

Lesson 1: The Fight For Justice

OBJECTIVES

- Students will:
- Engage in group discussion
 - Brainstorm examples of discrimination that led to the fight for Civil Rights
 - Analyze a primary source for deeper meaning and connections
 - Recommend solutions to problems related to housing discrimination

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

MATERIALS NEEDED

Langston Hughes’s poem “Restrictive Covenants” (provided as a reproducible below)

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

Pre-Activity: Have students read and discuss the lead story on the front of the poster (“Major Milestones in Fair Housing”) for more background information about the issues of the era. Discuss the questions provided.

Activity:

1. Start with a discussion with the class regarding issues of discrimination. Sample questions you can use to elicit discussion include:
 - What does the word “discrimination” mean?
 - What are examples of discrimination that you know influenced the Civil Rights Movement?
 - What groups do you know were discriminated against in our country and still may be today?
 - What are examples of rights that you feel people in America deserve? What should be the role of government in protecting these rights?
2. Next, explain to the students that during the Civil Rights Movement, a large area of concern was discriminatory housing practices. In some neighborhoods, white homeowners signed agreements known as “restrictive covenants” to keep African Americans and others out of their neighborhoods. (A restrictive covenant is a type of legal contract that prohibits a land or property owner from selling to individuals who are part of the prohibited groups listed in the covenant. Asian Americans, Jews, and other groups were also affected.)

In response, many individuals of all races worked together to promote fair housing.
3. Hand out the poem “Restrictive Covenants” by Langston Hughes. Take time to read the poem aloud as a class.
4. Answer the following questions together (or have students answer individually or in small teams, and then discuss their answers as a larger group):
 - What is the meaning of each stanza of the poem?
 - What do you think is meant by “folks fly”?
 - In what ways do you think having covenants and other restrictions made it hard for African Americans and others to “breathe free?” List the effects you think this may have had not only on people of the time, but also for future generations. (Consider economic, political, and social implications.)
 - What are specific examples of laws that you think could help with the discrimination occurring at the time of this poem? What role do you believe government and individuals can play in helping end housing discrimination?

Assessment:

Have students create posters that they feel may have been effective in a fair housing protest in 1966. Posters should not only outline the problems, but also the kinds of solutions they feel should be used to end discrimination.

EXTENSION MATERIALS/ACTIVITIES

Have students research segregation that still exists today. How does this segregation affect opportunities for education, employment, healthcare, recreation, and other opportunities? Further research can be done on discriminatory practices such as “Redlining” and “Restrictive (or Racial) Covenants.”



*Langston Hughes was born on February 1, 1902. His poetry, along with his focus on social and racial issues, had a wide influence on society. His first book of poetry, **The Weary Blues**, was published in 1926.*

Restrictive Covenants

by Langston Hughes (1949)

When I move
Into a neighborhood
Folks fly.

Even every foreigner
That can move, moves.

Why?

*The moon doesn't run.
Neither does the sun.*

In Chicago
They've got covenants
Restricting me—
Hemmed in
On the South Side,
Can't breathe free.

*But the wind blows there.
I reckon the wind
Must care.*