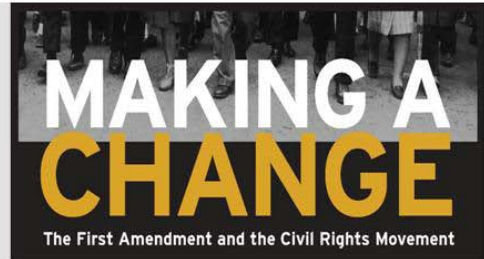


Civil Rights: Turning Points



Rationale/Main Concept:

What events changed the course of the civil rights movement — and our nation’s history? How did the First Amendment play a role in shaping these pivotal moments? In this exercise, students will explore the concept of turning points in history using a multimedia timeline of the civil rights movement that features historical photographs, newsreels and newspaper front pages covering key events. By considering the consequences of milestone events and citing evidence of their impact, students develop their knowledge of this key chapter in America’s story and exercise critical thinking and communication skills. A wrap-up discussion focuses on the importance of the First Amendment to the course of history as we know it.

Essential Questions:

- What were the key turning points in the civil rights movement?
- How did these events affect the course of history?
- How do historians identify and explain turning points in history?
- How was the First Amendment important to this movement?
- When and how did its participants use the five freedoms, and what strategies proved most effective?

Objectives — Through this lesson, students will be able to:

- Discuss the concept of a historical turning point and cite examples.
- Analyze civil rights milestones to determine their impact.
- Use primary and secondary sources as evidence to support their arguments and conclusions.
- Explain the importance of the First Amendment to the civil rights movement.

Time: 30 minutes of class discussion, additional time to complete group or individual assignments, 50 minutes to share and discuss work

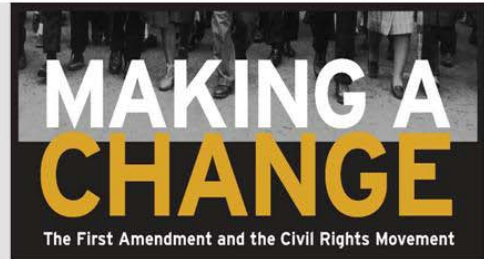
Materials:

- Lesson Plan
- Access to the Internet for research and viewing the interactives
- Note-taking materials

Procedure:

1. Ask your students, what is a “turning point” in history? *An event (or set of events) that, had it unfolded differently, would have changed the way history played out. In other words, an event with an impact that shapes the events that follow.* There is no single, exact definition

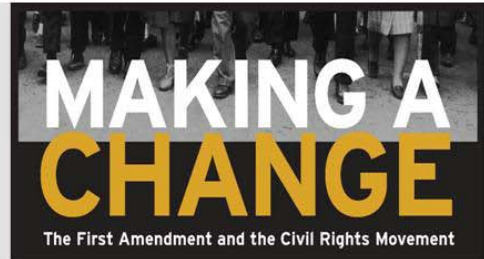
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of a turning point — historians continue to debate exactly how we should define a turning point. In deciding if something is a turning point, finding evidence that shows the impact of the event is more important than applying a strict definition.

2. Turning points can be big or small, and they can affect individuals, groups, nations or even the whole world. Ask students to give you some examples of turning points from their own lives to help clarify the concept; write their ideas on the board, being sure to note how their lives were different before and after. You may wish to use the “Before and After” chart (included at the end of this lesson plan) to organize their ideas. Possible examples:
 - a. **Turning point:** Moving to a new house
Before: I lived in a small house in town.
After: We moved to a farm where I learned to ride horses, and now I compete at horse shows.
 - b. **Turning point:** Birth of my little sister
Before: I was an only child and my parents were able to do things whenever I needed them.
After: My parents need me to help them and my sister, and I have a lot more responsibilities.
3. After discussing personal turning points, brainstorm some historical turning points (examples need not come from the civil rights movement) to further illustrate the idea. As with the personal examples, be sure to note the key difference(s) before and after the event. Possible examples:
 - a. **Turning point:** Signing of the Declaration of Independence
Before: The 13 colonies belonged to England.
After: The signing sparked a rebellion that led to the creation of the United States and a new model for democratic government.
 - b. **Turning point:** Invention of the telegraph
Before: People had to physically deliver messages, which could take a long time.
After: It was possible to send messages instantly across long distances, changing the way business was conducted, wars were fought, etc.
4. Tell students they are now going to focus on finding and analyzing turning points in the history of the civil rights movement. Have students work individually or in groups to choose an event from the [Newseum interactive timeline](#) that they believe is a turning point, and

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use the worksheet included with this lesson plan to collect evidence supporting their choice. Their evidence should include at least one primary source.

5. Have students turn their notes and evidence into a multimedia slideshow that explains what life was like before and after the turning point. The slideshow should include at least one slide for each piece of evidence and one for the turning point itself. For higher-level students, assign the use of additional resources beyond the timeline and have them write an essay to accompany their slideshow.
6. Have students present their slideshows to the class and discuss their findings.
7. Ask students, what is the First Amendment? *Five freedoms (speech, press, religion, assembly and petition); part of the Bill of Rights; ratified in 1791.* Go through what each of the freedoms means.
 - a. **Religion:** You are free to believe what you please, belong to any religion or no religion at all.
 - b. **Speech:** You are free to voice your opinions through words, symbols or actions.
 - c. **Press:** The media and individuals are free to publish information without censorship by the government.
 - d. **Assembly:** You are free to gather together with other people.
 - e. **Petition:** You are free to criticize the government and to ask for change.
8. Make a list of all of the turning point events identified by your students and discuss the role of the First Amendment in each one. Possible discussion questions:
 - a. Would these turning points have been possible without the First Amendment?
 - b. Who used their First Amendment rights? How did they exercise these rights?
 - c. Which freedom or freedoms seem to be the most important to the civil rights movement?
 - d. How would history have been different had these turning points not taken place? What changes would not have occurred? Would other events have ultimately led to the same changes?
 - e. Look back at your class's original definition of a turning point. Having completed this assignment, is there anything you would change?