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Read the “Directions” sheet for step-by-step instructions.

SUMMARY

In this activity, children and adults will explore a local seat of government and consider how they could make for changes in their communities.

WHY

This activity will introduce children to the governments in their communities, which will encourage lifelong community interest and social action.

TIME

- 35 minutes, plus travel time

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in 1st through 4th grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **citizen:** a person who has responsibilities to a government and is also entitled to protection from it
- **civic:** of or relating to a citizen, a city, citizenship, or community affairs
- **government:** the organization of people responsible for directing and supervising public affairs, such as making laws and law enforcement
- **negotiate:** talk about and come to an agreement on an issue
- **nonviolence:** a philosophy or strategy for change that opposes using violence
- **seat of government:** a place in which one or more part of a government acts or meets

GET READY

- Read *Martin’s Big Words* together. *Martin’s Big Words* is a biography of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/mlk/mlk_reading.pdf).
- Read the [Step Back in Time](#) sheets.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/mlk/>.

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YOU NEED

- Directions sheets (*attached*)
- Step Back in Time sheets (*attached*)
- Martin's Big Words book (*optional*)
- Transportation (*possibly*)
- Paper and pencil

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/mlk/>.



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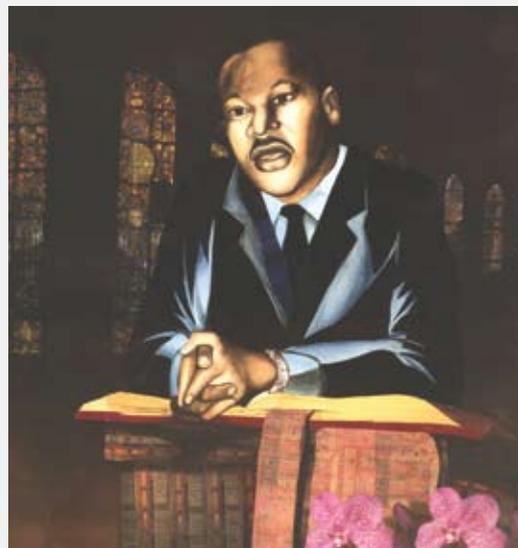
For more information, visit the National Museum of American History Web site <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/mlk/>.

In 1955, African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, organized to demand equal treatment with whites on city buses. They chose as their leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a pastor at a church in the community. Dr. King had studied the lives of leaders who made changes through **nonviolent protests**. Like Mohandas Gandhi, who helped India gain independence from Great Britain without using violence, King believed that the moral power of **nonviolence** was the strongest force for social changes.

Dr. King used powerful speeches to lead others in marches, **boycotts**, and other forms of peaceful **demonstrations**. **Nonviolent demonstrators** often met with violence and were sometimes arrested for their **protests**. When these **demonstrations** were reported in the news, more people learned about the problems of other citizens and began to pay attention to how the **demonstrators** felt.

Dr. King fought against many kinds of **injustice**. He believed that all people had the right to go to good schools, get fair treatment at their jobs, and be able to use all public places like buses and restaurants.

Many of the **injustices** Dr. King protested against were considered **customs** in the communities where he worked. Many people in the governments of those



Dr. King was a pastor who worked at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama before he became known as a civil rights leader. Image from *Martin's Big Words*.



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communities benefited from these **customs** and made laws supporting them, so Dr. King and his followers couldn't just work with the local governments to make changes. Instead, Dr. King led **nonviolent demonstrations** and met with members of Congress, U.S. presidents and other national leaders, to talk about problems that needed to be solved.

Important Dates

- In 1963 about 250,000 Americans of all races came together in Washington, D.C., to protest against racial **injustice** and to demand strong national civil rights laws. At the March on Washington, Dr. King declared, "I have a dream," appealing to the hopes of all Americans seeking racial **harmony**.
- In 1964, Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in the **nonviolent** civil rights movement.
- In 1968, while he was working on a **protest** in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. King was killed by a man who disagreed with his words and actions

custom: unwritten law

demonstration: public display of group feelings toward a person or cause

demonstrator: person who is part of a demonstration (see above)

harmony: balanced and peaceful relationship

injustice: unfair act

nonviolence: a philosophy or strategy for change that opposes the use of violence

protest: public demonstration of disapproval

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Before you go:

1. Read through the **Step Back in Time** sheets or *Martin's Big Words*. What are some of the things Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. believed in or supported through his actions? Are these things still problems today?

Tip If you are looking through *Martin's Big Words*, be sure to also read the timeline in the back of the book.

2. In 1965, Dr. King led civil rights marches from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery, Alabama. Montgomery was chosen as the ending point for the marches because that was where the governor worked in the State Capitol. Who is in charge of your town or state? Where does he or she work? In order to make changes in your community, you might want to get to know one or more of the places and people in your community's **government**.

Tip If you are curious about the Selma to Montgomery marches, check out the notes, maps, and photographs at the National Parks Service Web site <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/133SEMO/133selma.htm>.

3. Do a search on the Internet for the seat of government you are planning to visit. Find out if there are special security requirements for visiting that seat of government, such as a list of items you cannot bring into the building. There may also be tours or events that you could plan on attending during your visit.

Tip Plan ahead to find the best time to visit. There may be specific times when you are encouraged to visit, or when you are not allowed to visit.

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4. Look at a map together. Find your home and find the **seat of government** you're planning to visit. Plan how you will get there and estimate how long the travel will take.

During your trip:

- If you meet a **government** worker who has time to talk with you, ask him or her:
 - What is your job here?
 - What do you do that helps our community?
 - What made you want to have this job?
- Find out how citizens can influence the **government** at this level.
 - Are there special times when **citizens** can meet with **government** workers?
 - If you wanted to write to one of the government workers, who could you write to?
- Draw a sketch of the building or any interesting rooms you see.

Label especially interesting parts of your picture with words, so you will remember what you saw!

After your trip:

- Make a drawing of yourself making a speech to the **government**, presenting an idea that Dr. King would have supported.

You may want to reread the **Step Back in Time** sheets or *Martin's Big Words* to refresh your memory about Dr. King!

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- Write a letter to one of the **government** workers you saw or one who works in the **seat of government** you visited. In your letter, ask for a change that Dr. King would have supported.
- Think about it: If going to the **seat of government**, writing a letter to the **government**, or otherwise trying to **negotiate** with the **government** doesn't work, what other options do you have to make a change? Dr. King supported the use of **nonviolence** to make changes, and would have recommended taking action in peaceful ways.

Tip

Learn more about nonviolence from a comic book! Take a look at the Comic Book Hero activity, online at http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/mlk/mlk_comic.pdf.

If you want to take action in your community to make a change through service, check out the You Can, Too! activity, online at http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/freedom/LunchCounter_Service.pdf.

For more activities and information about *Martin's Big Words* and Dr. King, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/mlk/>.

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Read the “Parent Guide” and “Directions” sheets for step-by-step instructions.

OBJECTIVES

Students will be better able to:

- Describe a seat of government in their community and the role of one worker (or more) employed in that seat of government.
- Describe Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his message to others.
- Envision one or more opportunity for civic engagement.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Accurately describes what is seen or felt while visiting the seat of government.
- Selects a message that is in keeping with the traditions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

5A: Identify problems or dilemmas.

K-4 Historical Content Standards

4C: The student understands historic figures who have exemplified values and principles of American democracy.

4D: The student understands events that celebrate and exemplify fundamental values and principles of American democracy.

IRA/NCTE Language Arts Standards

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

