



Lesson

Making Change: Revolutionary Tactics of the Civil Rights Movement

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will consider competing strategies used by civil rights leaders in the 1960s and look at tensions between supporters of Malcolm X's Black Nationalism and supporters of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy of non-violent resistance. They'll examine this era through the eyes of radical philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs, whose ideas about activism and strategies for change evolved as her understanding of the nature of revolution deepened.

Video clips provided with this lesson are from *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Understand the philosophical foundations of non-violent revolution
- Learn some of the history of the Black Power movement in the United States
- Become familiar with the work of radical philosopher Grace Lee Boggs
- Reflect on some of the stereotypes and misconceptions about leftists and Black Power activists
- Practice listening, writing and reasoning skills

GRADE LEVELS: 10 – College/University

SUBJECT AREAS

U.S. History
Civics/Government
Political Science
Philosophy

MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One to two 50-minute class periods (depending on time devoted to discussion).
Prerequisite: This activity assumes that students already know the basics of the philosophies espoused by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X in terms of Black Nationalism, civil rights and the use of violence.

FILM CLIPS

Clip 1: "Meeting Grace Lee Boggs" (6:35 min.)

The clip begins at approximately 6:00 with the filmmaker saying, "I didn't know I was searching for someone like Grace." It ends at 12:35 with Boggs explaining, "If a movement can achieve that, that's what I want to do with my life."

Clip 2: "Black Power" (4:35 min.)

The clip begins at 24:45 with the filmmaker explaining that in the 1960s, Boggs split from the Marxist establishment and became active in the Black Power movement. It ends at 29:20 with the filmmaker saying that despite her organizing work, Boggs was excluded from a major civil rights conference.

Clips 3 and 4: "Violence vs. Non-Violence" (approx. 4 min. and 1 min., respectively)

Clip 3 begins at 34:17 when Boggs begins to talk about white flight with a reference to building freeways. It ends at 38:11 with Boggs recalling that looting and crime came to be seen as normal. Clip 4 begins at 57:39 with the voice-over saying, "As Grace struggled to understand the violence that was devastating her community, she returned to the evolving ideas of Malcolm and Martin." It ends at 58:42 with Boggs saying, "It's taken me a long time to learn that."

Clip 5: "Defining Revolution" (46 sec.)

The clip begins at 47:45 with the filmmaker noting, "During Grace's lifetime, hundreds of revolutions have taken place around the world." It ends at 48:31 with this quote from Boggs: "People thought of revolutions chiefly in terms of taking state power, but we've had revolutions and we've seen how the states which they have created have turned out to be like replicas of the states which they opposed. You have to bring those two words together and recognize that we are responsible for the evolution of the human species. It's a question of two-sided transformation and not just the oppressed versus the oppressor. We had to change ourselves in order to change the world."

ACTIVITY

1. Review Some History

The activity begins with an opportunity to review students' knowledge of history. Divide the class into small groups. Their task is to list as many significant political or social revolutions as they can think of in five minutes. Remind students that while some items may have the word revolution in the title (e.g., the Russian Revolution), others may not (e.g., the struggle for women's suffrage or, more recently, the Arab

Spring). Merge the lists from all the groups and ask students to list all the tactics used to accomplish these revolutions. Note how frequently violence comes up as a tactic.

2. Introduce the Film

Explain that you are going to take a closer look at a revolutionary movement in the United States that split over the use of violence as a tactic: the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Students will learn about that split through scenes from a documentary called ***American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs***, which is about a Black Power activist. In the first clip, they'll meet Boggs and learn a bit about her background. Prior to showing the clip, ask students to form pictures in their heads of what they think Boggs looks like.

3. Show Clip 1: "Meet Grace Lee Boggs"

Open discussion by asking, "What did you learn?" or "What did you notice?" In the ensuing discussion, review topics like gender- and race-based discrimination and invite students to consider stereotyping and how Boggs is similar to or different from their preconceived notions of what a Black Power activist would look/be like. Also be sure that everyone understands who Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was and what dialectical thinking is. To explain Hegel, you might read aloud or distribute the following transcript excerpt from the film and ask students to read it, noting that this is Boggs' explanation:

Hegel was a German philosopher who came of age during the French Revolution and saw its violent aftermath. Hegel said that every idea contains its opposite and only by struggling through those contradictions can you get closer to the truth. That's dialectical thinking. It means don't get stuck in old ideas. Keep recognizing that reality is changing and that your ideas have to change.

End the discussion by filling in some additional information that will provide context for later clips: Boggs married activist and fellow Marxist, James "Jimmy" Boggs, and the couple lived in Detroit.

4. Introduce Clip 2: "Black Power"

Do a check-in to determine what students already know (or think they know) about the Black Power movement. Invite them to use what the film says as a self-assessment to check whether their ideas are accurate or not. Show Clip 2.

Again, open the discussion by inviting students to share what they learned. Discuss what they think Boggs meant when she said that "the black movement was about something deeper than rights" and that it wasn't about "trying to become equal to whites." What's the difference between wanting to be allowed to participate as an equal in the existing system and wanting to revolutionize the system?

Also, note that both clips screened so far include references to the importance of transforming oneself along with society. Briefly explore what students think that

means and how Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. approached the issue of transforming the way African Americans saw themselves.

End the discussion by reciting the following statement from King: “There’s a great deal of difference between non-resistance to evil and non-violent resistance.” Use this as to segue to the next clip.

5. Show Clips 3 and 4: “Violence vs. Non-Violence”

Discuss why Boggs initially supported violent resistance and later changed her mind. Also talk about the difference between a “riot” and a “rebellion” and invite students to think about which word has been used in your community or textbooks and why.

6. Wrap Up

Bring the discussion back around to the initial small group task. Invite students to look at their list as they view one final clip.

Show Clip 5: “Defining Revolution”

Discuss which of the events or movements on their initial list would fit the dual criteria that Boggs lays out. Does their list validate or invalidate Boggs’ beliefs about revolution?

7. Assessment: Link the Past to the Future

Assign each student to write a brief essay that begins with this quote from Grace Lee Boggs: “History, that’s a story not only of the past but of the future.” The essays should include specific references to things they learned from this history lesson that inform the way they think about events today. What kind of revolution would they create?

EXTENSIONS

1. Assign a comparative reading of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Grace Lee Boggs’ *Living for Change: An Autobiography*.
2. Show students the part of ***American Revolutionary*** about Detroit Summer (approx. 1:00:28-1:10:00, from “King said what our young people in our dying cities need are direct action programs which enable them to transform themselves and their institutions at the same time,” to just before the conversation with Danny Glover begins). Use the footage as a springboard for a brainstorming session on projects the students might undertake in their own neighborhoods. Encourage them to choose a project to implement.

RESOURCES

James and Grace Lee Boggs Center

<http://boggscenter.org/>

Created to honor the work of James and Grace Lee Boggs, the center focuses on leadership development. Its website includes updates on Grace Lee Boggs' work, writing from others featured in the film (including Shea Howell, Scott Kurashige and Stephen Ward) and links to articles that people at the center are reading as they engage in the kind of dialectic thinking that Boggs embraces.

Bill Moyers Journal: Grace Lee Boggs

<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/06152007/profile2.html>

The site includes transcript and video of Bill Moyers' interview with Boggs, as well as links to her work and related organizations.

Social Justice Speeches: "The Ballot or the Bullet" by Malcolm X

http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/speeches/malcolm_x_ballot.html

This site provides text of a speech given by Malcolm X in Detroit in 1964.

Malcolm X: "Message to the Grassroots"

<http://www.csun.edu/~hcpas003/grassroots.html> This site provides an excerpt of the speech given by Malcolm X in Detroit in 1963 as part of the Grassroots Leadership Conference that Grace Lee Boggs helped organize, which is referenced in the film.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle: Speech at the Great March on Detroit

<http://mlk->

kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_speech_at_the_great_march_on_detroit/

This site provides audio and text of King's famous "I have a dream" speech, as given in Detroit at the rally that Boggs helped to organize and that took place just a few weeks prior to the famed 1963 March on Washington.

POV: American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs

www.pbs.org/pov/americanrevolutionary

The site includes online features, a discussion guide with additional activity ideas, a reading list and additional resources.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php>

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

[SL.11-12.1](#) Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[SL.11-12.2](#) Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

[SL.11-12.3](#) Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis and tone used.

[SL.11-12.4](#) Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.

[SL.11-12.6](#) Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

[W.9-10.1](#) & [11-12.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[W.9-10.2d](#) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

[W.11-12.2d](#) Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

[W.9-10.4](#), [11-12.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Language Arts, Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

U.S. History, Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 200 independent films.