

## Martin Luther King, Jr.

### Part 1: Early Years

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on Jan. 15, 1929. He was the son and the grandson of a pastor, so it is perhaps no surprise that he became a pastor as well. He also became a leader of the **civil rights** movements and one of the most famous people America has ever **produced**.

Young Martin grew up in the **segregated** South. He attended, David T. Howard Elementary School and Atlanta University Laboratory School, which were full of African-American students, who at that time were not able to attend school with white children. Martin graduated from Booker T. Washington High School when he was just 15 and went right to college. Following in his grandfather's and father's footsteps, he attended Atlanta's important Morehouse College, graduating in 1948 with a **degree** in **sociology**. He then moved north to Pennsylvania to study religion at the Crozer Theological Seminary. (During his stay at the seminary, he studied the teachings of Indian spiritual leader Mohandas Gandhi, who cautioned against violence as a way to bring about social change.) The **seminary** classes included students of varying colors of skin, and Martin was elected president of his senior class, a class that had mostly white students in it. He received his seminary degree in 1951 and then moved on to Boston University, from which he graduated in 1955 with a doctorate degree.

It was in Boston that Martin met his future wife, Coretta Scott, a strong and powerful woman who cared deeply about civil rights. They were married soon after and eventually had four children, two sons and two daughters.

His doctorate in hand, King became **pastor** at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He also was on the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. A **spiritual** man who wanted to **advance** the cause of civil rights yet didn't want to use violence to do it, King found himself in a position of leadership when many African-Americans decided to **boycott** the buses in Montgomery. (This was not the first bus boycott, however. That took place in 1953 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana) The **Montgomery boycott**, which began when Rosa Parks refused to sit at the back of the bus, lasted 382 days. Not long after it ended, the Supreme Court ruled that laws requiring segregation on buses were **illegal**.

During the boycott and his increasingly public presence, King was arrested and was also the target of violence and threats on his life. After one of his arrest, he wrote the famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail, outlining his beliefs and his hopes for the future of America.

## Part 2: His Life Cut Short

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a leading civil rights organization, elected him president in 1957. That year, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the first civil rights law passed since 1875. From that time forward, King took his case directly to the American people. It is estimated that he traveled more than 6 million miles and spoke more than 2,500 times. He also wrote five books and numerous magazine and newspaper articles during this time.

In 1960, he accepted his father's offer and became co-pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. He served in that role until his death eight years later.

One of his famous moments was a speech that he gave in Washington, D.C. On August 28, 1963, he delivered, as part of the 250,000-people strong March on Washington, a famous speech that has come to be called the "I Have a Dream" speech. Later that year, Time magazine named him Man of the Year.

In 1964, he became the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. (He was 35.) King promptly announced that he would turn over all of the money he received along with the award (\$54,123) to help advance the civil rights movement. When he returned to the U.S. from Norway, where he had accepted the Nobel award, he led a nonviolent march to promote voter **registration** that came to be known as the Selma-to-Montgomery Freedom March. More than 25,000 people took part.

As famous as he was, Martin Luther King, Jr. was not above or below anyone. What turned out to be his final protest march was a gathering of **striking** garbage workers in Memphis, Tenn. He was there on April 4, 1968, in order to participate in the protest march the next day, when he was shot dead.

His message of nonviolence was **heeded** by many and **scorned** by others. His hope for an America without color lines is still an ongoing **pursuit**, according to many people. But his name lives on as a symbol of freedom and **determination**. Just about everywhere you go in the world, you'll find someone who has heard his name. You can also find his name on street signs and schools around the United States. And his birthday, January 15, is recognized as a national holiday.

MLK Lesson Vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Clue</b>
Civil Rights	
<i>produced</i>	
segregated	
segregation	
degree	
sociology	
seminary	
pastor	
spiritual	
advance	
boycott	
illegal	
registration	
striking	
heeded	
scorned	
pursuit	
determination	

## MLK Lesson Vocabulary

## Teacher Copy

Word	Clue
Civil Rights	rules that protect a person's freedoms
produced	Created
segregated	Kept apart
segregation	Keeping things separate
degree	educational award
sociology	the study of people
seminary	college for priests
pastor	a church leader
spiritual	holy
advance	move forward
boycott	refuse to do something
illegal	against the laws
registration	to sign up for something
striking	protesting, complaining
heeded	to think about
scorned	disliked, hated
pursuit	search
determination	working hard for a purpose or goal

**I have a dream**

