



K-12 Civic Learning Opportunities: Black History Month

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

February is Black History Month. It is a chance to learn about leaders and events important to the history and progress of African-Americans in the United States. One civic learning opportunity related to Black History Month is voting rights. A large part of the civil rights movement was dedicated to establishing voting rights for all Americans.

Background

The 15th Amendment to the US Constitution guaranteed voting rights would not be denied “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude”. It was made official in 1870, after the Civil War.

In some states, African-Americans voted and were elected to local, state and federal offices. In other states, particularly in the South and in other areas, state governments enacted voting laws that required citizens to own property, pay a special tax or pass a literacy test to be eligible to vote. This meant that many people, including poor or uneducated African-Americans, were unable to register to vote.

Over time, civil rights supporters worked to overturn these voting requirements. This was done through activism, protests and other methods of communication and advocacy. The people involved included both famous leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as other private citizens who wanted to make a difference.

In 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act. It outlawed the literacy requirements for voter registration. It also provided federal protection to help ensure that voters were given equal opportunity to register and vote.



Objective and Activities

Use the context of Black History Month to learn and think critically about voting rights. A variety of activities are available. Modify based on your grade level or subject area. For example, you can focus students on the community, North Carolina, the United States or another country. Connect this to history, literature or in a global community. There are many opportunities for writing, reading, small group discussion and oral presentation. The activity aligns with several core standards. Skills include:

- Critical thinking
- Analysis
- Reading information
- History
- Writing
- Civic literacy
- Founding documents
- Primary sources
- Media literacy
- Collaboration
- Civic leadership
- Government
- Effective communication
- Group discussion
- Connecting historic events, personal knowledge, current events or global life

WEB RESOURCES

Find many resources, primary sources, and correlations to curriculum standards at www.generationnation.org/index.php/learn/entry/learning-opportunity-black-history-month

ACTIVITIES

CONNECTING KNOWLEDGE

Compare and contrast the roles of individuals, leaders and how leaders are selected at different levels from student council to global cities and countries. What are the differences and similarities? Who can make changes? How does it happen?

- Student Council
- School Board
- City or town
- County
- State
- United States
- Global
- Other?



WRITE THE HEADLINE

If you were reporting on civil rights, including voting rights, what would your headline say? Search news headlines in history. Were you close? Were they right? Why or why not?

Read headlines about the address from different news sources. What do they say? How are they similar or different? Why?

Use important dates in the Civil Rights Movement in 1965 including March 7 (March on Selma), March 17 (President Johnson sends Voter Rights Act to Congress), and August 6 (when the Voter Rights Act was signed into law).

LEADERS, CITIZENS AND COMMUNICATORS

Role-play leaders and citizens involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Possible roles:

- Famous African-American leader such as Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Citizens who want to change voting rights People who want to vote and are not allowed to register
- News reporters from the NY Times, Birmingham (AL) News and a global news source Governor of a Southern State
- President of the United States
- People involved in current civil rights movements in the United States and globally.

Questions to discuss and think about:

How do the leaders demonstrate their leadership? Are they persuasive? Collaborative? How?

How do the citizens get involved? How do they convey that they want to make a difference, not just trouble?

If you are reporting the news, is your coverage different depending on where you live?

What are a state governor's responsibilities? Does he/she have to work with other governments? Citizens? Leaders? Why or why not?

Why did the President enact the Voting Rights Act? How did he accomplish that task?

If you were working to make a difference this year, would you march and protest? Why or why not?

What are some ways you can make an impact on leaders, policies and decisions?