

# The Civil Rights Movement and American Literature



## Objective

In this lesson, you will **analyze the civil rights movement and its influence on American literature.**

## The Civil Rights Movement in America

- African Americans faced this **discrimination** every day in the United States until the mid-1900s. Although the Civil War had abolished slavery, many states, particularly in the South, began passing laws that **persecuted** African Americans and other minorities.
- In the South, the **Jim Crow** system of laws and traditions relegated African Americans to second-class status.
- For a time, after the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court decision, the government permitted racial **segregation** as long as states provided public and private establishments of equal quality for whites and African Americans.
- But the quality of white and Black establishments was far from equal. This level of discrimination in the United States prompted African Americans and others to push for **civil rights** and equality, thus beginning the civil rights movement.

After World War II, African Americans began to speak out against their treatment as second class citizens.



In 1954, with *Brown v. Board of Education*, segregation in education was outlawed.



The years 1954 through 1957 saw a flurry of activity to advance equal rights for African Americans.



In legal terms, African Americans advanced their civil rights immensely during these years. But social change did not follow quickly, and many schools remained segregated for decades.

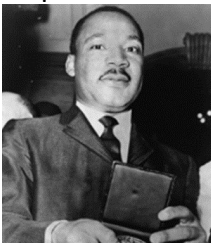
## Persuasive Language in the Civil Rights Movement

- ✓ The tumultuous era of the civil rights movement caused notable tension in the United States, but it also allowed certain individuals to rise to the occasion and lead the country into a more just, more equitable society.
- ✓ These leaders often used persuasive speeches or essays to address their audience. Martin Luther King Jr. epitomizes this description. In his many speeches and persuasive texts, King used rhetorical features and figurative language to convince his audience of the need for equality in US society.



## The Civil Rights Movement



The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

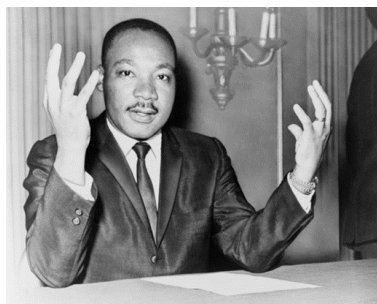


In 1957, Martin Luther King Jr., along with some colleagues, formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to coordinate protests, raise funds, and train Black leaders in nonviolent direct action. The SCLC worked closely with other civil rights groups, including the NAACP, which helped to bring civil rights cases to court.

<p>Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)</p> 	<p>The 1956 <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> decision desegregating schools energized Black students. In 1960, they formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to organize <b>nonviolent</b> direct action protests, such as <b>sit-ins</b>, freedom rides, and voter registration drives.</p>
<p>Freedom Riders</p> 	<p>In the summer of 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an organization co-founded by <b>James Farmer</b>, sent a mixed group of Black and white nonviolent "freedom riders" to travel by bus through the South, testing federal bans on segregated transportation.</p>

## Implicit Versus Explicit Opinion in Persuasive Texts

Implicit Opinion	Explicit Opinion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when authors don't state their opinion directly, readers need to deduce the author's opinion based on the <b>context</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authors may also use sarcasm, satire, irony, or metaphor to implicitly convey a point of view.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when authors directly state their opinion in a persuasive text                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authors use often with evidence to support their statements to persuade their audience to agree with their point of view.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Martin Luther King Jr. states his opinions **both** explicitly and implicitly in "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

### Implicit Example:

*Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.*

King is **implicitly** stating his opinion, explaining to the readers of his letter that the treatment of African American citizens must change. He does not begin his statement by using phrases such as "I believe" or "In my opinion" or any other **indicator** that he is giving an opinion, so readers must consider the context to understand King's opinion.

- In "Letter from Birmingham Jail," King also implicitly conveys his opinion by employing irony.
- The irony in this excerpt comes from the contrast between an amusement park called Funtown and the fact that **such a place offers no pleasure to an African American child.**

This use of irony helps to implicitly convey King's opinions about the enforced separation of white and Black citizens.

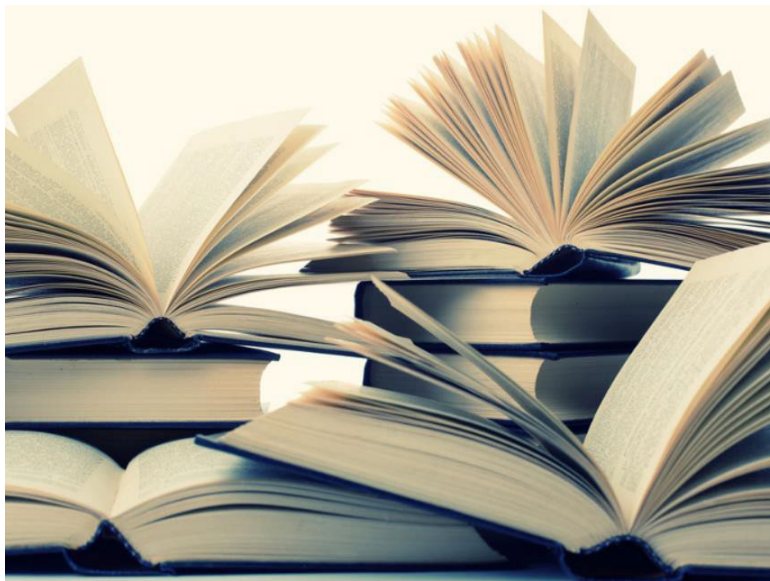
### Explicit Example:

*I submit that an individual who breaks the law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.*

In this statement, King explicitly gives his opinion on when a person should be able to break the law, and why. By using the phrase "I submit," he explicitly states what he believes in, without leaving anything to the reader's interpretation.

## Influences in Writing

- Authors often expand on and respond to each other's ideas, and thus influence each other's viewpoints, style, and tone. Authors may respond to an earlier work by alluding to the text or its author in their own work.



# Reading Selections

## “Civil Disobedience”

Born in 1817, Henry David Thoreau became one of the most notable writers of the transcendental era. Thoreau rarely confirmed to society's norms during his lifetime. In 1846 he was jailed for a night after refusing to pay a poll tax as an act of protest against the Mexican-American War. Following this experience, Thoreau wrote the essay "Civil Disobedience."

### Analysis

Henry David Thoreau states his opinions both explicitly and implicitly in "Civil Disobedience." He directly expresses his views and opinions about government. For example, he begins one sentence with the phrase "I believe," indicating that he is explicitly stating his belief. However, when musing on human nature, he does not directly say what his views are. Instead, through his analysis of how and why people act as they do, he conveys his opinions implicitly to his readers.

The term civil disobedience refers to the refusal to obey certain laws in order to influence governmental policy through nonviolent methods of protest. Boycotts, sit-ins, picketing, and refusal to pay taxes are all forms of civil disobedience. Thoreau coined the term in his essay, and the idea influenced countless political activists around the world.

## Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement

- ❖ John Lewis, a **founding** \_\_\_\_\_ member of the civil rights organization Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), became a prominent leader of the civil rights movement at a young age.
- ❖ Published in 1998, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* is Lewis's recollection of the civil rights movement and the **March** \_\_\_\_\_ **on** \_\_\_\_\_ **Washington** \_\_\_\_\_.



### Analysis



From the onset, John Lewis believed that the March on Washington would be a **positive** \_\_\_\_\_ event. He hoped it would raise awareness of the civil rights movement:

- ❖ *I never saw [the march] as something to support a political position or a particular piece of legislation or even a particular issue. I saw it as an **opportunity** \_\_\_\_\_ to highlight what we were doing and facing with our direct action all throughout the South, a chance yet again to call the nation's attention to the ugliness and violence and suffering.*

- Lewis conveys his views explicitly. He states his beliefs directly and cites evidence supporting his standpoint. He often uses phrases such as "**I think** \_\_\_\_\_" or "in my opinion."
- As a pacifist, Lewis was influenced by Thoreau's views on civil disobedience. A believer in **nonviolence** \_\_\_\_\_, Lewis never advocated any kind of violent action. Instead, he urged "creative disruption" and "aggressive nonviolence" to make a bigger impact on society. Lewis thought the movement should be driven by Thoreau's view of nonviolent **civil** \_\_\_\_\_ **disobedience** \_\_\_\_\_, an idea that militant activists such as **Malcom X** \_\_\_\_\_, another prominent civil rights leader, did not share. Instead, militant civil rights leaders believed that the use of force was **1 ghj4YX** \_\_\_\_\_ to protect one's rights and freedoms.

## Focus on Language



### Presentations: Incorporating Visual Aids

- Visual components in presentations can help to elaborate on or support an argument or **deepen** an audience's understanding of what is being presented.
- Such visual aids can be used to expand on a definition, **illustrate** a process, or present additional information to an audience.
- Charts, **graphs**, photographs, illustrations, timelines, and **tables** are common visual aids that presenters use to better convey an idea or experience.

### ? Question

Description	Visual Aid
<i>evaluation of whether a company needs to improve its presence on the Internet</i>	<b>chart listing pros and cons</b>
<i>explanation of a complex football play</i>	<i>drawing on a board</i>
<b>description of the lives of giant pandas in their natural habitats</b>	<i>map</i>
<i>explanation of how to best save and manage money</i>	<b>pie chart</b>
<b>description of the Empire State Building's architectural details</b>	<i>blueprint of a building</i>
<i>comparison of two authors' writing style</i>	<b>Venn diagram</b>

## Summary

What are key elements of the literature of the civil rights movement?

**answers will vary**