

We Are All Birmingham: Local History through Primary Sources and Writing

Unit Overview

Inspired by the account from Virginia Jones that mentions being unaware of major civil rights unrest despite growing up in the Birmingham area, this unit focuses on civil rights events in Birmingham and beyond while also looking at investigating the historical events simultaneously happening in the neighboring community of Homewood. Students will learn about national and local events by investigating primary and secondary sources, including photographs, written firsthand accounts, newspaper articles, books, and more. Next, students will apply what they have learned to construct timelines and write summaries of the events. Finally, students will choose one event to commemorate by designing a mock historical marker.

Alabama State Standards

English Language Arts

Literacy R4. Utilize a writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish writings in various genres.

Social Studies

SS.4.5. Describe Alabama's entry into statehood and establishment of its three branches of government and the constitutions.

SS.4.10. Analyze social and educational changes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for their impact on Alabama.

SS.4.14. Analyze the modern Civil Rights Movement to determine the social, political, and economic impact on Alabama.

SS.7.5. Compare duties and functions of members of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Alabama's local and state governments and of the national government. (Alabama)

Notes

- Each numbered item below is intended to be a daily plan, so this is a unit designed to take roughly 7 days to complete, spending 45 minutes- 1 hour for each lesson. Ideas for adaptation are below.
 - If a teacher is short on time, I suggest omitting the historical marker assignment at the end.
 - This unit works well for teachers located in Birmingham, Homewood, or even Mountain Brook (which is mentioned in the 1959 and 1964 mergers). Teachers from other OTM communities would benefit from using timeline events from their own communities rather than Homewood history.

- TTW= the teacher will TSW/SW= (the) students will

Daily Plans

Day 1

Materials needed: Day 1 Primary Sources copied for each student; notecards for each students

1. TTW ask students what they already know about Civil Rights and hold a brief discussion to assess background knowledge.
2. TTW explain that students will be learning more about two major Civil Rights events (Rosa Parks' arrest and the March on Washington) through primary sources. SW each receive a packet of primary sources with accompanying questions. TTW explain that students will have the rest of the class period to investigate the sources and build their background knowledge on these events, so invite students to get comfortable. SW individually investigate the sources and write their answers to the questions in the packet, their observations on the sources, connections they make between the sources, or anything they think is important.
3. SW answer the question: What did you learn that you didn't know before? on a notecard as an exit ticket.

Day 2

Materials needed: *The Youngest Marcher* by Cynthia Levinson, Day 2 Primary Sources copied for each student; notecards for each student

1. TTW have a brief discussion and ask students what they know about the Children's March/Children's Crusade.
2. TTW read the book *The Youngest Marcher*, which focuses on the youngest child who participated in the Children's Crusade.
3. TTW repeat the process of investigating primary source packets from Day 1 with the Day 2 Primary Sources, which focus on the Children's Crusade. SW write their responses to the accompanying questions and observations as they investigate.
4. SW illustrate and write a caption about something they learned on a notecard as an exit ticket.

Day 3

Materials needed: Day 2 Account for each student, Day 2 Questions for each student, *We've Got a Job* by Cynthia Levinson

1. SW read Virginia Jones' account of growing up in Birmingham as a young white woman and being unaware of the Civil Rights violence and unrest happening around her. SW write responses to the question: What surprises you most about this account? TTW ask students to share their responses in a brief discussion.
2. In pairs, SW read excerpts from *We've Got a Job* and answer the Day 2 questions.

Day 4

This unit was designed by Emily Blackstock in collaboration with Dr. Jeremiah Clabough and Dr. Jay Bickford for Kids in Birmingham 1963. <https://kidsinbirmingham1963.org/class/we-are-all-birmingham-local-history-through-primary-sources-and-writing/>. See more at kidsinbirmingham1963.org. Contact us at info@kidsinbirmingham.org.

Materials Needed: Day 4 1959 Documents copied for each student, notecards for each student

1. TTW explain that today SW look at events happening simultaneously with the events they have already studied, but in Homewood.
2. TTW explain that Homewood (and Mountain Brook) looked at merging with Birmingham in both 1959 and 1964, and Homewood City Schools was established in 1970. SW investigate newspaper articles to try to determine the causes behind these events.
3. Elementary students often struggle with newspaper formatting, so TTW guide students through reading the articles for the 1959 merger. SW then investigate the articles for the 1964 merger independently.
4. TTW hold a whole class discussion, asking students to compare what they learned about the 1959 merger and contrast it with the 1964 merger.
5. As an exit ticket, students will answer the following question on a notecard: Why do you think Homewood voted against merging with Birmingham?

Day 5

Materials needed: National Timeline Events (copied onto one color of paper for each student), Local Timeline Events (copied onto a different color of paper), construction paper or cardstock

1. SW cut out the national timeline events, which do not include dates, and arrange them in chronological order on their desks using their background knowledge and reasoning skills. Though some events might be unfamiliar to S, encourage them to use what they have learned and to discuss their reasoning with each other.
2. Once students have tried to put the events in the correct order, show them the correct order and have them write the dates next to the events on the sentence strips. The key with event dates and the correct order is on the second page of the National Timeline Events.
3. Finally, pass out the local timeline events and have students cut thee out and add them, in chronological order, to the national events. SW glue all of these to a piece of construction paper or cardstock. The color coding will help students differentiate between the national and local events.
4. TTW lead a class discussion focused on the following questions: how did you decide which events came first or last without dates? Were you surprised that any events were happening at or around the same time?

Day 6

Materials needed: timelines from previous day, student work from previous lessons, paper

1. TTW explain that students will be synthesizing what they have learned with a summary. Using their timelines from the previous day and any materials they would like to consult from previous days, students will write a summary of the events that addresses these questions: How would you describe our past? What do you hope for the future? SW tape or glue these summaries to the backs of their timelines.

Day 7

Materials needed: Historical Marker Template copied for each student

1. TTW show students examples of historical markers ([Historical Marker Database](#) has many) and explain that they will be choosing one event, person, or place that they have learned about to create a historical marker for.
2. In no more than 50 words, students will write a description of what their marker is commemorating, who was involved, where the event took place, when it took place, and why it should be remembered.
3. These make for a wonderful classroom display!

Extensions

1. TTW ask students if they think there are major events happening in the world or closer to home that they think they could be unaware of. SW research national current events using Time for Kids, Scholastic News, Newsela, or local events using local newspapers or websites, then report their findings to the class.
2. SW create illustrations to accompany their historical markers.
3. TW create a large-format version of the timeline including all events and dates on butcher paper. TTW find a picture to accompany each event and distribute the photographs to S. SW decide which event each photograph accompanies and make arguments to explain why.

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