

Join the Student Sit-Ins

Teacher Guide for the Classroom Video

Introduction to the Classroom Activity

In this activity, students will watch and discuss a 22-minute video of a theater presentation created by the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. The activity could also include an in-classroom simulation, extension activities, and a sing-along performance of a freedom song.

This guide includes:

- **Historical Background Information**
- **Introduction to the Video**- Introduction to the Video includes a brief description of the theater performance.
- **Thematic Warm-Up Questions**
- **Focus and Discussion Questions**- Before each act, share focus questions that students should consider while they are watching that act. After each act, review answers to the focus questions and also talk about the discussion questions, which follow-up on the content and help students integrate it into prior knowledge or make personal connections. Possible answers to some questions are included in parenthesis, and tips are included in italics.
- **Extension Activities**
- **In-Class Simulation Instructions for Act Four**- If you choose to organize a classroom simulation instead of watching act four, use the script and instructions on this sheet.
- **Lyrics to “I’m on My Way to Freedomland”**- This song is incorporated as a sing-along in act five and students can sing along using these lyrics.



Xavier Carnegie performing as Samuel P. Leonard at the National Museum of American History

Historical Background Information

Racial segregation was not illegal in the United States on February 1, 1960, when four African American college students sat down at a “whites-only” lunch counter at an F. W. Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina. Politely asking for service, their request was refused. When asked to leave, they remained in their seats.

In Greensboro, hundreds of students, civil rights organizations, churches, and members of the community joined in a six-month-long nonviolent protest that spread to other places in the South. Many people continued to show their unhappiness through sit-ins. Others held picket signs on the streets outside the store with messages for people to see, while other people decided to boycott. All of these protest strategies caused Woolworth, and other businesses that practiced segregation, to lose customers and drew national attention.

The protests put college students and young people into an important position in the ongoing movement to challenge racial inequality across the United States. Some of the people involved in the protests were sent to jail. Their commitment led to the end of segregation at the lunch counter on July 25, 1960; but, it took four more years before segregation finally ended across the country with the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The National Museum of American History added a portion of the Greensboro lunch counter to its collection after the Woolworth store shut down. Today, it is on display as one of the landmark objects in the Museum. For more information, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/news/factsheet.cfm?key=30&newskey=53>.



Joseph A. McNeil and Franklin E. McCain, joined by William Smith and Clarence Henderson, on the second day of the Greensboro sit-in
Courtesy of News & Record, Greensboro, North Carolina

Introduction to the Video

This theater presentation happens at the National Museum of American History, where a piece of the actual lunch counter from the protest is on display.

The year is 1960. An African American college student (a fictional composite character) is conducting a training session for people interested in joining a student sit-in to protest racial segregation. The student speaks about the recent protests in Greensboro, North Carolina, and coaches members of the audience in the philosophy and tactics of non-violent direct action.

Thematic Warm-Up Questions

- What do you know about the civil rights movement? (Rosa Parks, separate but equal, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)

You could link student answers to where the Greensboro Four might have drawn inspiration.

- What did tactics did individuals in the civil rights movement use? (boycotts, marches, meeting with government leaders, sit-ins)
- What changes did the civil rights movement focus on? (desegregation of public places, equal employment opportunities, equal housing opportunities)

Act One (approximately 3 1/2 minutes)

<http://amhistory.si.edu/video/jtss/A1.aspx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- Who is the main character? How would you describe his personality?
- The main character says that he has a purpose in meeting with the audience. What is his purpose?

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- How do you think you would feel if you were Samuel, the main character, while leading protest training?
- How do you think you would feel if you were a participant in the training session?

Act Two (approximately 7 minutes)

<http://amhistory.si.edu/video/jtss/A2.asx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- What might have inspired “The Greensboro Four,” the first students to sit-in in Greensboro?
- Think about your answers to the Warm-Up Questions from the beginning of the class. Does Samuel’s talk agree/confirm or disagree/dispute any of your answers to the Warm-Up Questions?
- Do you think it is OK for a lunch counter to serve one person and not another simply based on skin color? Why or why not?
 - What if the counters looked exactly alike?
 - What if the owner of the restaurant wanted it that way?
 - What if the customers and general public at the lunch counter thought it was OK?

This was a very real question to ask in 1960.

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- How many of you think that all American laws today are fair?

If everyone thinks they are fair, you can play devil’s advocate, highlighting some laws that apply to students and might be viewed as “un fair,” such as not being able to vote until you are 18 or the limitations on freedom of expression in schools.

If they say laws are not fair, ask which ones are not fair and why.
- If you think a law isn’t fair, what can you do about it? (protest, petition the government, move away from its jurisdiction)
- What are some American laws from the past that seem unfair from a modern perspective? (Slavery was legal in the United States until the 13th Amendment was ratified in 1865. It was legal to deny women the right to vote until the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920.)

Act Three (approximately 2 minutes)

<http://amhistory.si.edu/video/jtss/A3.aspx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- What does the word “nonviolent” make you think of? What other words come to mind? Compare the words suggested by the audience and those from Samuel.

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- Samuel states that “Nonviolence is a tool we use because we want to win. We see nonviolence as the most effective way to accomplish our goals.”
 - What makes nonviolent protest effective? (organized individuals, dedication, drawing attention from outsiders)
 - What is the role of the media in the success of nonviolent protest? (publicize the violent reactions to nonviolent protestors, show the number/geographic distribution of protestors, connect the ideas of the protests to human faces)

Act Four (approximately 4 minutes)

<http://amhistory.si.edu/video/jtss/A4.aspx>

For this act, you may either watch the video or do a classroom simulation. Use the instructions on pages eight and nine.

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- How would you feel if you were taking part in this training session? Write down 5 adjectives that describe your feelings, and 2 things you might be telling yourself to help you deal with your feelings. Watch the faces of the people in the video or listen to Samuel for hints.

Half of the class should watch the people who are acting as “sit-in protestors” and the other half should watch the people who are reacting to the sit-in protestors.

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- What actions were mentioned during Samuel's description? How could a nonviolent protest escalate and possibly turn violent?
- How do you think the Greensboro community felt about the students who protested?

Although in the 21st century we view the students as heroes, in 1960 many people saw them as radicals and troublemakers. In fact, David Richmond's life was threatened and he was denied employment countless times in the years that followed because of his involvement in the sit-ins. School administrators resisted community pressure to stop the students from protesting. Some African Americans in the community did not approve of the students' radical tactics and withheld their support.

Act Five (approximately 4 minutes)

<http://amhistory.si.edu/video/jtss/A5.aspx>

Focus Questions (share with students before watching)

- What are some of the specific safety instructions and defensive responses to violence that Samuel gives? Why are those instructions important?
- During the last part of this act, Samuel leads the audience in protest singing. Join in with the audience and sing along with Samuel. The lyrics to "I'm on My Way to Freedomland" are included in this guide.

Discussion Questions (review with students after watching)

- Think about Samuel's safety and defensive instructions. Does a nonviolent protest mean that there won't be violence?
- Why was singing a powerful non-violent tool? Can you think of any songs that have specific messages? If you were jailed for taking part in a sit-in, what songs might you sing (or make changes to the lyrics before singing) to keep you strong?

Extension Activities

- Listen to and analyze [Freedom Songs](http://www.folkways.si.edu/explore_folkways/civil_rights.aspx) from the U.S. civil rights movement (http://www.folkways.si.edu/explore_folkways/civil_rights.aspx).
- Listen to or read the [oral history program](http://americanhistory.si.edu/connect/webcasts/youth-town-hall-greensboro-civil-rights-pioneers-commemorating-50th-anniversary) with the three remaining members of the Greensboro Four (<http://americanhistory.si.edu/connect/webcasts/youth-town-hall-greensboro-civil-rights-pioneers-commemorating-50th-anniversary>). Did any of their answers surprise you? Did any confirm what you expected?
- Review the videos, 360 degree images of the lunch counter, historical photographs, and text on the Greensboro lunch counter sit-ins on the [Object of History](http://objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/lunchcounter/) (<http://objectofhistory.org/objects/intro/lunchcounter/>). Have students create online exhibits using [the site's interactive student exhibit tool](http://objectofhistory.org/activity/) (<http://objectofhistory.org/activity/>).
- Have students identify and then take action against problems in the community. Assign research and community service projects.
- Have students do Web research and create a timeline of the civil rights movement. Include the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, the Greensboro Sit-Ins, and the March on Washington.
- Ask students to respond to one or more of the following questions in 1-paragraph responses:
 - Is there a cause you would risk your life, friends, family, financial security, personal possessions, or reputation for? What is it? Why is it worth the risk?
 - Is it the duty of citizens in a democracy to peacefully violate laws they believe to be unjust?
 - Choose a law you want to see changed. Why would you want to change it? Do you think it could be effectively changed through nonviolent action?

In-Class Simulation Instructions for Act Four

You may want to view Act Four of the video to see how the actor runs the simulation (<http://amhistory.si.edu/video/jtss/A4.asx>).

Set up four chairs at the front of the classroom, all facing the front of the classroom.

Ask for four volunteer students from the class to sit in the chairs at the front of the classroom.

To these volunteers (now “protestors”), but have the rest of the class listen, as well:

You four are going to take the role of protestors at a sit in. But the rest of us have a job too, we are going to give you a taste of what you’ll need to be prepared for during a real sit in.

The rules are simple. This is serious. Much of our success as protestors depends on our attitude. We need to project a calm confidence that comes from our committed belief in what we are doing. There is to be no physical retaliation, no verbal response, and no non-verbal reaction to any kind of attack.

I want you four to think about these things and what it will feel like when you first sit down and are surrounded by people who hate you.

Look forward. Do not respond to any of the looks you receive. Stay solemn and stay strong.

To the rest of the class (now “mob”):

Mobs that might attack us will have a plan as well. They might not be right or as well organized as we are, but they will be trying just as hard to disrupt us as we are trying to do the right thing.

You will act as the mob in this training session. When I say “go,” you should move in and crowd around the protestors. Stare at them and invade their space, but **do not touch them**.

Ok, go.

If any student takes physical actions or becomes emotionally distressed, immediately discontinue the exercise.

To all:

As the mob closes in around you, how will you respond? Are you determined to be free? Can you control your fear and emotions? Imagine feeling the angry stares on the back of your neck. Imagine people saying “what do they think they’re doing here?” Imagine the Negro women in the kitchen, whom you thought would be on your side, saying “You’re making the race look bad.” Imagine the mob starting to

yell at you and call you the worst names. Now they begin to touch you – pushing, poking, spitting. A milkshake gets poured on your head. They might start hitting any minute. What will you do? Can you stay strong? Stay focused? Stay non-violent?

Tell the mob to step back and give the protestors space. Then applaud the protestors.

Discussion Questions:

- Ask at least one protestor and one person in the mob: How did that make you feel?
- What types of actions did I describe? How could a nonviolent protest escalate into violence? What other ways might a protest end?

Lyrics to “I’m on My Way to Freedom Land”

I’m on my way
To Freedom Land (3X)
I’m on my way
Oh, Lord, To Freedom Land!

I’m on my way
To Freedom Land
I’m on my way
Oh, Lord, To Freedom Land!

If you don’t go
Don’t hinder me
I’m on my way
Oh, Lord, To Freedom Land!

I asked my mother
Come and go with me
I’m on my way
Oh, Lord, To Freedom Land!

If she won’t go
I’ll go anyhow
I’m on my way
Oh, Lord, To Freedom Land!

I’m on my way
To freedom land
I’m on my way
Oh, Lord, To Freedom Land!