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.