Title of Lesson: MLK: Using Nonviolence to Make Positive Change

Lesson By: Christine Lanzoni

Grade Level/ Subject Areas: K-2

Class Size: Any class size

Time/Duration of Lesson: 3-5 30 minute sessions

Guiding Questions:
- How did MLK’s life experiences shape his decisions and historic actions?
- What did MLK want to change, how did he change it?
- What does it mean to change things through nonviolence?

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson focuses on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life and the many ways he changed unfair laws to bring equal rights to all people through nonviolent means. Many events that happened in King’s early years shaped his future actions. All his life experiences taught him valuable lessons that compelled him to act for social change.

Lesson Content:
It is necessary for primary teachers to make information relevant to students. In order to humanize a great leader you have to find common ground between your students and the subject of study. I would like to bring to light the early years in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s life to have students connect that he was once a boy with a great family unit, attended school, and had responsibilities. All these factors influenced his future and the positive change he brought to society.

In Atlanta, Georgia on January 15, 1929 a baby boy was born to Reverend Michael King, Sr. and Alberta Williams King, named Michael King, Jr. He grew up with an older sister, Willie Christine King, and a younger brother, Alfred Daniel Williams King. They grew up in Atlanta during the great depression.

Alberta and Michael were loving parents. Alberta was a great dedicated Christian role model for her children. When describing his own mother Martin explains “she is soft-spoken and easy-going…warm and easily approachable”. (Carson, 1998, p 3) Alberta grew up as an only child with all the proper education through college. She was not used to dealing with segregation. When managing to raise her children in such an environment, according to King, “She instilled a sense of self-respect in all of her children from the very beginning” (Carson, 1998, p 3).

Michael King, Sr. was the minister of Ebenezer Baptist Church. He led his congregation graciously and had involvement in civil rights. At a young age his son admired his leadership. In his son’s words, “he is as strong in his will as he is in his body. He has a dynamic personality, and his very physical presence commands attention. He has always been a very strong and self-confident person. I have rarely ever met a person more fearless and courageous than my father.” (Carson, 1998, p 4) “Michael King, Sr. traveled to the Middle East and Europe with ten other Baptist ministers from the United States. They attend the Baptist World Alliance in Berlin.” He discovered a German Protestant leader Martin Luther. “Martin Luther was a German monk who thought people had forgotten the true teaching of Jesus. He formed a new church called the Lutherans” (Bull, 2000, p 4). Shortly after this trip, his father, Michael King, Sr. decided to change both his name and his oldest son’s name in honor of the German Protestant leader to Martin Luther. “The German Protestant Martin Luther initiated the Protestant Reformation. He believed that freedom from God’s punishment could not be bought.”(Ling, 2002, p 11) The parallelism between these historic leaders with a shared name,
yet centuries apart, is astounding. Both stood up against policies for what they believed was true.

Young Martin attended nursery school then tried to enter school with his sister when he was only five years old but was very honest with his first grade teacher and was expelled due to his young age. Therefore he reentered school the following year as a six year old at Yonge Street Elementary School. Shortly after, he was baptized with the name Martin Luther King, Jr. In the fall, he entered school at Atlanta's David T. Howard Colored Elementary School, where he attended third through sixth grade. At the age of eight, he delivered local newspapers, the Atlanta Journal. He attended the seventh through ninth grade at Atlanta University Laboratory School. “At thirteen, he became the youngest assistant manager of a newspaper delivery station for the Atlanta Journal.”(Carson, vol. I) He also attended Booker T. Washington High School for two and a half years before he was accepted early at Morehouse College.

When Martin was a young boy the world of innocence came crashing down. He always played with a little white boy in his neighborhood. His friend’s father had a store near Martin’s house. When reflecting on this time King revealed, “We always felt free to play our childhood games together”. When the boys were school age they had to go to different, segregated, schools and his friend returned to tell Martin they could no longer play together, “he told me one day that his father had demanded that he would play with me no more.”(Carson, 1998, p 7) Martin was devastated by this news and could not understand the reason behind it. He turned to his parents for answers. This was the first time he had felt and recognized the divide between the races. At this point in his young life he hated white people. Through the next few years there were more events that shaped this distrust and dislike for whites.

One event that Martin reflects on was a day he and his father were in a department store to purchase shoes. His father sat in the empty seat waiting for service. To his dismay, the white clerk informed him that in order to be served he would have to sit in the back of the store. He refused to move and she refused to attend to his needs. Martin’s father stated, “We'll either buy shoes sitting here or we won’t buy shoes at all”. (Carson, 1998, p 8) Martin had never seen his father so upset. Martin reflects, “That experience revealed to me at a very early age that my father had not adjusted to the system, and he played a great part in shaping my conscience.” (Carson, 1998, p 8)

These experiences shaped who Martin Luther King, Jr. was as a person and shaped his future actions. He felt compelled to work towards change to make a common understanding and equal rights among all people. He studied many leaders of the world, taking valuable information from every source. One in particular was Mahatma Gandhi and the nonviolent struggle to gain Indian independence from Britain. King was inspired and decided to also take this direction in the Freedom Struggle. He truly believed that using words and educating others about nonviolence was the best answer to solve problems.

Nonviolence is a mindful way of life. The ability to come together in unity. By having the courage to making a choice and not just acting on impulse. Nonviolence is the ability to pause and think about the situation and having compassion and empathy, putting yourself in other’s positions. Animals have to commit violence to survive, humans do not. Being able to forgive your oppressor while displaying self-restraint in your own actions. By living as a model of nonviolence you are demonstrating to others the action necessary.

One of the major events that propelled King to the front of the movement was when Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to move to the back of the bus when a white passenger wanted her seat. Many women began the movement to boycott the buses. This was one of the
many nonviolent acts during the Freedom Struggle. King was encouraged to speak to the community. He persuaded them not to retaliate with violence but with nonviolence. This is when King started to become the spokesperson for the movement. The community mobilized a city-wide bus boycott. The black community walked and carpooled rather than ride the buses. This lasted for 381 days resulting in the Bus Company and town losing money. Finally, the Supreme Court declared that the bus segregation was against the Constitution of the United States. This meant that black and white people had equal rights on the local buses.

The nonviolent struggle continued in the South when college students began sit-ins at local lunch counters. The students sat in the white only sections of the diner and peacefully waited to be served and refused to leave when told they would not be served. “Guided by the theory of nonviolent resistance, the lunch counter sit-ins accomplished integration in hundreds of communities at the swiftest rate of change in the civil rights movement up to that time.” (Carson, 1998, p 137) During this time, King was arrested and indicted for perjury; it was declared that the sentence would be at least ten years. This was to diminish the effort toward the freedom movement. The court was made up of all white people with exception of King’s two lawyers, William Ming and Hubert Delaney. “They brought to the courtroom wisdom, courage, and a highly developed art of advocacy; but most important, they brought the lawyers’ indomitable determination to win.” (Carson, 1998, p 141) All these qualities won the case when all seemed to be against them. “They overcame the most vicious Southern taboos festering in a virulent and inflamed atmosphere and they persuaded an all-white jury to accept the word of a Negro over that of a white man”. (Carson, 1998, p 141) This achievement was a turning point in the eyes of King and his followers. This was the first time their voice was accepted by the dominant white system as valid human beings.

The fight for equal rights continued with a protest on the buses traveling across the United States, called the Freedom Rides. The Freedom Rides began with young people quickly spread to people of all ages. This like all other events of the freedom movement did not go on without violence committed toward the protesters, buses were burned and protesters were beaten. The protesters stood strong and did not retaliate. Eventually, the Interstate Commerce Commission declared all bus terminals must be integrated.

One hundred years after the passing of abolishment of slavery, King called on the community of the freedom movement to gather at the Lincoln Memorial. On August 28, 1963 the March on Washington united thousands and thousands of people of the movement to motivate their spirits forward. King lifted spirits with his “I Have a Dream” speech, declaring his image of the future. This was the first event truly covered by the media giving millions of people the opportunity to view this on television. This was just one of many ways King used nonviolence to educate people.

In December of 1964, King received the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 35 years old, the youngest recipient. King was the first person of the western world to show that a struggle can overcome inequality without violence. Many factors influenced King’s life; he felt compelled to act and brought positive change to society. He demonstrated that a voice and a conscience choice of nonviolence can bring positive change. He was just one of many people involved with the nonviolent Freedom Movement. In summary, the Freedom Movement and Martin Luther King, Jr. used nonviolent means to change many unfair laws and the prejudice minds of many people through peaceful marches, speeches, protests, sit-ins, court proceedings, boycotts and negotiations. By making a public stand in a nonviolent way, and peacefully making the point that even though it is a law it is not fair to all people, change was possible.
**Massachusetts State Content Standards:**

Civics: Concept Skill #6) Define and give examples of some of the rights and responsibilities that students as citizens have in the school.

Civics 2.10 After reading or listening to a variety of true stories about individuals recognized for their achievements, describe and compare different ways people have achieved great distinction.

**Materials Needed:**
- Various children’s books on Martin Luther King, Jr., refer to the annotated bibliography.
- Digital Story on MLK & Nonviolence
- Video “My Friend Martin”
- Venn diagram
- Paper, Pencil, Crayons
- Journals

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**
1) Read and discuss various children’s books on the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.
2) Introduce and explain vocabulary words: change, just, unjust, freedom, nonviolence, unity, compassion, truth, courage, trust, fearlessness, forgiveness, service, self-restraint, etc.
3) View Digital Story on MLK and Nonviolence.
4) Watch the video on MLK “My Friend Martin”.
5) Class discussion: Have you ever wanted to change something? How did you change it?
6) Compare and contrast your situation of change with MLK’s on a Venn diagram.
7) Illustrate and write the before and after of a time when you wanted something to change.
8) Journal Reflection:
   Sentence Starter: I wanted change because______. I changed _____when I ______.

**Works Cited:**
Carson, Clayborne (ed.). *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Volume I: Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951.

**Annotated Bibliography: (Books and Websites for Teachers and Students)**
King, Coretta Scott. *I Have A Dream Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Scholastic, 1991.
Website: *Civil Rights Movement*: http://www.kidskonnect.com/content/view/410/27/