

# Civil Rights

During the American civil rights movement in the 1950s and '60s, black Americans sought to end the effects of racism and discrimination by fighting for equal rights under the law. This text set explores the theme of civil rights by looking at some historical figures and events that brought about social justice reforms.

## Essential Questions

1. What are civil rights?
2. What problems did the civil rights movement address?
3. Who played an important role in civil rights reform? What did they do? What was their impact?
4. Why is it important to learn about the civil rights movement? How can we apply lessons from that historical period today?

## Introduction to the Theme

Have students watch the video [Little Rock Nine](#) (which can be found at [timeforkids.com](#) at the bottom of the article “Justice for All”). Then have them write down what they’ve learned from the video, what questions they have about the video, and what else they’d like to learn about the time period covered by the video. Students should share their responses and questions with classmates.

After this, explain to the class that they’ll be learning about the American civil rights movement and how different people (such as the Little Rock Nine) and events shaped this revolutionary period of our history.

## Informational Text

These *TIME for Kids* articles can be used to discuss the theme of civil rights.

1. **“Martin Luther King Jr.”** (September 6, 2018) Martin Luther King Jr.’s leadership of peaceful protests helped end segregation during the American civil rights movement.
2. **“Lyndon B. Johnson”** (August 2, 2018) President Lyndon B. Johnson advanced equality with major civil rights legislation.
3. **“Fannie Lou Hamer”** (July 24, 2018) Fannie Lou fought to expand voting rights for African Americans and raise awareness of segregation’s impact.
4. **“Ruby Bridges”** (May 25, 2018) The integration of public schools in the South began when a 6-year-old named Ruby Bridges walked into an all-white school.
5. **“Justice for All”** (February 23, 2018) In 1957, the Little Rock Nine became among the first black teenagers in the U.S. to attend an all-white school.

## Literary Texts

These fiction and nonfiction texts can be used to discuss the theme of civil rights.

1. ***Freedom Summer***, by Deborah Wiles. Joe and John Henry are best friends. But living in the South in 1964 means John Henry isn’t allowed do everything his white friend is allowed to do.
2. ***When Thunder Comes: Poems for Civil Rights Leaders***, by J. Patrick Lewis. The stories of seventeen heroes of civil rights are told through moving verse.
3. ***Hot Pursuit: Murder in Mississippi***, by Stacia Deutsch and Rhody Cohon. This story recounts the fate of three civil rights workers pulled over in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer of 1964.
4. ***Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Brightly***, by Walter Dean Myers. This biography looks at how Malcolm X became a legendary civil rights leader. It addresses the full scope of his life, including his childhood in poverty, his imprisonment, and his assassination.
5. ***Becoming Kareem: Growing Up On and Off the Court***, by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. In this autobiography, Abdul-Jabbar defies racism to become one of the NBA’s all-time greats and a champion for social justice.

## Optional Extensions

Have students write a poem based on something they learned about the civil rights movement. They may use *When Thunder Comes* as a mentor text. Students should choose an activist or event to describe in a poem, and should include answers to the unit’s essential questions. They should also include an illustration. When students have completed this project, gather the poems to make a poetry book that can be shared.

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