

Lesson Plan: Advocating for Freedom through the lens of Danny Lyon



Danny Lyon. A Toddle House in Atlanta has the distinction of being occupied during a sit -in by some of the most effective organizers in America when the SNCC staff and supporters take a break from a conference to demonstrate, 1963. Gelatin silver print. Promised Gift of James P. Agah and Wendy S. Agah (P'26, P'28) to the Wake Forest University Print Collection, University Art Galleries & Collections, LOAN2024.1.1.44. © Danny Lyon / Magnum Photos. www.bleakbeauty.com. Instagram: [@dannylyonphotos2](https://www.instagram.com/dannylyonphotos2).

Compelling Question

How have Americans been empowered to be advocates for freedom and overcoming challenges?

Grade Level/Course

American History - 11th grade

Estimated Time

1 block class; 1½ year-long classes

- The summative performance task can be completed outside of class

REYNOLDA

Suggested Unit

This lesson would best fit within Unit 7: Striving for “All Men are Created Equal.” It is suggested that this lesson be part of Lesson Essential Question 4: What role have various movements and their leaders had in fighting back against restrictions.

Objective

- **AH.C&G.1.3** Explain how various individuals and groups strategized, organized, advocated, and protested to expand or restrict freedom and equality.

Background Knowledge

After the American Civil War, Congress abolished slavery and took steps towards granting African Americans more access to rights and freedoms. For instance, Congress passed the 14th and 15th amendments that stated everyone born in the US were considered citizens (14th amendment) and African American men had the right to vote (15th amendment). However, many southern states found ways to bypass these new laws and implement discriminatory practices. Most of these discriminatory practices were established through the passage of Jim Crow laws throughout southern states. Many of these laws denied African Americans the right to equal access to public spaces by implementing segregation. These laws also denied their right to register and participate in local, state, and federal elections. These discriminatory practices continued for several decades until individuals and groups began strategizing, organizing, and advocating for African Americans to have access to the same opportunities as their white counterparts; thus the beginning of the civil rights movement.

There were many leaders and advocacy groups in the civil rights movement. This lesson focuses on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which was created out of Martin Luther King Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Many of the participants in SNCC were students or young people. This group was very action oriented and used their manpower to lead protests and to provide opportunities and aid for groups of African Americans.

This lesson is text based with images from Danny Lyon, a member and first official photographer of SNCC, to support the text. The images and text should be used together for students to identify the cause of SNCC strategizing, organizing, and advocating and how those actions have affected (impacted) generations, policies and legislation, and social norms. You will find in this lesson that it is focused on people who are not often highlighted as the “major players” of the civil rights movement. Keep in mind that many students already know about Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, and others who were center stage of the movement. This lesson aims to show students that other people were highly involved and can also influence change in a nation.

REYNOLDA

About Reynolda

Completed in 1917, Reynolda House Museum of American Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina was originally the home of Katharine Smith and R.J. Reynolds, founder of the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. Promising a healthier lifestyle, the more than 34,000-square-foot historic home was the centerpiece of a 1,067-acre estate and model farm. Over 100 people worked at Reynolda in the early 20th century. The model farm used modern technology to grow crops and raise animals. In the 1960s, Reynolda became a museum of American art and today it connects people to the beauty and complexity of the American story through its history and collections.

The museum holds more than 6,000 historic objects along with its collection of world-renowned American art on view in the historic house and special exhibitions in the Babcock Gallery. Spanning 250 years, the collection is a chronology of American art, and features artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Frederic Edwin Church, Alexander Calder, Romare Bearden, Lee Krasner, Stuart Davis, Martin Johnson Heade, Jacob Lawrence, John Singer Sargent, Andy Warhol and Grant Wood. Works rotate throughout the historic house frequently, and the Museum keeps [a listing of current works of American art on view here](#). View [a listing of decorative arts on view here](#).

Vocabulary

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC): Student Nonviolent Coordinating committee – group that was developed out of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to lead protests and advocate for African Americans' rights and freedoms during the civil rights movement.

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC): group of activists, led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to advocate for access to freedoms and rights for African Americans during the civil rights movement.

Organize: to plan an event and create a structure so that everyone can work together

Strategize: to make a careful plan or system of steps to reach a goal

[to] Advocate: to speak in favor of a plan, cause, or person

Empower: to give someone confidence to do something

Activist: a person who works to make social or political changes

Protest: public expression of objection, disapproval, or dissent towards an idea, law or action

Oral History: method of collecting, recording, and preserving spoken memories and life stories during specific time periods

REYNOLDA

Jim Crow: a set of discriminatory laws that restricted rights of African Americans, especially in southern states.

Direct Action: Direct action is when people use their own physical or economic power to create change right away.

Nonviolence: a strategy of civil disobedience that focuses on not using violent strategies to advocate for change.

Materials

- Printed sources
 - [Source 1: Ella Baker](#)
 - [Source 2: John Lewis](#)
 - [Source 3: Danville, VA](#)
 - [Source 4: Fannie Lou Hamer](#)
- Graphic Organizers
 - Source Analysis Formative Performance Task
 - [Print Version](#)
 - [Electronic Version](#)
 - Written Response Summative Performance Task
 - [Print Version](#)
 - [Electronic Version](#)

Lesson Procedures

Staging the Question

Option 1: Gallery Walk

Students will participate in a [gallery walk](#) of 6 images (see note about image 6).

As students are examining each image, they should answer the following questions using the [graphic organizer](#):

- What do you observe in the image?
- How were people affected by the content of the image?
- How could the content of this image lead to advocacy for change?

After students have had an opportunity to look at each image and complete the graphic organizer, the teacher should facilitate a discussion about each image.

Approximate time allotted for this activity: 15-20 minutes

REYNOLDA

****NOTE: The last image in an intimidation tactic used by the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia. Please prepare students and use your professional discretion if you think that your class(es) can handle it. It is encouraged that you use it, but make sure that you have class discussions around this image.**

Option 2: Introductory Discussion

If you are experiencing some time constraints, below would be a good option to engage students in the lesson.

Pose the following question to students: What do you know about the causes of the civil rights movement?

Allow students to do a quick write (1 minute) of everything that they know about the causes of the civil rights movement. After they have a chance to individually write, allow students to talk with a partner to share their responses (2-3 minutes). Finally, allow students to volunteer their responses with the whole class (2-3 minutes).

Approximate time allotted for this activity: 10-15 minutes

Lesson Steps:

Option 1: Stations

Note: This would work well for classes of 30 or less

- Set up your classroom in 4 groups; 1 per set of sources
- Divide students into 4 groups; 1 for each station
- Provide 2-3 copies of the source
 - The goal is for students to work together to analyze the sources and discuss the images and text
- Allow students 7-10 minutes to analyze each source and complete the corresponding section of the graphic organizer (linked in the materials section)
 - Time will be depended on the speed that groups work; you can allow them to work longer if needed
- Once students have finished at one station, have students move to the next station as you direct
 - Continue this process until students have visited all stations
- If time permits or as the teacher desires, you can review the information from each station as a whole class.

Approximate time allotted for this activity: 50-60 minutes

Option 2: Historical Sandwich Jigsaw

Note: This would work well for classes more than 30 or for classes that would prefer not to move around the classroom

- Divide students into groups of 4
- Print and distribute source sets for each group
 - Each member of the group should get a different source

REYNOLDA

- Allow students 10-15 minutes to read their sources individually and complete the graphic organizer
 - You can adjust the time provided to your individual classes
- After students have individually analyzed and completed the graphic organizer, students will share their findings with their group
 - Each member of the groups should record information from each group member on their graphic organizer.
- If time permits or as the teacher desires, you can review the information from each station as a whole class.

Approximate time allotted for this activity: 45-60 minutes

Guiding Questions

The following questions are included in the graphic organizer and will help guide students in their analysis:

- What challenges did individuals and groups face that led to their advocacy?
 - This question is focused on the **CAUSE** for the involvement in the Civil Rights movement
- How did the advocacy of individuals and groups expand or restrict freedom and help to overcome challenges?
 - This question is focused on the **EFFECTS** of involvement in the Civil Rights movement

Formative Performance Task

As students are analyzing each source, they will complete a graphic organizer. Below are two options that can be used:

- [Graphic Organizer - Electronic Version](#)
 - This version of the graphic organizer can be shared with students to complete electronically via Google Docs
- [Graphic Organizer - Print Version](#)
 - This version of the graphic organizer can be printed and given to students to complete

Summative Performance Task

In the summative performance task, students will respond to the following prompt (compelling question): How have Americans been empowered to be advocates for freedom and overcoming challenges?

Students should adhere to the following expectations:

- Write their own claim and ensure that it is relevant to the prompt (compelling question)
- Be able to identify 2 pieces of evidence that support their claim and is relevant to the prompt (compelling question)
- Be able to explain each piece of evidence and how it is relevant to the prompt

REYNOLDA

(compelling question)

- Write a cohesive conclusion that ties everything together

Note: all expectations are provided on the student handout, including a grading rubric

- [Written Response Handout \(print version\)](#)
 - This version can be used if you want to make hard copies of the handout
- [Written Response Handout \(electronic version\)](#)
 - This version can be used if you want students to complete electronically through a learning management system

Enrichment Resources

[Additional Ella Baker Primary Sources](#). This collection from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides an array of primary sources from Ella Baker, including additional oral histories. Some of the oral histories have been recorded and it can be substituted for the text, but they **need to be previewed before** using with this lesson.

[Additional John Lewis Primary Sources](#). This collection from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides an array of primary sources from John Lewis, including additional oral histories. Many of the oral histories have been recorded and it can be substituted for the text, but they **need to be previewed before** using with this lesson.

[Virginia Encyclopedia](#) The summary excerpt for the Danville, VA demonstrations is in the included sources (excerpt B). There is a more in depth entry that could be supplemented, as well as some videos. The videos are not graphic and can be shown, but you will want to preview before showing to your specific classes.

[SNCC Digital Gateway](#). A majority of the text for excerpt A is from this website. There are other images and primary sources available on this website.

REYNOLDA

Sources

Source 1: Ella Baker	
	Image Source: Danny Lyon. Ella Baker, who called the 1960 meeting of student activists in Raleigh, North Carolina, that created SNCC, 1963. Gelatin silver print. University Art Collections, Wake Forest University. Promised Gift of James P. Agah and Wendy S. Agah (P'26, P'28) to the Wake Forest University Print Collection, LOAN2024.1.1.2. https://artcollectionswfu.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/B77414B4-E848-48D5-9FA8-934816591432 Text Source: Ella Baker Center for Human Rights. "Who was Ella Baker," accessed 2026. https://ellabakercenter.org/who-was-ella-baker/ Text Source Oral History Interview with Ella Baker, April 19, 1977. Interview G-0008. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. https://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0008/excerpts/excerpt_8582.html Link to compiled source document for students

NOTE: These images are provided for individual classroom use for educational purposes only. They are not to be reproduced or used in any ways other than to provide them for student contemplation and discussion as part of this lesson plan.

REYNOLDA

**Source 2:
John Lewis**



Image Source: Danny Lyon. John Lewis in Nashville, 1963. Gelatin silver print. University Art Collections, Wake Forest University. Promised Gift of James P. Agah and Wendy S. Agah (P'26, P'28) to the Wake Forest University Print Collection, LOAN2024.1.1.2.

<https://artcollectionswfu.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/569F19CF-BC08-4F57-9AB7-782562626056>

Text Source: excerpts from National Museum of African American History & Culture, a Smithsonian Museum. "John Lewis," accessed 2026. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/john-lewis>

Text Information: Oral History Interview with John Lewis, November 20, 1973. Interview A-0073. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. https://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/A-0073/excerpts/excerpt_7334.html

[Link to compiled source](#) document for students

REYNOLDA

**Source 3:
Danville, VA**



Text Information: excerpts from SNCC Digital Gateway. "Protests in Danville, Virginia," accessed 2026.

<https://snccdigital.org/events/protests-danville-virginia/>

Image 1 Source: Danny Lyon. *Mass Meeting in Danville, VA*, 1963. Gelatin silver print. University Art Collections, Wake Forest University. Promised Gift of James P. Agah and Wendy S. Agah (P'26, P'28) to the Wake Forest University Print Collection, LOAN2024.1.1.2.

<https://artcollectionswfu.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/1CF4321D-07E9-4458-84AD-532029398832>

REYNOLDA



Image 2 Source: Danny Lyon. *Crowd watches demonstrators in Danville, VA, 1963*. Gelatin silver print. University Art Collections, Wake Forest University. Promised Gift of James P. Agah and Wendy S. Agah (P'26, P'28) to the Wake Forest University Print Collection, LOAN2024.1.1.2.

<https://artcollectionswfu.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/75F44B32-83C0-46F1-B272-981620635438>

Text Source: excerpts from National Museum of African American History & Culture, a Smithsonian Museum. "John Lewis," accessed 2026. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/john-lewis>

[Link to compiled source](#) document for students

REYNOLDA

Source 4:
Fannie Lou
Hamer



Text Information: excerpts from National Museum of African American History and Culture. “How Fannie Lou Hamer Challenged a Nation” accessed 2026.

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/how-fannie-lou-hamer-challenged-nation>

Image Source: Danny Lyon. Fannie Lou Hamer, SNCC field secretary from Ruleville, and future Mississippi Freedom Democratic party candidate for Congress, marches in the cold Hattiesburg rain, 1963. Gelatin silver print. University Art Collections, Wake Forest University. Promised Gift of James P. Agah and Wendy S. Agah (P'26, P'28) to the Wake Forest University Print Collection, LOAN2024.1.1.2.

<https://artcollectionswfu.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/56D6A260-AC39-4DE5-B568-822650152466>

[Link to compiled source](#) document for students