Title of Lesson: Get up, Stand up. Stand up for your Civil Rights.

Lesson By: Reha Modi

| Grade Level/Subject Areas: Fourth/English Language Arts | Class Size: 25-35 students | Time/Duration of Lesson: 3-5 days (Time will vary for Teaching Activities) |

Guiding Questions:
• How are Dr. King and President Obama civil rights leaders and activists?
• How can you stand up for something you believe in?

Lesson Abstract:
Students will understand Dr. King’s role as a civil rights leader as well as his influence on President Obama becoming an activist in civil rights. They will use this information to synthesize these two figures and reflect on how both men stood up for their beliefs and were able to create change. Students will demonstrate an understanding of these men as proponents of social change and will relate their actions to actions they can take in their own lives to create change by standing up for their own beliefs.

Lesson Content:
Dr. Martin Luther King, inspired a generation of people to change their thinking. Today he continues to inspire communities of oppressed people to stand up for their rights. What made Dr. King a leader? Why did he stand up for his beliefs?

Dr. King was born into a religious family whose parents who were deeply committed to Christianity. According to his autobiography, “My home situation was very congenial. I have a marvelous mother and father.” (page 2) King’s family life and religious fervor fostered his ability to develop relationships with all kinds of people. At a young age, Martin was exposed to different types of racism and discrimination. His parents each had their own role in helping to explain the inequalities that existed. His father, Martin Sr., was involved in civil rights, and was the president of the NAACP in Atlanta, Georgia, while his mother had the difficult job of explaining what segregation is and why there were separate areas for blacks and whites.

At the age of 6, King Jr. was faced with first recallable experience of discrimination. His playmate, a white child, had been forbidden to play with his friend anymore after befriending him for 3 years. King remembers feeling confused about why he could not play with his friend. The confusion soon turned into anger and King began to develop a hatred for a race of people who hated him, but his Christian beliefs told him to love all people. King continued to face more situations of discriminations and at the age of 14 won an essay contest discussing the Constitution and negroes. Clearly, at a young age, Martin was affected by social issues. During his schooling, Martin dealt with discrimination, but overcame these quandaries and was still able to succeed in his own educational pursuits. After completing his undergraduate work, he
went on to theology school, and became a minister. An effective speaker, Martin was constantly traveling, preaching his word around the country. He was an inspirational speaker to many in his own community as well as in communities across city and state borders.

Dr. King was called upon by E.D. Nixon on December 2, 1955, the day after the arrest of Rosa Parks. Nixon told the story of Parks’ arrest and the idea of starting a bus boycott. The bus boycott was a very successful tool for the blacks all over Montgomery to stand up to the unfair segregation laws. Soon after, Dr. King was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, where he gave “The most decisive speech of my life.” (Carson, page 58). He told of the grievances that blacks all over had been facing, and explained why oppression needed to end. “We are going to work together. Right here in Montgomery, when the history books are written in the future, somebody will have to say, “There lived a race of people, a black people, fleecy locks and black complexion,” a people who had the moral courage to stand up for their rights.” (Carson, page 61)

From this day forward, King had established himself as a leader of his community and he effectively empowered the people to use their unity to stand up to an oppressive system. King led many more boycotts and demonstrations that often times led to his arrest, but he always reassured the people that these were necessary steps for them to meet their end goal of putting an end to segregation. His role as a civil rights leader paved the way for many more leaders to emerge and to follow his example. King ignited a fire in people that still continues to burn in the 21st century. Segregation still exists, and people still continue to fight for their civil liberties. King did not leave his work unfinished, rather he led a movement that has yet ended. Though King did not live to see the progress that has been made since the 1960’s, he continues to inspire generations of people.

One such individual that has been inspired by King, is the current president of the United States, Barack Obama. Barack born to a black father and a white mother faced many issues of racism in his childhood. Obama grew up in Hawaii, and in his neighborhood he was one of the only black children in his school. In Dreams From My Father, he tells of his first day of school, recalling the way to way the other students responded to him. He tells of a girl who wanted to touch his hair, and a boy who asked him if his father ate people. Early on, Obama became very aware that he was different from the other students.

Obama was formerly a civil rights activist and community organizer with low income residents in South Side of Chicago. Even before Obama was elected to the Senate, he worked on several reforms including organizing voter registration drives which aided in registering thousands of black voters in Chicago. Once Obama was elected in the Illinois state Senate, he worked on several bills including ones that called for tax breaks for low income families, healthcare improvement, childcare reforms and one particularly significant bill that tried to eliminate racial profiling used by police enforcement.

Throughout his senatorial career, Obama championed many bills that sought to improve the conditions of minority groups in the U.S. “One of the, I think, tragedies of the civil rights movement was because the civil rights movement became so court-focused. I think that there was a tendency to lose track of the political and community organizing and activities on the
ground that are able to put together the actual coalitions of power through which you bring about redistributive change, and in some ways we still suffer from that.” (2001 Chicago Public Radio interview.) In 2008, when Barack Obama announced his candidacy for president, he employed the strategy of community organizing, and mobilizing people who all stand for a similar cause. He used the support of those individuals who rallied for change. Throughout his campaign, Obama relied heavily on communities that were being failed by the system, including minorities of all kinds. During the civil rights movement of the 1960’s, the primary focus was desegregated the blacks and whites, and allowing for blacks to have the same rights as whites. While this continues to be a struggle today in the 21st century, new struggles have emerged, called for additional civil rights reform. Today, civil liberties has extended to include those facing discrimination due to not only race, but gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs.

At the NAACP 100th convention, Obama stated, "Make no mistake: The pain of discrimination is still felt in America. Racism, is felt by African-American women paid less for doing the same work as colleagues of a different color and gender. By Latinos made to feel unwelcome in their own country. By Muslim Americans viewed with suspicion for simply kneeling down to pray. By our gay brothers and sisters, still taunted, still attacked, still denied their rights.”

Obama continues to use the inspiration of great leaders such as Dr. King and Mahatma Gandhi. In his book, The Audacity of Hope, Obama refers to Dr. King several times, as a social reformer and makes reference to his famous speech on page 231 while discussing a vision of America. (“…an America that fulfills Dr. King’s promise that we be judged not by the color of our skin but the content of our character.”)

Both King and Obama can be viewed as civil rights leaders working in different times in the nation’s history. Both have worked to stand up to discrimination and fighting for basic civil liberties that are supposed to be granted to all. Though the struggle has been arduous and difficult, the journey still continues and will continue as long as our nation has leaders that Obama and King who stand up for what they believe in.

**California State Content Standards:**

RC 2.5: Compare and contrast information on the same topic after reading several passages or articles.

LS 1.7: Emphasize points in a way that help the listener or viewer to follow important ideas and concepts.

**Materials Needed:**

- Paper
- Pencils
- Pens

**Suggested Teaching Activities:**
- Narrative Prompt (see below)
- Venn Diagram – Compare Dr. King and President Obama as civil rights leaders
Narrative Prompt

Dr. King, a great civil rights leader, stood up for beliefs against people being treated unfairly. He believed that all men and women, no matter what color their skin was, should be treated equally. He worked hard in his lifetime to see that people would change and everyone would be treated equally. President Obama, the first African American president in the United States, is continuing Dr. King’s work to create for equal rights for all people. Think about something that you feel is unfair in our world today. Do you have the courage to stand up for your beliefs? How can you stand up for something that you believe in? What are the steps that you would take?

Journal Response Prompts

1. Does it take more courage to stand up for something you believe in or sit back and watch?

2. What are ways that people can stand up for something they believe in?

3. Make a list of things you think are unfair in the world.

4. Why do you think Dr. King stood up for his beliefs? What would you have done if you were in his position?

5. Why do people stand up for their beliefs?

6. Do you have to be a hero to stand up to someone or something?

7. Have you ever stood up for something that you believed in? What did you do?

Bibliography: