

Martin Luther King Jr. Day
TIELLA (Tigard Informal Language Learning for Adults)
January 18, 2021

Warm-up: What are Nobel Prizes? Who are some famous people that have won the Nobel Peace Prize?

Listen: to the first 5 minutes and 8 seconds of King's Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech (YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r98tT0j1a0>). The video has captions. The first five minutes appear below. You may also read along with the speech or read the speech later.

Martin Luther King Jr. gave his acceptance speech at the University of Oslo on 10 December, 1964. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/26142-martin-luther-king-jr-acceptance-speech-1964/>

Martin Luther King's Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech
Oslo, Norway, December 10, 1964

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I accept the Nobel Prize for Peace at a moment when 22 million Negroes of the United States of America are engaged in a creative battle to end the long night of racial injustice. I accept this award on behalf of a civil rights movement which is moving with determination and a majestic scorn for risk and danger to establish a reign of freedom and a rule of justice.

I am mindful that only yesterday in Birmingham, Alabama, our children, crying out for brotherhood, were answered with fire hoses, snarling dogs and even death. I am mindful that only yesterday in Philadelphia, Mississippi, young people seeking to secure the right to vote were brutalized and murdered. And only yesterday more than 40 houses of worship in the State of Mississippi alone were bombed or burned because they offered a sanctuary to those who would not accept segregation.

I am mindful that debilitating and grinding poverty afflicts my people and chains them to the lowest rung of the economic ladder.

Therefore, I must ask why this prize is awarded to a movement which is beleaguered and committed to unrelenting struggle; to a movement which has not won the very peace and brotherhood which is the essence of the Nobel Prize.

After contemplation, I conclude that this award which I receive on behalf of that movement is a profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time – the need for man to overcome oppression and

violence without resorting to violence and oppression. Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts.

Negroes of the United States, following the people of India, have demonstrated that nonviolence is . . . a powerful moral force which makes for social transformation.

Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace. . . . If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.

The tortuous road which has led from Montgomery, Alabama to Oslo bears witness to this truth. This is a road over which millions of Negroes are travelling to find a new sense of dignity. This same road has opened for all Americans a new era of progress and hope. It has led to a new Civil Rights Bill, and it will, I am convinced, be widened and lengthened into a superhighway of justice as Negro and white men in increasing numbers create alliances to overcome their common problems.

Zoom Rooms with Tutors

1. Discussion of King's Nobel Prize acceptance speech.
2. The MLK Day Holiday story followed by language exercises.
3. Brief biography of Martin Luther King's Jr. followed by student-generated question about passages in the biography leading to open-ended discussion.

1. Accepting the Nobel Peace Prize

Tutors: Start with checking for comprehension. Which words are not understood? The term "civil rights" and "segregation" may need definition.

In response to listening to Dr. King's speech, have students share what they already know about the civil rights movement of the 1960s. They may choose to talk about or ask questions about the present-day Black Lives Matter movement. How are they similar? How are they different?

Encourage students to write down their own questions about the civil rights movement in the 1960s, then share them with each other.

2. The Story of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a U.S. holiday that celebrates the birth date of one of America's greatest civil rights leaders. Dr. King's date of birth is January 15th, but the actual holiday is on the third Monday in January. The holiday recognizes his great achievements. His leadership in the campaign to achieve equal rights for black Americans changed America forever. His focus on non-violent protests led to new laws against racial discrimination in America.

Dr. King was assassinated in 1968. Just 15 years later, in 1983, then President Ronald Reagan signed this holiday into U.S. law. People first observed the holiday three years later, in 1986. At first, the holiday was not popular with all American states. Some didn't like the name and so they called it "Civil Rights Day". However, in the year 2000, all 50 states observed the holiday using its correct name. The musician Stevie Wonder helped the campaign for the holiday. He released a hit single called "Happy Birthday" in 1980. The song made millions of Americans aware of the campaign. Six million people signed a petition for the American Congress to create the holiday. It is still the largest petition in U.S. history in favor of an issue. (Sources: <http://www.wikipedia.org/> and assorted sites.)

Match to complete the following phrases from the article.

Paragraph 1

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. one of America's greatest | a. violent protests |
| 2. The holiday recognizes his | b. civil rights leaders |
| 3. the campaign to achieve | c. great achievements |
| 4. His focus on non- | d. equal rights |
| 5. new laws against | e. racial discrimination |

Paragraph 2

- | | |
|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Dr. King was assassinated | a. three years later in 1986 |
| 2. People first observed the holiday | b. its correct name |
| 3. At first, the holiday | c. aware of the campaign |
| 4. all 50 states observed the holiday using | d. in 1968 |
| 5. The song made millions of Americans | e. in U.S. history |
| 6. the largest petition | f. was not popular |

With a partner, put the words back into the correct order.

1.	rights one America's civil leaders of greatest
2.	actual on Monday the is third January holiday the in
3.	campaign the rights equal achieve to
4.	on - protests focus non-violent His
5.	equal The became more society USA a
6.	Dr King assassinated 1968 . was in
7.	three holiday the observed first People later years
8.	American not states popular the with holiday all was
9.	observed holiday its name the using correct
10.	million Six petition a signed people

3. *Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*
Brief Biography of a Civil Rights Leader
Born in 1929, died in 1968



Martin Luther King Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia in the large twelve room house of his parents on January 15, 1929. His grandparents also lived in the house. He was born during a time when black people did not have the rights which they have today.

M.L., as he was called, first experienced racial discrimination when their white neighbors refused to let him play with their boys. This was hard for him to understand because the boys had grown up as neighbors and had played together for years.

At a later time, he and his father were asked to move to the back of a shoe store to be fitted with shoes. They left without buying anything. These early incidents made a deep impression on the young boy.

He attended Oglethorpe Elementary School which was a private school associated with Atlanta University. His parents paid \$25 a year which covered all his expenses. Miss Lemon, his teacher taught him to be independent. She taught him if there was an injustice, he could rebel, but still keep his dignity and find quiet ways to resist. She inspired her students to learn about black history and take pride in their heritage. Her students started each day by singing the song, [*Lift Every Voice and Sing*](#).

On one occasion M.L. and his teacher were riding on a bus. When the bus filled up with people, the driver asked them to stand up and let two white people have their seats. It was the law. Martin saw the injustice of it, and he never forgot that incident.

When he was 15 years old, he entered Morehouse College. After two years in school, he decided he could best serve others by becoming a minister. He became assistant minister of the Ebenezer Baptist church where his father was minister. The following year he graduated from college. He was only 19 years old.

He then attended Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania. While he was at Crozer he began to study the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, a man who brought about changes in India through "passive resistance". Gandhi urged people to not fight, but to protest peacefully. Martin saw this method of non-violent resistance as the answer to the unfair treatment blacks received in America.

He worked on his Ph.D. at Boston University. It was there he met Coretta Scott who would become his wife. They would eventually have four children; two boys and two girls. When he graduated from Boston University, he became the minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama.

Blacks and whites were segregated in Montgomery, attending different schools and sitting in separate sections on buses. Sometimes blacks would be forced to stand

on a bus even though there were empty seats in the "white" section at the front of the bus. On December 1, 1955 Mrs. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus. The police were called, and she was arrested. This event led to a revolt all over America.

E.D. Nixon, who was a train porter, bailed Rosa out of jail, and he started contacting others about starting a boycott of the buses. "Boycott" means they would refuse to ride the buses until they received fair treatment. The newspapers heard of the plan and wrote an article. This article was very helpful in getting the word out about the boycott.

The boycott lasted for more than a year and they walked, rode bicycles, and rode in carpools to get to work. In December of 1956 the Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was unlawful.

Then the "freedom riders" began riding buses from state to state and doing "sit-ins" at lunch counters and "white" waiting rooms. The Jim Crow laws that said blacks were to be denied certain rights began to be challenged in many cities in America.

Peaceful marches were organized, and people were arrested because they were taking part. Even little children were sprayed with water hoses and arrested! On August 28, 1963 Martin Luther King and other leaders led a march into Washington D.C. Over 200,000 people marched from the Washington Monument to the Lincoln Memorial. It was here Dr. King delivered his "I Have a Dream" message.

In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in Norway. He gave the \$54,000 prize money to the civil rights groups which were working to secure the rights blacks deserved.

Dr. King was put in jail 30 times for his resistance. Some people tried to kill him. Then on April 4, 1968 a gunman *did* murder him in Memphis, Tennessee. His widow Coretta Scott King passed away January 30, 2006.

Many changes have taken place in America because of the leadership of Martin Luther King. In 1986 when Ronald Reagan was president, Congress passed a law establishing a national holiday, Martin Luther King Day. (This biography by Patsy Stevens, a retired teacher, was written in 2006.)

Review exercise:

Choose a passage of a paragraph or two in length that you feel is interesting. Write a question that your choice of a passage answers. Take turns reading the questions and discussing the answers.

Note: Placed on the tiella.org website is an abridged version of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech. The class has read this version as a responsive reading in past years. At the end are notes on the history of civil rights law in the USA.