

Significance of Individuals to a Movement

Purpose: The purpose of this lesson is to demonstrate to students that social and political movements, as large as they often seem, cannot take place without the leadership and example of individual participation. The handout provided will use the examples of Frederick Douglass, Mohandas Gandhi, Cesar Chavez and Rosa Parks to illustrate this point.

Objectives:

1. Students will learn how Frederick Douglass, Mohandas Gandhi, Cesar Chavez and Rosa Parks provided the necessary leadership skills for a successful political or social movement.
2. Students will answer questions about the importance of individuals to a movement based on their learning or readiness level.

Key Words:

nonviolent resistance	bus boycott	labor union
migrant worker	abolition	emancipation
integration	segregation	

Materials:

1. Handout of *The Significance of Individuals to a Political or Social Movement*.
2. *Bloomed Questions* handout
3. Primary source material on each individual

Procedure:

1. Warm-up: Use the handout to introduce students to four pivotal civil rights leaders. Use these four individuals to guide students chronologically through the civil rights movement.
2. Divide students into four teams and ask them to read primary sources provided for Douglass, Chavez, Parks or Gandhi. (You may want to group students by reading levels since some documents are more complex than others.)
3. After reading the primary resources, students may answer *Bloomed Questions* as a class, in small groups, or independently. Questions are tiered and designed for teachers to distribute among students based on their learning styles or readiness levels.

The Significance of Individuals to a Political or Social Movement



Frederick Douglass

His tireless support of abolition influenced others, particularly Lincoln, to support freeing the slaves.



Mahatma Gandhi

His quiet manner and nonviolent resistance led to India's independence from Britain and later influenced Martin Luther King's protest tactics.



Cesar Chavez

His leadership of Mexican-American migrant workers resulted in a nationwide boycott of grapes and ultimately to a political respect for the Latino community in U.S. politics.



Rosa Parks

Her refusal to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus inspired a city boycott of the buses and more importantly sparked the civil rights movement.

Frederick Douglass (aprox.1817 – 1895)

- Excerpt from *My Slave Experience in Maryland*, a speech by Frederick Douglass before the American Anti-Slavery Society, May 6, 1845

“ . . .I ran away from the South seven years ago – passing through this city in no little hurry, I assure you – and lived about three years in New Bedford, Massachusetts, before I became publicly known to the anti-slavery people. Since then I have been engaged for three years in telling the people what I know of it. I have come to this meeting to throw in my mite, and since no fugitive slave has preceded me, I am encouraged to say a word about the sunny South. I thought, when the eloquent female who addressed this audience a while ago, was speaking of the horrors of Slavery, that many an honest man would doubt the truth of the picture which she drew; and I can unite with the gentleman from Kentucky in saying, that she came far short of describing them.

I can tell you what I have seen with my own eyes, felt on my own person, and know to have occurred in my own neighborhood, I am not from any of those States where the slaves are said to be in their most degraded condition; but from Maryland, where Slavery is said to exist in its mildest form; yet I can stand here and relate atrocities which would make your blood to boil at the statement of them. I lived on the plantation of Col. Lloyd, on the eastern shore of Maryland, and belonged to that gentleman’s clerk. He owned, probably, not less than a thousand slaves . . .

We don’t ask you to engage in any physical warfare against the slaveholder. We only ask that in Massachusetts, and the several non-slaveholding States which maintain a union with the slaveholder – who stand with your heavy heels on the quivering heart-strings of the slave, that you will stand off. Leave us to take care of our masters. But here you come up to our masters and tell them that they ought to shoot us-to take away our wives and little ones- to sell our mothers into interminable bondage, and sever the tenderest ties. You say to us, if you dare to carry out the principles of our fathers, we’ll shoot your down. Others may tamely submit; not I. You may put the chains upon me and fetter me, but I am not a slave, for my master who puts chains upon me, shall stand in as much dread of me as I do of him. I ask you in the name of my three millions of brethren at the South. We know that we are unable to cope with you in numbers; you are numerically stronger, politically stronger, than we are- but we ask you if you will rend asunder the heart and (crush) the body of the slave? If so, you must do it at your own expense.

While you continue in the Union, you are as bad as the slaveholder. If you have thus wronged the poor black man, by stripping him of his freedom, how are you going to give evidence of your repentance? Undo what you have done . . .”

Foner, Philip S., *Frederick Douglass - Selected Speeches and Writings*, International Publishers, 1999.

Other Resources:

<http://odur.let.ruq.nl/~usa/usa.htm>

Mohandas Gandhi (b.1884 – d.1941)

- Two excerpts are submitted below. Excerpt one is briefer and more direct and may be easier for students with weaker reading abilities to digest. The second excerpt is a letter to President Roosevelt and will be more challenging for students to read.
<http://www.mkqandhi.org/sfqbook>

Non-Violence

425. The world is weary of hate. We see the fatigue overcoming the Western nations. We see that this song of hate has not benefited humanity. Let it be the privilege of India to turn a new leaf and set a lesson to the world. –IV, 166.

426. In the past, non-co-operation has been deliberately expressed in violence to the evil-doer. I am endeavoring to show to my countrymen that violent non-co-operation only multiplies evil and that as evil can only be sustained by violence, withdrawal of support of evil requires complete abstention from violence. Non-violence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for non-co-operation with evil. –VI, 23-3-22, 168.

427. I am not a visionary. I claim to be practical idealist. The religion of non-violence is not meant merely for the rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well. Non-violence is the law of our species as violence is the law of the brute. The spirit lies dormant in the brute and he knows no law but that of physical might. The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law—to the strength of the spirit.

I have therefore ventured to place before India the ancient law of self-sacrifice. For satyagraha and its off-shoots, non-co-operation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering. The rishis, who discovered the law of non-violence in the midst of violence, were greater geniuses than Newton. They were themselves greater warriors than Wellington. Having themselves known the use of arms, they realized their uselessness and taught a weary world that its salvation lay not through violence but through non-violence. –VI, 11-8-20, Tagore, 712.

Excerpt Two ~ Letter to President Roosevelt from Gandhi

[+http://www.mkqandhi.org/letters/index.htm](http://www.mkqandhi.org/letters/index.htm)

Dear friend,

I twice missed coming to your great country. I have the privilege [of] having numerous friends there both known and unknown to me. Many of my countrymen have received and are still receiving higher education in America. I know too that several have taken shelter there. I have profited greatly by the writings of Thoreau and Emerson. I say this to tell you how much I am connected with your country. Of Great Britain I need say nothing beyond mentioning that in spite of my intense dislike of British rule, I have numerous personal friends in England whom I love as dearly as my own people. I had my legal education there.

I have therefore nothing but good wishes for your country and Great Britain. You will therefore accept my word that my present proposal, that the British should unreservedly and without reference to the wishes of the people of India immediately withdraw their rule, is prompted by the friendliest intention. I would like to turn into goodwill the ill will which, whatever may be said to the contrary, exists in India towards Great Britain and thus enable the millions of India to play their part in the present war. My personal position is clear. I hate all war. If, therefore, I could persuade my countrymen, they would make a most effective and decisive contribution in favour of an honourable peace. But I know that all of us have not a living faith in non-violence. Under foreign rule however we can make no effective contribution of any kind in this war, except as helots.

The policy of the Indian National Congress, largely guided by me, has been one of non-embarrassment to Britain, consistently with the honourable working of the Congress, admittedly the largest political organization of the longest standing in India. The British policy as exposed by the Cripps mission and rejected by almost all parties has opened our eyes and has driven me to the proposal I have made. I hold that the full acceptance of my proposal and that alone can put the Allied cause on an unassailable basis. I venture to think that the Allied declaration that the Allies are fighting to make the world safe for freedom of the individual and for democracy sounds hollow so long as India and, for that matter, Africa are exploited by Great Britain and America has the Negro problem in her own home. But in order to avoid all complications, in my proposal I have confined myself only to India. If India becomes free, the rest must follow, if it does not happen simultaneously. In order to make my proposal foolproof I have suggested that, if the Allies think it necessary, they may keep their troops, at their own expense in India, not for keeping internal order but for preventing Japanese aggression and defending China. So far as India is concerned, we must become free even as America and Great Britain are. The Allied troops will remain in India during the war under treaty with the free Indian Government that may be formed by the people of India without any outside interference, direct or indirect. It is on behalf of this proposal that I write this to enlist your active sympathy. I hope that it would commend itself to you. Mr. Louis Fischer is carrying this letter to you.

If there is any obscurity in my letter, you have but to send me word and I shall try to clear it. I hope finally that you will not resent this letter as an intrusion but take it as an approach from a friend and well-wisher of the Allies.

I remain,

Yours sincerely,
M.K. GANDHI

Cesar Chavez (b.1927 - d.1993)

+ <http://www.incwell.com/Biographies/Chavez.html>

Website featuring biography on Cesar Chavez

+ http://www.sfsu.edu/~cecipp/cesar_chavez/apostle.htm

Website including an interview with Cesar Chavez in May of 1970

An excerpt follows below.

Observer: *...Why do you insist on non-violent means in this struggle?*

Chavez: Our conviction is that human life and limb are a very special possession given by God to man and that no one has the right to take that away, in any cause, however just. We also find that violence is contagious; it is uncontrollable. If we use it, then the opposition is going to respond in kind and it is going to be escalated.

Also we are convinced that non-violence is more powerful than violence. We are convinced that non-violence supports you if you have a just and moral cause. Non-violence gives the opportunity to stay on the offensive, which is of vital importance to win any contest. Suppose we are striking and the opponent appears to be getting the best of us and we resort to violence. Then he will bring in other forces and one of two things happens: violence has to be escalated, or there is total demoralization of the workers. Non-violence works in exactly the opposite manner: when for every violent action committed against us, we respond with non-violence, we tend to attract people's support; we have a chance of attracting other people who are not involved because they are workers, but are involved because they have a conscience and because they would rather see a non-violent solution to things.

Rosa Parks (b.1913-)

- Two excerpts are provided below. One introduces students to Rosa as she reflects on her life during a current interview and the other blends literature with civics as students study a poem about Rosa Parks by acclaimed poet Rita Dove.

Interview with Rosa Parks (February 1997) An excerpt follows below.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/rosa/rosatran.htm>

Have you ever faced something that you thought you couldn't stand up to?

"I can't think of anything. Usually, if I have to face something, I do so no matter what the consequences might be. I never had any desire to give up. I did not feel that giving up would be a way to become a free person. That's the way I still feel. By standing up to something we still don't always affect change right away. Even when we are brave and have courage, change still doesn't come about for a long time."

Rosa by Rita Dove

How she sat there,
the time right inside a place
so wrong it was ready.

The trim name with
its dream of a bench
to rest on. Her sensible coat.

Doing nothing was the doing:
the clean flame of her gaze
carved by a camera flash.

How she stood up
when they bent down to retrieve
her purse. That courtesy.

Dove, Rita, *On The Bus With Rosa Parks* W.W. Norton and Company, 1999.

Bloomed Questions: The Significance of Individuals to a Movement

Questions are tiered and designed for the teacher to distribute among students based on their learning styles or reading readiness levels. All students are expected to answer the knowledge and comprehension questions and then the teacher can determine which students work with the remaining questions and activities.

Knowledge:

- What is the name of the leader you are studying?
- What cause is the leader championing?

Comprehension:

- How does the leader feel about violent vs. non-violent intervention to promote his/her cause?

Application:

- Given what you've read about this individual, how would he/she respond to today's violence on television? Would he/she support censorship?
- Read the first amendment of the constitution. How would this individual interpret the first amendment as it relates to media violence?

Analysis:

- Describe leadership qualities you admired in the leader your studied. Read background information on a second leader from this lesson and compare their leadership skills. How are their personalities similar? How are they different?
- Describe life experiences that inspired the leader to fight for his/her cause.

Synthesis:

- Think about the leadership qualities each of these individuals possessed and their unique life experiences that inspired their passion for their cause. Based on this information, create a brief biography or character sketch for the ideal leader to fight for one of the causes listed below:

Literacy Programs

Health Care Reform

Affirmative Action