts of the First Amendment's freedoms of speech, assembly, and petition, using the non-violent actions of the Civil Rights Movement in American history. Students will be introduced to 19th and 20th century civil rights leaders who used their First Amendment rights to demand additional civil rights denied to them because of discrimination or prejudice. The lesson can be used during Black History Month or in conjunction with the national holiday, Martin Luther King Day, as well as anytime during the school year.

Procedure:

1. Ask students to sing together the song, "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)." (If students do not know the song, teaching them the lyrics is an important prelude to the lesson. Lyrics have been included in this lesson for reference. Piano music can be found at the following website for classroom accompaniment to singing the song: <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh697.sht>) Ask students to recall the words "liberty" and "freedom" in the song. What do these terms mean? What do they think the writer meant by the phrase "let freedom ring"?
2. Ask students if they have ever wanted to change something about their school. How would they go about making a change? What steps would they take to try to make a change? How many of his or her ideas would involve speaking to someone in authority? Point out the role of the First Amendment in their first steps to bring about change.
3. Ask students if they have ever heard of a man named Martin Luther King, Jr. and brainstorm what they have heard. Do any students know King as a person who wanted to bring about change? Do any students know about King as an inspirational speaker who used the First Amendment to bring about change? What kind of change did King want to see happen in this country?
4. Review together the freedoms found in the First Amendment (speech, press, assembly, petition, religion). How could a person wanting to bring about change use three of these freedoms (speech, assembly, and petition) at the same time to bring attention to changes that need to occur?
5. Give pairs of students the First Amendment in Pictures handout. Begin a class discussion by looking at photographs of nonviolent protest during the civil rights era. Allow time for pairs of students to examine the photographs, answering the three questions on the handout. Conduct a class de-briefing by asking students to compare the use of First Amendment freedoms, finding similarities in the photographs. Student should arrive at the conclusion that all three photographs show people using their freedom of speech, assembly, and petition simultaneously to ask for change.
6. Divide the class into two groups, A and B. Use the handout "I Have a Dream" which includes excerpts from King's speech to conduct a class "reader's theatre." Every time students hear a passage that reminds them of the lyrics from the song "America (My Country, 'Tis of Thee)" ask them to raise their hands. Conduct a class discussion, allowing students to express their reactions to King's speech. How did King use references to the First Amendment's liberties to remind people that change needed to happen in America?

7. Extension: The PowerPoint presentation, "Celebrate Black History Month" can be used to extend the lesson. It offers an overview of the meaning of "civil rights" and an introduction to three African-American leaders, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and M.L. King, who used the First Amendment to demand changes for all Americans.

America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)



Text: Samuel F. Smith, 1808-1895

Tune: AMERICA

**My country, 'tis of thee,
sweet land of liberty,
of thee I sing;
land where my fathers died,
land of the pilgrims' pride,
from every mountainside
let freedom ring!**

OUR FIRST AMENDMENT IN HISTORIC PICTURES



What First Amendment freedoms are being shown in this picture?



What do you think is happening in this picture?



What are some of the civil rights people are asking for in these pictures?

Readers' Theatre: I Have a Dream



All: I Have A Dream

Group A: I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of the words

Group B: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

Group A: I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

Group B: I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

ALL: I have a dream today.

Group A: When all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing."

Group B: So, let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Group A: Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado

Group B: Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Group A: Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

ALL: From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

Group B: When we let freedom ring, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black and white...will be able to join hands

Group A: And sing the words...

ALL: "Free at last! Free at last!
Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

- Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.
August 28, 1963