

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Third Monday in January

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929. He grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, with his older sister and younger brother. Martin attended segregated schools. He wanted to be a minister like his father so he studied very hard. He graduated from high school when he was only fifteen years old.

While Martin was at college, he read a book by Mohandas Gandhi. The book told how he used peaceful and nonviolent methods to free his people from British rule. Martin was very impressed with this book. Later, he was to use Gandhi's methods in his struggle to win equal rights for all people. Martin was also influenced by Thoreau's essay, "On Civil Disobedience."

After Martin graduated from college, he went to Boston University to study religion. He received a doctorate and became minister of a Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. There, Martin, who was now called Dr. King, organized a boycott of the city buses to protest the arrest of Mrs. Rosa Parks. Rosa Parks had broken a "Jim Crow," or segregation, law, by refusing to move to the back of a bus. The boycott was successful, and finally the Supreme Court decided that the "Jim Crow" law was unconstitutional.

In order to help people use peaceful means to obtain equal rights, Dr. King formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In 1963, he led the March on Washington. The march ended at the Lincoln Memorial where he gave his famous "I Have A Dream" speech to the thousands of people who had marched there with him. Dr. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. He was the youngest man ever to receive this award.

Dr. King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968.

Making It Work

Read King's "I Have A Dream" speech to your class. Discuss the impact this speech had on the people who heard it.

Show a video of the "I Have A Dream" speech as delivered by King at the Lincoln Memorial. Discuss his power as an orator.

Have each student give a speech about a subject that is important to him/her.

Have students write about their dreams for the future.

Tell your students about Gandhi and his struggle to gain independence for India. If appropriate for your class, show the movie, *Gandhi*, or excerpts from it.

Tell students about Thoreau, what he thought, and how and where he lived.