

YOUTH MAKING CHANGE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was the civil rights movement? How did young people help to achieve greater equality for Black Americans?



OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define civil rights and explore civil rights challenges faced by different groups.
- Define civil rights movement and identify rights denied to and won by Black people during this era.
- Investigate the experiences of Ayanna Najuma and how the sit-in movement advanced civil rights.
- Create a role-play exploring the significance of the sit-ins and youth leadership in the civil rights movement.



LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



TIME NEEDED

75–90 minutes



MATERIALS

- AV equipment for projecting a video
- *Civil Rights Scenarios* handout (one for teacher reference)
- *Ayanna Najuma: Sitting in for Change* handout (one per student)
- *Ayanna Najuma: In Her Own Words* handout (one per small group)



VOCABULARY

civil rights	freedom riders	segregated/segregation
Civil Rights Act of 1964	Jim Crow	sit-in
civil rights movement	March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom	SNCC
discrimination		

Procedures

PART 1

What are Civil Rights? (30 mins.)

1 Ask students if they have ever heard about people “fighting for civil rights.” Conduct a think-pair-share in response to the question, “What exactly are *civil rights*?” Allow several pairs to share their ideas. Create and post a class definition of civil rights. Use the sample definition and information below to guide students.

Civil Rights are the freedoms guaranteed to citizens that protect them from discrimination and ensure equality for all people.

- Civil rights allow citizens to live freely and have equal opportunities in a democracy.
- Civil rights are guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and other government laws.
- Civil rights protect people from discrimination based on their identity or background (including race, sex, age, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and other characteristics).
- Civil rights defend against unfair treatment in different areas, including schools, workplaces, housing and public facilities (such as restaurants, theaters, stores, libraries and parks).

2 Have students respond to the following prompt: What is a situation in which the government should step in to protect civil rights? Choose one of the following options for investigation, depending upon the ability of your students:

- a) As a class, discuss one or more of the situations on the handout *Civil Rights Scenarios* so students gain a concrete understanding of civil rights.

NOTE

Students may confuse *civil rights* with *civil liberties*. Civil rights are legal protections from discrimination and civil liberties are freedoms that prevent government control, such as freedom of speech, religion and the press. Civil liberties limit government action (such as an unwarranted search), while civil rights require government action to ensure equal treatment (such as safeguarding the right to equal pay for women).

- b) Divide students into small groups and assign each group one identity category (e.g., race, disability, religion) and one location (e.g., public school, office, restaurant). Direct groups to draw or write about a possible civil rights challenge for that combination of factors. Have students share and discuss their scenarios as a class.

NOTE

The Unit 4 lesson, “The Cruelty of Jim Crow Segregation,” defines and includes examples of segregation. It may be useful to teach this lesson prior to exploring the civil rights movement with students.

PART 2

The Struggle for Civil Rights for Black Americans (45–60 mins. + time for optional role play)

- 3** Have students create a T-chart in their notebooks as shown below. Ask them what the civil rights movement was. Define it as follows: The civil rights movement was the struggle to eliminate discrimination and secure equal rights for Black Americans that took place mainly in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Civil Rights Movement

RIGHTS DENIED	RIGHTS WON

- 4** Ask students to think about what life was like for Black people in the U.S. during the 1950s and 1960s, likely around the time their grandparents were growing up. Drawing upon students’ prior knowledge, generate examples of rights denied to Black people during this era and rights they fought for and won. Write the examples on the board and have students record them on their T-charts.

- 5** Show the BrainPOP video, *Civil Rights: A Kid-Friendly Explainer* [5:40]: <https://bit.ly/2Rg8nfx>. Instruct students to add at least three examples of rights denied and won to their T-charts as they watch. Pause the video as needed to clarify concepts and allow students time to note ideas. After the video, discuss some of the following questions:

- What is segregation? How did segregation “touch every part of society” in the 1950s and 1960s?

- Who was Linda Brown? How did her experiences lead to change for other Black children?
- How did Black people and their supporters use peaceful protest to make change?
- How do you think it affected Black people when their struggle for equal rights was met with hate and violence?
- What is the Civil Rights Act of 1964? How does it protect civil rights?
- The video says that the door to equality was opened, but there is still a long way to go. What civil rights challenges do Black people and other groups face today in our country?

6 Tell students they will learn about a seven-year-old girl who brought about big change during the civil rights movement. Distribute the handout *Ayanna Najuma: Sitting in for Change*. Depending on the age and ability of students, focus on just the first two parts of the reading (Ayanna's story) or also include the third part (youth leadership in the civil rights movement). Read together as a class or have students read in pairs. After, assign one or more of the "Think about it" questions for students to answer through discussion or writing.

7 As an optional assignment, have small groups develop a 2-3 minute role play in which they conduct an imaginary interview with Ayanna and other members of the Katz Drug Store sit-in. Distribute the handout *Ayanna Najuma: In Her Own Words*, which contains quotes from a podcast. Instruct groups to cut apart the quotes and choose at least three to use in their mock interview. Have them design questions and answers that highlight main ideas from their investigation of the sit-in movement. Allow groups to perform their role plays for the class.

8 Conclude the lesson by discussing some of the questions on the next page.



Discussion Questions

1

What does it mean to fight for civil rights? What rights were Black Americans fighting for in the 1950s and 1960s?

2

What stood out to you about the methods Black Americans used to attain these rights?

3

Why were the sit-ins so successful? What does this teach you about making change?

4

Were you surprised that young people played a big part in the movement? Why or why not?

5

What training or qualities do you think it takes to protest peacefully in the face of hate?

6

What civil rights challenges do Black people face today? How are they continuing to fight for their rights?

Lesson Extensions

- Read aloud the book *Emmett Till: Sometimes Good Can Come Out of a Bad Situation* or show the video *Emmett Till* (see Additional Resources). Discuss how the murder of Till affected Black Americans and shaped the growing civil rights movement.

NOTE: Given the brutal nature of Till's murder, this topic may not be appropriate for all students. If discussed, focus less on the explicit details of his death and more on how his story galvanized the civil rights movement.

- Assign small groups to research one of the following people or topics mentioned in the video from the lesson plan *Civil Rights: A Kid-Friendly Explainer*. Have groups create a brief panel with facts and illustrations about their subject. Arrange the panels into a class timeline of the civil rights movement.

- Linda Brown
- Jo Ann Robinson
- Freedom Riders
- Brown v. Board of Education
- Montgomery Bus Boycott
- 1963 March on Washington
- Rosa Parks
- Sit-Ins
- 1964 Civil Rights Act

- Invite a family or community member into the classroom to speak about their experiences or memories of the civil rights movement. Have students prepare questions about both historic and current civil rights challenges faced by Black Americans. Discuss ways in which the struggle for civil rights is different today, but still continues.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + Fresberg Cartoon. "Emmett Till (Documentary) Black History Month (Educational Videos for Students)." January 28, 2015. YouTube video, 3:24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ojlufRQj2w>.
- + Price, Sean. "Let the Freedom Rides Roll Through Your Class." Learning for Justice, May 1, 2017. <https://bit.ly/33Pt1pv>.
- + Rankin, Katina L. *Emmett Till: Sometimes Good Can Come Out of A Bad Situation*. Self-published, CreateSpace, 2018.
- + Schwartz, Heather E. *The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Primary Source Exploration of the Landmark Legislation*. North Mankato, MN: Capstone Press, 2014.
- + Thomas, Joyce Carol. *Linda Brown, You Are Not Alone: The Brown vs. Board of Education Decision*. New York: Hyperion Books, 2003.



Civil Rights Scenarios

For each scenario, discuss:

- **What** is the civil rights problem?
- **Where** is it happening?
- **Whose** rights are being threatened?
- **How** might their rights be protected?

1

A Muslim student, Amira, stays home from school one day to celebrate the holiday, Eid. Her teacher gives a big test on that day. Amira is given an F on the test and later gets a low grade for the class because she missed the test.

2

A lesbian couple is planning their wedding. When they try to order a cake from their local bakery, the owner says he won't sell them a cake because he believes it is wrong to be gay.

3

A Black man, Ron, responds to an ad for an apartment that he wants to rent for his family. When he shows up in person, the landlord says the apartment is no longer available. Ron later finds out the apartment was rented to a white family who applied a week later than he did.

4

Lauri has a physical disability that requires her to be in a wheelchair. She is a top performer at her job and applies for a promotion to be a manager. Her boss denies her, saying that Lauri isn't a strong leader. She adds that the job is on the second floor and, since the building doesn't have an elevator, it wouldn't be possible anyway.



Ayanna Najuma: Sitting in for Change

A TRIP UP NORTH

In 1957, seven-year-old Ayanna Najuma took a trip to New York City. She had never been that far from her Oklahoma City home. Ayanna was part of the NAACP Youth Council, a group of children fighting for equal rights for Black Americans. The group traveled almost 1,500 miles by bus to perform a play about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called *Brother President*.

On the trip, Ayanna noticed that things were different in Northern cities. Black and white people could eat in the same restaurants, shop in the same stores and use the same bathrooms. Black people in the North faced prejudice, but their communities were less *segregated*. Ayanna wondered how she could make things more equal in her own city.

TAKING ACTION AGAINST SEGREGATION

After their trip to New York, Ayanna and the Youth Council met with community leaders. They spent a year discussing ways to do something about segregation. Then they decided to take action.

Katz Drug Store was a big chain with more than 30 stores. Only white people were allowed to eat at their lunch counters. Black people could buy food there but had to eat outside. Ayanna and the Youth Council planned a “sit-in” with the help of their parents and group leaders.

On August 19, 1958, Ayanna and 12 other young people took seats at the food counter of the downtown Katz Drug Store. They were told to leave but stayed until the store closed. They came back the next day and the one after that. People threatened them, spat at them and dumped soda and ketchup on them. The children braved the disrespectful treatment and sat peacefully. Then, on the third day, they got the news—Katz Drug Store would change their policy and begin serving Black people. Ayanna ordered a hamburger and Coke. It was a taste of freedom that she would never forget.

YOUTH IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Ayanna and the Youth Council continued their sit-ins over the next seven years. They helped to end segregation in restaurants across Oklahoma City.

In 1960, a group of college students led a sit-in at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Hundreds of people joined over several days. News cameras showed up to report the story. The



Segregated means separated by race. From the 1870s to the 1960s, segregation laws in the U.S. (known as “Jim Crow”) separated Black people in almost every part of society, including schools, transportation, hospitals, theaters, parks and more.



AYANNA NAJUMA: SITTING IN FOR CHANGE (CONTINUED)



Freedom riders arrive in Jackson, Mississippi, 1961.

sit-in movement spread quickly. In just two months, more than 50,000 youth in 13 states were sitting in. They sat in restaurants, hotels, libraries, department stores and other segregated places. They were insulted, beaten, burned with hot coffee and dragged to jail. Yet the students remained determined and continued sitting until businesses and services across the South agreed to end segregation.

The sit-in movement was so successful that the students decided to take further action. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "The youth must take the freedom struggle into every community in the South." The sit-in leaders gathered for a meeting in April 1960. They decided to form a group called the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC ('snick') for short.

SNCC helped to organize the "freedom rides" in 1961. Participants rode buses throughout the South to protest segregated bus stations. SNCC also helped to plan the 1963 "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom." Over 250,000 people turned out to demand equal rights for Black Americans. The following year, SNCC worked to pass a new law. The 1964 Civil Rights Act ended segregation in public places throughout the U.S. The law also made it illegal to discriminate against people because of their skin color and other parts of their identity such as race, religion, national origin, etc.

The actions taken by Ayanna, SNCC and other youth led to to greater freedom for Black Americans. Young people today are carrying on this work by fighting for justice in education, policing and other areas. They are all part of one struggle to end discrimination and ensure equality for all.

THINK ABOUT IT...

- 1 How do you think segregation affected both Black and white people?
- 2 How do you think the children prepared to respond to mean behavior peacefully?
- 3 What did the sit-in movement teach you about how to change unfair behaviors or rules?
- 4 Why did Dr. King believe it was important for young people to be leaders in the civil rights movement?
- 5 What do you want to learn more about after reading this article? Why?

SOURCES

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Statement to the Press at the Beginning of the Youth Leadership Conference." April 15, 1960. The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. <https://stanford.io/3tNCBns>.

Najuma, Ayanna. "Ayanna Najuma: Drugstore sit-in helped shape a young life." *The Oklahoman*, January 20, 2014. <https://bit.ly/3of9mZs>.

Policemen watch as "Freedom riders" arrive in Jackson, Mississippi on a Trailways bus. Mississippi Jackson, 1961. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/98501400>.

Schmitt, Hannah. "Raising World-Changers." *Metro Family Magazine*. <https://www.metrofamilymagazine.com/raising-world-changers>.



Ayanna Najuma: In Her Own Words

Create an imaginary interview with Ayanna and other members of the sit-ins. The interview should communicate main ideas you learned about the sit-in movement. Cut apart the quotes below from Ayanna and choose at least three to use in your interview. Keep your role play to three minutes or less.

- 1 "When you're going north, there's a great deal of equality...we were able to stop at bus stations, we were able to stop at restaurants, a variety of things...without any discrimination."
- 2 "So, when we got back, the kids sat amongst themselves and had a conversation about 'Wow, look what we saw in New York. Wasn't that fabulous? This was amazing! Why can't we do that here?'"
- 3 "[The NAACP Youth Council] allowed us to learn about...activism...and the messaging from Dr. King, 'Number one in your life's blueprint should be a deep belief in your own dignity, in your own worth and your own somebodiness.'"
- 4 "Also, it allowed us to travel around the country...and meet children...from other cities...And so it gave us another perspective on the world that most children just didn't get."
- 5 "We would walk in...all dressed in our...church clothes...and everybody was very respectful to the waitresses and asked for a hamburger and a Coke...The waitresses were not nice people. 'What are you doing here?' 'Go ahead and take your stuff and leave...You're not supposed to be here. Get out!'...When people would say nasty things, we would just smile and keep it respectful."
- 6 "They would pour coffee on us, they would do things that you wouldn't think that would be done because we were children. And they would do it in front of their children, which even made it more embarrassing... What kind of example are you setting for your child?"
- 7 "We were taught about...Dr. King, about how to carry ourselves if we were spoken to in a certain kind of way or someone spat on us or if we were pushed and knocked down...And so it was very easy to keep the...nonviolence...because we were trained for [it]."
- 8 "I was taught to believe that anything I wanted to do, I could do. That I was just as good as anybody but not better than anybody. So, with the positive attitudes and...hard work, the sky was the limit."
- 9 "Even though I was little, my voice was just as important as everyone else's voice."

SOURCE: "Civil Rights with Ayanna Najuma" podcast. Richard Janes Entertainment and Entrepreneurship. <https://apple.co/3dNvrKg>, <https://bit.ly/30tLf1Q>.