

Decisions that Changed Our Lives:



A Look at the African American Quest for Freedom and Rights

Grades 5–8

Using AIT Products

- *America Past*, program 9, “The Abolitionists”
- *Northward to Freedom*
- *Tracks: Impressions of America*, program 8, “Divided and United”

Optional:

- *Cultural Horizons*, program 10, “Beyond Borders”
- *Human Rights: Youth Perspectives*, program 3, “The Price of Silence—Students Speak Out at the Front Lines”

Overview

Historical events result from decisions made by individuals. If individual citizens and political leaders had made different choices in the past, our history would not be the same. Imagine how different our lives would have been if the American colonists had never declared their independence or if Abraham Lincoln hadn’t issued the Emancipation Proclamation.

By analyzing how others have made difficult decisions in the past, students will gain a better understanding of why history happened the way

it did and learn to make their own informed choices. In this lesson students will explore race relations and the struggle for equal rights. They will evaluate decisions people made during the struggle for African-American equal rights and develop decision-making skills.

Objectives

- Describe the goals of abolitionists and list three specific activities in which abolitionists engaged.

- Describe how the Underground Railroad worked, cite reasons why slaves chose to escape on the Underground Railroad, and explain why people chose to hide slaves on their property.
 - Explain why African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, boycotted city buses.
 - Compare and contrast the philosophies and tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.
 - Evaluate the decisions individuals made during the struggle for African-American equality.
 - Identify situations that require a decision, gather information to make the decision, and make a decision based on the information obtained.
- From the Library of Congress: [The African-American Mosaic, Colonization](#)
 - From usinfo.state.gov: [The American Anti-Slavery Society](#)
 - From Encyclopedia Americana: [Free-Soil Party](#)
 - From the Library of Congress: [Anti-Slavery Activists](#) (Read only the section titled “Christian Arguments against Slavery.”)
 - AIT video: *Northward to Freedom*
 - AIT video: *Tracks—Impressions of America*, program 8, “Divided and United” (Cue the tape to approximate time code 8:25.)

Vocabulary

abolitionist	discrimination
boycott	Emancipation Proclamation
civil rights	options
consequences	segregation
decisions	Underground Railroad

Preparation

Materials Needed

- AIT video *America Past*, Program 9, “The Abolitionists” (first 8 minutes)
- From the Library of Congress: [Map Showing the Distribution of the Slave Population of the Southern States of the United States](#). Compiled from the census of 1860, Drawn by E. Hergesheimer.
- From the National Park Service: [Map showing Routes of the Underground Railroad](#)
- Map of the United States

Optional

- AIT video: *Cultural Horizons*, program 10, “Beyond Borders” (Cue the tape to approximate time code 2:04.)
- AIT video: *Human Rights—Youth Perspectives*, program 3, “The Price of Silence—Students Speak Out at the Front Lines”

Planning Notes

Arrange students in work groups to complete the activity on Days One and Two. Groups of four to six are best.

Time

This project will take about four 45-minute class periods, in addition to homework and extension activity time.

Procedure—Days 1 and 2

Introduce Topic: Making Decisions

Ask students to describe a time when they have had to make a decision. Have the class name things that make the decision-making process easier. For example, students may say that you

can gather information or think about the pros and cons of each alternative. Write students' responses on the board.

We make decisions every day. Sometimes we make decisions without really thinking about it, and sometimes it is very difficult to make a decision. One way to learn decision-making skills is to look at the choices others have made. Explain to students that they will explore the struggle for African-American equality and evaluate the decisions made by civil rights activists.

Pre-Viewing Activity

Show students the **Map Showing the Distribution of the Slave Population in the Southern States of the United States**. Point out where the largest concentration of slaves was. Have students explain why they think Southern states needed slaves. Students should understand that the economy of the South was dependent on agriculture, especially cotton, and that many people believed that slave labor was needed to raise and harvest crops. Tell students that many people believed that slavery was morally wrong. Ask, "What could these people do to combat slavery?"

Video

Prepare students for watching the AIT video from *America Past* by explaining that they will watch a video that describes the various things that people did to fight slavery. Tell students to take notes during viewing and list the different ways people fought slavery. Then play the video for about 7 minutes and 50 seconds.

Class Activity: Decision-Making Steps

Discuss the goals of abolitionists. Have students describe the differing views on how to solve the problem of slavery. Students should understand that some abolitionists thought they should purchase slaves and send them back to Africa. Others thought that they should stop slavery from spreading to the West. Another group of

abolitionists thought they should attack slavery in the South and immediately put an end to it.

Explain to students that each abolitionist had to decide which course of action to take. This was a difficult decision for some people to make. Ask, "What do you think influenced abolitionists' choice on which course of action to take?" You may want to refer students to the list they created early about decision making.

Write the following decision-making steps on the board and discuss each step.

1. Identify the problem you must solve or the goal that you want to achieve.
2. Gather information and facts.
3. List options. Identify the choices of action.
4. Predict consequences. You can make a table that shows the pros and cons of each alternative.
5. Choose a course of action based on the facts and evidence you have gathered.

Tell students that following these steps can make the decision-making process easier.

Group Work: What Would You Do to End Slavery?

Divide the class into small groups and ask students to imagine that it is 1840 and that they oppose slavery. Have each group follow the decision-making steps and decide how they will combat slavery. Tell each group to prepare an oral presentation that explains what they decided and describes how they reached that decision.

Allow each group to present. Then discuss how following the decision-making steps made the choice easier.

Have each group examine one of the following online resources:

- From the Library of Congress: [The African-American Mosaic, Colonization](#)
- From usinfo.state.gov: [The American Anti-Slavery Society](#)
- From Encyclopedia Americana: [Free-Soil Party](#)
- From the Library of Congress: [Anti-Slavery Activists](#) (Read only the section titled “Christian Arguments Against Slavery.”)

Allow time to analyze the primary sources. Have each group summarize the document for the rest of the class and describe how the abolitionists fought slavery. Discuss which course of action students thought was the most effective.

Procedure—Day 3

Introduce New Topic: Underground Railroad

Have students think about what they learned while watching the video “The Abolitionists.” Then ask the following questions:

- What was the Underground Railroad?
- Where did runaway slaves want to go?
- At the time, slavery was legal in the South. Why do you think some people in the North were willing to break the law and aid runaway slaves?
- Many slaves caught running away were severely punished or even killed. Why do you think slaves were willing to risk so much and flee on the Underground Railroad?



Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [LC-DIG-ppmsc-01269]

“Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Video

Prepare students to view the video *Northward to Freedom* by explaining that the journey on the Underground Railroad was long and hard. Project or duplicate and distribute the **Map Showing Routes of the Underground Railroad**. Point out that there were several different paths slaves could follow to Canada. Point out Texas, South Carolina, and Canada on a map. As a class, calculate the distances from Texas and South Carolina a person had to travel to reach Canada.

Tell students that they will now watch a video about two slaves who traveled the Underground Railroad. After the video, discuss student reactions. Ask students the following questions:

- What would have happened to the slave from South Carolina if he were sent back south? Why do you think he was willing to risk so much and run away?
- Why do you think the postmaster helped the slave from South Carolina?
- What happened when Lavinia Bell was caught running away?
- How did Lavinia Bell help runaway slaves?

- If you were alive before the Civil War, would you have helped runaway slaves? Why or why not?

Homework

It was not easy for slaves to decide whether they should run away and travel the Underground Railroad. The journey was dangerous. Every county in the South had slave patrols and sheriffs looking for runaway slaves. If they were caught, they were tortured or even killed.

Ask students, “If you were a slave and had the chance to escape, would you?” Tell students to follow the decision-making steps and choose a course of action. Then have them write a diary entry that explains why they chose to run away or not run away. Their diary entry should describe the benefits of running away on the Underground Railroad, identify the possible consequences of escaping, describe the dangers involved, and list the alternatives enslaved people had.

Procedure—Day 4

Introduce New Topic: Civil Rights Movement

When students come into the classroom, have half of them wait, sitting on the floor in the back of the classroom. Allow the other students to sit at their desks. For the next few minutes, continue giving the students at the desks special privileges. Then proceed to discuss the civil rights movement.

Explain that nearly 100 years after Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that freed slaves, African Americans were still subjected to discrimination. They were forced to attend segregated schools, and many laws denied African Americans the right to vote or to own land. Some African Americans were also the victims of violence from racist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.

Allow all students to sit at their desks. Then ask the students who were forced to sit at the back of the class to describe how they felt. Ask all students how they would feel if they were denied certain rights and privileges.

Video

Cue program 8 from the series *Tracks: Impressions of America* to approximate time code 8:25 (where Izzy and her grandma meet a woman sitting on a park bench). Play the video until the postcard questions appear.

Have the class follow the decision-making steps and answer these questions. You may want to draw a table on the board and list the pros and cons of all the alternatives.

After you have finished answering the questions, continue watching the rest of the video.

Reflection

Ask students the following questions:

- How did boycotts and non-violent protests contribute to the attainment of civil rights for African Americans?
- How would our lives be different today if citizens in the past did not speak out against the discrimination toward African Americans?

Homework

Explain to students that Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X both encouraged others to fight racial oppression. However, they had opposing philosophies. Martin Luther King, Jr., believed that African Americans should demand rights in a peaceful way. He encouraged others to participate in non-violent protests and boycotts. Malcolm X, a leader in the Nation of Islam, didn't think that non-violent demonstrations would end discrimination against African Americans. He encouraged African Americans to educate themselves, separate from white people, and fight for freedom “by any means necessary.”

Have students conduct research at the local library or on the Internet and learn about the opposing philosophies and tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X. Students should then imagine that it is 1963 and that they oppose racial discrimination. Whom would they follow: Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X? Ask students to create a poster that encourages others to fight racial discrimination by following the tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X.

Allow students to share their posters with the class and explain why they decided to follow the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X.

Assessment

1. Project Assessment

Use the following rubrics to evaluate the student products created during this lesson.

A. Days 1 and 2 Group Work: What would you do to end slavery?

Sample Assessment Rubric				
	Needs Improvement 1	Satisfactory 2	Excellent 3	Score
Clear and concise.	Presentation was not organized. Students spoke softly and incorrectly pronounced terms. Audience members had difficulty hearing presentation.	Presentation was organized. Students spoke clearly and pronounced most words correctly. Most audience members heard presentation.	Presentation was well thought out and organized. Students spoke clearly and used correct, precise pronunciation of terms. All audience members heard presentation.	
Explains what they would do to combat slavery.	Discusses the problem but does not explain what they would do to combat slavery.	Explains what they would do to combat slavery.	States what they would do to combat slavery and explains why this is the best course of action.	
Describes the decision-making steps.	Incorrectly describes the decision-making steps.	Lists all of the decision-making steps.	Accurately describes all of the decision-making steps and provides examples of how to follow these steps.	
Explains why following the decision-making steps made it easier to decide what to do.	Describes some of the decision-making steps but does not explain why following the decision-making process made it easier to decide what to do.	Adequately explains why following the decision-making steps made it easier to decide what to do.	States exactly how they followed the decision-making steps and explains why following the decision-making steps made it easier to decide on a course of action.	
Presentation Total Score:				/12

B. Day 3 Homework: Diary Entry of a Runaway Slave

Sample Assessment Rubric				
	Needs Improvement 1	Satisfactory 2	Excellent 3	Score
Correct spelling and grammar. Well developed and organized.	Wrote very little. What is written has spelling and grammatical errors. It is not well organized and is confusing.	Few spelling and grammatical errors. Fairly well developed and has enough information to inform the reader about the topic. The information is clearly presented with some elaboration.	Very few or no spelling and grammatical errors. Well developed and has more than enough information to inform the reader about the topic. The information is clearly presented with lots of elaboration.	
Specifically states the course of action taken and explains how the decision was reached.	Does not state the course of action or explain how the decision was reached. Strays from topic.	States the course of action and adequately explains how the decision was reached.	States course of action. Clearly explains how the decision was reached by outlining the steps in the decision-making process and explaining how each step was followed.	
Describes the dangers involved with running away.	Inaccurately describes the dangers and has little or no details.	Adequately describes the dangers involved with some details.	Clearly describes the dangers. Includes lots of details about the dangers involved with running away and expresses his or her opinion about the dangers.	
Lists alternatives enslaved people had.	Does not list the alternatives enslaved people had or inaccurately describes alternatives.	Lists several alternatives enslaved people had.	Lists several alternatives enslaved people had and describes the pros and cons of each alternative.	
Identifies the possible consequences.	Does not identify the consequences.	Identifies at least two possible consequences.	Describes at least two possible consequences and explains what would cause each consequence.	
Total Score:				/15

C. Day 4 Homework: Civil Rights Poster

Sample Assessment Rubric				
	Needs Improvement 1	Satisfactory 2	Excellent 3	Score
Correct spelling and grammar. Well organized and visually appealing.	Lots of spelling and grammatical errors. Not well organized. Messy.	Very few spelling and grammatical errors. Organized.	Little or no spelling and grammatical errors. Very well organized and visually appealing.	
Persuades others to fight racial discrimination.	Not very compelling. Does not adequately explain why people should fight racial discrimination.	Explains why people should fight racial discrimination.	Uses specific evidence and examples to influence others to fight racial discrimination.	
Describes the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X.	Inaccurately describes the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X.	Adequately describes the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X.	Describes the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X and explains how to put his philosophy to practice.	
Explains what individuals should do to fight racial oppression.	Does not adequately explain how individuals can fight racial oppression.	Describes at least one thing individuals can do to fight racial oppression.	Describes several things individuals can do to fight racial oppression and discusses the effectiveness of each action.	
Total Score:				/12

2. Individual Assessment

Check for deep understanding of the concepts by assigning students to write an essay on the following topic.

Evaluate the decisions made by two different civil rights activists. Describe the issue they were trying to resolve, explain what his or her options were, and describe what course of action he or she decided to take. Explain the long-lasting effects of the civil rights activists' decisions.

Extension Activity: How Will You Fight Racism and Discrimination?

Explain to students that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended institutionalized discrimination. However, many people are still subjected to racism and discrimination. Ask students to describe a recent example of discrimination and prejudice. For example, students may talk about how people discriminated against Muslims after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Ask students to name some things they can do to fight racism and discrimination. Then explain to them that they will watch two videos about students who decided to combat racial discrimination.

Cue program 10 from *Cultural Horizons* to approximate time code 2:04 (where the students discuss the tragic events of September 11, 2001). Play the video until approximate time code 6:07. Then ask students the following questions:

- What did Erin do before she finally decided to wear a hijab?
- How was Erin able to show her support of her Muslim friends by wearing a hijab?

Show students program 3 of *Human Rights: Youth Perspectives*, “The Price of Silence: Students Speak Out at the Front Lines.” Ask them the following questions:

- How did students at Lake City High School reach the decision that they should hold a counter-demonstration?
- How do you feel about the way that Lake City High School students responded to prejudice?
- Was the community fundraiser with the counter-demonstration effective?
- What can we do to reduce attitudes of prejudice?

Divide the class into groups and have students identify examples of discrimination in the news, on TV, or in the school or community. Ask each group to follow the decision-making steps and choose a course of action to fight current incidences of racism and discrimination. Have each group develop a speech that describes their solution to discrimination.

References

African-American Odyssey

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aohtml/exhibit/aointro.html>

This Library of Congress online exhibition explores the quest for African-American equality from the early national period through the twentieth century. It includes more than 240 primary and secondary resources that document the courage and determination of blacks in adverse circumstances who overcame immense odds to fully participate in all aspects of American society.

Teachers' Domain Civil Rights Special Collection

www.teachersdomain.org/special/civil

Produced by WGBH Boston in partnership with the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute and Washington University in St. Louis, this special collection provides free materials with free registration. This Web site includes audio, video, and text resources from *Frontline* and *American Experience* shows, *Eyes on the Prize*, and other PBS shows. It also has an interactive Civil Rights movement timeline and four lesson plans: Campaigns for Economic Freedom, Re-Examining Brown, Taking a Stand, and Understanding White Supremacy.

African-American World

www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld

This Web site is a compilation of PBS resources related to the African-American experience, including audio files, photographs, and links to lesson plans and online games.

National Civil Rights Museum

www.civilrightsmuseum.org/gallery/movement.asp

This Web site includes an online exhibit that has information about the civil rights movement and its lasting impact. It also has information about Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life and legacy.