

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Month: Jan.

Week #: 19

Day: c. Wed. Time: 30 min.

A Lunch Counter & Apple Pie

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Objectives/Aims

The students will: experience prejudice; learn that all people are created equal and have inherent worth; know what happened in the sit-ins in the 1960's.

Materials

apple pie, serving dishes and utensils, poster board and marker

Illustration

Imagine a lunch counter that served only blonds! It doesn't seem fair... I wonder why the blond girl with pigtails is refusing the apple pie? I mean, she is blond...

Background

By Jessica McElrath, at <http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/sitins/a/sitins.htm>. Jessica has a B.A. in history from the University of California at Berkeley and a J.D. from Santa Clara University School of Law.



When four black college students sat in protest of Woolworth's segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, at the time, it was unforeseen what impact their actions would have on the rest of the South. As the sit-in garnered national attention, the sit-in movement spread to other Southern cities and led to the desegregation of numerous lunch counters.

Greensboro, North Carolina Sit-In

On February 1, 1960, four North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College students sat down at a Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and waited for service. While the students knew that most likely they would not be waited on, they were also aware that this form of nonviolent protest could be a powerful method in accomplishing the desegregation of lunch counters.

However, this was not the first time sit-ins were used at lunch counters. This method of nonviolent protest had been used in 1943 in Chicago by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), in St. Louis in 1949, and in Baltimore in 1953. In these previous sit-ins, they had not garnered much attention from the media or the public.

Despite the lack of success of previous lunch counter sit-ins, this time was different. On the first day of the sit-in, college students Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Ezell Blair Jr., arrived at Woolworth in the afternoon. They took seats at the lunch counter and encountered silence from the white patrons next to them. At first, the servers ignored them, and then they were told that they could not be served. The four sat silently. When the police chief was notified, he told the store manager that nothing could be done as long as the students were not disruptive. Since the police would not respond and the students would not budge, Woolworth closed early. The students left with the intent to return the following day.

After the first day, word spread about the sit-in, and two more students joined them on the second day. After the media reported on the sit-in, on the following days, they were joined by more students, including white students.

The effectiveness of the sit-ins was due in part to the behavior of its participants. They dressed in their Sunday clothes, were quiet, nonviolent, and respectful. Furthermore, many students brought their school textbooks and studied while they sat at the lunch counters.

Background Information (continued)

Nashville, Tennessee Sit-In

The sit-in movement spread to numerous other cities. Nashville, Tennessee quickly began their sit-in movement. Prior to the Greensboro sit-in, Nashville students had been preparing through workshops for sit-ins. When it was their turn, they were ready.

On February 13, around five hundred students participated in the first sit-in. They organized into groups and went downtown to Woolworth's, Kresge's, McCellan's, and other stores. On the first day and the following days thereafter, they did not encounter any violence. However, on February 27, white teenagers attacked the student protesters. When the police arrived, they let the white teens go and arrested the sit-in protesters for disorderly conduct.

On April 19 in Nashville, the home of black attorney Z. Alexander Looby was destroyed by dynamite. Looby had been targeted because he had represented the arrested student protesters. Miraculously, Looby and his wife survived, suffering only minor injuries. In response, students and community members marched to the City Hall. Upon their arrival, Mayor Ben West met them. Fisk University student Diane Nash took the opportunity to ask him whether he thought it was right for lunch counters to discriminate based on race. The Mayor said no, it was wrong. The Mayor's statement was reported in the newspaper the following day, and a few weeks later on May 10, six lunch counters in Nashville began serving black patrons.

End of the Sit-Ins

Despite progress, the sit-ins did not stop. In Greensboro, the sit-ins continued for five months until Woolworth and Kress integrated. In some southern cities, they continued until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Over the course of the sit-in movement, more than 78 cities participated, there were over fifty thousand black and white protesters, and two thousand participants had been arrested.

Group Activity

1. Say, "Today we're going to going to play a simulation game called "A Lunch Counter & Apple Pie." This lunch counter was located in a Woolworth's store. It was a kind of small department store found in many American cities. This particular Woolworth's store was located in Greensboro, North Carolina, so you can speak in a southern accent if you'd like. We're also going to pretend that this is the year 1960."

2. Say, "To play this game, I need some students who really like apple pie." Chose a small group of students who share a common physical characteristic: same colored eyes, all 3rd grade girls, all tall or short, etc. You can also choose students of 'color', which will add an ironic twist to game. Write a sign in front of the class saying, "Tall students only!" or whatever would fit the common characteristic of the group you chose. Invite the group to come sit at your 'lunch counter.' With great fanfare, serve the chosen group, commenting on how great the pie is and how lucky they are to be in the chosen group. Turn to the rest of the class and say, "You don't get any pie. Even if you don't like apple pie, you won't be served your favorite dessert at this Woolworth's lunch counter. I'm not even sorry, because none of you are special enough to deserve this dessert. None of you belongs to this special group." Indicate the chosen group and speak to their special difference. "If you don't like this, that's too bad because this is how it is and there's nothing you can do to change it!" Tell the students that the simulation game is now over.

Group Discussion Questions

1. How many think this game was fun or fair? Why or why not?

A: The students who were served might think it was fun, if so, ask if they noticed the look on their classmate's faces when they weren't served. Most of the students won't think it was fun or fair. It's not fair that others are treated better simply because of some physical characteristic or difference.

2. Can you think of any ways to protest and change this situation without using violence?

A: Brainstorm and list ideas on the board. Highlight those that were actually used or bring the up methods that were actually used, like sit-ins if nobody suggests them.

Group Discussion Questions (continued)

3. Do you think an event similar to this really happened in American history? If so, what actually happened?

A: Yes. Refer to the background information.

4. Why do you think I chose to use 'apple pie' as the dessert?

A: There's a saying, 'as American as apple pie,' meaning that apple pie is associated with being American, and being American means, first and foremost, being free. It's ironic to serve apple pie when others are being denied their rights and freedoms.

5. (If you choose students of 'color' you can ask the following question.) Why was it ironic to choose students of 'color'? A: Because in the actual historical situation, persons of color never would have been served in the first place. They were not considered special enough to be served like white people.

Variations/Extensions

Conclusion

Say, "'As American as apple pie.' Yes, you are all Americans and you are all unique and special, but no more special than the person sitting next to you at that lunch counter. You all deserve and have the fundamental right to be treated with dignity and respect. And you, in turn, need to treat others with dignity and respect. Whether they are a boy or a girl, thin or fat, beautiful or plain, athletic or clumsy, African American or Asian, whatever their difference, you need to treat them with dignity and respect." Go back and repeat phrases that your students, in particular, need to hear.



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