

Sitting in for Liberty - The Liberty Bell as a Symbol for Civil Rights

Grade Levels: 9-12

(Expected Class Sessions to Complete: 2-3)

Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe why student activists in the mid-1960s chose the Liberty Bell as the site of a controversial sit-in for which the purpose was to encourage federal intervention in events in Selma, Alabama.
- Students will use a photograph of a March, 1965 sit-in at the Liberty Bell as a springboard for creating fictional characters through whom they will express their understanding of how the Liberty Bell has been used as a symbol by various groups, particularly by young activists during the Civil Rights era.

Standards Correlation :

Reading Information Text RI 5.1, RI 5.2, RI 5.3, RI 5.7, Writing W 5.2, W 5.4, Reading History RH (6-8).1, RH (6-8).2, RH (6-8).7

Materials:

- Photo of sit-in, March 12-13, 1965 (Photo #1)
- Brief summary of the Liberty Bell's history found at www.nps.gov/inde/liberty-bell-center.htm
- University of Pennsylvania NAACP flyer, March 12, 1965 (worksheet #1)
- “*Why Sit-in for Liberty?*” *Activity Sheet*

Introduction (Before the Lesson):

It will be helpful to give a brief summary of the events in Selma, Alabama in 1965 in order to set the stage for the lesson: *In March of 1965, civil rights activists planned a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama to protest the lack of voting rights for African-Americans. The march was broken up by police at the Edmund Pettus Bridge in what became known as “Bloody Sunday”. Two days later the march was attempted again and a minister named James Reeb was killed by police and counter demonstrators. Following these developments, civil rights activists throughout the country sought to bring national and world-wide attention to the events in Selma and to encourage the federal government to intervene on behalf of the protestors.* (For information about Selma, see <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/civilrights/al4.htm>, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/mar07.html>)

Engage/Procedure:

Whole Class Discussion:

1. Show the photo of the March 12-14, 1965 sit-in (Photo #1). Ask students to determine the era based on visual cues (e.g. clothing, hair styles, and location of the Liberty Bell). Have students predict why young people are sitting in front of the Liberty Bell.
2. Explain that the students were participants in a sit-in organized by members of the University of Pennsylvania chapter of the NAACP. The student activists were seeking to bring attention to, and to encourage federal intervention in, the events in Selma, Alabama.

Individual Work:

Students will read the brief history of the Liberty Bell found at www.nps.gov/inde/liberty-bell-center.htm and University of Pennsylvania NAACP flyer from March 12, 1965.

Cooperative Work:

1. Break students into groups of 4-7 students and have them brainstorm reasons that the NAACP leaders at the University of Pennsylvania chose the Liberty Bell as the site of their demonstration.

2. Optional: Distribute *Why Sit-in for Liberty* Activity worksheets and have them fill in the sheet using information from the two handouts. (*The worksheets may not be needed for older or more sophisticated students.*)

Closing:

Whole Class Discussion:

1. Have students share the ideas generated during their brainstorming session. Elicit or present the following responses:
 - a. Inscription on the Liberty Bell reads, “*proclaims Liberty thro’ all the Land and to all the Inhabitants thereof*”; in March, 1965 many African-Americans were denied Liberty because they were unable to vote in many southern states.
 - b. Liberty Bell had been used by various groups seeking rights including abolitionists and women’s suffrage activists. Similar to the Civil Rights movement, abolitionists sought freedom for African-Americans, and suffragists sought to extend voting rights.
 - c. Liberty Bell was a well-known site; a sit-in there would garner media attention.
 - d. Liberty Bell is a national symbol; it is associated with the federal government which is the level of government which the activists were seeking to influence.
 - e. The organizers of the sit-in saw a role for each branch of the federal government in enforcing civil rights; this reinforces the vision of the framers of the Constitution in terms of separation of powers and division of federal and state authority. (In 1965, the Liberty Bell was housed in Independence Hall where the Constitution was written and ratified.)

Individual Work:

2. In their groups of 4-7, each student will choose a different individual depicted in the photo for which they will develop a character and a voice. Students will work independently to write a monologue, journal entry, or letter in which they convey:
 - a. What is this person’s background that led to his or her participation in this sit in—what has been the individual’s personal experience of race/the Civil Rights movement and why did this person join the University of Pennsylvania chapter of the NAACP?
 - b. Why has the individual decided to participate in the sit-in at the Liberty Bell—what did he or she hope to accomplish and what factors did he or she consider when deciding whether or not to take part?
 - c. Why does he or she think that the Liberty Bell is an appropriate setting for the sit-in—what about the history, symbolism, and prior use of the Liberty Bell by activists make it a fitting location for meeting the student activists’ current goals?
(*see rubric*)

Post Visit-Extension:

Cooperative Work

In groups, students will present their writing by creating *tableaux vivants* for their peers. Each group will be expected to recreate the photo and to take turns enacting the characters they have developed. Depending on time constraints, students will either share an excerpt or the entire content of their written work.

Additional Extension:

Individual Work:

Have students read all or some of the reactions to the Liberty Bell sit-in. Half the class should read letters that support the superintendent’s decision to let the sit-in occur; the other half will read letters opposed to his decision.

Whole Class Discussion:

1. Generate a “T-chart” showing reasons that people either supported or opposed the park superintendent’s decision to allow the students to stage their sit-in. Once reasons have been shared, draw a horizontal line on the chalkboard and explain that the line represents a continuum. On one end, is the opinion that the superintendent did the right thing in allowing the Liberty Bell to be used as the site of a protest; on the other end, is the opinion that the superintendent should not have allowed a sit-in. Students should put their initials where their opinion lies.
2. Have students discuss their points of view, at first just quoting from and referring to the documents they have just read. Once words and ideas from numerous documents have been put forth, students can share their personal opinions without referring to the documents. At the conclusion of the lesson, give students the opportunity to move their initials on the continuum and to explain why they have changed their view.
3. If time allows, ask if sit-ins should be allowed at the Liberty Bell today and, if so, under what conditions.

Activity Worksheets:

Why Sit-in at the Liberty Bell?

Primary Sources:

March 12th photo (Photo #1)

March 12th flyer (Worksheet #1)

Primary Sources for Additional Extension Activity

Documents in support of Superintendent and sit-in

- March 13, 1965 letter from Richard Sabreen (Worksheet #2)
- March 13, 1965 letter from Hennig Cohen (Worksheet #3)
- March 22, 1965 *Evening Bulletin*, “Liberty Bell Sit-ins Defended” (Worksheet #4)

Documents critical of Superintendent and sit-in

- March 18, 1965 letter from Vincent R. Foley (Worksheet #5)
- March 19, 1965 letter from Kathryn M. Lawrence (Worksheet #6)
- March 16, 1965 *Evening Bulletin*, “Sit-ins at Liberty Bell Shrine Bring Sharp Protests” (Worksheet #7)

Photo #1



Liberty Bell sit-in. March 1965
From the Collections of Independence National Historical Park

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA NAACP

MARCH 12, 1965

DEMONSTRATION AT INDEPENDENCE HALL

TIME & PLACE: Independence Hall 5th and Market Streets, Philadelphia
Friday, March 12, 13, from 10:00 A.M. Friday, on

PURPOSE: To protest, by a sit-in and picket demonstration, the complete denial of constitutional rights throughout the entire south, and in particular, the voter registration campaign this year which has been marked particularly by mass arrests and intolerable jail conditions. The Liberty Bell again serves as a national focal point in the struggle for freedom, which today is taking place in Selma, Alabama.

FACT SHEET: The 1957 and 1960 Civil Rights Laws contained provisions that give to the FBI full powers to arrest any person or persons prohibiting a citizen of the United States from exercising his full constitutional rights. This includes the right to vote!

Three young Negro men and a white clergyman have been killed since the beginning of this year.

WE ARE PROTESTING TO:

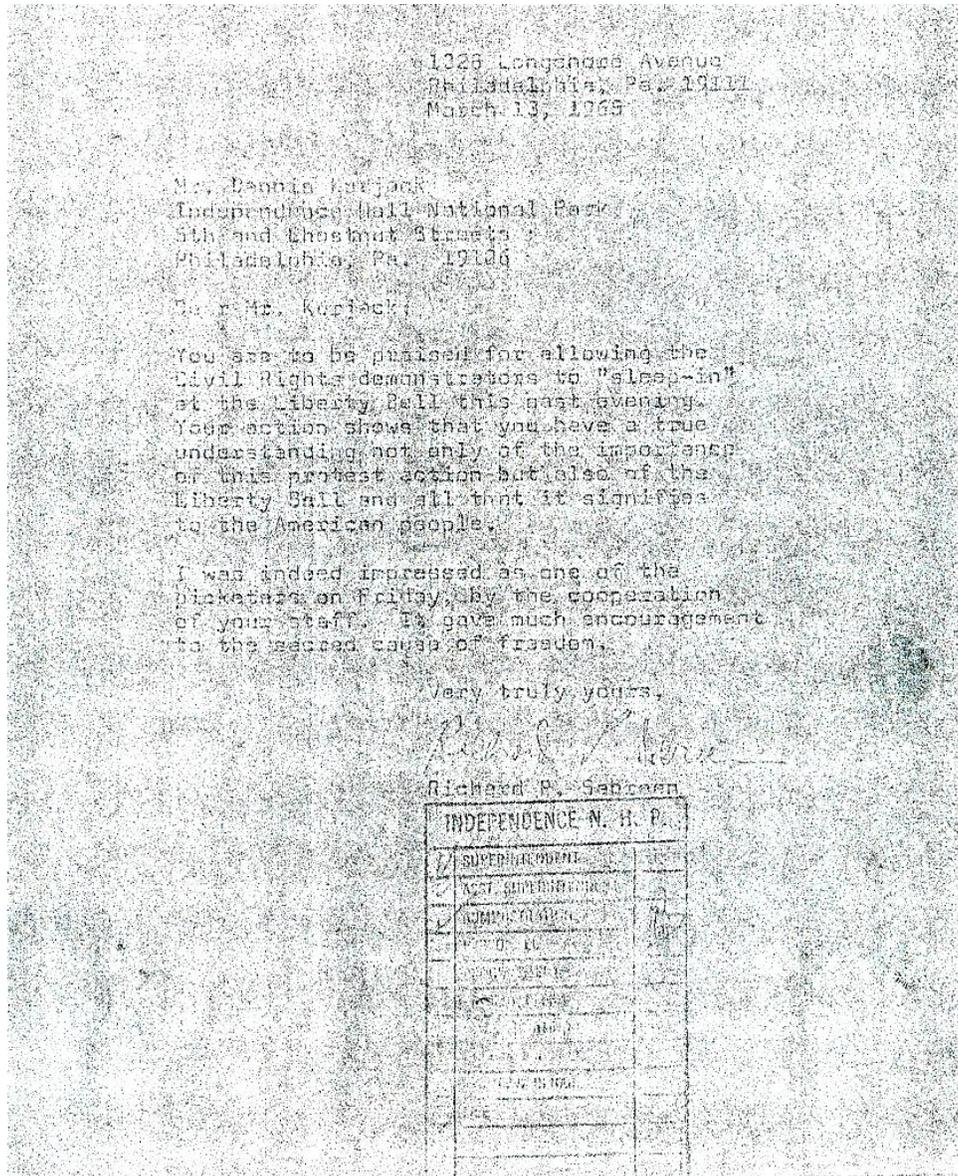
1. Demand Federal protection for those attempting to register and vote.
2. Demand fulfillment of promises of Federal action against the registrars of Dallas and Perry counties in Alabama.
3. Call for a Congressional investigation of jail conditions in these Alabama areas.
4. Request that additional Congressmen and public officials (other than those who went to Selma) visit these central Alabama areas to obtain first hand information and to lend support to the fight for constitutional rights being waged there.
5. Ask that the Justice Department file in Federal Court a bill of information asking that the police and county officials who have arrested voter registration workers and prospective applicants be prosecuted for a misdemeanor under Section 241, Title 18 of the U.S. Code (this section makes it a crime to intimidate or coerce people in their attempt to vote).
6. Demand FBI agents in Alabama begin to exercise their right, under sections 3052 and 3053 of U.S. Admin. Law (Title 18), to arrest on the spot those law enforcement officers and private citizens doing the intimidation and harassment of voter registration workers and applicants.
7. Demand the arrest of Sheriff Jim Clark for violation of Civil Rights Laws.

IF YOU ARE IN AGREEMENT WITH OUR DEMANDS, ADD YOUR NAME TO THE FORMS AVAILABLE AT INDEPENDENCE HALL.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, JOIN US AT INDEPENDENCE HALL, OR CALL EV6-1530.

March 12, 1965, Demonstration Application
From the collections of Independence National Historical Park

Worksheet #2



March 13, 1965, Richard Sabreen letter

From the collections of Independence National Historical Park

Transcription of body of letter:

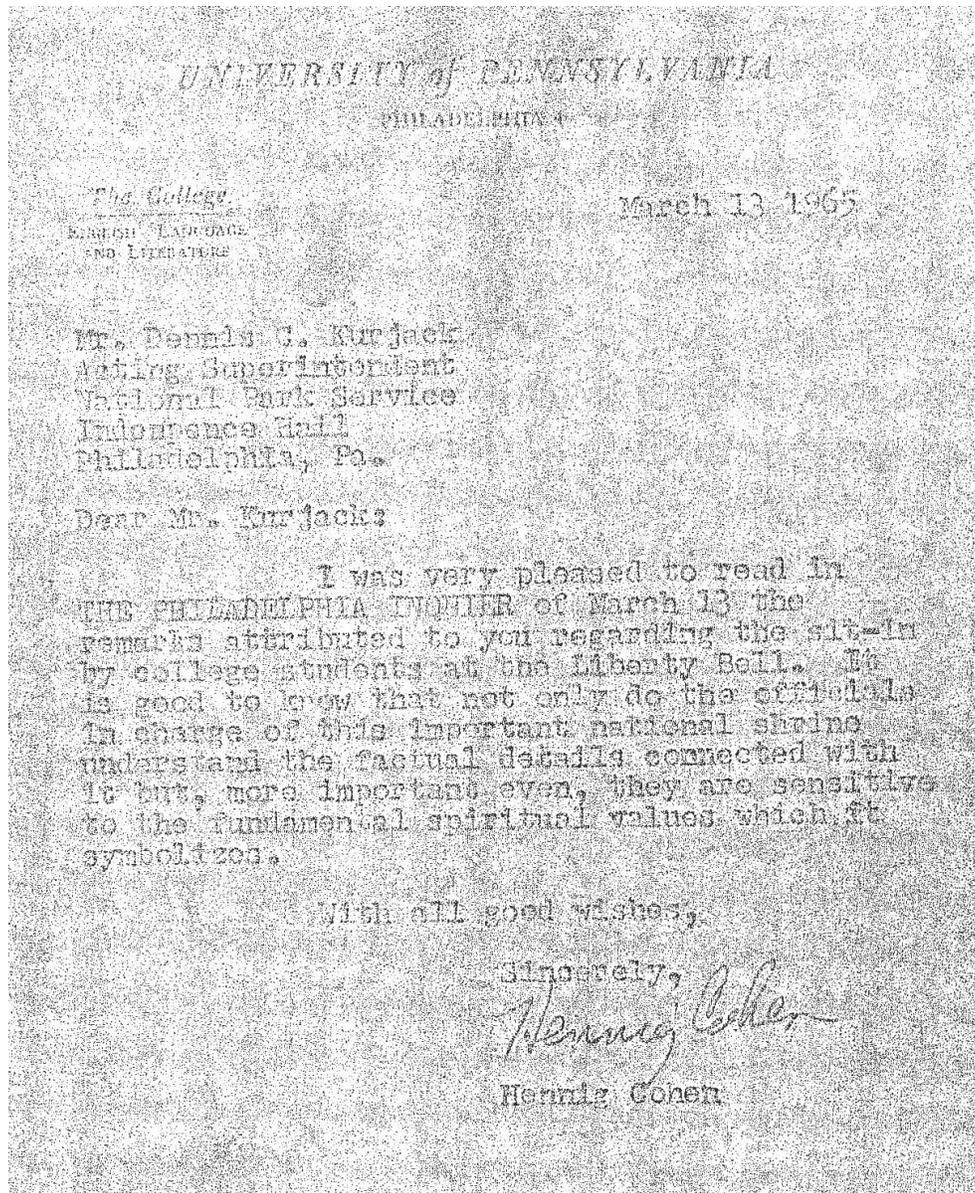
Dear Mr. Kurjack:

You are to be praised for allowing the Civil Rights demonstrators to "sleep-in" at the Liberty Bell this past evening. Your action shows that you have a true understanding not only of the importance of this protest action but also of the Liberty Bell and all that it signifies to the American people.

I was indeed impressed as one of the picketers on Friday, by the cooperation of your staff. It gave me much encouragement to the scared cause of freedom.

Very truly yours,
Richard P. Sabreen

Worksheet #3



March 13, 1965, Henning Cohen letter
From the collections of Independence National Historical Park

Transcription of body of letter:

Dear Mr. Kurjack:

I was very pleased to read in The Philadelphia Inquirer of March 13 the remarks attributed to you regarding the sit-in by college students at the Liberty Bell. It is good to know that not only do the officials in charge of this important national shrine understand the factual details connected with it, but more important even, they are sensitive to the fundamental spiritual values which it symbolizes.

With all good wishes,

Sincerely Henning Cohen

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THE EVENING BULLETIN
Philadelphia, Penna.
March 22, 1965

Liberty Bell Sit-Ins Defended

I was surprised by the letters March 16 criticising the Liberty Bell sit-ins. These people seem to have misunderstood the significance of both the sit-ins and the Bell itself.

I doubt if anyone ever valued his life so cheaply as to die for either a broken bell or a colonial building. Many however, have died for what each symbolized: democracy and freedom.

Nothing could have made a larger mockery of either, or insulted more those men who died for democracy, than Governor Wallace's troopers blackjacking peaceful people

protesting "taxation without representation."

The students who sat in at Independence Hall were continuing the tradition of democratic protest started by the First Continental Congress. If anything the students added to the history and tradition of the building and Bell, by again using it for those purposes that made them a national shrine: the right to choose one's own leaders and make the laws.

John W. Little
Ardmore, Pa.

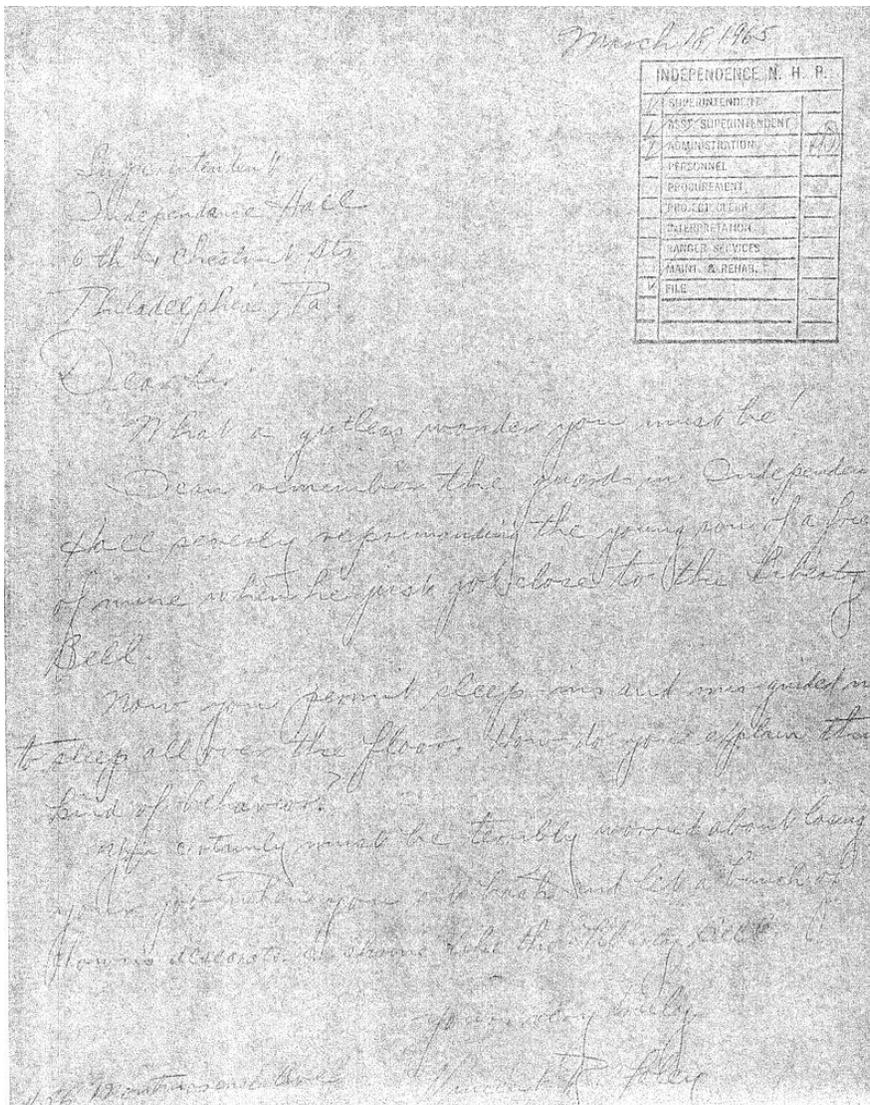
Jack J. Glickstein, in a letter to you, does not agree with the sympathy sit-ins in Indepen-

dence Hall because he says the pickets are publicity hounds. He also says that he would pay for paint and materials to clean the homes of poor Negro families that he knows.

Poor people are not just Negroes, and any liberties gained by Negroes is a gain for all other discriminated minorities, including poor whites. As for cleaning of homes, if he would just look around he could find many poor whites with dirty homes that need cleaning. I know he can, because I can. And he would have a much easier time looking since he is white also.

W. Ray Colbert
Springfield, Pa.

March 22, 1965, "Liberty Bell Sit-ins Defended" from the Evening Bulletin
From the collections of Independence National Historical Park



March 18, 1965, Vincent Foley letter

From the collections of Independence National Historical Park

Transcription of body of letter:

Dear Sir:

What a gutless wonder you must be! I can remember the guards in Independence Hall severely (sic) reprimanding the young son of a friend of mine when he just got close to the Liberty Bell.

Now you permit sleep-ins and misguided visitors to sleep all over the floor. How do you explain this kind of behavior?

You certainly must be terribly worried about losing your job when you sit back and let a bunch of clowns desecrate a shrine like the Liberty Bell.

Yours very truly,
Vincent R. Foley

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722 Collenbrook Avenue
Drexel Hill, Pa.

February 19, 1965
(This must have been intendend for March)

Dear Mr. Anderson:

It was a disgrace for officials of Independence Hall to allow our sacred shrine to be desecrated by Civil Rights demonstrators who recently staged a sitin and sleepin around the Liberty Bell.

If a visitor from out of town visited the Hall and refused to leave at closing time, because he hadn't seen everything, he would be ousted pretty fast. If one group is allowed to sit in, other groups with a grievance will try the same thing. I don't think our Founding Fathers would approve of such actions.

I hope the officials will adhere to the rules in the future and not allow demonstrations regardless of race, color or creed.

Will you kindly pass my sentiments on to the proper authority.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs) Kathryn M. Laurence

March 19, 1965, Kathryn M. Lawrence letter
From the collections of Independence National Historical Park

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 EVENING BULLETIN
 Philadelphia
 3/16/65

Sit-ins at Liberty Bell Shrine Bring Sharp Protests

The desecration of the Liberty Bell by so-called "students" is the crowning blow to real civil rights. The authorities at Selma cannot be impressed as the rest of the world cannot by wanton disregard of lawful authority evidenced by refusal to even limit the number of demonstrators at Independence Hall.

If our cradle of liberty is to be periodically used as a flophouse to further the cause of liberty, please close it. Too many men have bled and died in forthright demonstrations of defense of freedom, and this defense did not include the license of disobedient juveniles to make their own rules. The rule of anarchy will be that generation's legacy.

Let the same diligence be applied to education by these students and the cause of equality can be more realistically advanced.

Leonard E. Tully

Students Challenged

I wonder just what is the purpose of college students staging a sit-in at the Liberty Bell.

Since I don't agree with such doings many people call me anti-Negro. I feel there is too much to do to help the Negro in Philadelphia for any of us to waste our times parading in Selma or sitting around the Liberty Bell.

If these students are not publicity hounds and truly want to help the Negro may I offer this challenge? For every hour that they have sat down around the Liberty Bell will they join in giving the same amount of hours to painting and cleaning homes of poor Negro families that I know? I will join them every Sunday in this project and will attempt to furnish the paint and cleaning materials for the job. By this I mean, if they have sat ten hours at the Liberty Bell they will spend ten hours

on the cleaning project spread over a period of three weeks. Thanking you for any consideration you give this offer, I remain,

Jack J. Glickstein

Made Into Flophouse

Participants in the misnamed civil rights movement have turned Independence Hall into a flophouse with the blessing of the acting superintendent, who does "not believe American citizens should be forcibly removed from the Liberty Bell while they are giving peaceful expression to their beliefs."

What a grotesque interpretation of a patriotic symbol! Would he permit members of white citizens councils to express in the same way their belief in the tenth article of the Bill of Rights? Would he permit members of the John Birch Society to express their belief in our American traditions by taking over the Hall and staying there overnight? Indeed, could any mere taxpaying citizen, who had no political axe whatever to grind, sleep there overnight simply because he wanted to choose that peaceful way of expressing his patriotism? Let us apply the laws evenly without respect to race

or color and stop this exploitation of public property for partisan political purposes.

Dennis D. Murphy

Special Interests?

It seems strange to note that when a law-abiding citizen visits Independence Hall, in order to see the Liberty Bell, if he has not taken his hat off within two seconds after entering the door, he is yelled at by a guard, in a nasty tone of voice: "Take your hat off!"

However, a news picture on March 13 shows demonstrators lying or sleeping right in front of the Liberty Bell, showing no respect whatever for it. Nothing seemed to be done to correct this situation.

F. C. S.

Seeds of Lawlessness

Seeds of lawlessness are being sown not only by the exhibitionists who became involved in the civil rights passion, often for reasons far removed from this just cause, but also by some public authorities who hesitate to act in illegal sit-ins and other demonstrations.

A good example was provided by the sit-ins and sleep-ins

at the revered Liberty Bell. One official there said he saw no harm in permitting the students to remain in Independence Hall overnight.

Frankly, I think most of these students are not sincerely concerned with civil rights. They are out for a thrill or attention and public officials who appease them are themselves contributing to future defiance of constituted authority and disrespect for our traditions.

Joseph W. Dragonetti

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Rubric for Written Work “Sitting in for Liberty”

Lesson Name: <i>Sitting in For Liberty</i>		Student Name:			Score:
Essential Questions	Advanced (4)	Proficient (3)	Basic (2)	Below Basic (1)	0
What did the Liberty Bell represent to activists in the Civil Rights movement?	Student clearly and accurately conveys three aspects of what the Liberty Bell represented to activists in the Civil Rights movement.	Student clearly and accurately conveys two aspects of what the Liberty Bell represented to activists in the Civil Rights movement.	Student clearly and accurately conveys one aspect of what the Liberty Bell represented to activists in the Civil Rights movement.	Students' presentation of the Liberty Bell lacks clarity, accuracy, or completeness.	Student does not meet requirement of assignment.
On what other groups' experiences with the Liberty Bell as a symbol did Civil Rights activists draw?	Student presents at least two strong examples of uses of the Liberty Bell as a symbol prior to the Civil Rights era.	Student presents at least one strong example of a use of the Liberty Bell as a symbol prior to the Civil Rights era.	Students' presentation of the prior uses of the Liberty Bell is lacks accuracy, completeness, or clarity.	Students' presentation of the prior uses of the Liberty Bell is inaccurate, incomplete and/or unclear.	Student does not meet requirement of the assignment.
Was the Liberty Bell successful in helping the Civil Rights activists meet their goals?	Student demonstrates detailed knowledge of the chronology of the March, 1965 sit-in.	Student demonstrates satisfactory knowledge of the chronology of the March, 1965 sit-in.	Student demonstrates superficial knowledge of the chronology of the March, 1965 sit-in.	Student knowledge of the chronology of the March, 1965 sit-in is flawed or incomplete.	Student does not meet requirement of the assignment.
Why is Selma, Alabama considered a major event in the history of the Civil Rights Movement?	Student demonstrates detailed knowledge of the Selma voting rights protests in March, 1965.	Student demonstrates satisfactory knowledge of the Selma voting rights protests in March, 1965.	Student demonstrates superficial knowledge of the Selma Voting Rights protests in March, 1965.	Student knowledge of the Selma Voting Rights protests in March, 1965 is flawed or incomplete.	Student does not meet requirement of the assignment.
Why and how do individuals decide to take action to seek liberty for themselves or others?	Student successfully develops a fully-realized character with a unique voice, a distinct biography, and a clearly explained path toward activism.	Student attempts to develop a character with a unique voice, a distinct biography, and a clearly explained path toward activism.	Student develops a character with aspects of voice, biography and/or path toward activism.	Students' character lacks voice, biography, and/or path toward activism.	Student does not meet requirement of the assignment.
Score					

***Why Sit-in for Liberty?
Activity Worksheet***

Name: _____

Date: _____

How can the Liberty Bell be viewed as a symbol of the goals of the Civil Rights movement?

What other groups with similar goals have used the Liberty Bell?

Why Sit-in at the Liberty Bell?

Why did a sit-in at the Liberty Bell bring attention to recent events in Selma?

How is the Liberty Bell associated with the federal government?