Lesson Three: Protesting Violence without Violence

Objective:
Using primary sources such as newspaper articles and music, students will learn about the death of Emmett Till and the effect it had on Americans. After examining later examples of non-violent protests, student then write their own protest songs.

Materials: Emmett Till Newspaper Articles (three) and Worksheet; Everything Changed on August 28, 1955; recording of the Bob Dylan song “The Death of Emmett Till” (available on the Internet); The Line in the Sand Has Been Drawn; Mississippi Civil Rights Map and Timeline; Journal Three: Ask Yourself.

Procedures:

Activity One: Emmett Till
1. Divide the class into groups and distribute one Emmett Till Newspaper Article to each. Also distribute the Emmett Till Newspaper Article Worksheet.
2. After students have read their assigned article and answered the questions, have a representative from each group share the content of the article with the class and their impressions of its content.
3. Engage the class with a comparison of the various articles.
5. Prepare students to listen to the song The Death of Emmett Till by Bob Dylan. Tell students that this is a protest song. Distribute lyrics to the class or project them on a classroom overhead or projector.
6. Students should read the lyrics silently while listening to the song.
7. Note: A recording of this song can be easily found by Googling “Bob Dylan The Death of Emmett Till.” You may also access the song on your cell phone or by obtaining a recording of the song from a local library.

Activity Two: Writing Protest Songs
1. Distribute The Line in the Sand Has Been Drawn.
2. Individually or in small groups, have students write protest songs involving one of these events. They can use the tune of a popular song they like and maybe even some of the basic lyrics, but it should be about these cases. Remind them the purpose is to bring awareness of an issue to people around the country and to persuade them to join in the fight.
3. Have students perform their songs for the class.
4. Give students the opportunity to label their Mississippi Civil Rights Map and Timeline with locations and events covered during the class activities and discussions.
5. Students will answer the questions in Journal Three: Ask Yourself individually before discussing them aloud.

Extension Activity: The Freedom Riders
2. Have students imagine they were Freedom Riders in 1961 who are writing letters home to their families concerning what they have seen using a standard friendly letter format.
3. View An Ordinary Hero, the true story of a white Southern girl and civil rights activist name Joan Traumpauer. The film relates her time as a Freedom Rider and resident of Parchman Penitentiary, to her sit-in at the Jackson Woolworth's counter, to her time as a student at the historically black Tougaloo Collage. Color/black and white, 90 minutes. Middle school to adult. This film can be borrowed free of charge from the Mississippi History on Loan Collection. Go to http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/learn/classroom-materials/mississippi-history-on-loan-film-collection/ or contact the Outreach Programs Coordinator at 601-576-6997.
**Emmett Till Newspaper Articles**

September 10, 1955. MDAH, Archives and Records Services. Used with the permission of The Jackson Advocate.

MISSISSIPPI HARD HIT BY THE SLAYING OF TILL

NATIONAL INDIGNATION SEEN AS
CONGRESS COMENDS SLAYING OF
14-YEAR-OLD NEGRO BOY IN
WOLF-WHISTLE INCIDENT
AT MONEY, MISSISSIPPI

The Atlanta Constitution, Atlanta, Ga., in a nationwide editorial, condemned the slaying as a "lynch-murder." Communication on the incident, the editorial in The Atlanta Constitution said: "The body of a 14-year-old Negro boy has been taken from a river near Greenwood, Miss., where it had been shot. The weighted body had then been thrown into the river.

Once again the South has been rubber-stamped with a lynch-murder. Jack Johnson was a Negro child. His effusion reportedly was that some days before his kidnapping and disappearance he had "wolf-whistled" when a lady passed by. If such were the case, juvenile courts or regular legal procedure were in effect to cover any offense.

"The brutal murder is great in the minds of those who picture the South as a region of violence. It assails the immigrant propagandist. It delivers us into the hands of the N.A.A.C.P. and the officials of Mississippi vigorously follow up this murder and bring the guilty to justice, all of us will be ashamed by it."

"In this critical period in the South's rush to adjust itself to the rest of the nation, we cannot continue to trample on the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored without paying the price in the years ahead."

As the news of the finding of the boy's body transmitted shock wave after shock wave to white and Negro people alike in the state, and spread across the nation, Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People released a bitter statement blaming the entire state of Mississippi as a result of the incident.

"The Wilkins statement said, "It would appear from this lynching that the state of Mississippi has decided to maintain white supremacy by murdering children. The killers felt free to lynch him because there is in the entire state no restraining influence of decency, not in the state capital, among the daily newspapers, the clergy nor any segment of the so-called better citizens."

Negro Citizens Heartened by Gov. Rossides of the state, living under conditions which have developed since the drive for integration described by some of the oldest and wiser of both races as being those that were during the Reconstruction era, faced with the threat of total disfranchisement, by bitter measures to reduce Negro voting in the state as planned by the State Democratic Executive Committee last week, and with the threats of economic sanctions and intimidation from the reported spread of the Ku Klux Klan, and the White Citizens Councils, pledge to retain segregation and prevent Negro voting at any cost, were said to have taken heart from the message of Gov. Whitfield to the N.A.A.C.P. following the bitter blast from Roy Wilkins.

In a telegram to the New York office of the N.A.A.C.P. Governor Whitfield said: "Parties charged with the murder are in jail. I have every reason to believe the court will do its duty in prosecution. Mississippi does not condone such conduct."

Following the reports that the group was coming from Chicago, rumors of all kinds spread across the state, and, as a result of the report, Coahoma County authorities set up a road block north of Clarksdale, Saturday at which time a score or more of Negro motorists in cars with Illinois licenses were arrested on charges of speeding and other traffic violations. None were arrested for carrying a concealed weapon.

In commenting on the arrest of Negro motorists from Illinois one of those stopped pointed out that there are an estimated 300,000 or more Negroes in Chicago alone from Mississippi, practically all of whom have relatives in the state, most of whom did not know what was going on.

On Monday some 60 members of the National Guard patrolled the grounds of the Leffors County Court House where the Grand Jury was preparing to study the case. Maj. Gen. R. L. Wilson, adjutant general of the state, was in Greenwood, and an Army National Guard helicopter and L-18 liaison plane was there for use in emergency situations.

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District Attorney Not Concerned By Outside Agitation And Pressure

9 23 - 1955

By SAM JOHNSON

SUMNER, Miss., Sept. 23 (AP)—A defense attorney told a country jury today there are several groups which would throw a corpse into a river in the hope it would be identified as Emmett Louis Till.

John Whitten made the statement in final arguments, in the trial of two white men accused of murdering Till, 14-year-old Chicago negro youth.

"There are people in the United States who want to destroy the way of life of Southern people," said Whitten.

He said the states did not prove the body could have been Till and the defense proved it could not. Defense witnesses testified the body had been in the river at least eight days, while Till was missing only three days before the body was found in the Tallahatchie River.

"There are people," said Whitten, "who will go as far as to kill any crime known to man, to widen the gap between the white and colored people of the United States."

"They would not be above putting a rotten, stinking body in a river in the hope it would be identified as Emmett Louis Till."

SUMNER, Miss., Sept. 23 (AP)—Defense attorney J. W. Killian told a country jury today your forefathers will turn over in their graves if the jury convicted two white men of murdering a 14-year-old Chicago negro boy.

But Dist. Atty. Gerald Chatham charged that the "killing of Emmett Till was a cowardly act and pleaded for justice against the defendants.

Rt. Bryant 24, and his half-brother, John W. Milam, 36, are charged with murdering Emmett Louis Till in a widely publicized white-whaling slaying.

The case is considered likely to reach a jury composed principally of Mississippi Delta farmers during their afternoon.

Council Judge Curtis Swango Jr. reviewed the trial for lunch halting arguments by the defense.

Hillman—one of five local attorneys defending Bryant and Milam—said there was no need for pressure.

Testimony by Bryant's wife about a negro man who molested and whipped five girls without incident is material, Killian said.

Defense attorney Sidney Carlson demanded: "Where is the motive?"

"He (Mose Wright) had knowledge Till had been somewhere. And if you'll look at theposit," said Carlson.

"Wright is the sharecropper uncle young Till was visiting at the time he was abducted. Down there referred to Bryant's country store in which Mrs. Bryant testified the incident occurred.

"Wright also asked how Wright could testify that Till had died. This is one of the many witnesses who have given your name. There is nothing reasonable about the state's theory."

He went on: "That's identification. That's trying to throw off the trial and put it on another man."

"We hope to prove this trial on the second day of the trial am called the Milam trial or the Reese trial or the Wright trial or the shooting trial."

Willie Reed, negro farmhand, testified he heard "beards and boons" of murder pie. McRee was charged with murder.

Reed said four white men and two negro men drove to the barn with white men's firetruck. Till sat in the back with two negroes, he said.

"We took the court and the two men left the barn and go to the store."

"Then for two hours after the two men left the barn, the trial state was in the store and never left the store and never left the store."

"And the state was in the store and never left the store and never left the store."

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"And the state was in the store and never left the store and never left the store."

The plantation is managed by Leslie Milam, the defendant's brother.
Defendant’s Wife Testifies

Till Asked Her for Date

Sumner, Miss., Sept. 22 (AP)—Mrs. Roy Bryant testified today that 14-year-old Emmett (Bobbo) Till, Chicago Negro, caught her around the waist and asked for her date. Mrs. Bryant’s husband and half-brother, John W. Milam, 31, are on trial for the slaying of Till whose battered body was taken from the Tallahatchie River Augus


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NAME: ____________________________________________________________________ DATE: ________________

Emmett Till Newspaper Article Worksheet

Use the newspaper article to answer the following questions.

Name of paper and place of publication: _________________________________________________________

Title and date of article: ______________________________________________________________________

What events does the article cover? _____________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

Does the article reveal a bias towards any group or individual? Give examples and explain. ______________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

How are newspapers valuable research tools? How are they unreliable? _________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

If a crime were committed today and your local newspaper reported on it, would there be more information
several months later? Will the newspaper do follow-up reports if some initial theories are proved wrong?
Explain. ___________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________________
**Everything Changed on August 28, 1955**

Use the lyrics below to follow the words of Bob Dylan's protest song about the death of Emmett Till.

**The Death of Emmett Till**
By Bob Dylan

‘Twas down in Mississippi not so long ago
When a young boy from Chicago town stepped through a Southern door
This boy’s dreadful tragedy I can still remember well
The color of his skin was black and his name was Emmett Till

Some men they dragged him to a barn and there they beat him up
They said they had a reason, but I can’t remember what
They tortured him and did some things too evil to repeat
There was screaming sounds inside the barn, there was laughing sounds out on the street

Then they rolled his body down a gulf amidst a bloody red rain
And they threw him in the waters wide to cease his screaming pain
The reason that they killed him there, and I’m sure it ain’t no lie
Was just for the fun of killin’ him and to watch him slowly die

And then to stop the United States of yelling for a trial
Two brothers they confessed that they had killed poor Emmett Till
But on the jury there were men who helped the brothers commit this awful crime
And so this trial was a mockery, but nobody seemed to mind

I saw the morning papers but I could not bear to see
The smiling brothers walkin’ down the courthouse stairs
For the jury found them innocent and the brothers they went free
While Emmett’s body floats the foam of a Jim Crow southern sea

If you can’t speak out against this kind of thing, a crime that’s so unjust
Your eyes are filled with dead men’s dirt, your mind is filled with dust
Your arms and legs they must be in shackles and chains, and your blood it must refuse to flow
For you let this human race fall down so God-awful low!

This song is just a reminder to remind your fellow man
That this kind of thing still lives today in that ghost-robed Ku Klux Klan
But if all of us folks that thinks alike, if we gave all we could give
We could make this great land of ours a greater place to live

The Trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant

Dr. T.R.M Howard quickly made his home a headquarters for prosecution investigation and began efforts to protect witnesses from corrupt authorities. With his own money, Howard brought Till’s mother to Mississippi from Chicago and escorted her around town in a “heavily armored caravan.” However, an all-white jury acquitted J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant and under protection of double jeopardy, both later admitted to the crime with smiles and no fear of consequence.

At the funeral, Till’s mother chose an open casket so reporters could photograph her son’s severely beaten body. Dr. Howard quickly began speaking about Till across the country, drawing attention to the plight of African Americans in the South. In fact, it was only four days after listening to Dr. Howard speak that Rosa Parks chose to keep her seat on a city bus. With the post-trial confession, the photographs of the funeral, and Howard’s speeches, people across the country began to demand civil rights for all.
The Line in the Sand Has Been Drawn

Read about the different non-violent protests staged in Mississippi during the early 1960s. Then choose one and write a protest song involving one of the events that contains at least one verse and a refrain. You may use a popular tune, but remember that the purpose of a protest song is to bring awareness of an issue to people around the country and to persuade them to join in the fight.

Biloxi Wade-Ins - Biloxi, 1960: Homeowners along Biloxi’s beaches had claimed the shoreline as private property, despite the fact that public funds had built them. Therefore, these beaches were almost entirely segregated with the exception of a small area near the veteran's hospital. During the spring of 1960, Dr. Gilbert Mason, a member of the NAACP and prominent African American doctor on Mississippi’s coast, organized a non-violent demonstration. One-hundred-twenty-five African Americans participated in the wade-ins with specific instructions not to bring anything that could be considered a weapon. Some brought footballs and umbrellas, typical beach-gear. But the scene turned violent as white citizens arrived with bats, cue sticks, and chains. The mob beat the beach-goers, in some cases, to near death. Mason reported that one attack became so brutal, a white lady hurried from her home with a gun to shoo away the men attacking the victim. When Mason hurried to help those injured, an officer told him he was under arrest. Mason’s response was he didn’t have time for arrest and he would come to the station that evening after he had treated the victims. The officers allowed him to do this.

An affidavit from Charles Ellis relating the events of and violence at the Biloxi wade-in on April 24, 1960. MDAH, Archives and Records Services.
**Tougaloo Nine - Jackson, 1961:** On March 27, nine students from Jackson's Tougaloo College went into Jackson's white library. They quietly sat down and read from books that weren't available in the city's colored library. Police soon came and arrested them, charging them with “breeching the peace” and throwing them in jail. The next 24-hours saw prayer vigils and marches organized on the nearby campus of Jackson State and within the capitol city. Police with clubs, tear gas, and dogs were used to disperse demonstrators.

![The Tougaloo Nine are escorted from the Jackson Public Library.](image1) ![An African American Freedom Rider attempts to use a women's restroom for whites.](image2)

**Freedom Riders - Jackson, 1961:** The US Supreme Court had previously ruled against segregated buses that crossed state lines. However, the southern states ignored this and the federal government did little to enforce the ruling. Soon, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) decided to fight back with non-violent demonstrations. Founded in Chicago nearly twenty years earlier, CORE welcomed anyone who believed that all people were created equal and were willing to work toward the ultimate goal of true equality throughout the world. In 1961, a group of mostly college students began to ride interstate buses in non-violent protest. The first interracial ride traveled from Washington DC to New Orleans, Louisiana, with occasional non-violent sit-ins at segregated lunch counters as well.

After facing violent attacks from mobs in Alabama, more riders arrived to replace wounded activists and continue into Mississippi. Behind the scenes, President John F. Kennedy worked with state governments and decided state police and National Guard would protect the riders, but in return, the federal government would not intervene on the actions of local police. In Jackson, the riders were arrested when they tried to use white-only facilities at the bus depot. When Jackson and Hinds county facilities could hold no more, Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett had them placed at the Mississippi State Penitentiary known as Parchman. Guards strip-searched the Riders, took away their beds, and placed them in the maximum-security unit also known as death row. Prisoners received only their underwear (if that) and no exercise time or mail. All of this happened because African Americans had used white facilities while whites used “colored” facilities.
Burgland High School Student Walk-Out - McComb, 1961: After 15-year-old civil rights activist Brenda Travis was released from jail for attempting to purchase a bus ticket at a “whites only” counter, she tried to return to school at Burgland High School. Finding herself expelled, over 100 students walked-out in her support on October 4, 1961, in what would become the first mass student-led civil rights activity in Mississippi.

Woolworth’s Sit-In - Jackson, 1963: Organized by Medgar Evers, a group of white and African American students from Tougaloo College walked into Woolworth’s Department Store, and sat down at the segregated lunch counter. They did nothing but sit, but the consequences were far from peaceful. As participant Ann Moody wrote in her 1968 memoir, “all hell broke loose.” A mob arose and did everything from dousing the participants with condiments to beating them. One student was knocked unconscious while Jackson police ignored the incident.

Evers received reports on the sit-in over the phone and despite the escalating violence decided not to call off the protest. The sit-in lasted for several hours before the store closed. Regarding the Woolworth’s sit-in, a friend said of Evers, “Medgar has more courage than us. He knew he would be blamed.”
Journal Three: Ask Yourself

1. After receiving death threats following the Emmett Till trial, Dr. T.R.M Howard moved his family to Chicago and continued giving speeches on civil rights. As you continue to study the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, you will learn of others who chose to stay and some who even lost their lives. Do you believe Howard showed fear or weakness by leaving or do you think he made a bigger difference by protecting himself and his family where he could continue the fight? Why?

2. Dr. Mason received the rare privilege of working in hospitals when many African American doctors had not. Once, when a man came to speak to the medical community in Biloxi and refused to speak to an integrated audience, four white doctors left with Mason, saying they would not participate either. Yet even with this amount of respect in the white community, he was not allowed to go to the beach. Based on your understanding of segregation in Mississippi, why was he not allowed?

3. Each Freedom Rider had to go through training where others would yell at them, spit on them, and hit them. If they could not remain non-violent and control themselves without retaliating, they couldn't travel South. What current issue is important to you? Would you be willing to protest for it non-violently? Explain.

4. In McComb, high school students chose to walk-out of school in support of a student activist. Would you be willing to sacrifice your education in the present if the result would be better education in the future? Why or why not?