

The Greensboro Four

OVERVIEW

"We had a common outlook to change the unjust conditions in the society that was pushed forward by frustration."

–Dr. Franklin McCain

On February 1, 1960, four students from North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, North Carolina decided to take action for change. For years, they had grown frustrated by the segregation and discrimination in the South. They frequently talked about why they could not eat at the same places as Whites. They had late-night conversations in their dorm rooms about what freedom and equality should mean in the United States. They reflected on the actions of Civil Rights leaders in other towns. And, they determined that they had to do something nonviolently to force change. Their historic sit-in at a lunch counter at Woolworth's would inspire thousands of other young men and women to get involved in the struggle for equality.

In this lesson, students will hear the inspirational story of the Greensboro Four and apply their strategies to modern examples of perceived injustice.

Goals/Objectives:

To describe and apply the methods of the Civil Rights Movement:

- Identify injustices in the post-war South.
- Describe the Greensboro Four and their methods.
- Analyze primary sources (oral histories).
- Build and support a position using evidence on a current issue involving injustice.

Standards:

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.1

Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Time Required:

1 day

Recommended Grade Level:

7-12

Topics/Eras:

- Civil Rights Movement
- The 1960s
- Nonviolent civil disobedience

Materials:

- Lincoln's Legacy Oral Histories (http://lfg.com/misc/legacy/Oral_Histories.html)
- LCD Projector for PowerPoint
- Greensboro Four Lesson PowerPoint
- Scenarios for Application (PDF)

Optional Video Clips

- Lee Daniels' The Butler, Chapter 6: 36:35-43:00 [7 min.]
- A representation of the "sit-ins" across the South in 1960.

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Additional Resources:

1. "The A&T Four: February 1st, 1960" F.D. Bluford Library at North Carolina A&T State University
<http://www.library.ncat.edu/resources/archives/four.html>
2. "The Story of the Greensboro Sit-Ins" Jim Schlosser, News & Record Staff Writer <http://sitins.com/story.shtml>
3. "The Greensboro Chronology" International Civil Rights Center & Museum, Greensboro, NC <http://www.sitinemovement.org/history/greensboro-chronology.asp>
4. "The Greensboro Sit-Ins" North Carolina History <http://nchistory.web.unc.edu/the-greensboro-sit-ins/>
5. "Franklin McCain—of 'Greensboro Four,' who defied whites-only barrier—dies" Monte Plott, CNN <http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/10/us/greensboro-four-activist-obit/index.html>
6. "FEBRUARY ONE: The Story of the Greensboro Four" PBS Independent Lens <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/februaryone/film.html>

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

SET (Personal Connection)

To engage students and connect to prior knowledge about injustice, inequality, and the Civil Rights Movement, use the Greensboro Four Lesson PowerPoint to provide a scenario that students will find unjust. Feel free to make this scenario more authentic by acting like it is really going to happen at your school. Allow students time to process and discuss this scenario in pairs or in small groups through two simple questions: (1) *How do you feel about this? Why?* and (2) *What can you do about it, if anything?* Then, provide time for a formal classroom discussion or airing of grievances.

LECTURE/DISCUSSION: The Greensboro Four

To tell the story of the Greensboro Four, use the Greensboro Four Lesson PowerPoint. You are also encouraged to research the story using the additional resources and links provided above. This simple lecture will first provide a background of the issues in the South and the early victories of the Civil Rights Movement and then cover the inspiring story of the Greensboro Sit-Ins. Students should be encouraged to take notes for understanding. Use probing questions to involve the class.



ORAL HISTORIES

Now that the students have a framework for understanding the basics of the Greensboro Sit-Ins, select and play one or more of the oral history interviews from the Lincoln Legacy Project.

Dr. Franklin McCain

- One of the four students from North Carolina A&T State University who staged a sit-in at a lunch counter in Woolworth's in Greensboro, NC on February 1, 1960.

Julian Bond

- A veteran of many sit-ins across the South, Julian Bond is a noteworthy civil rights activist. He served in both the Georgia House of Representatives and Senate. In this interview, he shares with his grandchildren how he was arrested for defending civil equality and what it was like to be one of only eight people taught in a class by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Use the questions on the Greensboro Four Lesson PowerPoint to debrief and discuss their stories.

APPLICATION: Strategies of the Greensboro Four

Now that your students have heard the inspiring story of Dr. Franklin McClain and the Greensboro Four it is time for them to apply what they have learned about fighting injustice.

- **Groups:** Break the students into 5 groups. Choose a leader for each group.
- **Scenario:** Each group will be given a different scenario involving some kind of injustice. Possible scenarios can be found on the Scenarios for Application (PDF). Or, feel free to create your own based on issues in your school, community, or state.

Scenarios for Application

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- **Analyze:** Instruct the group to read and discuss its scenario together. Use the following questions to fuel group discussions: How do you feel about this? Is this wrong or unjust? Why or why not? What actions could be taken to correct it? What would the Greensboro Four have done? What steps should be taken? What are the risks of those steps?
- **Create an Action Plan:** Based on this discussion, each group should create an action plan to share with the class. The plan should summarize the situation and detail what actions should be taken. The plans can be written on easel paper or on the board.
- **Present:** As a class, review each group's scenario and plan. Allow students to offer feedback and suggestions. Draw connections to the Greensboro Four.

CLOSURE

What does it take to make a change in America? Based on today's lesson, ask the students to write a brief response to this prompt. If time permits, discuss student answers as a class and make connection to other reform movements in U.S. History.

HOMEWORK SUGGESTIONS

Letter to Editor on Injustice: Now it is time for students to put it all together to take action to make a change. Students should research a topic that involves some kind of injustice. They should compile appropriate evidence (primary and secondary sources) in order to build an argument. They will write their argument in the form of a letter to the editor of the local newspaper.

Current Event: Find an article on individuals or groups who are currently fighting injustice and inequality. What is their cause? What are they doing about it? What strategies are they using? How effective have they been?

College Tuition Rates

As a reward for your hard work and excellence in completing high school, you find yourself attending one of the most prestigious universities in your state. As you committed to the university, you were confronted with a yearly tuition bill of \$50,000. To enroll and begin your freshmen year, you had to take out student loans. Upon completion of a successful freshmen year, you were preparing to embark upon your

sophomore year. However, the tuition bill for sophomore year increased 5% to \$55,000. This puts you in a difficult situation financially. As you figure out a way to pay for the increase, you begin to do some research into college tuition rates and quickly find out that since the mid-1990s, college tuition costs have averaged a 3-5% increase per year. The average four year university now costs almost \$200,000 to attend. At the same time, salary rates and pay for newly employed college graduates has failed to rise in accordance. What will you do?

Predatory Credit Cards

As you begin your freshmen year at a local university, you pass a table to the student cafeteria that is handing out cool beach towels to anyone interested. The catch is that you have to sign up for a credit card in order to get the free prize. Realizing that you are now out of your parent's home, you think that having a credit card could be a good thing. As you sign up with the credit card company, you pretend to read through a few pages of fine print details, sign the paperwork, and take the plunge. The credit card company gives you a card with an initial credit limit of \$1,000. Your initial annual percentage rate is 13%. During your freshmen year, you and your friends realize that you could use the card to buy some cool items for your dorm room. As long as you can pay off the owed amount every month, you will be ok. However, you quickly realize that your credit limit has been raised at first to \$2,000, then to \$5,000, and eventually to \$10,000, allowing you to buy more items. You also realized the credit card company, because you were one day late on a monthly payment, raised your percentage rate to 29%. This means that you will be paying more interest in order to pay down your debt. You call the credit card company to ask them to work with you and lower the rate. They reject your request. Feeling slighted, you begin doing some research and quickly find out that the average American household has \$15,000 in credit card debt and they began their credit card usage in much of the same way you had. What will you do?

Low Wages for Workers

In a medium sized American town, one local company is the largest and most profitable firm in town. This company has become so large and dominant that it employs a large percentage of the townspeople and donates money to the campaign funds of the local politicians. In order to increase

Scenarios for Application

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profit and remain dominant, this particular company has refused to give their workers a wage increase and continues to pay its workers well below market value. The company has refused to provide time for employee vacations and has increased the hours required to work per week. Also, the company has recently required its employees work over certain traditional holidays. What will you do?

Gay Wedding Cake

In Indiana, two women are set to marry each other in a civil ceremony. At their wedding reception, they will be serving a wedding cake that they want to be special. In their local community, one wedding cake baker makes the best cakes. As the two women approach the bakery about baking a wedding cake for their reception, they see a sign on the door that says "traditional weddings only." As they enter the door, the two women ask to have a cake made. As soon as the lady at the counter realizes that two women will be getting married, she denies service to the couple. Even though the US Supreme Court recently ruled that same sex marriage is constitutional, the two ladies are being refused service because of their sexual preference. What will you do?

School Activity Fee Increase

You are a junior at a large regional high school. You are also a 3-sport athlete playing varsity soccer, basketball, and track. Due to budget cuts required by the state during your freshman year, the School Board instituted an activity fee for all students involved in any extracurricular activity. The School Board said that this fee was necessary in order to keep these activities alive. The money would go to pay the coaches and advisors. Initially, each student involved in an activity would have to pay \$100 per year. In your sophomore year, this increased to \$150 year. And, now you've just heard that the fee will increase to \$300 for your junior year. As someone with two other siblings in the school, you worry whether your parents have \$1,000 so that all three of you can participate in sports at the school. You also have read in the newspaper that your state has actually reinstated funding to your school over the last two years. You have also noticed that the school is spending money on items that do not seem very necessary for your education. The principal just had her office remodeled. There are carts of laptop computers that never get used. And, even though the student population is stable,

the school just created two new positions for administrators who will be making well over \$100,000 per year. You also received an email from your coach with this year's required fundraising activities. Even with your activity fee, the coach of each team is still expecting you to raise over \$500 more to be on the team. What will you do?

AP U.S. History Banned

You are a top student in the junior class at your public high school. Your favorite subject has always been history and you are seriously considering it as a career. You also have ambitions to go onto a top college. Two weeks before school begins, you receive an email from the principal stating that AP U.S. History will not be offered at your school anymore. You will have to take the regular level course and you will not be allowed to take the AP Exam and earn college credits. Apparently, the course was banned by the School Board after it reviewed the new curriculum changes by the College Board. Members of the School Board did not feel like the course painted an accurate picture of history or honor the country's veterans. In particular, the School Board did not like what it considered to be a liberal slant of the curriculum. You really wanted to take this course because of your love of the subject and your future goals. What will you do?

Gay Teacher Fired from Private School

You are two months into your senior year at a private prep school. Your school has a reputation for academic excellence, but also tends to be on the conservative side both socially and politically. You just found out that your favorite teacher, Mr. Morris, has been fired. You have had Mr. Morris as your history teacher for the past 4 years. He has inspired your interest in the world around you. He has been there for you through personal issues at home. He has helped you believe in yourself and your future. You have enjoyed playing for him on the soccer and baseball teams. Mr. Morris has been such a big part of this school and your life. When you ask one of the school administrators why Mr. Morris has been fired, he says that the school does not condone his lifestyle. Apparently, Mr. Morris had recently applied for a license to marry his partner. The school terminated him the day this was discovered. What will you do?