



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

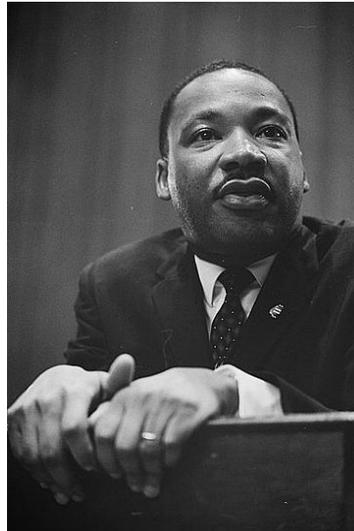
Living the Dream: The Promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* and Martin Luther King Jr.

The long struggle to desegregate schools and end segregation in other parts of society began after the NAACP won a significant victory on May 17, 1954, which ended segregation in public schools. The promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* was an end to legal segregation in public schools. *Brown* gave African Americans a new hope for justice denied them in American history.

A new leader, a 26-year-old preacher from Atlanta, Georgia in his second year as pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, emerged in December 1955 from Montgomery, Alabama. Martin Luther King Jr. organized a citywide bus boycott in support of Rosa Parks for refusing to obey segregation laws on public buses.

The boycott lasted over a year and King became the new leader in the push for desegregation in all parts of society. His use of nonviolent techniques and his ability to motivate thousands of people through rhetoric made him an unprecedented force in the fight for civil rights in America.

In his December 15, 1956 speech, King called the *Brown* decision, "...one of the most momentous decisions ever rendered in the history of this nation..." and how it was a "...reaffirmation on the good old American doctrine of freedom and equality for all men." However, he also stated that "...segregation is already legally dead, but it is factually alive." According to King, the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* would not be fulfilled until all forms of



Martin Luther King Jr. speaking at a press conference March 1964. Photo Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

segregation were erased from society.

King believed the promise of *Brown* was more than an end to legal segregation. Instead, King announced in a May 17, 1956 speech that the promise of *Brown* was "personal and social integration". Personal and social integration is not a legal process, it is only a personal and voluntary behavior to integrate without the force of law.

In a speech commemorating the second anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, he declared *Brown* was about more than equal education, it created an era where "...all men will live together as brothers, and where every man recognizes the dignity and worth of all human personality." However, King was not an irrational optimist, he understood

there was, and still is, work that must be done to accomplish the promise of *Brown*.

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. shared his dream with America about the future of American race relations. Standing in front of the Lincoln Memorial, King announced his hope that "...my four little 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." The dream King hoped for was a society that fulfilled the promise of *Brown*. The promise of an end to racial segregation, prejudice, and injustice.

The technique used by King to help achieve his dream was nonviolence. King explained how nonviolence worked by "...refus[ing] to hit back will cause the oppressors to become ashamed of their own methods and we will be able to transform their own methods and we will be able to transform enemies into friends." Nonviolence can be used in the absence of violence too. By showing brotherly love to everyone in society you are participating in nonviolence as well.

January 21 is a national holiday dedicated to the life and memory of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It is important to remember on this day what King accomplished for humanity during his lifetime, but it is more important to help King's dream become a reality. King's dream of a society where people are not judged by race can be accomplished and the promise of *Brown* will be fulfilled by celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day everyday.

Educational Activity: Martin Luther King Jr. Comic Book

Grade Level: 6th-8th

The purpose of this activity is for students to learn about the life of Martin Luther King Jr. in a comic book and then create their own comic strip about Dr. King. Teachers can download a copy of the comic book from <http://www.ep.tc/mlk>.

Objective:

- Students will be able to identify major events that shaped Dr. King's life and techniques he used to help achieve equal rights for all.
- Students will show their understanding of the content by creating their own comic strip about Dr. King.

Procedure:

Allow each student an opportunity to read the comic book. After reading the comic, bring the class together for a discussion and ask these questions.

- What techniques did Martin Luther King Jr. use to gain equal rights for all?
- How did Dr. King react when his house was bombed?
 - What was the significance of his reaction?
- Is there a way nonviolent protest can be used today?
- Is there a way you could use nonviolent resistance?
- Does segregation still exist today?
 - Why or why not?
- How can you celebrate the life of Dr. King on Martin Luther King Jr. Day?

After the discussion, give the students a blank sheet of paper and allow them to draw their own comic strip. Students should relate their comic to the life of Dr. King, the use of nonviolence, or the struggle for equal rights. Allow the students to be as creative as possible when creating their comic strip.

Kansas Standards:

Based on 8th Grade
Civics-Benchmark 2 & 4
History-Benchmark 4
Reading-Benchmark 4
Literature—Benchmark 1

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Martin Luther King Jr. Day was established on November 3, 1983 and the first national celebration took place on January 20, 1986. January 15th is the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr., however, Martin Luther King Jr. Day is celebrated on the third Monday of January every year. Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a time to reflect on the life of Dr. King and his achievements and it is also a day to reflect on the status of race relations in America today.

African Americans have made gigantic strides in their quest for equal rights. Today, Barack Obama is running for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States, Condoleezza Rice is Secretary of State, and Oprah Winfrey is a media tycoon. Nevertheless, in a study conducted by The Brookings Institution, the income gain among African Americans and whites have both increased, however, the growth is greater among whites.

In an address offered at the second annual institute on nonviolence and social change in 1957 at Holt Street Baptist Church, King delivered a speech titled "Some Things

We Must Do." King's speech was about the need for African American readiness in the new post-*Brown* era. *Brown* brought about an era when legal segregation is dying and African Americans would no longer be judged by their skin color but by their ability. King believed the African American community would be able to compete successfully post-*Brown* era, using examples of increased wages over the past 20 years, an increase in literacy, and the growing middle class among African Americans.

King's advice to help African Americans overcome the obstacles placed in front of them is to develop intelligent, courageous and virtuous leaders, both black and white. He declared that leaders are needed at every level, local, state and national. King continued by stating the need for leaders who are, "Not leaders in love with money, but in love with justice. Not leaders in love with publicity, but in love with humanity."

Check in your local newspapers for activities to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day in your community. Become a leader in your community by looking for opportunities to serve those in needs.



Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X greet each other before a press conference in March 1964. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.