

ACTIVITY 1 ANSWERS

1. What was Birmingham's nickname and why?

Birmingham's nickname was "Bombingham" because there had been about 60 unsolved bombings with no one arrested for them.

2. Have you ever seen a white tank anywhere before? What might a white tank symbolize to white people? What might it symbolize to black people?

Students probably have not seen a white tank before. To Whites it might symbolize power, force or control. To Blacks it might symbolize oppression, intimidation and threat.

3. The film states, "Under Bull Connor, Birmingham was the closest thing in America to a police state." What is a police state?

A police state exists when political and police mechanisms shut down or control media coverage, serve the government instead of its citizens, enforce the policies of the central government instead of responding primarily to criminal misdeeds and when the political and police mechanisms spy on or intimidate citizens.

4. Why couldn't the parents or adults protest? What would happen to them if they did protest?

If the adult parents were seen on the picket lines they could lose their jobs, have their cars repossessed and their homes burnt down.

5. What does it mean to "meet violence with non-violence"? What would it look like?

Meeting violence with non-violence is not being passive but being actively engaged with peace and non-violent behaviors. These might mean allowing perpetrators to be violent and then not respond so that their acts of violence indict and incriminate them.

6. Dr. King said in a strategy session that "the only way we're going to break Birmingham is to fill the jails." What do you think a strategy session is? Why is it important?

A strategy session is where you develop a clear plan of action to meet your desired goals. It's important because without a plan of action there is often chaos. The strategy session also prepared people for what to expect during their protest (i.e. getting hit by police) so that they would be prepared and able to respond non-violently.

7. Why do you think that Dr. King said "no," at first, to kids going to jail?

Dr. King was afraid for the kids' safety.

8. Shelley "The Playboy" told the kids that "there's going to be a party in the park today." What did he mean?

This statement was a code for children to meet in the park to begin the protest.

9. What did the children's teacher, Mrs. Goree, do to help them go to the march?

Mrs. Goree turned her back so that the students could leave without her seeing them. This was her way to be an ally with the kids and yet not lose her job.

10. Kelly Ingram Park was the big green buffer between black Birmingham and the white downtown. Do buffers exist between groups in your community?

Lead students in a discussion about various aspects of your local community. For example, school rivalries, different aspects of your city where people pool together because of socio-economic status, race or other identity groups.

11. Gwen Webb says, "A lot of people thought the kids were going to get hurt, but the reality was that we were born black in Alabama and we were going to get hurt if we didn't do something." What did she mean by this?

Gwen Webb meant that Blacks were going to be hurt by the systemic racism that permeated every aspect of their lives.

12. The children left the church in "waves of 50." How is that a strategy? What do you think it accomplished?

They left in waves of 50 because the police thought they only needed to arrest the first 50. When waves of 50 kept coming, it overwhelmed the police and this, indeed, was part of their strategy. The police filled up the police wagons and then had to bring in school buses.

13. The police thought the kids would be frightened to be arrested. Instead, they were happy and singing. Why do you think the kids were full of joy to be arrested?

The kids were empowered to be a part of the solution to racism. They were glad to be arrested because it was their strategy to fill the jails so that national attention would be focused on the movement in Birmingham.

14. Why were the kids told to say that they were 15 years old when they were arrested? Did it work?

Those who were 15 years old and younger are normally placed in a different jail than those who were 16 and older. This strategy did not work because the police placed them all together.

15. How many men did it take to hold the fire hoses steady?

The water was so powerful that four men couldn't hold it steady.

16. There were 10 kids still standing after everyone else had been knocked down or dispersed by the fire hoses. What were they singing?

They were singing, "Freedom!"

17. What did President Kennedy think of the photographs he saw of children being hosed on the second day of the march?

He was sickened by the photos and said, "I call upon all the citizens of Birmingham, both Negro and white, to realize that violence only breeds more violence."

18. What were the conditions in the jails? Were they clean? What did the children get to eat? How long were they kept in jail?

The jails were crowded and dirty. Food was minimal. The police kept some children at the fairgrounds in animal pens. Some were kept in jail up to seven days.

19. What did the kids do in jail?

They sang to each other. The boys and girls were in separate places and so the girls would sing and then the boys would respond back to them. Perhaps this helped them feel like they were not alone while they were in jail.

20. How old was the youngest child who got arrested and put in jail?

He was 4 years old and said he was in jail for "teedom."

21. Dr. King told the parents, "Don't worry about your children. They are going to be all right. Don't hold them back if they want to go to jail for they are doing a job for all of America and for all mankind." What job were they doing?

They were fighting racism for everyone.

22. The white detective said that in the end there "was no way to hold a lid on this because the fear was gone." What is significant about people losing fear?

Often, keeping someone fearful is a way to control that person. When Blacks lost their fear, the police and government realized they had lost that form of control.

23. On May 10th Dr. King said that "we have come today to the climax of the long struggle for justice and human dignity." Had they?

It was indeed a significant moment in the Civil Rights Movement but, sadly, there is still much to do in the struggle for justice and human dignity.

24. On June 11th President Kennedy said "This is the end of segregation." Was it?

Racism and segregation continue today. For instance, in many schools the AP courses have more white students in them than black students. There is often segregation in school lunch rooms as well where the black students sit with other black students, white students sit together and so on. There are still many things we can do to participate in ending segregation.