



Step Three: Essential Practices Checklist

Use these ideas to reflect on how you teach about the civil rights movement. How can integrate these essential practices into your instruction?

Educate for empowerment

- Challenge students to question the assumptions and narratives they have been taught about the civil rights movement by developing their critical thinking and questioning skills.
- Prepare students to be change agents and participants in history by emphasizing the importance of young people in the civil rights movement.
- Introduce students to role models in their school and communities who can serve as strong examples of change makers.
- Provide opportunities for experiential learning that allow students to apply what they learn to the real world.
- Teach the tactics and strategies of the civil rights movement, and encourage students to think creatively about how they can address injustice in their own world.

Know how to talk about race

- Speak from your own authentic experiences with race and racism.
- Allow regular opportunities for students to talk, in a supportive environment, about their experiences with race and racism.
- Be conscious and curious about the ways race is important in your students' lives.
- Dispel ideas about a biological basis for race.
- Reacquaint yourself with the evolving social constructions surrounding race and how it has been used as a means of control throughout history.
- Avoid colorblind language—make whiteness visible; acknowledge contemporary racial disparities.

Capture the unseen

- Push back against the “Montgomery-to-Memphis” frame. Teach a wider civil rights movement that took place across the country—not just in the South—and in daily life—not just in the political sphere.
- Shift the focus from familiar heroes and villains to lesser-known individuals.
- Offer alternative and competing viewpoints of civil rights history by drawing upon original sources and personal narratives and testimonies.
- Promote a model of learning as discovery in which students are producers of knowledge and meaning rather than passive receptacles.
- Teach students to examine historical events in the context of both the past and the present.

Resist telling a simple story

- Avoid presenting sanitized accounts that obscure the realities of racial violence and systems of racial control.
- Address work that remains to be done and current day inequalities and challenges to racial justice.
- Shift students' thinking away from individuals and toward systems and institutions.
- Dispel the Malcolm vs. Martin dichotomy that casts the civil rights movement as divided over nonviolent resistance.
- Present the U.S. civil rights movement from a global perspective that captures its international implications.

Connect to the present

- Build bridges from the civil rights movement to current events related to social justice and racial equality.
- Encourage students to make connections between the African-American struggle for civil rights and other freedom struggles going on today.
- Address goals of the civil rights movement that remain unmet today.
- Make the civil rights movement relevant to students' lives by drawing on local issues and community struggles.
- Use project-based learning and performance tasks to assess student learning in application to their own lives.