

Stony the Road We Trod: Lesson Plan

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Group Concept: Voice

Subject/Course: Government 9-12

Length of lesson: 2-3 60 min. periods

Lesson Plan Title: The Voice of Government during the Civil Rights Movement



George Wallace speaking to a Citizens' Council meeting during a gubernatorial campaign

Photo Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History

By default, a government's voice can be heard through the legislation it passes. In a democracy, words have always been a powerful tool to send a message to the people. Prior to the Civil War, the government spoke through the Supreme Court that slavery was constitutionally legal. During the Civil War, Lincoln passed the Emancipation Proclamation to declare free the slaves. After the war, Johnson and Congress amended our constitution to declare slavery unconstitutional. And finally, through the Supreme Court once again Plessy v. Ferguson declared segregation legal, "separate but equal." It wasn't until Brown v. Board of Education that our government ultimately used its voice to declare separate but equal was unconstitutional.

Despite powerful legislation to empower African Americans once more, the south utilized its own legislation to oppress those same voices. Through black codes, Jim Crow and de facto segregation, African Americans were caught between two voices: one of empowerment and one of oppression. It would take a movement for African Americans to finally make their voices heard, above and beyond that of the government.

This lesson aims to introduce students to legislation that both empowered and oppressed African Americans during and after the Civil War through text analysis, video comparison and real life examples of oppression in the south, as well as how our nation fought to give African Americans a voice once again.

Essential Questions:

1. Whose voice matters? Who is excluded or included?
2. To what extent was voice used to oppress?
3. To what extent was voice used to empower?
4. How were a variety of methods used to project the voice of the movement?

Lesson Plan Details

College/Readiness Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6](#)

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.10](#)

By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 9-10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2](#)

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the role of the government's voice during the Civil Rights movement through legislation
- Analyze the Southern response to governmental legislation through Jim Crow and de facto segregation
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the governmental intervention during the Civil Rights movement
- Examine the differences between the two voices and complete a comparative analysis between the two voices of government – the U.S. versus the South and Jim Crow.

Guiding Questions:

1. How did the U.S. government attempt to enforce the 13th Amendment while maintaining de facto segregation, namely in the south?
2. How was the south able to use legislation to prevent desegregation among the African American community?
3. In what ways were African Americans able to use their voices to eventually stand up and resist the oppressive voice of the white legislation?

Preparation:

1. Students should have background knowledge on the climate of segregation in the south from 1945-1955. This includes information on the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Freedom Rides sponsored by C.O.R.E., the Children's March and the bombings in Birmingham, Bloody Sunday and the March to Selma. Students should have some understanding of the local, regional and national stances on segregation and integration, as well as an understanding of the concepts of de facto and de jure legislation.
2. Students will learn about the various government "voices" to give African Americans their rights in the United States while maintaining the "tradition" of segregation

Lesson Activity

1. Activity 1: Students will be given the primary documents of the court cases that define segregation: Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) and Brown v. Board of Education (1954), as well as the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments issued at the end of the Civil War and pair off in groups of 2-3 to analyze the text of the amendments
 - a. What is the Supreme Court's opinion on segregation before 1954? Is it legal?
 - b. How is the idea of Brown v. Board of Education challenged after 1955?
 - c. What do the amendments say and how do they tie into the Civil Rights Movement?
 - d. Why would the south struggle with implementation of Brown v. Board of Education?
2. Activity 2: Students will be given an overview of the Southern vocal response to the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, as well as Brown v. Board of Education by reviewing The Alabama Constitution of 1901, as well as de facto segregation examples and the Jim Crow laws. They will compare the language and message.
 - a. How do southern government representatives use their voice to quiet the voices of African Americans?
 - b. What Jim Crow laws were specifically crafted to suppress the vote of African Americans, their only voice in U.S. politics?
 - c. How does Jim Crow use de facto segregation to bypass the court cases and the amendments?
3. Activity 3: Students will research one example of de facto segregation or Jim Crow law that was specifically designed to oppress the voice of African Americans in the South prior to 1955.
 - a. In pairs, students will research a law designed to oppress and find a real-life example where this law not only hurt the African American community of the South but keep their voices quiet.
 - b. They will provide the law, a specific example from history and present a visual of this exchange
4. Activity 4: Students will watch two videos of leaders at the time: George Wallace and John F. Kennedy. One leader represents the regional response while the other represents the national platform.
 - a. How does regionality play a role in legislative voice?
 - b. What are the differences between their messages?
 - c. How do these figures portray themselves visually? Who is their audience?
 - d. Imagine being an African American southerner watching George Wallace? What emotions would you feel? How would you feel watching John F. Kennedy?
 - e. Students will discuss the concepts through a Socratic Seminar where one group takes the side of Wallace, while the other takes the side of John Kennedy, thinking through the questions presented.

Assessment

Students will write a comparative essay documenting government voice through legislation leading up to the Civil Rights movement as well as the southern response through their own legislation, whether de facto or de jure.

1. How did the government attempt to maintain segregation after slavery? How did the amendments give African American rights while they remained segregated via Plessy v. Ferguson?
2. What was the southern response to the maintenance of segregation, but also resistance to Brown v. Board?
3. How were the voices of African Americans oppressed during the Civil Rights movement with examples?
4. How did African Americans use their voice and their protest as empowerment against those southern voices, with examples?

Documents attached:

Plessy v. Ferguson: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/163/537>

Brown v. Topeka Board of Education: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/347/483>

13th Amendment: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiii>

14th Amendment: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiv>

15th Amendment: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxv>

Jim Crow Laws: https://www.nps.gov/malu/learn/education/jim_crow_laws.htm

Video of George Wallace: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcPGiGvo-uU>

Video of John F. Kennedy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWX_pjylg-g