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John Lewis: Examining the Past to Inform Understandings of the Present

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Introduction

When did the Civil Rights Movement end? Did it end with the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965? Or was it after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr? What if the Civil Rights Movement did not end? How would we know?

During the first week of the 2020-2021 school year, one of my students shared a selfie of themselves protesting in Richmond, Virginia. This student, along with other activists in the city, took to the streets in response to the murder of George Floyd. Activists in Richmond toppled statues from the Confederates to Columbus, erected new historical markers showcasing marginalized histories, and created art representing Black voices.[1] Students actively participated with the George Floyd protests as they will actively participate in how it is shaped in our collective memory. Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, students continued to reference Black Lives Matter and other social movements in their work including the advancement of LGBTQIA+ rights.

Social justice is important to students, yet its study is often absent or consciously omitted from curriculum. Recently, Donald Trump's 1776 Commission attempted multicultural curriculum erasure at the federal level. His effort to create a "patriotic" curriculum was driven by fear of the *New York Times*' 1619 Project and continued through the actions of predominantly white communities.[2] These supporters of the 1776 Commission actively sought to suppress conversations that addressed systemic racism, disrupting school board meetings throughout the country. Some states, such as Oklahoma, responded by passing legislation to prohibit educators from teaching certain concepts around gender and race to combat unsubstantiated fears of Critical Race Theory.[3] As these events illustrate, if we as educators are unwilling to study history in a manner that is open and critical, we allow it to be presented as a singular, white-washed memory.

This curriculum unit, titled "John Lewis: Examining the Past to Inform Understandings of the Present," explores the complexity of history by placing recent social movements within the broader context of American history. Through examination of the George Floyd protests both locally and nationally, students will examine the evolution of social movements and their connection to other historical events. It also seeks to empower student voice by drawing on personal experiences.

Rationale

I teach English Language Arts at River City Middle School. It is the largest middle school in the Richmond Public School (RPS) system. Construction of the school was completed during the 2020 fall semester. It is projected to exceed its capacity of 1,500 students within the 2021-2022 school year.[4] The student population is 59% economically disadvantaged. The school demographics are 53.1% Black and 42.8% Latinx. English Learners compromise 36.8% percent of the student population.[5] As a new construction, the school reflects progress; however, issues with overcrowding and segregation represent historic challenges faced by our education system.

To improve scores in Reading and Math, RPS adopted block scheduling in middle school. As a result, Math and English Language Arts now meet for ninety minutes each day. Social Studies, Science, and elective courses meet every other day. This shift diminished the amount of history instruction to under 140 instructional hours while increasing English instruction to 270 total hours.

I had a small group of students participate in an after-school reading program during the 2020-2021 school year. Given its relevance and the district's reduction in its instructional hours, I felt there was a need to embed history within my Language Arts curriculum. Towards this end, I completed a DonorsChoose project to secure copies of *March*, a graphic novel depicting the Civil Rights Movement from the perspective of John Lewis. While major figures of the Civil Rights Movement were familiar to many of my students, I discovered their knowledge of the prolonged struggle of the movement was limited. A student once asked me why they had never learned about the topics of *March* in their history class. They made many spontaneous and personal connections to the present; they once asked how I felt as a white person in my relation to this history. These conversations highlighted the importance of centering the Black and BIPOC experience in the classroom while also demonstrating the need to learn of the past in order to reflect on the present.

This unit will be implemented in a seventh-grade Language Arts course and could be adapted for Social Studies or other grades. It encompasses Virginia statewide standards for 7th grade ELA and Social Studies, which includes the History of the United States from 1865 to the present and the study of narratives. More broadly, the themes explored in *March* promote civic participation. *March*'s use of images enhances comprehension for English learners. The use of a biography to teach history and ELA skills highlights the interdisciplinary nature of Social Studies and English.

Content Objectives

The objective of the unit is to improve understanding of the classical period of the Civil Rights Movement from 1954 through 1965 and its relation to the present. The Civil Rights Movement is often simplified as a progress narrative. It is centered around the federal government's response to Southern racism through *Brown v. Board*, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The traditional narrative elevates the role of movement leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., while diminishing the work of the countless people that made it a movement. How we remember individuals and events does not always provide a complete picture. Memory often favors simple stories that move towards progress or decline and offer a sense of resolution.

In exploring this topic, I hope students will see that the ideas of a movement are often simplified by how they are remembered and retold. The demands and often brutal realities of the Civil Rights Movement are reduced to excerpts of "I Have a Dream." Narrowing the focus of the movement to formal equality allows white memory to frame the story of the Civil Rights Movement as one that arcs towards justice. This frame proves even more compromised when considering the Civil Rights Movement's calls for economic and institutional reconstruction.[6] Evidence of the movement's focus on systemic inequality can be found in many key events of the movement. For example, Black Americans who organized the Montgomery Bus Boycotts of 1955 were fighting for integration as well as economic equality, demanding that the bus company employ Black people as bus conductors.[7] King made his "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Through detailed study of the Civil Rights Movement, including its unmet socioeconomic demands, students will understand the limitations of framing history solely in terms of progress or decline.

March by John Lewis will help students address some of the ahistorical simplifications. Specifically, the graphic novel shows readers how the Civil Rights movement was led by ordinary people like themselves.

Student observations and experiences form a key aspect of this unit and are what bring the content to life. As witnesses and participants in the George Floyd protests and other social movements, students will be able to connect the text to their own understandings and experiences. Some of my students will likely have background knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement from their elementary school curriculum or through their home environments. A picture from the March on Washington could be enough for them to evoke connections to the present. Their assessment of America's progress in addressing inequity will help them explore the outcomes of the Civil Rights Movement as it relates to the ideas of meritocracy and broader racial injustice.

The unit opens with a series of essential questions to establish the content objectives: What was the Civil Rights Movement? How is the Civil Rights Movement significant? How does the study of history help us understand our present? How do social movements begin and end? By the end of the unit, students will be able to reflect on how their responses may have changed.

Content Background

March by Andrew Aydin, John Lewis, and Nate Powell will serve as the anchor text to the study of the Civil Rights Movement. *March* is a graphic novel trilogy. It combined John Lewis' memoir on the Civil Rights Movement, *Walking with the Wind*, with his experience as an elder statesman during the Obama presidency. *March: Book One* focused on Lewis' childhood in Alabama and ended with the Nashville Student Movement's efforts in forcing lunch counter integration. *March: Book Two* and *March: Book Three* covered the Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, the Selma to Montgomery Marches, the Civil Rights Act, and Voting Rights Act. *March* showed that the movement was more than just a handful of leaders. It was a movement of hundreds of unnamed people.

Why Teach History?

This unit will incorporate methods used by historian Sam Wineburg to teach history. In 2006, Wineburg, Abby Reisman, and other Stanford researchers piloted a program to teach historical thinking in an urban setting.[8] Historical thinking goes beyond memorizing dates and facts from a textbook. It encourages students to look at

history at its sources.

Primary documents and accounts often create conflicting realities. This conflict requires students to make sense of the past. The primary accounts of the colonial settler John Smith showcase this conflict. Smith wrote two accounts of his encounter with Pocahontas and the Powhatan Confederacy. His first account from 1608 described Chief Powhatan as welcoming. He did not mention any threat to his life. His account from 1628 described Pocahontas as saving him from Chief Powhatan[9] In a span of twenty years, Smith's account of his first encounter changed from friendly to life-and-death. Why would John Smith write two inconsistent accounts? Instead of being told what happened, students must uncover history for themselves. This change in method transforms their role from passive to active as they research and interpret history.

In *Why Teach History (When It's Already on Your Phone*), Wineburg emphasized the contextualization of documents and events by asking questions such as: What bibliographic information is provided with a source? How or why was a document created? What does it tell us about the perspective of people in the past and why events happened when they did?[10] This method of historical thinking will encourage students to make sense of conflicting accounts.

John Lewis and the Nashville Student Movement

Congressperson John Lewis was a major figure of the Civil Rights Movement. He was involved in many key events including the March on Washington. He died in July of 2020. The same month, *John Lewis:Good Trouble* was released. The retrospective documentary celebrated his life. The film showed his willingness to put himself on the line for freedom even when it met arrest and physical harm. Since his death, he has received an almost saint-like elevation that can be seen in the christening of the United States Naval Ship *John Lewis* or Democrats naming new voting rights legislation after him.[11]

March begins by focusing on Lewis' childhood. John Lewis was born in Troy, Alabama in 1940. His family worked as sharecroppers in the Jim Crow South.[12] 1955 was a watershed moment for Lewis. Massive Resistance, the organized effort by southern whites to block integration, dashed hopes for a better school experience promised by *Brown v. Board*. The brutal murder of Emmett Till, a Black 14-year-old, by white vigilantes shook him to the core. The gospel of Martin Luther King Jr. and the Montgomery Bus Boycott inspired him beyond the constraints of his hometown.[13] His experiences as a distant witness to these events highlight the anonymity that many people feel when facing the inequality of the American Dream versus the perception of him as a revered freedom fighter. Injustices from institutionalized racism in Lewis' youth in the mid-1950s draw parallels to injustices students witness today.

Lewis entered American Baptist Theological Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee on a work-study scholarship in 1957.[14] He joined a growing group of students that studied the philosophy of non-violence. The group intended to start a sit-in campaign in Nashville.[15]

Students in Greensboro sparked the sit-in movement nationally on February 1st , 1960. Less than two weeks after the Greensboro sit-ins, Nashville students began their campaign.[16] The Nashville community was unprepared for the first day of sit-ins. The protestors were not met with violence. Businesses closed and members of the Nashville Student Movement convened in a church to celebrate. In the days that followed, the response from the community grew violent. The students were met with verbal harassment and physical beatings. Police intervened by arresting the nonviolent student protestors. They did not arrest white people that assaulted the students.[17]

Nationally, the sit-in movement created friction within the Black community. Many university presidents of Black institutions privately discouraged the direct action of the sit-in movement.[18] The sit-in movement from Greensboro to Nashville surprised more established groups like the NAACP. It was an unconstrained, grassroots social movement led by students.[19] Thurgood Marshall, the lead attorney in *Brown v. Board*, spoke to the Nashville students in April of 1960. He discouraged them from some of their tactics.[20] Regardless, the Nashville Student Movement gained support of leaders in the local Black community.[21]

Tensions surrounding the Nashville sit-ins culminated with the bombing of a sit-in supporter's home on April 19th of 1960. In response, 2,000 people marched to Nashville's City Hall.[22] The mayor of Nashville placated the protestors with promises. Actual government intervention was minimal. The mayor recommended lunch counter integration but did not enforce it.[23] Six of the downtown Nashville restaurants agreed to integrate.[24] The integration of the restaurants marked a success for the Nashville Student Movement.[25] However, the final pages of *March* showed continued resistance to members of the Nashville Student Movement as they expanded their campaign.[26]*March: Book One* ended without resolution.

John Lewis marked the Voting Rights Act of 1965 as a turning point for the movement. *March* closed the Civil Rights Movement at its traditional end in the 1960s. However, it used flash forward to join it to the 21st century. Ending the book during Obama's presidency connected Lewis' time as a congressperson to the Civil Rights Movement. *March* made sense of the present through its presentation of the past. It showed the interconnectedness of social movements that seem disjointed by our memory and the distance of time.

The Richmond sit-in movement

Students at Virginia Union University began Richmond's sit-in movement on February 20th , 1960.[27] The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* documented the non-violent protests led by Virginia Union University students and the community response. The businesses affected by the sit-ins closed. White youth, with rebel hats and waving Confederate flags, harassed the Black student protestors. The president of Virginia Union University, Dr. Samuel Proctor, publicly supported the nonviolent protests of the students. White groups like the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties called for their arrests.[28] Richmond was caught off guard. The responses of businesses and the white community matched the first-day responses in Nashville of nonplussed businesses hastily closing because of the nonviolent sit-ins.

The Virginia Union University students continued their sit-in protests. They received front page coverage when police arrested 34 of them on February 22nd , 1960. Thalhimers, a downtown department store targeted by the Black students, prepared statements after the first day of the protest. Thalhimers warned the students that their trespass would lead to arrest. When the students refused to move, police on standby moved in and arrested the students. The students that participated in the sit-in at Thalhimers became known as the Richmond 34. Two female protestors stated white citizens spat on them. Another protestor was scalded with hot coffee. Overall, the community response in Richmond was not as violent as it was in Nashville.[29]

The response across the state included the introduction of a bill to allow for harsher punishment towards sit-in protestors. Similar protests occurred in cities like Norfolk, Virginia.[30] Two *Richmond Times-Dispatch* editorials criticized the sit-ins. One supported racial discrimination in legal terms. It argued that the sit-in protesters were breaking the law by trespassing. The editorial stated that private businesses were not subject to court rulings like *Brown v. Board*. The second argued white people carried a burden to elevate Black Americans from "below serfdom" to a rate of literacy "largely considered impossible a century ago."[31] It described the sit-in

supporters as agitators that felt the “white man owes him everything.” The editorial closed with a warning to not force freedom of association.[32] These editorials reflected racist attitudes common among white people in the United States. They resented the Black students for challenging the system of segregation that they sought to maintain. They failed to account for white people’s role in slavery, the illiteracy of Black Americans, and other historic forms of oppression. Though white Americans in Richmond were less violent than in Nashville, they wanted the same racist status quo.

Absent from the *RichmondTimes-Dispatch* coverage was the most well-known picture taken in Richmond. The nonviolent protests in Richmond garnered some national attention with the arrest of Ruth Tinsley. Ruth Tinsley was the wife of NAACP director, Dr. Jesse Tinsley. She was supporting the students along with other protestors outside of Thalhimers. The photograph captured two police officers with a police dog carrying away an elderly Tinsley.[33] People who see the image often describe her as being dragged by police. The editorial decision not to include this picture was likely intentional as it would have garnered sympathy.

In contrast to the local white-owned papers, the *Richmond Afro American* articles and editorials cast the sit-in in a favorable manner. Coverage on the front page of the *Richmond Afro American* announced the location and time of a meeting to support the sit-in movement.[34] Additional articles identified supporters of the sit-in movement including a small group of white people, the Black community, and the *Afro American* editorial board.[35] The two papers showed the divergence of perspective within the Richmond community.

The sit-ins sparked the Campaign for Human Dignity, which virtually ended segregation in Richmond in 1961. The campaign included a boycott, picketing, and other forms of protests to spur integration. Although there was no direct government intervention, most local businesses desegregated.[36]

Like many other papers in the 21st century, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* issued an apology for its role in Massive Resistance.[37] In 2010, the paper looked back on the sit-in movement fifty years earlier. The article featured an interview with the granddaughter of the owner of Thalhimers, one of the businesses targeted by the Richmond 34. She stated that her grandfather knew segregation was wrong but speculated that he did not integrate because of the economic clout of his white clientele.[38] These various primary and secondary sources highlight the significance of the sit-in movement and the complexity of narratives within a segregated society.

Richmond Today

The George Floyd protests connected to Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement more broadly.[39] Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall described the mass spread of television as thrusting the Civil Rights Movement “out of nowhere." For many white Americans, the scenes from the Civil Rights Movement and the 2020 summer uprising were without precedent.[40] However, events from the classical period of the Civil Rights Movement connected to prior movements including the end of segregation in the military in 1948.[41] Protests like the Ferguson protests that began because of the police murder of Michael Brown in 2014 preceded the 2020 George Floyd protests.[42] Remembering either the Civil Rights Movement or the George Floyd protest in an ahistorical manner removes them from broader movements against institutional racism.

There are major differences from the nonviolent protests of the sit-in movement to the George Floyd protests, but the connections are worth noting. For example, the protests over the summer of 2020 were often led by young people similar in age to the student protestors during the sit-in movement. The George Floyd protests drew for calls of restraint from more established groups just as leaders in the NAACP called for restraint of

students like John Lewis during the Nashville Student Movement.[43] All these movements responded to institutionalized racism manifest in police brutality. “I Have a Dream” specifically referenced police brutality stating Black people were “the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.”[44]

These various social movements resulted in advances while exposing unresolved inequity. The George Floyd protests sparked investigations into police departments and forced some localities like Los Angeles to shift funding from police to other services. In general, the socioeconomic demands of the Civil Rights Movement and the George Floyd protests have not been met.[45] Formal equality does not address underlying conditions that cause inequity. De facto segregation has left society more segregated today than it was in the late 1960s.[46] The unfulfilled components from these movements measured alongside their successes affirm that we must “forego easy closure and satisfying upward or downward arcs.”[47]

After the murder of George Floyd protestors gathered in Richmond. They protested for weeks and made several demands to address local reforms. Protestors’ various demands included an assessment of the police budget in Richmond, the removal of police in schools, the establishment of a civilian review board for police oversight, and the removal of Confederate statues.[48] Richmond activists have seen minimal progress that mirrors the immediate outcomes of the Nashville Student Movement.

Almost a year after the protests, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney wrote an op-ed in *The New York Times*. He framed himself as moving the city past the protests by apologizing for the unintentional use of tear gas on peaceful protestors. Richmond police launched tear gas into a crowd of protestors that had gathered around the largest Confederate monument in the city. The event took place in broad daylight. The use of teargas appeared to be unprovoked and was covered extensively by the local media. The mayor cited his subsequent decisions to remove Confederate statues as a resolution.

The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* fact-checked the mayor’s *NYT* op-ed. It quoted locals that accused the mayor of simplifying the narrative to portray himself as a hero. The journalist refuted several unsubstantiated claims the mayor made in his op-ed.[49] By the time the city started to remove statues, several had been taken down by protestors. Additionally, the police intentionally used tear gas on peaceful protestors even after the mayor’s public apology for its unintentional use.[50]

A retrospective piece from the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* examined how most of the demands of the protestors remain deferred.[51] Studying the Nashville Student Movement and having our current vantages can help students see the peaks and valleys of social movements. The competing narratives between the mayor’s op-ed and the other primary sources from 2021 show how memory and history are already diverging.

Teaching Strategies

Class Discussion and Journaling

The introduction of the unit will focus on student responses to the essential questions. Students will preview images and terms associated with the Civil Rights Movement to prompt them as needed. Students will record and share their responses.

As an introduction to comics and the Civil Rights Movement, students will read part of *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story*. This preview will focus on the visual presentation of comics. Instruction on the visual display will help students identify the purpose of comic book features including narrative boxes and speech bubbles.

Instruction will emphasize Lewis' study of *The Montgomery Story* as it relates to this curriculum unit. This comic inspired John Lewis as an adolescent. The comic was distributed in Cairo, Egypt. It influenced some protestors during the nonviolent mass movement that led to the overthrow of the Egyptian government in 2011 during the Arab Spring.[52]*The Montgomery Story* will provide students with immediate evidence in responding to the questions related to the significance of the Civil Rights Movement. Lastly, I hope the idea of studying methods of nonviolent resistance just as John Lewis did will pique student interest in the unit.

The essential questions previewed in the first discussion will be revisited throughout the unit to evaluate student learning: What was the Civil Rights Movement? How is the Civil Rights Movement significant? How does the study of history help us understand our present? How do movements begin and end?

While reading *March*, students will engage in journaling to reflect on what they have learned about the significance of the Civil Rights Movement and its relation to our present moment. There are multiple parallels between *March* and our current experience. Lewis' segregated and underfunded schooling even after *Brown v. Board* mirrors the de facto segregation of today. Many major events including the murder of Emmett Till and the Montgomery Bus Boycott affected him as a youth. Students will be able to relate with the idea of being changed by historic moments as witnesses or participants in movements like the George Floyd protests. His teenage inspiration of applying Martin Luther King Jr.'s gospel of bettering society relates to core ideals of BLM and other social movements.[53] The brutalization of nonviolent protestors by police forces during the George Floyd protests is akin to the violence committed by white Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. Footage from "Bloody Sunday," the police attack on civil right marchers in 1965, draws direct connections to the use of police violence during the George Floyd protests.[54] These journals will help me gain insight on facilitating discussions around the graphic novel and aspects of modern social movements.

One of the final assessments of the essential questions will align with Wineburg's approach to teaching historical inquiry. The Stanford History Education Group developed a reflection activity related to the Greensboro sit-ins.[55] The assessment included an iconic photograph of four Black students denied service by white Americans in Woolworths. The assessment asked what event was represented in the photograph and why was it historically significant. These questions will complement the essential questions in our curriculum unit and will encourage students to display their historical thinking. It will allow them to identify the event in the photograph and connect its significance to the sit-ins in *March*. At this point in the unit, the class will have only focused on the Nashville sit-in movement. Students will be able to draw from their own historical knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement, BLM or the George Floyd protests beyond the curriculum unit.

Inquiry Based Learning - Gallery Walk

The class will move to the Richmond sit-in movement after concluding *March*. The components of the content objectives associated with primary sources related to Richmond during the sit-in movement and the George Floyd protests lend themselves to gallery walk activities. Links and adapted copies of the newspaper articles and video resources identified in the curriculum unit will be printed and posted along the wall of a classroom or hallway. Student groups will move from resource to resource and take notes on the bibliographic information, perspectives, and significance of the source material. The documents focusing on the Richmond

sit-in movement will allow students to compare perspectives of a paper owned by Black Americans to one owned by white Americans.

The materials from the 1960 sit-ins in Richmond will help students support the Civil Rights Movement's evolution and importance. During the gallery walk, the dates of the article will be removed. Students will be asked to explain which publications and events occurred first and to support their conclusion. The primary resources will center around four events: the first day of sit-ins in Richmond, the initial arrests of the Black students, public response, and integration. This activity will require students to discuss how they ordered the events and why. The students will vote on the order before the teacher reveals the correct chronology to the class. Students will be able to justify the significance of the Civil Rights Movement from their knowledge of the sit-in movement through reading *March* or through the newspapers' reference to a national sit-in movement. Interaction with multiple documents will allow students to synthesize information and display their historical reasoning.

The class will next move from Richmond in the 1960s to the summer of 2020. The collection of articles and videos detailing the George Floyd protests in Richmond will be used to compare the memory of our class versus history. Before interacting with the primary documents, students will reflect and discuss the following questions: What was the George Floyd protest? How did it start? Did it end; how do you know? These questions allow students to display their historical thinking. It also allows for unprompted connections to the classical period of the Civil Rights Movement. Student groups will engage with source material during a gallery walk.

These materials will focus on the initial protests in Richmond, the city's response, and the aftermath. The material will be used for two separate activities. The first activity examines the idea of a start and an end to the protests. This section will highlight the preceding Black Lives Matter movement, the demands of protestors during the George Floyd protests, and activist reflections a year out from the protests. Students will then revisit the initial questions: What was the George Floyd protest? How did it start? Did it end; how do you know? After class discussion, the teacher will ask if the protests connect to the Civil Rights Movement and how. Focusing on the Civil Rights Movement and its consequences can help students make sense of their understanding of the George Floyd protests. Studying past social movements shapes our understandings of the present and highlights how movements evolve.

The second activity will focus on historical inquiry. Students will sequence events based on chronology. The sources will examine the initial use of tear gas on protestors, the mayor's apology for the "unintentional" use of tear gas, the continued use of tear gas, and the mayor's retrospective. The dates from the article will be removed. Student groups will order them before the teacher reveals the correct sequence. If the mayor's apology was taken at face value, the logical ordering would place uses of tear gas before the apology. This order conflicts with reality.

Wineburg's methods for historical inquiry helps make sense of the mayor's op-ed. In asking students what bibliographic information is provided, they would be able to identify the publisher, *The New York Times*. A precursory search on a cellphone would tell students this paper is based in New York City. It would tell them it is a big paper.

This discovery leads to questions on how or why this document was created. Students could speculate on the possibility of controlling a narrative on a national stage. They could conclude it is about monetary benefits or fame.

The most important reflection is on what this document tells us about the past. What does the "unintentional" use of tear gas mean? What happens if we only read the mayor's account? Students will have to make sense of the op-ed in relation to their prior knowledge and the presented sources. The op-ed does not acknowledge the complexities of the movement. The use of "unintentional" absolved the mayor of wrongdoing. His account buried the police's continued role in attacking protestors. The more complex and critical narratives including the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* article that outlines the protestors' role in taking down the Confederate statues do not benefit the mayor on a national stage. Studying the mayor's op-ed and other sources will be beneficial because it exposes how memory can replace history.

A Field Trip to the Future

Several museums document the Civil Rights Movement. It is likely that artifacts from the George Floyd protests will make their way to some of these museums or into museums of their own. Many artifacts related to the protests in Richmond including a bus set ablaze by protestors have been collected by museums for preservation.[56]

In this activity, students will select artifacts for a museum exhibit that reflect contemporary social movements. Students will imagine themselves as museum curators in the year 2071. Students will document how a contemporary social movement evolved. They may select the George Floyd protests or choose another event or social movement to represent an issue of interest to them.

One of the artifacts they select for their exhibit will predate a traditional start date of their social movement. Historians and curators often emphasize the idea that a movement originates in events that occurred earlier. As an example, they could select Black Lives Matters as a precursor to the George Floyd protests. The chronology of the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee starts with slavery in the United States.[57]

Students will demonstrate their understanding of historical significance by making a prediction on the consequences of the social movement of their focus, as well. Beyond their own reflective experiences, students will study the idea of future societies looking to the past. They will review the retrospectives in the curriculum unit including the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* articles published 50 years after the sit-ins. Additionally, students will read Franny Choi's "Field Trip to the Museum of Human History."[58] The poem focuses on a classroom trip to a museum. The setting is a future utopian society. Police do not exist. Objects like nightsticks seem terrifying and unconscionable to members of their egalitarian society. Reading and discussing the poem will help students realize new possibilities outside of our present mode of thinking. In reading this poem, the newspaper retrospectives, and applying their historic knowledge, students will demonstrate historical thinking by justifying artifacts to explain the present to the future.

Classroom Activities

Comparing March to Good Trouble: John Lewis

As students read *March*, the class will watch clips of *Good Trouble: John Lewis*. Students will compare transcripts of the film to the text of the graphic novel. Students will analyze the techniques of the different

media formats and how they support the ideas within the narrative.

Vocabulary Activities

Graphic novels provide many benefits to building student vocabulary. *March*'s use of imagery helps reinforce basic and subject-related vocabulary. The repetition of words throughout a story and within its context aids comprehension.

Beyond reading, students need to spend time interacting with vocabulary. Students can utilize a graphic organizer like a Frayer Model to record definitions, cite examples, describe characteristics, or create images to associate with a term. Creating their own examples, images, and sentences for terms like "integrate" and "segregate" encourages incorporation in students' vocabularies. Virtual programs like Gimkit create interactive vocabulary games for whole class engagement.

Language Dive

Language dives develop understanding of sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary through deconstructing and analyzing language in a single sentence. Students study the structure then practice and transfer the concepts within it. The sentence does not have to be overly complex to focus on specific concepts.

For example, students could analyze the following sentence from *March*: "Violence does beget violence, but the opposite is just as true."[59] The class could discuss the use of "but" verses "and" to build their understanding of conjunctions. Context clues could be applied to words like "beget" to glean meaning. After deconstructing the sentence, the students practice writing their own sentences using some of the academic vocabulary, sentence structure, or grammatical concepts found in the original sentence.

Resources

Student Reading List

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List of Material for Classroom Use

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Virginia uses the Virginia Standards of Learning in lieu of Common Core.

VA SOL ELA 7.6: The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of nonfiction texts. Students will demonstrate understanding by summarizing material in *March* or the other texts. They will demonstrate higher order thinking by making connections between the texts and themselves.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.10: By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

VA SOL ELA 7.7: The student will write in a variety of forms with an emphasis on exposition, narration, and persuasion. The majority of the writing in this unit will be narrative. Students writing around the central questions will include exposition as they will provide descriptions related to what the Civil Rights Movement was and its significance.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4a: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

VA SOL USII.9a: The student will apply social science skills to understand the key domestic and international issues during the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by examining the impact of the Civil Rights Movement. Students will be able to identify some of the major points and figures of the Civil Rights Movement according to the Virginia standards. These include *Brown v. Board*, the murder of Emmett Till, the

Montgomery Bus Boycott, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks.

Notes

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[8] Wineburg, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*, 123-126.

[9] Ibid, 107-108.

[10] Ibid, 84, 128.

[11] Hauck, Grace. “'A beacon to the world': One year after John Lewis' death, Navy christens ship in his honor” *USA Today*. 17 July 2021. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/07/17/john-lewis-navy-christens-ship-legacy-good-trouble-remembered/8002122002/. Accessed 18 July 2021.

[12] Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, 14-15.

[13] Ibid, 36, 43-44, 46-48.

[14] Ibid, 53.

[15] Lewis notes that the Nashville Student Movement studied *Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story: How 50,000 Negroes Found a New Way to End Racial Discrimination.* Lewis also mentions that one of the members of the Greensboro sit-in read this comic and the comic resurfaced in Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring, as well. Ibid, 75, 80, 82.

Lewis, *Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America*, 82-83.

[16] Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 20.

[17] Lewis, *March: Book One*, 88-105.

[18] Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 30-32.

[19] Ibid, 29.

[20] Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 107.

[21] Ibid, 102-106.

[22] Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, 22-23.

[23] Lewis notes the mayor stated that desegregation was "up to the store managers." A sympathetic local paper dropped this stipulation in its headline the following day. Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 110.

[24] Lewis, *March: Book One*, 120-121.

[25] Lewis, *Walking with the Wind*, 110-111.

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[27] Matthews, *The Richmond 34 and the Civil Rights Movement (Images of America)*, 7.

[28] The 2/21/1960 edition includes one letter of support for the sit-ins from a reader. *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 21 February 1960, 5, 21.

[29] Matthews, *The Richmond 34*, 66.

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[33] Matthews, *The Richmond 34.* 57, 61.

[34] Jenkins, "Students picketing the stores." *Richmond Afro American*. 27 February 1960, 1.

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[36] Matthews, *The Richmond 34*, 7, 71

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