

Martin Luther King



Martin Luther King

Purpose

To learn about racial discrimination and how one person can make a difference through the life of Martin Luther King.

Entrance of Pupils

A thought provoking slideshow introducing the theme of 'Martin Luther King' for the pupils to enter assembly to (10 minutes).

Background

Martin Luther King was born in Atlanta, Georgia on 15th January 1929. It was a very troubled time in that part of America - especially for people who were black.

Church Minister

Martin Luther King was a very bright, intelligent man. He was a Christian who dedicated his life to his church. He was so clever he was able to skip a couple of year groups during his education. All he wanted to do was to become a minister in the church and look after the people who were members of his church.

Racial Tension in America

The southern states of the USA had a very negative and poor attitude towards black people. Some of them felt at that time that black people were less important than white people - an attitude that today we would correctly consider to be disgraceful - yet it wasn't so long ago. The groups of hateful white people were called 'White Supremacists.'



What is Racial Hatred?

Racial hatred is where people whose skin is one colour - often white - treat people with different coloured skin as lesser people. Less important, less human.

This was the attitude of some people during the 1950s and 1960s in Southern States of America. They openly hated the black people - including supposedly important civil leaders who should have known better - such as mayors and people in charge of the police force.

During this time - there were numerous examples of black people being very badly treated by white people - including really nasty violence and even killings - just because of the colour of their skin. Not all white people were like this, but sadly a significant number of them in the southern states were.

In some states such as Georgia, there were large rule books written - the law - which would set out how black people would live their lives separately from white people.

Black people were not allowed to marry white people.

They weren't allowed to sit in the same seats on buses - and even had to get on the buses from special different doors at the back. They were allocated separate seats there at the back of the buses.

They would have to use different toilets, drink from different water fountains, use different entrances to public buildings such as cinemas - and even sit in different sections away from white people.

Black people would be forced to eat in different places from white people. It was much harder for black people to get jobs - and often those that were available were much more poorly paid.

They had to live in different houses - often much poorer quality - and were not usually given permission to vote in elections. This meant they wouldn't be able to elect leaders who could look after their rights.



Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Protest

In the City of Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, black people - just as elsewhere - were made to be segregated on the public buses. They had to give up their seats to white people if the bus was full - even though black people made up about three quarters of the total number of passengers who used the service.

Black people would also experience beatings from some of the white bus drivers and would sometimes be prevented from actually entering them even though they had paid their bus fare.

On 1st December 1955, Rosa Parks, a Black American lady was seated in the front row of the seats that were given to black people.

She came to realise that she was being driven by a white man called James Blake. On a previous occasion, Blake had prevented her from entering the bus at the front door where she tried to get on. He had told her to enter at the back. Reluctantly she went to the back door. Before she was able to get on, Blake drove off and left her on her own - stranded without transport.

A white person entered the bus at the front door and the driver, told everyone in the black section to move back so that the white person could sit at the front of the black seats.

Rosa Parks refused to move, though the other black passengers did move.

She was actually arrested and was fined \$14 in total which was a lot of money at that time.

The story of her refusal to move and the fine that she received got out among black people of Montgomery. They were furious about it. They could see that it was unjust and unfair. They decided to organise a protest against this awful situation.

About this time, Martin Luther King was a Pastor - and kind priest or vicar - who really just wanted to complete his studies and help the people of his parish, his church. He didn't want to get involved in action - but when he was asked if he would - he said that the community could use his church for their



meeting.

To his amazement - about 5000 turned up and packed themselves into the church. They discussed what had happened to Rosa Parks and also about the segregation that they all experienced. They managed to persuade Martin Luther King to help them and lead their protest against the injustices they were all experiencing.

Although King was reluctantly persuaded to take on this role - he was determined to make sure that whatever protest went ahead it would be strictly non violent. He was passionately against violence - which he saw as being terribly destructive and cruel.

The Protest

King met with a group to organise what they should do. They agreed that they would establish a protest whereby black people would refuse to board the buses.

This would create a lot of hardship for the black people - since they relied heavily on the buses to travel to work etc - however as far as they could - they persuaded people to help. Taxi drivers, for example, were persuaded often to allow the black community to travel in their taxis for the same money as they would have spent on the buses.

The City of Montgomery were stunned by the protest. It cost them a huge amount of money since they had a large bus service that needed to be paid for - and black people made up about three quarters of the paying customers who would normally use it.

The lack of payments put the city under huge pressure. They lost so much money during this time - they couldn't cope with it.

After just over a year - the City gave way and agreed to end segregation on their buses. The protest had succeeded and black people no longer had to sit in separate seats from white people.



Government Inaction

The black people of the Southern States of America were convinced that the government weren't doing sufficient to help them. They felt they were ignoring the terrible things they could see happening - turning what's called "a blind eye" to the situation.

'I Have A Dream' Speech

August 28th 1963 one of the biggest marches for human rights ever seen in America took place. Martin Luther King delivered a speech to the huge crowd that was gathered in Washington, the capital city. He talked about the unfairness that black people experienced.

He went on to one of the most famous sections of a speech ever spoken. "I have a dream."

' I have a dream. I have four little children who will one day live in a a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.'

King Seemed To Know He Didn't Have Long To Live

Martin Luther King continued to fight for improvements and for the rights of Black Americans throughout 1966 to 1968. During that time he was still hated by the White Supremacists.

Through the non violent demonstration that he had arranged and lead - the rights and lives of Black Americans - especially in the Southern States of America improved dramatically.

At long last - laws were being passed to help the Black Americans. Segregation was ended and even more importantly - people's attitudes towards the Black Americans were improved.

King seemed to know that his work had raised many enemies though. He sensed that he didn't have too long left to live. He talked about this in one of his speeches. He was asked about some of the threats that he had received from White Supremacists.



He said:

“Well I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. “

He said :

“I’ve been to the mountaintop. I’ve seen the promised land.....but I might not get there with you.”

Assassination.

On April 4th 1968, King travelled to Memphis, Tennessee. work. He was at his Motel - The Lorraine Motel. He stood on the balcony of the second floor by his room.

Just after 6pm he was fatally shot. A man called James Earl Ray was later arrested and convicted of his murder. Martin Luther King, activist and civil rights leader was dead.

Today in America.

Today in American attitudes are far from perfect - and there is still some way to go to reach a time when there is no more racism - however things are very much better.

The laws which were passed allowed for the Black people of America to have equal rights to white people and many black people flourished.

Martin Luther King made a huge difference to justice and fairness in the US. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Also the Congressional Gold Medal. These are the highest honours that can be awarded to any civilian in America such is the regard for what King did.

Every year - he is remembered and honoured with a national holiday - Martin Luther King Day— on the third Monday of every January and is considered a national hero.

The changes he helped to make against racism and injustice are amongst the most remarkable of any person in history.



Quotation

**'Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.'**

Martin Luther King

The Bible says

'Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression.'

Isaiah 1:17

Let's Pray:

Dear God

Help us to realise and remember that all people should be treated equally and fairly no matter the colour of their skin; their beliefs and religions; how they look or where they are from.

Amen

Putting it into Practice

Research the story of Martin Luther King to understand more about this heroic character.

Exit of Pupils

A thought provoking slideshow introducing the theme of 'Martin Luther King' for the pupils to exit assembly to (10 minutes).



Collective Worship and Putting it into Practice for the Rest of the Week

Day 2

Dear God

Thank you for the work of those brave people who stand up for the rights of themselves and others, no matter what danger they may face.

Amen

Look carefully at the photograph of a single man making a courageous stand against oppression in Tiananmen Square. Discuss what you think about his actions.



Day 3

Let us remember the prayer of St Francis:

‘ Make me a instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.’

Amen



Make a conscious effort all day to treat everyone equally including those you don't know or like very much.

Day 4

From the Prayer of St Francis:

Dear God

'Grant that I may not seek:

To be consoled, but rather to console.

To be understood, as to understand.

To be loved, as to love.'

Amen

Research and gather some of the famous sayings of Martin Luther King.

Day 5

From the Prayer of St Francis:

Dear God

'Remind me that:

It is in giving that we receive

It is in forgiving, that we are forgiven.

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.'

Amen

Make a collage wall of famous quotes from Martin Luther King for your classroom or corridor.

