



Movies that Matter: Film Study & Social Justice
“John Lewis: Get in the Way”

Teacher Resources & Lesson Plans



Acknowledgments

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Movies that Matter: Film Study & Social Justice

“John Lewis: Get in the Way”

Museum Introduction:

The Mizel Museum, an educational, nonprofit organization, is Denver’s only museum that addresses today’s social justice issues through the lens of Jewish history and values. We encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to celebrate diversity and equality and to combat discrimination and hatred. Our programs, events, and exhibits address these and other social issues and encourage positive change in our communities. Our museum is dedicated to fostering cross-cultural understanding, combatting racism, and promoting social justice. We achieve our mission through educational programming, events, and exhibits that connect universal Jewish values to the larger world.

Unit Background:

The study of films to understand the depth and complexity of significant events in history allows students to interact with primary source materials in meaningful ways. The narrative focus of film documentaries can share evocative stories of strength, survival and courage, all key themes reflected in the study of social justice issues. The following film has been carefully selected to emphasize meaningful historical events. It focuses on a key individual who has made the cause to stand up for themselves and others their life’s work, demonstrating remarkable bravery, initiative and resilience. This film addresses the importance of becoming civically engaged in our communities, cultures and countries to positively impact those affected by the most prevalent social justice issues throughout history and today.

“John Lewis: Get in the Way” (2017)

John Lewis, a man inspired by individuals like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks, emerged as a young leader during the Civil Rights Movement. Committed to non-violent social justice activism, John Lewis was not afraid to “get in the way.” From the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, he notably became one of the original Freedom Riders and assisted with the March on Washington as president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In the effort to register black voters, Lewis served as a prominent leader in the Selma to Montgomery protest marches in Alabama. During this march, just after crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he was beaten by state troopers during their attempt to disperse the demonstration. Dedicated to non-violent protest and response, John Lewis endured these verbal and physical attacks throughout his many years as a leader for desegregation and the establishment of voting rights for African Americans. He continued to get in the way through his work as a state representative for Georgia, a position he has held since his first election win in 1986. In the past 30 years, Lewis has participated in introducing and passing meaningful legislation in Congress. This documentary illustrates how standing up and speaking out can impact monumental change. It is a testament to Lewis’ perseverance and devotion to the cause of human rights.

Implications for Unit Study:

The Mizel Museum’s goal is to provide a cohesive, educational experience that puts social justice issues into context and empowers students to confront hatred and bigotry. Through the study of documentary films, students can recognize how social change is the result of continual advocacy. These films also help promote understanding and empathy for others, in particular those who are disenfranchised or the object of discrimination and oppression. This particular film depicts the individual and collective struggle to make progressive change and demonstrates how human rights activism is rooted in dedication and personal sacrifice. The aim is to motivate students to act, and, ultimately, to help mold a responsible participant in civil society who will continue to combat bigotry and hatred today and in the future.

Key Terms & Definitions:

| Vocabulary Term | Definition |
|--------------------|---|
| Social Justice | All people share a common humanity and therefore have a right to equitable treatment, support for their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources. |
| Social Movement | Sustained campaign of a social goal that serves to implement or prevent a change in society’s structure or values. Social movements are characterized by the coming together of people who share a common outlook on society. |
| Social Change | The alteration of social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behavior, social organizations, or value systems |
| Bigotry | Intolerant devotion to one’s own opinions and prejudices |
| Disenfranchised | To deprive of a legal right, privilege, or immunity, especially regarding the right to vote. |
| Marginalized | |
| Oppression | Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power. |
| Segregation | The separation or isolation of a race, class, gender, or ethnic group. |
| Discrimination | To make a difference in treatment or favor on a basis other than individuality. |
| Civil disobedience | A symbolic, non-violent violation of the law, to protest against some form of perceived injustice. |
| Civil rights | The rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality |
| Ally | To join with another person, group, etc. to give support |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Militant | Combative or aggressive support of a political or social cause, characterized by extreme, violent, or confrontational methods. |
| Repression | The act of subduing someone or something by force. |
| Suffrage | The right to vote in political elections. |
| Privilege | A special right, advantage, or immunity available only to a particular person or group of people. |
| Advocacy | Public support for a specific cause or policy. |
| Protest | A statement or action expressing disapproval of or objection to something. |
| Orator | A skilled or eloquent public speaker. |
| Rhetoric | The art of speaking or writing effectively. |

Colorado Academic Unit Standards

| Content Area | Grade Level | 6th Grade |
|----------------|--|--|
| Standard | Grade Level Expectations (GLE) | GLE Code |
| Social Studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze and interpret historical sources to ask and research historical questions The historical eras, individuals, groups, ideas and themes in regions of the Western Hemisphere and their relationships with one another | SS09-GR.6-S.1-GLE.1 SS09-GR.6-S.1-GLE.2 |
| Language Arts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful group discussions require planning and participation by all Monitoring the thinking of self and others is a disciplined way to maintain awareness Assumptions can be concealed, and require identification and evaluation | RWC10-GR.6-S.1-GLE.1 RWC10-GR.6-S.4-GLE.3 RWC10-GR.6-S.4-GLE.2 |

| Content Area | Grade Level | 7th Grade |
|----------------|--|---|
| Standard | Grade Level Expectations (GLE) | GLE Code |
| Social Studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare how various nations define the rights, responsibilities, and roles of citizens Regions have different issues and perspectives Different forms of government and international organizations and their influence in the world community | SS09-GR.7-S.4-GLE.1 SS09-GR.7-S.2-GLE.2 SS09-GR.7-S.4-GLE.2 |
| Language Arts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small and large group discussions rely on active listening and the effective contributions of all participants Purpose, tone, and meaning in word choices influence literary, persuasive, and informational texts | RWC10-GR.7-S.1-GLE.2 RWC10-GR.7-S.2-GLE.3 |

| Content Area | Grade Level | 8th Grade |
|----------------|---|---|
| Standard | Grade Level Expectations (GLE) | GLE Code |
| Social Studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulate appropriate hypotheses about United States history based on a variety of historical sources and perspectives Analyze elements of continuity and change in the United States government and the role of citizens over time The place of law in a constitutional system | SS09-GR.8-S.1-GLE.1 SS09-GR.8-S.4-GLE.1 SS09-GR.8-S.4-GLE.2 |
| Language Arts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of response strategies clarifies meaning or messages Quality reasoning relies on supporting evidence in media | RWC10-GR.8-S.1-GLE.2 RWC10-GR.8-S.4-GLE.3 |

| Content Area | Grade Level | High School |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Standard | Grade Level Expectations (GLE) | GLE Code |
| Social Studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the historical method of inquiry to ask questions, evaluate primary and secondary sources, critically analyze and interpret data, and develop interpretations defended by evidence • The key concepts of continuity and change, cause and effect, complexity, unity and diversity over time • The significance of ideas as powerful forces throughout history • Research, formulate positions, and engage in appropriate civic participation to address local, state, and national issues or policies • Purposes of and limitations on the foundations, structures, and functions of government | SS09-GR.HS-S.1-GLE.1 SS09-GR.HS-S.1-GLE.2 SS09-GR.HS-S.1-GLE.3 SS09-GR.HS-S.4-GLE.1 SS09-GR.HS-S.4-GLE.2 SS09-GR.HS-S.4-GLE.3 |
| Language Arts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective collaborative groups accomplish goals • Validity of a message is determined by its accuracy and relevance • Effectively operating in small and large groups to accomplish a goal requires active listening • Listening critically to comprehend a speaker's message requires mental and physical strategies to direct and maintain attention • Evaluating quality reasoning includes the value of intellectual character such as humility, empathy, and confidence • Logical arguments distinguish facts from opinions; and evidence defines reasoned judgment • Complex situations require critical thinking across multiple disciplines | RWC10-GR.12-S.1-GLE.2 RWC10-GR.11-S.1-GLE.2 RWC10-GR.10-S.1-GLE.2 RWC10-GR.9-S.1-GLE.2 RWC10-GR.11-S.4-GLE.3 RWC10-GR.12-S.4-GLE.2 RWC10-GR.11-S.4-GLE.2 |

Pre-Lesson: History in Context

Overview & Activity:

The Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) was a move to amend the injustice that persisted in the Reconstruction Era and in response to the mandated Jim Crow Laws. John Lewis, a key figure during the Civil Rights Movement was instrumental in helping to lead and facilitate some of the most famous marches and protests during that time. His voice and commitment to the cause of civil rights for African Americans became a powerful call to action and he continues to be an advocate for human rights issues as a U.S. Representative for Georgia's 5th Congressional District. Most notably, Lewis asks for others to "get in the way" and be a voice and representative for change. In this activity, students will begin to develop an understanding of past and present social justice issues in American history by comparing and contrasting the speeches of Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglas, Henry David Thoreau and John Lewis (see Supplement for handout). Each of these individuals are pioneers of civil rights advocacy and study of their most famous work allows students to see how an enduring cause takes a commitment from individuals who are not afraid to speak up for themselves and others.

Objective:

Students will evaluate the history of injustice through examination of speeches that were instrumental in bringing about social change and action.

Resources:

- [Susan B. Anthony: "Is It a Crime for a U.S. Citizen to Vote?"](#) (3 April 1873)
- [Frederick Douglass: The Destiny of Colored Americans](#) (16 November 1849)
- [John Lewis: "Speech at the March on Washington"](#) (28 August 1963)
- [John Lewis: "Civil Rights Advocate U.S. Rep. John Lewis Urges Graduates to "Get in the Way"](#) (13 June 2016)
- Henry David Thoreau: Excerpts from Civil Disobedience (1849) (See Supplement)
- [YouTube Video: "What is Justice? Civil Disobedience"](#) (4 April 2015)
- [YouTube Video: "Thoreau and Civil Disobedience"](#) (27 January 2017)

Colorado Prepared Graduate Competencies:

- Analyze key historical periods and patterns of change over time within and across nations and cultures
- Use primary, secondary, and tertiary written sources to generate and answer research questions
- Gather information from a variety of sources; analyze and evaluate the quality and relevance of the source; and use it to answer complex questions

Post Lesson: Call to Action

Overview & Activity:

The legacy of John Lewis is one that speaks to the need to get involved and create actionable steps to denounce injustice or to impact change. Lewis has been a model of action-oriented protest from his first experience with the Montgomery Bus Boycott to his latest [Congressional Sit-in over gun control](#). In this activity, students will explore a contemporary social justice issue and develop an action plan that will A) present the issue and B) describe how they would address it in the form of civil protest. Using one of the many examples of protest implemented by John Lewis in the movie, students can develop their own plan of action (see Supplement for handout) to represent how they would bring their social justice issue to light in the public sphere.

Objective:

Students will research a contemporary social justice issue and present their research in a form of an organized plan of action to launch a civil protest.

Extension Activity:

- Have students implement their plan through the launching of a Campaign for Change (see [At the Table with Dr. King Teacher Resources](#) for lesson plan)
- Have students give class presentations on their plans using one of many presentation software programs.

Resources:

- [March: Books 1, 2, 3](#) by John Lewis, the Graphic Novel series
- [United Nations Human Rights Information](#)
- [United Nations Human Rights Issues](#)
- [198 Methods of Non-violent Action](#)
- [Film: A Force More Powerful](#)
- [Voices of a People's History](#)

Colorado Prepared Graduate Competencies:

- Analyze and practice rights, roles, and responsibilities of citizens
- Deliver organized and effective oral presentations for diverse audiences and varied purposes
- Discriminate and justify a position using traditional lines of rhetorical argument and reasoning
- Recognize, articulate, and implement critical thinking in the visual arts by synthesizing, evaluating, and analyzing visual information

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SUPPLEMENT

Lesson Plan Materials

The Power of Protest: Get in the Way

John Lewis was not afraid to get in the way. Like many before him, he saw acts of injustice, especially those that were being upheld prior to desegregation, as an affront to basic human rights. During the Civil Rights Movement, John Lewis was a pioneer for social justice and became a powerful voice that resonated even at the young age of twenty-three. Even today, his continual commitment to the cause of equality has led him to become a respected leader as a U.S. Representative for Georgia's 5th District. Like many before him, he was outspoken and ready to challenge others for what was just and what was right. In the following activity, compare and contrast the similarities and differences in the speeches of those who were not afraid to **GET IN THE WAY**.

| Speech | Key Ideas | Significance | Similarities & Differences Between Speeches |
|---|-----------|--------------|---|
| "Civil Disobedience" — Henry David Thoreau (1859) | | | |
| "Is it a Crime for Citizens to Vote?" — Susan B. Anthony (April 3, 1873) | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>“The Destiny of Colored Americans” — Frederick Douglass (November 16, 1849)</p> | | | |
| <p>“Speech at the March on Washington” — John Lewis (August 28, 1963)</p> | | | |
| <p>“Civil Rights Advocate U.S. Rep. John Lewis Urges Graduates to ‘Get in the Way’” — John Lewis (January 27, 2017)</p> | | | |

Call to Action: Get in the Way

The legacy of John Lewis is one that speaks to the need to get involved and create actionable steps to denounce injustice or to impact change. Lewis has been a model of action-oriented protest from his first experience with the Montgomery Bus Boycott to his 2017 Congressional sit-in for gun control. In this activity, explore a contemporary social justice issue and develop an action plan that will A) present the issue and B) describe how you would address it in the form of civil protest. Like John Lewis, how would you bring your social justice issue to light in the public sphere? What action steps will it take to get in the way? What methods might you use to develop a call to action? (Examples might include social media campaign, petition or signature campaign, march organization)

| Get in the Way: Action Plan | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| Describe the issue you would like to address and why it is important to create a call to action: | | | |
| Action Step 1: What Needs to be Done | Responsible Person: Who should take action to complete this step? | Resources: What do you need to complete this step? | Challenges: What, if any, are some challenges you might face in completion of this step? |
| | | | |
| Action Step 2: What Needs to be Done | Responsible Person: Who should take action to complete this step? | Resources: What do you need to complete this step? | Challenges: What, if any, are some challenges you might face in completion of this step? |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| Action Step 3: What Needs to be Done | Responsible Person: Who should take action to complete this step? | Resources: What do you need to complete this step? | Challenges: What, if any, are some challenges you might face in completion of this step? |
| Action Step 4: What Needs to be Done | Responsible Person: Who should take action to complete this step? | Resources: What do you need to complete this step? | Challenges: What, if any, are some challenges you might face in completion of this step? |
| Expected Results | | | |
| What do you hope to achieve in developing an action plan around your social justice issue? | | | |

Before we went on any protest, whether it was sit-ins or the freedom rides or any march, we prepared ourselves, and we were disciplined. We were committed to the way of peace - the way of non-violence - the way of love - the way of life as the way of living. — John Lewis



HENRY DAVID THOREAU

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) grew up in Concord, Massachusetts, and graduated from Harvard in 1837, the year in which his mentor Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered his famous address “The American Scholar” there. Like Emerson, Thoreau was a “transcendentalist,” who saw nature as man’s greatest teacher. His classic *Walden* offers his meditations on two years spent living alone in a cabin on the banks of Walden Pond. Despite his preference for the solitude of the Concord woods, he was a sharp social critic and political activist and a strong supporter of the abolition of slavery. “Civil Disobedience,” an essay that influenced Mahatma Gandhi and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., was inspired by his opposition to the Mexican War. In 1845 the James K. Polk administration bullied Mexico into a war, and forced it to sell the U.S. about a third of its territory in exchange for peace. Like many Northerners, Thoreau was appalled both at the slenderness of the pretext upon which Polk declared war and at the fact that the conflict would clearly result in a great expansion of territory into which slavery would spread. When the fighting broke out he personally seceded from the union, as it were, refusing to pay his taxes to carry on what he regarded as an unjust war. Thoreau spent a night in the Concord jail before an unidentified person—possibly his aunt—bailed him out, and four years later he published this striking statement of his beliefs.

Thoreau carried the doctrine that “that government is best which governs least” to its extreme, and perhaps logical, conclusion: if less is better, the government that is truly best is one “which governs not at all.” Respect for the law for him was less important than “respect for the right.” The essay is a stirring call to the individual to stand up against Tocqueville’s “tyranny of the majority.”

It is also, though, an arrogant assertion that the author belongs to the “wise minority,” walking in the footsteps of Christ, Copernicus, and Luther. But once one not only opposes but refuses to abide by majority political decisions one thinks misguided, the only way to settle disputes is by force—a stance hardly compatible with the spirit of compromise that is so necessary to the smooth running of a democratic government.

I heartily accept the motto,—“That government is best which governs least;” and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,—“That government is best which governs not at all;” and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best but an expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing govern-

ment. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. . . .

Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right. It is truly

enough said, that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation *with* a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. . . .

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailors, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others—as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders—serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the Devil, without *intending* it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and *men*, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it. . . .

How does it become a man to behave toward this American government to-day? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as *my* government which is the *slave's* government also. . . .

Unjust laws exist: shall we be content to



Henry David Thoreau in 1856, two years after the publication of his most famous work, *Walden*.

obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy *is* worse than the evil. *It* makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and *do* better than it would have them? Why does it always crucify Christ, and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington and Franklin rebels? . . .

I do not hesitate to say, that those who call themselves Abolitionists should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property, from the government of Massachusetts and not wait till they constitute a majority of one, before they suffer the right to prevail through them. I think that it is enough if they have God on their side, without waiting for that other one. Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already. . . .

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. . . .

Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recogniz-

ing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at last which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A State which bore this kind of fruit, and suffered it to drop off as fast as it ripened, would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.