

**“NEVER, EVER BE AFRAID TO MAKE SOME NOISE
AND GET INTO GOOD TROUBLE, NECESSARY
TROUBLE.”**

—*John Lewis*

Walking in the Footsteps of John Lewis



In this lesson, students will explore the life and legacy of John Lewis, from his days as a young civil rights leader, through his political career as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Atlanta. Students will look at their own community and explore access and obstacles to voting, as well as where to go for information about voting.

Step 1: Hook – An Exercise in Photo Analysis (5 minutes)



Have students select one of the images in the lesson.

Ask students to take notes on the selected image considering the following questions for analysis:

- Who is in the image?
- What is happening?
- When do you think this image is from and why? What tells you this?
- What does the photo reveal to us about John Lewis?
- What does this photo convey regarding Lewis' approach to his work?



Step 2: Profile of John Lewis (20 minutes)



John Lewis was the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a civil rights activist group, from 1963 to 1966. (One-minute video, [“Celebrating SNCC: 60 Years of Social Justice”](#))

John Lewis was one of the "Big Six" leaders of groups who organized the 1963 March on Washington. He fulfilled many key roles in the civil rights movement and its actions to end legalized racial segregation in the United States.

Video (seven minutes): [Excerpts of John Lewis’ Speech at the March on Washington](#)

In 1965, John Lewis led the first of three Selma-to-Montgomery, Ala., civil rights marches across the famous Edmund Pettus Bridge. In an incident that became known as “Bloody Sunday,” state troopers and police then attacked the marchers, including Lewis.

Video (seven minutes): [Selma 50 Years Later: Remembering Bloody Sunday.](#)

MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR JOBS AND FREEDOM AUGUST 28, 1963	
LINCOLN MEMORIAL PROGRAM	
1. The National Anthem	<i>Led by Marian Anderson.</i>
2. Invocation	<i>The Very Rev. Patrick O’Boyle, Archbishop of Washington.</i>
3. Opening Remarks	<i>A. Philip Randolph, Director March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.</i>
4. Remarks	<i>Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, Stated Clerk, United Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.; Vice Chairman, Commission on Race Relations of the National Council of Churches of Christ in America.</i>
5. Tribute to Negro Women Fighters for Freedom	<i>Mrs. Medgar Evers</i>
	<i>Daisy Bates Diane Nash Bevel Mrs. Medgar Evers Mrs. Herbert Lee Rosa Parks Gloria Richardson</i>
6. Remarks	<i>John Lewis, National Chairman, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.</i>
7. Remarks	<i>Walter Reuther, President, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America, AFL-CIO; Chairman, Industrial Union Department, AFL-CIO.</i>
8. Remarks	<i>James Farmer, National Director, Congress of Racial Equality.</i>
9. Selection	<i>Eva Jessye Choir</i>
10. Prayer	<i>Rabbi Uri Miller, President Synagogue Council of America.</i>
11. Remarks	<i>Whitney M. Young, Jr., Executive Director, National Urban League.</i>
12. Remarks	<i>Mathew Ahmann, Executive Director, National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice.</i>
13. Remarks	<i>Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.</i>
14. Selection	<i>Mrs. Mahalia Jackson</i>
15. Remarks	<i>Rabbi Joachim Prinz, President American Jewish Congress.</i>
16. Remarks	<i>The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference.</i>
17. The Pledge	<i>A Philip Randolph</i>
18. Benediction	<i>Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, President, Morehouse College.</i>
“WE SHALL OVERCOME”	

Follow-Up Extension: For further reading, assign students to read a biography of John Lewis. We suggest the one by [Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights](#). Add the recap of his life by the [Associated Press](#).

Voting Rights Extension: The connection between John Lewis, the civil rights activist, who put his life on the line, and John Lewis the public servant, was his advocacy in the fight for voting rights. Forty-eight U.S. senators have introduced legislation to restore the Voting Rights Act to its previous status.

Video (three minutes): [John Lewis speaking on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on the right to vote](#)

Step 3: Questions for Discussion (15 minutes)

- How do the images of John Lewis and his activism over time inform our understanding of who he was as a defender?
- How does an individual impact change, and what role can individuals play in bringing change to their community?
- How did John Lewis' advocacy for voter rights legislation open access to the ballot for disenfranchised citizens, and how are those issues still with us today?

Follow-Up Extension: John Lewis and Nelson Mandela shared a love of the poem “Invictus,” by William Ernest Henley. The word “invictus” is Latin for “unconquered.” Why might this poem have meant so much to John Lewis? What did U.S. Rep. Lewis and South African President Mandela have in common?

You might even challenge students to learn and recite this poem!

- “Invictus” Text/Audio: [The Poetry Foundation](#)
- Article: *Washington Post*—[“Invictus” was among John Lewis’ favorite poems. It captures his indomitable spirit.](#)

Step 4: What Can Students Do?



Use this step to expand on the legacy of John Lewis and his fight for voting rights. Divide the class into teams. Each team is assigned to conduct an oral history interview based on the idea of “voting rights.”

Your interview subject may be an individual or organization that advocates for voting rights, and has participated in calling for the widest possible enfranchisement -- for youth, or for minority communities, or for seniors, or for those who are depending on postal access to the ballot box during the time of pandemic.

With what your students learn, they will next assemble as a project team. Examples would include a theater piece, podcast, mural, poster display, comic strip, or poem.

Here are two excellent options for your students to join in with students from around the country working on similar projects:

[RFK Human Rights Video Contest](#)

[RFK Music Composition Contest](#)

Additional Resources and Materials



Article: *The Guardian* -- ['Something Died in America': John Lewis on Robert F. Kennedy's legacy](#)

[RFK Human Rights: Ripple of Hope Gala, remarks by John Lewis](#)

Graphic Novel for Your Classroom: “*March*” (Winner of the National Book Award for Young People's Literature) A graphic novel trilogy, written by John Lewis “*March*” is the story of the Civil Rights Movement through the eyes of Congressman John Lewis. Available from [Amazon](#).