

# **Muhammad Ali and the Civil Rights Movement**

## **Middle and High School**

### **Core Content Correlation**

USH.6.2 Summarize the early struggle for civil rights and identify events and people associated with this struggle.

USH.7.1 Explain the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s by describing the ideas and actions of federal and state leaders, grassroots movements, and central organizations that were active in the movement.

USH.7.7 Describe United States' involvement in Vietnam and reactions by Americans to this involvement.

USH.9.2 Locate and analyze primary sources and secondary sources related to an event or issue of the past. Example: Use electronic and print sources -- to compare accounts and perspectives related to America's involvement in the Vietnam conflict.

### **In the Classroom: Introduction**

Share the following quotations with the class or ask a student to read aloud.

Pledge of Allegiance

*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

Excerpts from the Declaration of Independence

*We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness - That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the governed . . . Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient Causes; . . . all Experience hath shewn, that Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while Evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.*

Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America

*We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*

Ask your students whether or not these essential American documents have always referred to all groups of Americans. If not, who has been excluded? Tell the students that today we will be exploring the United States Civil Rights Movement. Ask students to share what they know about the Civil Rights Movement. Explain that there are examples in American history when individuals' rights were denied because of the color of their skin, also known as racial discrimination. In particular, black and white children were not allowed to go to the same schools, sit together in restaurants, play together, or use the same water fountains or bathrooms. Ask the students if they know what term means, the separation of people into racial groups. Write and discuss “**segregation**.” Provide examples of segregation experience by Muhammad Ali such as the Gold Medal/restaurant story. Explain that during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement men and women struggled to abolish these unjust laws and to bring about political and social freedom and equality for all people.

### **In the Classroom: Lesson and Activity**

Explain that today, you want them to imagine that their school believes that XX graders (fill in correct grade of students in the room) are not as good, not as worthy, are “less-than” other students. In order to keep the XX graders from influencing other students, their school has established new rules. (Have these rules written on the white board.) They are:

- XX graders will only receive 2 hours of instruction each day. For the rest of the day, they must sit silently in the gym.
- XX graders cannot use the student restrooms at their school and must share two “XX grade” only restrooms at the back of the school.
- XX graders may not speak to or interact with students of other grades.
- XX graders cannot eat in the lunchroom at their school, but must eat silently at their desks.
- There are no longer buses to and from their school for XX graders.
- XX graders cannot use the water fountains at their school.
- Teachers may give XX graders detention at anytime and for any reason, no questions asked.

Ask students to imagine for a moment that these are new rules, and respond to the following questions:

- How do you feel about being treated differently?
- Was this a fair rule? Why or why not?
- How would you respond?
- What if breaking the rule meant getting punished or arrested?

Explain that prior to the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans experienced similar, unjust laws every day. (Give examples: segregated busses, water fountains, segregated schools, etc.) Thus, during the Civil Rights Movement many Americans worked diligently to bring equality to all people. Refer to the exhibits. As they saw (or will see), one of the methods that people employed during the Civil Rights era was “peaceful protest.” Ask if anyone can define “protest.” A **protest** is an expression of objection,

by words or by actions, to particular events, policies or situations. Protests can take many different forms, from individual statements to mass demonstrations.

Show examples of **Protest Signs** and ask the students to explain what each sign is protesting. Explain that today they are going to create their own protest signs.

Divide the students into small groups (have teacher divide before visit).

**For Middle School**—Assign one of the new rules to each group. Ask each group to imagine that the example applies to them, and brainstorm possible responses. Each group should discuss the following questions and come up with answers that represent group consensus:

- How would you feel if this was a law that you had to obey?
- Is it fair or unfair? Why?
  - What are some things you could do to express your opinion and change the law? Who would you go to?
  - What if the law didn't apply to you, but you saw someone else being discriminated against; what would you do?
  - How might you get the message out in your community?

**For High School**—Ask the students to think about what current issues require “protest.” What would like to see changed in their world? How can they bring about that change?

Pass out the **Create a Protest Sign** worksheet to each group. Have each group work together to create a flyer they would post in their community. Brainstorm questions that a flyer might address; for example:

- What is the problem you're trying to publicize? How can the larger community address the problem? What do you want people to do? How can they get involved?
- What are some features of a good flyer (e.g., important information; name of organization; eye-catching picture)?

**Discussion**—Ask each group to share their flyer and describe the choices they made. Ask students to consider Muhammad Ali’s story and the Center exhibits. Ask students if they think protestors today would be willing to submit themselves to the abuse dealt out to the nonviolent protestors and students in the 1960s.

Explain that in the Center the students will be doing a Civil Rights Scavenger Hunt. (Explain teams, answer sheets, rules, etc.) Explain that during the hunt, they will learn about Muhammad Ali’s personal struggle against injustice and racial inequality both here in Louisville and throughout the world. Ask the students to keep this question in the back of their minds as they go through the exhibits: “What are some ways you could make a difference today to make sure no one is treated unfairly?”

## **In the Center**

### ***Civil Rights Scavenger Hunt***

Students should be divided into small groups for the scavenger hunt. For younger ages, a chaperone should stay with each group throughout the activity. Encourage the chaperone to allow a student to record the group's answers. Remind students that the hunt is not a race.

### **Post Visit Activities**

- 1) Have students research organizations such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee), SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), etc. that arose during the Civil Rights Movement.
- 2) Create a time capsule containing selected items that young people from the Civil Rights Movement would have left behind to explain the times in which they lived and of their contribution. Research both points of view – pro-integration and anti-integration. Ask students to reflect on what they would include in a time capsule. What are some current social issues that affect students and their communities?
- 3) Have students identify and research some of the key events and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement and how they contributed to the equality for all people (Emmett Till, Rosa Parks, Meager Evers, Little Rock Nine, Freedom Rides, Boycotts, March on Washington, etc).
- 4) Connect with a local organization to complete a service learning project focusing on social justice.
- 5) Challenge students to develop a campaign that shows their own commitment to a worthy cause while increasing awareness about it, too. Students should select a cause to promote, such as civil rights, racial or gender equality, child welfare, improved schools, animal rights, or environmental protection. Individuals (or small groups of students) should create a poster, a demonstration sign, and a flyer. These materials should be informative, professional, and creative. They should include a student-created logo of some sort, as well as a slogan, and should be developed with the intention to attract attention, inform the public, and gain supporters. Each campaign should be based on facts, so research time will be necessary. Once the campaigns are complete, students should present them to the class.