

Grades 9-12

Common Core State Standards

Anchor Standards for Writing:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9](#) Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Anchor Standards for Reading:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#) Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

Time One 45-60 minute class period

Project Summary

The goal of this activity is to help students practice their close reading, analytical, and persuasive writing skills by thinking critically about the March on Washington. Students should respond to the questions in each document and then use evidence from at least three sources to respond to the central question. Suggestions for responses to each question are included below. The final product should be judged on the basis of the strength and persuasiveness of the student's argument. The exhibition *Changing America: Emancipation Proclamation 1863, and the March on Washington 1963* suggests that the March is evidence of both the importance of charismatic leadership and of grassroots organizing. The organizational genius of Bayard Rustin and the vision of A. Philip Randolph helped to make the March a reality. The March was organized by leaders from the largest civil rights and labor organizations in the country and it is, of course, remembered for Martin Luther King Jr.'s powerful "I Have a Dream" speech. However, the March could not have happened without the strength of local organizations and grassroots organizing. For example, document D, the budget for the March, shows that Bayard Rustin began as Deputy Director for the March in June, and the March was announced in early July. Just a few weeks later, an estimated 250,000 people arrived on the Mall. Such a feat could not have been achieved without both organizers and leaders like Rustin but also without activists and leaders in cities and towns across the United States who mobilized participants, and the thousands of marchers themselves who worked in support of racial justice before, during, and after the March.

Response Guide

Central Question: Scholars of the modern civil rights movement have debated the relative importance of grassroots organizing and so-called 'charismatic leaders' in the movement. Is the March on Washington evidence of the power of grassroots organizing or of charismatic leadership?

Document A: March on Washington Flier

1. What does this document suggest are the goals of the movement?



Equal economic opportunity and an end to racial discrimination

2. What organizations are included on this document?

Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, Negro Labor Council, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Urban League

3. How might this document help you to address the central question?

Students may read this as suggesting that the March represents the importance of charismatic leadership, in that it highlights the many large organizations and their representatives who led the March.

Document B: Organizing Manual

1. Review the document carefully. Who produced this document?

Bayard Rustin and Cleveland Robinson, Deputy Director and Chairman of the Administrative Committee for the March on Washington.

2. What is the purpose of this document?

To help local organizers prepare potential marchers for the event.

3. How could this object help you to answer the central question?

Bayard Rustin was a lifelong activist. As the curators of the *Changing America* exhibition note, "Within the civil rights community, Bayard Rustin was recognized as one of the most gifted and experienced organizers. A committed pacifist, he helped introduce nonviolent techniques into the movement. He participated in the first freedom rides to desegregate interstate busing in the South in 1947. He also organized several mass demonstrations in the 1940s and 1950s and served as a leading strategist of the Montgomery bus boycott." This document could suggest the importance of a few experienced leaders, but the fact that Rustin is distributing information to support organizing at the local level could also suggest the grassroots nature of the March.

Document C: Budget from the March

1. Review the document carefully. What can this document tell you about the timeframe in which the March was organized?

Note that Bayard Rustin begins taking a salary in late June 1963 and other staff on this project began in July.

2. How might his document help you to answer the central question?

As with the previous document, students may use this as evidence that centralized leadership was key to the development and success of the March. However, students should also consider the timeframe. Students should consider whether even the most



charismatic leaders could mobilize a March of this size in such a short period without strong organizations at the local level.

Document D: ABC News Footage: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA9TJCV-tks, to 1:17

1. Watch the video footage carefully and record what you see.
Large crowds, many modes of transportation, Joan Baez, announcer calling for marchers
2. How could this document help you to answer the central question?
This document is included to suggest the importance of local organizing to mobilize a large crowd.

Document E: Transportation List

1. Examine the document closely. From what regions of the country are the protestors traveling?
How large might the crowd become?
East Coast, South, Midwest, West Coast; 67,000 [note that estimates of the actual crowd size were closer to 250,000]
2. How could this document help you to answer the central question?
This document is included to demonstrate the diversity of the origins of the protestors and the range of locations from which they arrived, all evidence of the power of grassroots organizing to spread the message about the March.

Document F: List of Locations of Civil Rights Demonstrations in 1963

1. In which regions of the country were civil rights protests recorded in 1963?
South, Midwest, West Coast
2. For what are protestors marching in the image from Seattle?
Racial equality, jobs and justice
3. How might these images and dates help you answer the central question?
These images are included to demonstrate activism at the local level in a variety of regions in the country that enabled these protests throughout the year of the March on Washington.

