# WOMEN IN THE MOVEMENT

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION**
How did women leaders influence the civil rights movement?

**LESSON OVERVIEW**
In this lesson students will expand their historical understanding and appreciation of women in the Civil Rights Movement, especially the role of Coretta Scott King as a woman, mother, activist, and wife. Students also will learn about other women leaders in the movement through listening and analyzing first-person interviews from The Interview Archive.

Students will apply the historical reading skills of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration, and broaden their skills and use of close reading strategies by analyzing historical images, documentary film, and first-person interviews alongside the transcript. As a demonstration of learning and/or assessment, students will write a persuasive essay expanding on their understanding of women in the Civil Rights Movement through a writing prompt. Through this process students will continue to build upon the essential habits of a historian and establish a foundation for critical media literacy.

**LESSON OBJECTIVES**
Students will use skills in reading history and increase their understanding of history, particularly of women in the Civil Rights Movement, by:

- Analyzing primary source materials including photographs and documents
- Critically viewing documentary film and first-person interviews to inform their understanding of the lesson topic
- Synthesizing new learning through developing questions for further historical inquiry
- Demonstrating their understanding of the lesson topic through a final writing exercise

**MATERIALS**

- Equipment to project photographs
- Equipment to watch video
- Copies of handouts

**ACTIVITIES**



**HANDOUTS**

# ACTIVITIES

## 1. Do-Now: Opening Questions

*Teacher Note:* Have students discuss or respond in writing to these Opening Questions:

- What leadership roles did women hold in the Civil Rights Movement?
- Were the opportunities and obstacles they faced specific to women during this period?
- What do you know about Coretta Scott King?

## 2. A Close View: Analyzing Images

*Teacher Note:* A Close View mirrors a Close Read exercise in which students use visual analysis skills to "read" visual sources as if they were employing literary analysis skills.

Project or print and distribute the photographs under the "Images" title on the Women in the Movement Lesson page and have students discuss the questions in small groups. Use the discussion questions in this section as a starting point for students to closely analyze one image at a time.

1. Coretta Scott King shakes hands with New York City Mayor Robert Wagner as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stands between them, 1964. (Courtesy Library of Congress).
2. Dr. & Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr., head-and-shoulder portrait, facing front, 1965. (Courtesy Library of Congress)
3. Coretta Scott King holding a candle and leading a march at night to the White House as part of the Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam, 1969. (Courtesy Library of Congress)

**DISCUSS**

- What story does each individual photograph tell?
- What larger story do the photographs tell when viewed together?
- What questions would you ask the photographers about these photos?
- How can we know that these images are accurate?
- Do you trust what you see in the images? Why or why not?

## 3. Analyzing Film as Text

### Watching a Clip from the Film *King in the Wilderness*: Contextualization

*Teacher Note:* In this clip we learn about the important role Coretta Scott King assumed as a woman, wife, mother, and activist in the Civil Rights and anti-war movement.

Distribute Handout 1: Coretta Scott King Note Catcher and review Visual Analysis questions listed below. Have students read the questions before showing the clip, so they have a sense of what to watch for and how to take notes. You may elect to watch the clip more than once for students to collect detailed notes.

**WATCH**

- Clip 1: "Women in the Movement" (Run Time: 2:46)

**NOTE CATCHER QUESTIONS**

What did you see?

- What happens in this clip?
- What events do you see?

What did you learn?

- What did you learn about Coretta Scott King in this clip?
- What assumptions about Mrs. King do the reporters' questions to Dr. King and to her reveal? How are their assumptions different from who she is?

Why is it important?

- What are the ways in which women's roles are and are not incorporated into our understanding of history?
- What political, social, or cultural factors influenced the way women's roles have been understood, recognized, and documented over time?

Ask students to share notes in pairs or as a large group.

**HABIT OF A HISTORIAN**

After students view the photos and watch the film clip, have them write down their own questions about Coretta Scott King's role in the Civil Rights Movement, or the roles of other women.

## 4. Close View of Interview Threads

To make *King in the Wilderness*, 19 interviews were completed. For each lesson, interviews were edited together to create what we are calling "interview threads." Each thread weaves together different interviews to enrich student learning of the lesson topic. There are two interview threads in this lesson that teachers and students can choose from or use together. These interviews are part of the Interview Archive but were not used in *King in the Wilderness*.

*Teacher Note:*

- Print and distribute the transcript of the interview threads in Handout Two for *Coretta Scott King*, or Handout Three for *Other Leaders*.
- Have students follow the transcript and take notes as they watch the interviews.
- When finished, have students write new historical questions sparked by what they read or heard for later investigation.
- Have students use their notes and questions to select a historical detail, then conduct research to find a corroborating document. This will place the interview threads in a larger context.

Each interview in The Interview Archive on the website is accompanied by biographical information about each subject.

**WATCH INTERVIEW THREAD(S):**

1. Thread One: Coretta Scott King (Run time: 11:10)
   Featuring Andrew Young, Xernona Clayton, and Sam Massell

2. Thread Two: Other Leaders (Run time: 10:51)
   Featuring Diane Nash, Marian Wright Edelman, Clifford Alexander, and Dorothy Cotton

**DISCUSS**

- What do we learn from the first-person accounts featured in the interview threads that are different from other kinds of historical sources?
- What questions arise from using memories as a historical source?

## 5. Research: Corroboration

*Teacher Note:* After viewing and reading the interview threads, have students choose one or more historical details to practice their sourcing and corroborating skills -- in other words, research and identify a credible historical source that will verify the detail or details they selected from the interview.

**HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND:**

- Where did you find the document? Is it credible? How do you know?
- What is the date and who is the author? Why is this important?
- How does the source confirm, or refute, the detail or details selected from the interview?
- What other sources can you use to help you better understand memories and recollections as historical resources?

**HERE ARE SUGGESTED ARCHIVES TO USE TO FIND CORROBORATING EVIDENCE:**

1. The King Center. (www.thekingcenter.org/archive)
2. Stanford University: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. (kinginstitute.stanford.edu)
3. Library of Congress. (www.loc.gov)

## 6. Closing Discussion Questions

- How does viewing the historical sources contribute to your understanding of Coretta Scott King's influence, and the influence of other women, in the Civil Rights Movement?
- What can we extrapolate from this lesson about how women's roles in the Civil Rights Movement and other events in history were recognized and documented?

## 7. Homework or Extended Learning

In *King in the Wilderness*, Xernona Clayton, friend and colleague of Dr. King and Coretta Scott King, shared:

> "Coretta believed in his [Dr. King's] cause so much that she was willing to pay the price, and she tried hard to have him spend as much time with the children as he could 'cause he wasn't home that much."

As an assessment or extended learning assignment, have students write an essay expanding on the phrase "to pay the price" in the context of learning about the positions of leadership and the influence of women in the Civil Rights Movement. Students can refer to any of the historical source material included in the lesson or resources they discover through independent research.

## Common Core State Standards

**ANCHOR STANDARDS**

Reading Literature and/or Information: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- RL/RI.X.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- RL/RI.X.8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- RL/RI.X.9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

- SL.X.1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- SL.X.2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- SL.X.3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- W.X.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- W.X.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

HANDOUT 1

# CLOSE VIEW OF THE FILM

## CORETTA SCOTT KING NOTE CATCHER

*Instructions:*
As you are watching these film clip from *King in the Wilderness*, consider the following questions and record your answers.

**What did you see and hear?**

- What do we learn about Coretta Scott King in this clip?
- What happens in this clip? What events do you see?

**What does it mean?**

- What assumptions about Mrs. King do the reporters' questions to Dr. King and to her reveal?
- How are their assumptions different from who she is?

**Why is it important?**

- What are the ways in which women's roles are and are not incorporated into our understanding of history?
- What political, social, or cultural factors influenced the way women's roles have been understood, recognized, and documented over time?

**After watching this clip:** What questions do you have about Coretta Scott King's role in the Civil Rights Movement?

HANDOUT 2

# WOMEN IN THE MOVEMENT

## INTERVIEW THREAD ONE: *CORETTA SCOTT KING*

**ANDREW YOUNG**

"...I don't know whether I was aware of it, and I'm sure he wasn't, but they both went to the same high school, Marion, Alabama, Lincoln School, and had led pretty much parallel lives. Because Marion, when Coretta was growing up, and when Jean was growing up, was a pretty rough place.

I mean, Coretta's family had several businesses, so did Jean's family, and they were all destroyed, for no reason -- just because there was a resentment of successful, aggressive black people. They destroyed, they burned down the grocery store that Coretta's father had formed, and they sabotaged a saw mill and a logging company. Jean's family had little shops downtown. Her great grandfather had been a postmaster or something in Reconstruction, so they owned almost a whole block of property with a grocery store, and a shoe shop, and a candy store, and it was the black business community. And somehow, they were swindled out of it. And Jean's grandfather committed suicide, and her father became an alcoholic for a while, and her mother was fired from her teaching position because she resisted the advances of the superintendent.

And so during their early teen years, from about 12 to 16, Coretta was a little older, so for Coretta it might have been 14, but they had both lived very traumatic lives, and they both had experienced the raw cruelty of racism and segregation, and would have been very bitter I think, except that a young Quaker couple, Fran and Cecil Thomas, came down and took an interest in both of them and arranged for Coretta and her sister to go to Antioch College, and Jean and her two sisters went to Manchester College in Indiana.

Now, the significance of that is that I think in the '50s, '40s, those were the only two schools I know of that had a required course in nonviolence. Jean had taken a course in New Testament nonviolence. Coretta was a member of Women's Strike for Peace and I don't [know] whether we could have found two beautiful, intelligent, black women, who were committed to the values that we were struggling with as students.

Now, it wasn't as easy. I think both Martin and myself grew up in a fairly privileged circumstance. I mean, there was all the difference in the world between Atlanta and New Orleans, and Marion, Alabama, Selma, Alabama, Thomasville, Beachton, Georgia. We were protected from racism and segregation pretty much in the big cities. And it was -- well, it was there, but we were taught to deal with it, not to be victims, and we're taught that racism was a sickness and it was the white people who were sick, not you. And you don't get mad with sick people and you don't get upset with them, they just don't know any better. They've been taught that they are better than you, but you know that God created all of us in his image. God created of one blood all of the nations of the Earth, and for some reason they have a problem with that, but that's not our problem.

And so, I think, while we had sort of spiritual defenses that were part of our growth growing up, we never had them tested. Whereas our wives had been tested and been through the fire and somehow realized that you could come out without being burned. I always say that at that time at Talladega, I don't know whether I realized it then, but that's not just a coincidence, and I've learned to say that coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous, and that -- but if we had not married these two little country girls, who had the fire built up in their bones to fight racism and segregation, and not to fear death or walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil, they were some courageous women who never tried to hold us back. In fact, they were always pushing us forward, and I don't know if you would have heard of either of us if we had not married these two women."

**XERNONA CLAYTON**

"So, when I look at their lives together, she was such a good partner and I can tell you this, the world owes her the debt of our hearing his words today because she was relentless in seeing to it that a microphone and a tape recorder were present every time he spoke. And she would get agitated and she would say to me, "Where is that boy with that microphone?" She would insist on having it. And had she not been that type, we wouldn't have his words today. She kept every piece of paper. That's why we have his papers. Now, of course, at his office his secretary was well-organized, but the stuff he had at home, Coretta was responsible for that. And so, we would not have his words to hear and live by and capture were it not for Coretta, the best partner he could have ever chosen."

**SAM MASSELL**

"Coretta handled the tragedy in a very, you might say, mature demeanor, in that she felt she had a job to do of being the widow of such a giant. And she had enough vision to see and learn that she was going to have a great assignment for life ahead of her. She and I worked together. I was a point man to get the birthplace of Martin put on the historical register. And I had us in -- but she -- when I would meet with her at her home, which is where we'd normally get together to talk, she was very determined as to what she should do, could do, would do. She maintained her composure in a calm way. She certainly felt the loss that we all shared, but she was the -- she was his voice now. She was his face for the public and she maintained that stature in a very mature way, in my opinion.

Coretta Scott King was a leader in her own way. As the widow of Doctor King unexpectedly, all at one time to be the focus of this movement for the rest of the world, she rose to the occasion. She conducted herself in a very mature, sophisticated manner. She obviously felt the loss greater than anyone else could, but she knew that she had a responsibility. I think she had the vision that she would now be in charge of a legacy that would have to be protected and nurtured, and that all of a sudden, she was taking on a whole new lifestyle. And I believe this demeanor was all that could be expected of her at that time, that she had to be the voice and the face for Martin, and for the movement from then on."

HANDOUT 3

# WOMEN IN THE MOVEMENT

## INTERVIEW THREAD TWO: *OTHER LEADERS*

**DIANE NASH**

"The day four little girls were murdered in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, [Alabama] my husband at the time, James Bevel, and I were in Edenton, North Carolina. SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] had a voter registration project going on there. It was a Sunday and he came into the living room and told me about the murder of these little girls. We were both crying, really. And we decided that an adult man and woman could not allow four little girls to be murdered and do nothing about it. We felt confident that if we tried, we could find out who had done that crime, and make certain that they were killed. We felt that that was one option that we had. Option two was that we get the right to vote for blacks in Alabama, and in that way, they could better protect their children. So, we made a conscious decision, and we chose option two to get the right to vote, and made a promise to ourselves, to each other, and to God, that no matter how long it took us, we were going to work on getting the right to vote.

One thing that's not widely understood is that the murder of those little girls was horrible. And the only thing that would have been more horrible would have been if nothing positive came out of it. But the fact is that the right to vote for southern blacks is a direct result of their deaths. That afternoon, he and I drafted the original strategy for what became the Selma right to vote movement. He was, my husband was responsible for working on the voter registration project that was going on at the time in North Carolina. So, it became my job to present the draft of the strategy that we had written to Doctor King. My task was to ask him to call a meeting of SCLC and make a decision about what we were going to do in response to the murders. The draft we had written was just so we'd have a possibility of something that we could do. It was fine with us if the organization decided to do something totally different or decided to do nothing at all. But our point was let's meet and make a decision.

So, I took the draft to Atlanta. That's were Martin and -- that's where he was at the time. And the first person I saw was Reverend [Fred] Shuttlesworth. And actually, I presented it to him. And his response was, "We'll see what Martin thinks." And then I did find Martin and present it to him. His initial -- well, I should say that the things that we were advocating such as really shutting the state of Alabama down, physically blocking transportation, airports, etc. That what we were advocating was going to take a lot of courage. But there was a whole state of black people who were upset, sad, angry, and wanted to do something. In addition, there were people throughout the country, blacks and definitely non-blacks who were going to be supportive, I felt. But anyway, Doctor King's initial reaction was kind of, "Oh, Diane, get real." And it took us -- well, we were -- and by us, I mean Jim Bevel and me, we worked for the next four months to try to persuade Andy Young and Doctor King to go into Alabama on this voter registration.

Andy was the Executive Director of SCLC at the time. And we were not successful in persuading them. So, Bevel was the director of Direct Action. And he and I decided that he should take a few of his Direct Action staff and go into Alabama and start working. He could have been fired for insubordination, but we felt if he could not get fired for a couple of months, the organization in Alabama, that the Alabama people would ask Doctor King to come over, and that's what happened. In the meantime, I was expecting our second child, and I had a toddler. And we lived kind of on the outskirts of Atlanta. And I made the supreme sacrifice of the family car for him, and his staff to go to Alabama. And I started writing pamphlets, and gathering statistics of, you know, how many blacks were in which counties and, you know, that type of thing. And so, they worked for a couple of months and the blacks in Alabama asked Martin to come in and that was the beginning of the Selma right to vote movement.

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**MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN**

"I didn't feel I had to make a choice. I mean, there's always going to be a continuum of views and I had -- I mean I knew all my SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] colleagues very well -- didn't agree with them a lot. The role of women in the movement was always complicated and I wasn't somebody who was going to take a lot of guff off of any of them. And, and it was -- you know, and they were my friends and friends disagree, husbands and wives disagree, people in complicated situations disagree, and when some things are moving very slowly, it is the job of young people to be more impatient and to push it. And I remember what it was like to be a young person and to push it. And -- but my job was to get them out of jail, and try to keep them alive if I could, try to keep us all alive."

**CLIFFORD ALEXANDER**

"Is politician for a bad ending, a bad thing? Yes. That's said. I mean, if you're a politician like we're living through now where it is to denigrate people because of their race, religion, sexual orientation, yeah. That's pretty bad. And you can say some politicians do that. But it is their own particular lack of heart that causes them to do that, it isn't that they are politicians. As I see it, a politician in this world works to achieve a particular political end, and did [Lyndon] Johnson work for that? Yes. Did Martin work for that? Yes. But I think let's continue to remember that it goes well beyond those two people, well beyond it. Now, if you want to take again the black side, if you will, of this, the black leadership side, how did Roy Wilkins, who was somewhat cold, not a sweet backslapper he was, though, very highly regarded by Lyndon Johnson, so he had his ear, he had a chance to talk to him. Or you want to take Whitney Young, who had sort of a combination of both. He could slap you on the back but he also was a practical politician, and he and Margaret Young were vital entries into the whole world of moving things along. Or you want to take Dorothy Height, as few women as they had unfortunately in the movement, she until the day of her death in her late 90s, was sustaining an interest on behalf of black people and on behalf of women."

**DOROTHY COTTON**

TREY ELLIS (Interviewer):

"I was going to ask about what it was like to be -- about women in the movement. What was it like to be a woman in a movement run by men? And -- you know in terms of feminism, did you think that -- how was Martin -- what was Martin's attitude?"

DOROTHY COTTON:

"Yeah. I -- don't even deal with that junk. Now, when I say, "that junk," it was up in the Delta of Mississippi that Fannie Lou Hamer was up there fighting for the right of black folk to go into public places, use a public restroom, all those -- Fannie Lou Hamer. It was Rosa Parks who decided she was not going to move to the back of the bus -- I don't let people get away with saying anything like that because it's not true. When Rosa Parks would not move to the back of the bus to give a white guy her seat up front, it didn't have anything to do with black, white, it had to do with this woman who said, "I am not going to the back of that bus."

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