

KIDS IN BIRMINGHAM 1963

www.KidsInBirmingham1963.org

Teaching Civil Rights with direct access to eye witnesses

Lesson #2. What would you do? The 1963 Birmingham Children’s Crusade

Learning about the 1963 Birmingham Children’s Crusade, your students hear from four of the young people who were growing up in Birmingham when that city became the center of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement for a short time. Then your students reflect on whether they would have joined the march or sat it out. This lesson plan uses the primary sources available at www.KidsInBirmingham1963.org—first-person recollections from the blacks and whites who were children in segregated Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1960s.

In May 1963, the Civil Rights Movement made a leap forward with the Birmingham Children’s Crusade and the jailing of thousands of young people. The nation’s attention was riveted by the images of police dogs and firehoses trained on children and teenagers who were peacefully marching to end the city’s strict “Jim Crow” segregation laws.

In a single class period, your students read the personal accounts of four people who were children, teenagers, or youth in 1963 (primary sources, assembled around the time of the 50th anniversary of the events); discuss how Birmingham’s kids, black and white, experienced and assessed the Children’s Crusade; make inquiry into the choices those youths made; and imagine how they themselves would respond if given the chance to take action for social justice.

Grades: 6th -12th Grades

Topic: U.S. Civil Rights Movement; 1963 Birmingham Children’s Crusade

Rationale: Students may benefit from imagining what would prompt a young person to join a social justice movement, by examining the first-person stories of black and white children who participated in—or chose not to join—the 1963 Birmingham Children’s Crusade

Class Time: 50- to 80-minute lesson

Learning Targets: You will be able to:

- Name the reasons people gave for whether or not they chose to join the Birmingham Children’s Crusade
- State whether or not you would have participated in the Children’s Crusade and why

Methods:

- **Teacher presentation** on the background of the Civil Rights Movement in Birmingham
- **Readings** of primary source material and **interpretation** of the texts to identify the writers’ motivations
- **Class discussion** to inquire about a variety of perspectives on the Children’s Crusade from the kids who lived in Birmingham in 1963
- **Self-reflection** and **declaration** of a personal position

Materials:

- **Video** to provide background on the Birmingham Children’s Crusade and its historical importance
- **Texts:** Primary source first-person accounts from four people who were kids in Birmingham during 1963, through:
 - Access to the Kids in Birmingham 1963 Web site (See hyperlinks, below)

or

 - Photocopies of excerpts from the selected primary source stories (Find these stories below, on pages 10-13)
 - Graphic organizer (page 14)

Preparation

- Post the learning targets (above) where they will be visible throughout the lesson
- (Optional) Create observation charts, as in the sample on page 5, using photos of children taking part in Civil Rights activities (You will need these charts if you use Warm-up, Option 1, page 5.)
- (If students will not access the stories online) Make photocopies of the four stories (pages 10-13). Members of each table group will need a copy of the same story.
- Prepare copies for each student of the graphic organizer (page 14)

This lesson uses the stories of four people, listed in this table. If you prefer to have students read the original stories online, use the links in this table. If you use the handouts, on pages 10-13 of this document, please note that each story has been edited to fit on a single page.

Storyteller		Link to full story online
	1. Marti Turnipseed Age 20 in 1963	http://kidsinbirmingham1963.org/nobody-dared-her-to-do-it/#more-263
	2. Freeman Hrabowski Age 12 in 1963	http://kidsinbirmingham1963.org/what-do-you-want-little-niggra/#more-44
	3. Harold Jackson Age 10 in 1963	http://kidsinbirmingham1963.org/school-first/#more-51
	4. Ingrid Kraus Age 17 in 1963	http://kidsinbirmingham1963.org/strength-to-pursue-our-ideals/#more-109

Why this history matters

Martin Luther King, Jr., had begun to see Birmingham, Alabama, as “probably the most segregated city in America.” In the spring of 1963 he brought his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), to Birmingham at the invitation of the local activist Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth. The plan for Birmingham was called Project C, for Confrontation. The activists conducted pickets and marches to pressure the downtown department stores to change racist policies that allowed blacks to spend their money at the stores, but *not* to try on clothes before they purchased them, eat at the lunch counters, or use the public restrooms. Still, some African Americans were opposed to the actions, and progress was slow.

All that changed when one of King’s young lieutenants suggested that the children lead the marches. For several days in early May 1963, thousands of Birmingham’s children and youth enthusiastically skipped school to march. Facing dogs and firehoses, they sang and clapped as they were led off to fill the jails. Within days, the businessmen had agreed to the blacks’ modest demands, and the movement declared a success.

How important was the Children's Crusade? It was critical for the Birmingham demonstrations to succeed. Award-winning author and Birmingham native Diane McWhorter says, "Although the gains won in Birmingham may seem minor, Project C brought about one of the most dramatic shifts in the history of the country. The Movement...forced the country to admit that segregation was morally unacceptable." (McWhorter 2004) Some historians say that the Birmingham movement led directly to passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Bibliography

McWhorter, Diane. 2004. *A dream of freedom: The civil rights movement from 1954 to 1968*. New York: Scholastic Nonfiction.

Acknowledgments

This lesson would not have been created without the encouragement of **Lena Frumin** and **Pamela Gardner** of **Woodrow Wilson High School**, District of Columbia Public Schools. Thanks also to the Wilson teachers and students who participated in the February 2015 Black History Month presentation, the first time this lesson was used.

Casey Kelly and **Beth Jimerson** bring their teaching experience to the refinement of this lesson plan. Many thanks for their insightful suggestions and edits. You may also want to use the original lesson they created for Kids in Birmingham 1963, commemorating the 1963 bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Access that lesson plan here: <http://bit.ly/2fBI8qQ>

Special thanks, too, to **Jenny Gilsdorf** for an important contribution to this lesson: guidance on helping students know how to interpret personal accounts of historic events.

Dr. Yonghee Suh, Old Dominion University, and the students in her 2016 class, "Instructional Strategies in Middle/Secondary Social Studies," made thoughtful critiques of an early draft of this lesson. The students are: **Arrica Agee, Meagan Caputo, Bradley Dingman, Erika Durdle, Daniel Flood, Jenny Gilsdorf, Sekani Grant, Tomeka Gross, Robert Keefer, Lisabeth Leighton, Richard Scarper, Wendy Scott, Glenda Warner, and Brandon Wynne.**

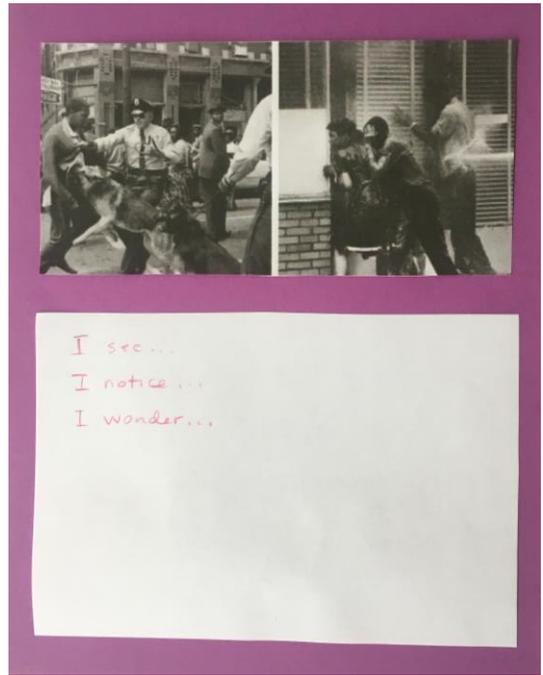
A lesson plan: What would you do?

Activities:

1. Introduce the topic (~5-10 minutes). Choose the best way to introduce this lesson for your class:

Warm-up, Option 1:

- Create observation charts to put up around the room. Each chart can have 2-4 pictures from the Civil Rights Movement, especially any involving children (see a sample observational chart, right)
- Put up the observation charts around the room
- Have students go around to each of the charts, writing their observations on the charts: What do you see? What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- Students rotate around the room—1-2 minutes for each picture (can be done to music; maybe a song from that era)
- When students have seen all charts, they will share out what was written on the observation chart where they end
- Students go back to their table group and discuss the question: “What historical event do you think we’ll be discussing today?”
- Ask student groups to share out their ideas with the whole class
- Transition to the lesson by explaining that today students will be reading personal stories from four people, two white and two black, and their memories of an event that changed America’s history: the Children’s Crusade of Birmingham, Alabama, in May 1963



Warm-up, Option 2:

- Ask students to think about what they know about a present-day movement for social justice such as LGBTQ rights, women’s rights, Black Lives Matter, Muslim rights, Latino or Hispanic rights, women’s rights, others
- Then have students turn to a classmate close by to share what they know about any one of these movements
- Next ask several students to share with the class what they know about the present-day movement they are discussing

- Finish by explaining that today students will be learning about another movement from history, the Children’s Crusade of Birmingham, Alabama in May 1963
- Tell students that as they learn about the Birmingham Children’s Crusade, they should be thinking about connections between that historic event and these current social justice movements

Warm-up, Option 3, for an assembly or large group:

- Choose 4-6 of the list of points below (or add your own). Say, *Let’s find out a bit about who you are and what your relationship has been to civil rights in the U.S. Please stand if you:*

- Have ever studied the Civil Rights Movement
- Have talked with someone who was part of the Civil Rights Movement
- Have ever been in Birmingham, Alabama
- Can name someone besides Dr. King, Jr., who fought for civil rights
- Can name a *woman*—besides Rosa Parks—who fought for civil rights
- Ever felt like an outsider
- Ever experienced injustice because of race or ethnicity, age, sex, sexual orientation, religion, or language
- Ever stood up for someone who was mistreated for one of those
- In the past month, been someplace where *everyone* was like you
- In the past month, been someplace where *no one* was like you
- Ever joined a march or a protest for a cause you believe in

For each point, you may ask some of the students who stand to say a bit about the reason they answered “yes.” Suggest that students look around too to learn more about the other students’ experiences.

2. Review the lesson’s learning targets (~3 minutes). Display these on a screen, a flipchart page, or a board so you can refer to them throughout the lesson.

Learning Targets: You will be able to:

- Name the reasons people gave for whether or not they chose to join the Birmingham Children’s Crusade
- State whether or not you would have participated in the Children’s Crusade and why

3. Introduce the historical event and the primary sources on 1963’s Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama (~5-10 minutes).

- Depending on the students’ prior exposure to information on the Children’s Crusade, you will want to provide some historical context.
 - Use the brief description above (“Why this history matters,” pages 3-4) to set the scene for the lesson; or
 - Show the four-minute video “American Freedom Stories: Children’s Crusade of 1963,” available on YouTube at <http://bit.ly/2fFplhH>

- Answer the question: What was the Children’s Crusade?
- Depending on the students’ experience with interpreting personal accounts of events, you will want to provide guidance on how to effectively analyze an individual’s account and relate it to the overall history of the event. Use your own resources or the websites listed below as resources to help teach students about interpreting primary documents:
 - Oral History Association: Oral History in Education
<http://www.oralhistory.org/education/>
 - National Archives: History in the Raw
<https://www.archives.gov/education/history-in-the-raw.html>
- Introduce students to the online resource Kids in Birmingham 1963, www.KidsInBirmingham1963.org. Let them know that in 2013, 50 years after the historic Year of Birmingham, 1963, people who were children in Birmingham in that year were invited to tell their stories and post them at the website. These storytellers represent many perspectives on a tumultuous year that transformed the nation and shaped their lives. Many of the storytellers make themselves available for interviews with students, scholars, and the media, to share the rich history of that time and place. Say: “In today’s lesson, you’ll read the stories of four of these people.”

4. Read Primary Source Stories (~17-27 minutes).

- *Jigsaw activity:* Assign students to a table group where all the members of the group will read the same person’s story. Using the graphic organizer, each individual student will fill in the row corresponding to that story—filling in:
 - The storyteller’s **age** in 1963
 - **Description.** A brief description of the storyteller
 - **Participated?** Indicate whether or not the person joined in the protests
 - **Reasons.** The reasons the person gave for joining or not joining the protests
 - **Impact.** The impact that choice had on the person who is telling the story.
 All students with the same person share together and discuss anything else they should add to their graphic organizer. Students then go back to the full class and share out about the four people so that all students have information about all four people.

5. Present the four stories to the class for analysis (~10-15 minutes):

- Call on groups to respond to the following questions:
 - Which people chose to participate?
 - Which people chose not to participate?
 - What were the reasons for participating?
 - What were the reasons for not participating?
 - What were the ways they participated?
 - What are some other ways of participating that were mentioned in the stories?
- Once all four stories have been reviewed, ask students to describe these storytellers—in terms of race, age, and choices they made. This is a chance to point

out that two of the young people, one black and one white, marched; and two did not, one black and one white. You may also remind students that the black youths and the white youths may never have had the chance to know one another, since Jim Crow laws required them to be in separate schools, separate places of worship, separate restaurants, swimming pools, libraries, and parks. They would not have played on the same sports teams.

- Introduce follow-up questions to discuss in groups and share out:
 - What kinds of discrimination did students encounter?
 - How were students of all races affected?

6. Encourage personal reflection (~5-10 minutes):

- Ask students to take a few minutes of quiet reflection to consider what choices they would have made had they lived in Birmingham in 1963. They should imagine that they—as they are today—are transported to that time and place. (That is, they should not try to imagine they are someone else.)
- Remind students that each of the people had good reasons for the choices they made. There is no single “right” answer for everyone. They were responding not just to their beliefs at the time, but to their families’ situations and wishes.
- Ask students to stand on a continuum and indicate their choices by moving to a place in the room that you have designated for those who would protest and those who would not protest. (For example, “If you believe you would definitely choose to protest, stand near the door. If you would definitely choose not to protest, stand near the window; if you are pretty sure you’d choose to protest, stand here; if you’re pretty sure you wouldn’t, stand here.”)
- Students should form a group with those who are near them and discuss their reasons for placing themselves there. Ask for one representative to share out. **Be sure that all students’ choices are affirmed as reasonable choices.**

7. Wrap up and close the lesson (~5 minutes):

- Ask students to consider and share what they have learned from the stories and the exercise. Encourage them to talk about relationships they see between the situation in Birmingham in 1963 and the current situation—helping them to make links with present-day movements for social justice such as LGBTQ rights, Black Lives Matter, Muslim rights, Latino or Hispanic rights, women’s rights, others. Be alert to how your students of different racial, cultural, and ethnic groups may be responding to the lesson, noting that the issue in Birmingham was viewed as “black and white,” with few other ethnic groups present.
- Direct students’ attention to the learning targets, posted. Lead a brief discussion about the extent to which students feel they have met each of the three targets.
- Close the lesson by reminding students that the voices of young people can make a difference. The Children’s Crusade in Birmingham in 1963 drew the attention of leaders throughout the country, including President Kennedy. The events of Birmingham are credited with contributing to the passage the next year of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Knowing this history may help today’s young people weigh the risks and opportunities of taking action for social justice..

RESOURCES on the Birmingham Children’s Crusade

BOOKS

- ***We’ve got a job: The 1963 Birmingham Children’s March***, by Cynthia Levinson. Peach Tree Publishers, Atlanta, GA, 2012.
- ***A Dream of Freedom: The Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968***, by Diane McWhorter. Scholastic Nonfiction, New York, NY, 2004.
- ***March, Book 2***, by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell. Top Shelf Productions, Marietta, GA, 2015. Part 2 of a graphic novel trilogy; pages 131-138 feature the Birmingham Children’s Crusade.
- ***The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement***, by Taylor Branch. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, New York, NY, 2013. This book, with selections from the author’s America in the King Years Trilogy, offers a chapter on the effects of the Birmingham campaign, “A National Firestorm from Birmingham, 1963,” pages 47-57.

TEACHER RESOURCES

- For a **free-to-teachers kit on the Birmingham Children’s Crusade**, see the Zinn Education Project’s listing at <http://zinnedproject.org/materials/the-childrens-march/>. The kit, produced by [Teaching Tolerance](#) in association with HBO, includes a 40-minute teachers’ edition of the Academy Award-winning documentary “**Mighty Times: The Children’s March.**”

VIDEOS

- **Foundational Experiences: Birmingham Children's Crusade.** Civil rights icon Julian Bond interviews college president Freeman Hrabowski about his experience as a 12-year-old leader in the protest. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWLjSed305g>
- **Mamie Chalmers on Protesting as Part of the Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, AL.** Mamie King-Chalmers, a youth leader of the Children’s Crusade, talks about her experiences in 1963. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0g6Lu7RY7hk>
- **American Freedom Stories: Children's Crusade of 1963.** This is the four-minute video suggested for a warm-up to this lesson. <http://bit.ly/2fFplhH>

1. Nobody dared her to do it



MARTI TURNIPSEED

Age 20 in 1963

Nobody pressured her. Nobody dared her to do it. Her decision was hers to make.

On April 24, 1963, Birmingham-Southern College sophomore “Marti” Turnipseed chose to join seven black students who were sitting in for justice at a segregated Woolworth’s food counter in downtown Birmingham.

Little did she know that Birmingham Police Commissioner Bull Conner had spying detectives everywhere. As soon as Marti returned to campus several hours later, she received an urgent summons to appear before college officials. The next day, the college’s acting president asked Marti to withdraw from school immediately.

Two of Marti’s friends helped Marti pack up her things. The next day, the three friends found themselves sitting in an office before five college administrators. One of them recalled, “We were given a moral lecture that ‘the college was doing the best it could and wanted to help race relations in the city and state, but that we were trying to move too fast and were making it harder and worse for them.’”

Just two days earlier Marti and two white friends had ventured off campus to attend a rally where Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke. They made a stir; local civil rights activist Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth introduced them and called them up to speak. Before the evening was out, Marti pledged to join in the sit-in the next day, becoming the first white student in Birmingham to do so.

She hadn’t always been an activist, says her brother. “My sister lived life in the way a kid does who embraces its goodness,” he said. “She was as normal as any growing girl you could ever meet. She was not fixated on doing any overt social and political acts that would shake up the world.”

Marti’s story is adapted from an article in Birmingham-Southern College’s alumni magazine, ‘Southern, the Winter 2013 edition that commemorates the 50th anniversary of “Birmingham’s great movement for civil rights.” The publishers gave permission. See the full edition at <http://www.bsc.edu/communications/southern/win-spr2013/index.html#/22/>

2. What do you want little Niggra?



FREEMAN HRABOWSKI

Age 12 in 1963

My memories of Birmingham in 1963 are vivid. I remember that my friends and I talked with our parents about whether we would be allowed to participate in marches. I recall the rumors that teachers and other workers (like my mother and father) would lose their jobs if they marched. As a ninth-grade student, I listened to adults seriously questioning the idea of asking children to march. In fact, there were many middle-class Black families who were suspicious of Dr. King and the Movement. From my perspective, it was exhilarating to march for such a worthy cause, but frightening to encounter menacing police dogs and to spend time in jail with other children. We believed that we were very much a part of the Movement, and it was cathartic to learn that we could be agents of change. This realization was especially meaningful for me, because I was allowed to lead a group of kids to City Hall.

I recall leaving my church and leading my line downtown, with the goal of kneeling on the steps of City Hall and praying for our freedom. My heart was pounding, and my head was swimming with fear. Before we could reach the steps, we were stopped by the Birmingham police. Police Commissioner “Bull” Connor, himself, stopped us and asked me, “What do you want little Niggra?” and, meaning to or not, spat on me. As I replied, “We want our freedom,” my fellow demonstrators and I were shoved into the paddy wagons in a moment of confusion.

In spite of the inspirational meetings and speeches, those children who went to the jail often found themselves in a frightening situation. For me, incarceration was especially depressing and unnerving because we were intentionally placed with juvenile delinquents who had had very hardened lives. I spent my five days of confinement thinking about the meaning of freedom while constantly worrying about my own personal safety. I must admit that I began to breathe with ease only after my parents secured my release.

It was eye-opening to see how Americans of all races responded to the way we, as children, were treated in those demonstrations. Such an experience told me that our voices—the voices of the young—were significant, and that young people could think and act responsibly, and that our actions could change the course of history and the world.

This story is excerpted from “The role of youth in the civil rights movement: Reflections on Birmingham,” by Freeman A. Hrabowski, III, PhD, President, University of Maryland Baltimore County (1996).

3. School first



HAROLD JACKSON



Age 9 in 1963

In 1963 I was 9 years old, in the third grade, and not paying much attention to the conversations of all the adults who were apprehensive because the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth had asked King to help lead the local civil rights movement.

Shuttlesworth asked for King's help because the Birmingham movement was losing its energy. King agreed to come because his national movement needed a spark after demonstrations in Albany, Ga., failed to integrate anything. In a telegram to President John F. Kennedy, King called Birmingham "by far the worst big city in race relations in the United States."

I'm sure he was right. But a 9-year-old black boy living in a segregated world doesn't experience much discrimination. My only memory of how segregation affected me at that age is of when my mother couldn't find a colored bathroom for her child when we were downtown shopping. My humiliating recollection is that we found an empty alley in time.

The pastor of my church was the father of Condoleezza Rice. Rev. Rice and Shuttlesworth were friends, but disagreed on tactics. Like many blacks, Rev. Rice believed integration would come eventually without the marches and demonstrations that might become violent. They believed education was the key to prove blacks were intellectually equal and deserved to be treated as such.

My parents believed that, too. My father was a truck driver for a furniture store. My mother was a stay-at-home mom. With my four brothers, we had lived in a housing project since I was born. My parents made sure we put school first, to succeed in any world – black or white. Bad grades were unacceptable. Bad conduct meant punishment at school and at home.

Our parents' focus on education was uppermost in our minds when my older brother Don and I were confronted on the way to school by two older youths who said black students were boycotting school that day to show support for King's demonstrations. I don't recall all that was said, but we went to school. Most children did, but others marched.

This story is excerpted from an article, "[The memories of a black child in Birmingham](#)," by Harold Jackson, first published in the Philadelphia Inquirer on February 24, 2013.

4. Strength to pursue our ideals



INGRID KRAUS



Age 17 in 1963

In 1963, I was a senior at Shades Valley High School in Birmingham, Alabama. That was the year a bright, intensely idealistic, not very savvy girl learned to retreat.

I was raised with a heavy dose of: “all men are created equal.” Birmingham schools were still segregated in the early ‘60s, and during my high school summers, my parents sent me to an integrated camp in Vermont.

When I started my sophomore year, I attempted to bridge the gap between home and school by having discussions with classmates about politics, history, communism, and integration.

By 1963, the Civil Rights Movement arrived in Birmingham in full force. Marchers were attacked downtown with fire hoses and police dogs and often jailed. During my senior year some white friends and I met regularly at each other’s homes to continue elaborate intellectual discussions. Some black friends (I had met through camp contacts) and I met occasionally to continue in our generation the type of dialogue my parents fostered in theirs. I wanted to join the marchers downtown, but my mother forbade my participation.

Hostile classmates followed me and my friends in the halls and in the lunchroom. They called us names. They made weird noises when they saw us. An article appeared in The Birmingham News alleging that there was a communist cell at our school. When I got hostile phone calls at home, my mother insisted I get off the phone, not argue with the callers. The school counselor wrote negative recommendations to try to keep me from being accepted into college. The principal called me into his office and said he had tried to manipulate my grades in every way he could to keep me from being valedictorian, but he had failed.

I realize that the treatment my friends and I received was nothing in comparison to the treatment of the activists downtown, some of whom were children. All of us must move from childhood into adulthood, and learn to see the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. Still, we should be able to move into adulthood with the strength to pursue our ideals, at least in some practical fashion. I learned that it is not safe to be open and honest, and, despite decades of activities and activism, some of which required great courage, a part of me has been in retreat ever since.

Ingrid Kraus wrote this story for Kids in Birmingham 1963, in 2013.

Children's Crusade Graphic Organizer

	Description	Participated?	Reasons	Impact
 Marti Turnipseed Age:				
 Freeman Hrabowski Age:				
 Harold Jackson Age:				
 Ingrid Kraus Age:				