

Breaking Barriers

Author:

National Constitution Center staff

About this Lesson

This lesson, which includes a pre-lesson and post-lesson, is intended to be used in conjunction with the National Constitution Center's Breaking Barriers program. Together, they provide students with first-hand experience about how African-American individuals have broken barriers to racial integration in the United States, achieving equal rights and making lasting contributions to the country's political, social and cultural development.

In this lesson, students begin by learning about the concept of rights and how African Americans have been denied rights throughout U.S. history. After the program, they return to the classroom and work in groups to research selected events that characterized the civil rights movement. They present their events to the class through producing mock television newscasts.

Designed for students in grades 3-5, this lesson takes approximately four to six class periods from beginning to end.

Background

Grade(s) Level

3-5

Classroom TimeOne or two 45-minute class periods
(pre-lesson)Three or four 45-minute periods
(post-lesson)**Handouts***Breaking Barriers: The Five W's*
student worksheet**Constitutional Connections**

Fifteenth Amendment

Nineteenth Amendment

In 1870, the United States Congress ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, giving African Americans the right to vote. Although some states had already given former slaves the right to vote, this was the first time when no state in the union could deny a person the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” But while the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment marked a significant turning point in the lives of African Americans, it would take another 100 years for them to achieve many of the other rights denied to them.

It was not until the civil rights movement, which took place largely in the 1950s and 1960s, when racial integration began to take hold in the U.S., affecting everything from public transportation to schools. This period was one of enormous turmoil and change in the country, ending most racial segregation through a combination of events that included boycotts, protests, landmark Supreme Court decisions and equal rights legislation.

Beginning in the 1800s and continuing well past the civil rights movement, African Americans have broken barriers to racial integration and equality. During the *Breaking Barriers* program, students will learn about many of the individuals who have made invaluable contributions to ending racial segregation in the U.S. They will meet everyone from James McCune Smith, who became the first African-American doctor in 1837, to Jackie Robinson, the first African-American individual to play major league baseball when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947. Through the program, students will develop a greater understanding of how African Americans have made lasting contributions to the country’s political, social and cultural development.

Objectives

Students will:

- Learn about the concept of rights and how African Americans have been denied rights throughout U.S. history;
- Research selected major events that characterized the civil rights movement; and
- Share their research with classmates through producing mock television newscasts.

Standards

5.1.3.C: Define the principles and ideals shaping local government.

- Liberty / Freedom
- Democracy
- Justice
- Equality

5.1.3.D: Identify key ideas about government found in significant documents:

- Declaration of Independence
- United States Constitution
- Bill of Rights
- Pennsylvania Constitution

8.1.3.C: Conduct teacher guided inquiry on assigned topics using specified historical sources.

Activity

Pre-Lesson

1. Before the lesson begins, choose a physical attribute that some, but not all, of your students have (for example: brown eyes, eyeglasses, blond hair, curly hair, braces, etc.). Do not share your choice with students. As you lead the discussion below, call only on students who have the attribute.
2. Ask students what it means to “have the right to do something.” How would they define the word “right”? Write down their definitions on the board, and then share the following definition with them:

right (noun): something to which one has a just claim; the power or privilege to which one is justly entitled (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*)

3. Lead a discussion with students about the rights that they do and do not enjoy -- in school and in the larger community (your town/city or the country). The purpose of this discussion is for students to understand that, because of their age, they are able to enjoy certain rights but not all rights. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:

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- As students, what rights do you enjoy at school? What are you allowed to do? (For example: They have the right to use the computers during lunch if they have library passes.)
 - As students, what rights are denied to you at school? What are you not allowed to do? (For example: They do not have the right to leave school for lunch.)
 - As children or teenagers, what rights do you enjoy in your town/city or the country? (For example: They have the right to watch PG-13 movies, even though parental guidance is suggested.)
 - As children, what rights are denied to you in your town/city or in the country? (For example: They do not have the right to vote or serve on a jury. They do not have the right to drive.)
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4. As the discussion continues, students will notice that you are only calling on those who have a specific physical attribute. Most likely, a student will eventually speak up and ask why you have not called on particular students. When this happens, turn the question around, and ask students why they think you have not called on certain students. Pose the following questions:

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- Think about the students whom I did not call on during our discussion. What do they have in common?
 - Why do you think I did not call on these students today?
 - How is this connected to the discussion we just had about rights?
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5. Explain that, in school, students typically enjoy the right to raise their hands and answer questions, share their opinions, ask questions, etc. As long as they follow class rules (raise their hands; do not call out; etc.), students are used to enjoying this right regardless of their eye color, hair color, gender, race, etc. Explain that, for many years, certain groups in the U.S. have not enjoyed the same rights that other people have. Just as students cannot vote because of their age, African Americans and women were not allowed to vote for many years, not because of their age, but because of their race and gender. It wasn't until 1870 and 1920, respectively, that African Americans and women earned the right to vote.
6. Lead a class brainstorm about the rights that have been denied to African-American individuals throughout U.S. history. The list should include, but not be

limited to, the following: vote, attend the same schools as white people, run for office, use the same restrooms as white people, sit anywhere on a bus, own property, etc. The first link listed under *Further Resources* is for an article that provides a useful overview of this topic.

7. Conclude the pre-lesson by explaining that the NCC program will introduce students to many African-American individuals who have contributed to breaking down barriers to equal rights throughout U.S. history.

Post-Lesson

1. When students return to the classroom, remind them that the NCC program taught them more about how African Americans have achieved equal rights in the U.S., from the right to vote to the right to become a doctor. Make sure students understand that this did not happen overnight. In fact, it took almost 100 years for African Americans to earn the right to vote (the Fifteenth Amendment was not ratified until 1870, almost 100 years after the U.S. became its own country) and *another* 100 years for racial segregation in schools, on public transportation, etc. to be outlawed by the Civil Rights Act (1964).
2. Divide students into 10 mixed-ability groups. Assign one of the following events to each group: Ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment (1870); *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954); Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955); Little Rock (1957); Sit-ins (1960); Freedom Rides (1961); Ole Miss (1962); March on Washington (1963); Freedom Summer (1964); and Passage of Civil Rights Act (1964).
3. Using the websites listed under *Further Resources* and additional online resources of your choice, have each group research its assigned event and prepare a brief (5-10 minute) presentation about it. Distribute copies of the *Breaking Barriers: The Five W's* student worksheet to each group, and have them complete the worksheet as they conduct their research and prepare their presentation.
4. When all groups are finished, have them present their events to the class in chronological order.
5. After each group has given its presentation, have students return to their groups to produce mock television newscasts about their assigned events. With the exception of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, all of the events occurred once television had already become a popular medium for reporting on major news events. Students should prepare three-minute newscasts that provide an overview of the events *and* their impact on the civil rights movement. Encourage them to be creative by incorporating interviews with participants, having someone act as an anchorman/woman, showing "live action" clips from the event, etc. When groups have finished, have them act out their newscasts in front of the class.

Further Resources

- <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/JFK+in+History/Civil+Rights+Context+in+the+Early+1960s.htm> (Resource about rights denied to African Americans throughout U.S. history)
- <http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/permexhibits.htm> (The National Civil Rights Museum's online permanent exhibition)
- <http://reportingcivilrights.loa.org/resources/> (Civil Rights Resources)
- <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/civilrights/home.html> (Civil Rights Resource Guide)
- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/eyesontheprize/sources/index.html> (PBS' Eyes on the Prize)

Breaking Barriers: The Five W's

Directions: As you research your assigned event, answer the questions below as a group. Use your answers to organize your presentation.

Event: _____

The Five W's:

Who?

When?

Where?

What?

Why?

Additional Questions:

1. What events or circumstances led to this event or caused it to occur?

2. What were the effects of this event? How did it change life for African Americans?

3. How did this event contribute to the civil rights movement as a whole? How did it lead to future events?
