

Grade
Level:
**Adaptable,
grades 6-8**

Fannie Lou Hamer, the Civil Rights Activist

Social Studies, US History, Black History, Women's History, American Government, Literacy

Learning Objectives:

- To deepen student knowledge of Fannie Lou Hamer by focusing on her contributions to the Civil Rights Movement
- To analyze the significant events, figures, groups, events and strategies of the mid-20th Century Movement for Black Freedom
- To examine the conflict between the Federal and State Governments during the Civil Rights Era
- To consider the lasting impact of the Civil Rights Movement in our contemporary context
- To strengthen reading comprehension skills by answering questions in response to a video, a sound recording, a speech transcript, and an article

Provided Materials:

- American Experience video segment, "[Fannie Lou Hamer's Powerful Testimony](#)" (3 min, 40 sec)
- [Complete audio recording of Fannie Lou Hamer's 1964 Democratic National Convention Speech](#) (8 minutes, 10 sec)
- [Transcript of 1964 Democratic National Convention Speech](#) and Reading Comprehension Questions
- National Archives, "[Analyze a Video](#)" Worksheet
- Kay Mills, "[Fannie Lou Hamer: Civil Rights Activist](#)"
- Reading Comprehension and Discussion Questions for "Fannie Lou Hamer: Civil Rights Activist"

Background Knowledge:

Depending upon your familiarity with Fannie Lou Hamer and the mid-20th Century Civil Rights Movement, you may wish to consult this [timeline](#) of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's activism and this brief [Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer](#) before leading this lesson.

Excellent book-length biographies have also been written about Hamer, including: Kay Mills' *This Little Light of Mine*, Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*, and

Maegan Parker Brooks, *A Voice that Could Stir an Army*. Further still, several contemporary articles have been written about the 1964 Democratic National Convention Credentials Committee Challenge and Hamer's pivotal role within the challenge. See, for example, DeNeen L. Brown, "[Civil Rights Crusader Defied Men--and Presidents--Who Tried to Silence Her](#)" (also available as a podcast episode).

Instruction Steps:

Anticipatory Set

Step One: Distribute the National Archives, "Analyze a Video" worksheet and pique student interest in the day's lesson by showing the American Experience video segment, "Fannie Lou Hamer's Powerful Testimony."

Teacher Input

Step Two: If you are extending upon the "Who is Fannie Lou Hamer?" lesson plan, you may wish to lead students in a Socratic Seminar regarding Hamer's political contributions to refresh their memories. You may also wish to group and list the facts they identified about her life during the previous session on the board before they arrive for today's lesson. Further, you could respond to common questions raised and/or work through new vocabulary identified in their responses.

Step Three: If you are teaching this lesson as a first introduction to Fannie Lou Hamer, you should summarize key aspects from the Biographical Sketch of Fannie Lou Hamer for the students.

Guided Practice

Step Four: Whether you are extending upon the previous "Who is Fannie Lou Hamer?" lesson or featuring this lesson as an introduction to Mrs. Hamer, you should now return to the Analyze a Video Worksheet and perhaps show the American Experience clip again for the students to complete the analysis.

Step Five: Note that the American Experience video only shows a clip of Hamer’s powerful speech. Distribute the entire speech transcript and play the complete audio-recording of the whole (8 minute, 10 second speech) for the class. In addition to the reading comprehension questions provided, ask your students to reflect on what they gained from hearing the complete speech as well as what stands out as most powerful about Hamer’s testimony.

Group Work

Step Six: Provide additional context for the speech by distributing Kay Mills’ article, “Fannie Lou Hamer: Civil Rights Activist.” After students read the article independently, break them into small groups to work through the reading comprehension questions below.

Step Seven: Project this picture:



August 8, 2015 Black Lives Matter protestors in Seattle, Washington interrupt Presidential Candidate, Bernie Sanders’ political rally. The protestor who speaks to the crowd about Black Lives Matter’s concerns dons a “Fight Like Fannie Lou” t-shirt.

Step Eight: Ask students what does it mean to: “Fight Like Fannie Lou”? Encourage them to summarize their responses into one or two sentences, which they will each share with the class.

Closure

Step Nine: Conclude the lesson by asking students what they learned from studying her activism. Push further to inquire about how those lessons could inform contemporary protest movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, the Yellow Vest Protestors in France, and the Fight for \$15.

Assessment of Student Learning: Student learning is assessed in the “Fannie Lou Hamer, the Civil Rights Activist” at three points. First, students will complete a video analysis worksheet. Next, they will collaboratively engage in reading comprehension and discussion questions based on their independent engagement with an article. Last, students will summarize Hamer’s enduring legacy in their own words and share this summary with their class.

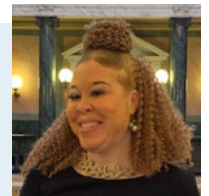
Additional Materials and Assessments: If time permits, you can expand this lesson plan by having students perform the Scholastic play about Fannie Lou Hamer entitled, [“A Long Road to Freedom.”](#)

Find Your Voice Highlights

Students will be inspired by Fannie Lou Hamer’s powerful testimony at the 1964 Democratic National Convention and they will learn about the larger strategy used by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to gain political representation for Black people. They will interpret Hamer’s lasting legacy in their own words and share what it means to “Fight Like Fannie Lou” with their class.

Lesson Plan Author: Mrs. Ervin-Rawls

Mrs. Alicia Ervin-Rawls is the Social Studies Content Specialist at T.L. Weston Middle School, in which she has been a seventeen-year educator of the Greenville Public School District. She was first the district’s Social Studies Instructional Coach from 2012-2017. Prior to that time, she was a high school social studies teacher for ten years. She is responsible for guiding the development and coordination of curriculum and instructional services in her content area. Additionally, she guides the development, implementation, and evaluation of pre-service and in-service training programs regarding test data analysis for professional and paraprofessional personnel in her assigned content area. She is one of the authors who helped with writing the Mississippi Social Studies Curriculum Framework. She is a graduate of Delta State University where, Mrs. Ervin-Rawls received both her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Social Science Education. She also commits her energy to economic and cultural development initiatives such as the Fannie Lou Hamer Project.





Fannie Lou Hamer, the Civil Rights Activist

Name: _____

Date: _____

“Testimony Before the Credentials Committee at the Democratic National Convention,” Atlantic City, New Jersey: August 22, 1964. Recording

Mr. Chairman, and to the Credentials Committee, my name is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, and I live at 626 East Lafayette Street, Ruleville, Mississippi, Sunflower County, the home of Senator James O. Eastland and Senator Stennis.

It was the thirty-first of August in 1962, that eighteen of us traveled twenty-six miles to the county courthouse in Indianola to try to register to become first-class citizens. We was met in Indianola by policemen, highway patrolmen, and they only allowed two of us in to take the literacy test at the time. After we had taken this test and started back to Ruleville, we was held up by the city police and the state highway patrolmen and carried back to Indianola where the bus driver was charged that day with driving a bus the wrong color.

After we paid the fine among us, we continued on to Ruleville, and Reverend Jeff Sunny carried me four miles in the rural area where I had worked as a timekeeper and sharecropper for eighteen years. I was met there by my children, who told me that the plantation owner was angry because I had gone down, tried to register. After they told me, my husband came, and said the plantation owner was raising Cain because I had tried to register. And before he quit talking the plantation owner came and said, “Fannie Lou, do you know—did Pap tell you what I said?”

And I said, “Yes, sir.”

He said, “Well I mean that.” Said, “If you don’t go down and withdraw your registration, you will have to leave.” Said, “Then if you go down and withdraw, then you still might have to go because we are not ready for that in Mississippi.”

And I addressed him and told him and said, “I didn’t try to register for you. I tried to register for myself.” I had to leave that same night.

On the tenth of September 1962, sixteen bullets was fired into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Tucker for me. That same night two girls was shot in Ruleville, Mississippi. Also, Mr. Joe McDonald’s house was shot in.

And June the ninth, 1963, I had attended a voter registration workshop—was returning back to Mississippi. Ten of us was traveling by the Continental Trailways bus. When we got to Winona, Mississippi, which is in Montgomery County, four of the people got off to use the washroom, and two of the people—to use the restaurant—two of the people wanted to use the washroom. The four people that had gone in to use the restaurant was ordered out. During this time I was on the bus. But when I looked through the window and saw they had rushed out, I got off of the bus to see what had happened. And one of the ladies said, “It was a state highway patrolman and a chief of police ordered us out.”

I got back on the bus and one of the persons had used the washroom got back on the bus, too. As soon as I was seated on the bus, I saw when they began to get the five people in a highway patrolman’s car. I stepped off of the bus to see what was happening and somebody screamed from the car that the five workers was in and said, “Get that one there.” And when I went to get in the car, when the man told me I was under arrest, he kicked me.

I was carried to the county jail and put in the booking room. They left some of the people in the booking room and began to place us in cells. I was placed in a cell with a young woman called Miss Euvester Simpson. After I was placed in the cell, I began to hear sounds of licks and screams. I could hear the sounds of licks and horrible screams. And I could hear somebody say, “Can you say, ‘yes, sir,’ nigger? Can you say ‘yes, sir?’” And they would say other horrible names.



Fannie Lou Hamer, the Civil Rights Activist

She would say, "Yes, I can say 'yes, sir.'"

"So, well, say it."

She said, "I don't know you well enough." They beat her, I don't know how long. And after a while she began to pray, and asked God to have mercy on those people.

And it wasn't too long before three white men came to my cell. One of these men was a state highway patrolman and he asked me where I was from. And I told him Ruleville and he said, "We are going to check this." And they left my cell and it wasn't too long before they came back. He said, "You's from Ruleville all right," and he used a curse word. And he said, "We are going to make you wish you was dead."

I was carried out of that cell into another cell where they had two Negro prisoners. The state highway patrolmen ordered the first Negro to take the blackjack. The first Negro prisoner ordered me, by orders from the state highway patrolman, for me to lay down on a bunk bed on my face.

And I laid on my face and the first Negro began to beat. And I was beat by the first Negro until he was

exhausted. I was holding my hands behind me at that time on my left side, because I suffered from polio when I was six years old. After the first Negro had beat until he was exhausted, the state highway patrolman ordered the second Negro to take the blackjack. The second Negro began to beat and I began to work my feet, and the state highway patrolman ordered the first Negro had beat me to sit on my feet—to keep me from working my feet. I began to scream and one white man got up and began to beat me in my head and tell me to hush. One white man—my dress had worked up high—he walked over and pulled my dress, I pulled my dress down and he pulled my dress back up.

I was in jail when Medgar Evers was murdered.

All of this is on account of we want to register, to become first-class citizens. And if the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where we have to sleep with our telephones off of the hooks because our lives be threatened daily, because we want to live as decent human beings, in America? Thank you.

Reading Comprehension Questions:

Now that you have watched, listened to, and read the speech, go back through and answer the following questions.

1. Fannie Lou Hamer states she is from the same county as Mississippi Senators Eastland and Stennis. That county is _____.
2. On _____, 19 _____ she traveled with _____ people to the courthouse in _____, Mississippi, to register to vote.
3. Only _____ people were allowed to take the literacy test.
4. They were stopped by the Highway Patrol and the bus driver was charged with _____.
5. The plantation owner she worked for said that if she wanted to continue working she'd have to _____.
6. On September 10, 1962, _____ homes were fired into and _____ girls were shot.
7. Hamer was again arrested in _____, Mississippi, when trying to enter a restaurant and washroom.
8. The police ordered two other Black men to _____ her.



**Fannie Lou Hamer,
the Civil Rights Activist**

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension and Discussion Questions to Accompany the Article

“Fannie Lou Hamer: Civil Rights Activist”

1. Which best describes Fannie Lou Hamer’s family’s responsibilities as sharecroppers?
 - a. Her family worked land they owned and shared the crops with neighboring families.
 - b. Her family worked land owned by another individual and kept the crops they were able to harvest.
 - c. Her family were permitted to work land owned by another individual and were obligated to share the crops.
 - d. Her family worked as sharecroppers wherever they were allowed to.

2. Fannie Lou Hamer’s decision to register to vote caused which of the following consequences?
 - a. She lost her home
 - b. She lost her job
 - c. Her life was threatened
 - d. All answers are correct

3. Civil disobedience is _____.
 - a. violently refusing to obey laws
 - b. staging violent protests
 - c. engaging in violent demonstrations
 - d. peacefully opposing unjust laws through protests, sit-ins or demonstrations

4. The poll taxes were unjust laws, rules and policies that prevented blacks from voting in the early to mid -1900’s?
 - a. True
 - b. False



Fannie Lou Hamer, the Civil Rights Activist

5. Hamer was severely injured while in police custody in a Montgomery County Jail in what year?
- a. 1963
 - b. 1942
 - c. 1975
 - d. 1952
6. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Congress for Racial Equality Committee (CORE)
- a. helped convince voters to register.
 - b. registered blacks in the South to vote
 - c. created mock elections to show support for black candidates.
 - d. all of the above

Fill in the Blank

7. What is the name of the segregation laws in the South? _____
8. What does Fannie do for the Black people as a civil rights worker? _____
9. When does the Voting Rights Act become a law? _____
10. In addition to civil rights work, what other causes did Hamer champion?
