

Grade
Level:
Adaptable,
grades 3-5

Getting to Know ALL About Her

Social Studies, English Language Arts, Art, US History, Black History, Women's History

This is a three-day unit that can be taught in discrete parts or as an extended lesson plan, depending on grade level and available instruction time.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will identify Fannie Lou Hamer as a significant historical figure, while learning more about the context in which she lived, especially those circumstances and conditions that gave rise to her activism.
- Students will deepen their understanding of Mrs. Hamer by reading and interpreting passages, answering comprehension questions, studying a map, and creating a timeline.
- Students will also be encouraged to find their voices by creating a collaborative art project and opinion pieces, through which they will support their points of view based on reasons and evidence.

Necessary Materials:

- [Image Gallery](#) compiled by Alicia Ervin-Rawls and Maegan Parker Brooks
- Carole Boston Weatherford, [Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer](#) (available for purchase [here](#))
- Biography.com, "Fannie Lou Hamer: Civil Rights Activist, Philanthropist (1917-1977)" Article, Discussion Questions, and Map Bonus! Activity (print enough copies for each student or for pairs of students to work directly with)
- Fannie Lou Hamer Fact Sheet and Timeline Template
- Maegan Parker Brooks, [Fannie Lou Hamer Timeline](#) example
- SNCC Digital Gateway, "[Fannie Lou Hamer](#)" entry
- Two large sheets of paper/poster board, chart paper, markers, scissors, ruler, index cards, and highlighters.

Instruction Steps:

Day One

Anticipatory Set

Step One: Display a photo of Mrs. Hamer from the [Image Gallery](#). Explain how important Mrs. Hamer

was in the Civil Rights Movement, especially her voter registration work on behalf of African Americans.

Step Two: Read and discuss *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer* by Carole Boston Weatherford to the class. You may wish to engage with aspects of the [lesson plan and discussion questions](#) provided by Candlewick Press.

Guided Practice

Step Three: Pair students and issue each student a copy of the Biography.com article, discussion questions, chart paper, highlighter, and a marker.

Step Four: Explain that the students will read the article on their own and then, with their assigned partner, they will answer the questions. Encourage them to highlight the evidence supporting their answers directly on the relevant section of the article.

Step Five: Once students have answered their questions and highlighted the evidence for their response, come around with a container holding the numbers 1-6. Have a student from each pair draw a number from a container with numbers 1-6 (depending on the size of your class, you might need multiple number sets). The number drawn will be the question that they will summarize and write on the chart paper, to be displayed around the room.

Closure

Step Six: Working in order of the reading questions 1-6, each pair will present their response to the class. Encourage the students who are listening to their peers to take notes about their responses directly on the discussion question hand out.

Step Seven: Refer to the Map Bonus! Activity and discuss the significance of where Fannie Lou Hamer came from. [The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area](#) website is a great place to learn about this historic area of the United States.

Day Two

Anticipatory Set

Step One: Review the previous day's discussion of Mrs. Hamer by selecting students to state one sentence about Mrs. Hamer.

Step Two: Review the meaning of the word "segregation" by revisiting the student charts and responses.

Direct Instruction

Step Three: Explain today's objectives, which are to enrich student knowledge of Fannie Lou Hamer as an important historical figure by understanding the context surrounding her activism and recognizing how her life unfolded in time.

Step Four: Review passages from Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer that feature dates.

Step Five: Model and explain what a timeline is. For example, "a timeline is a list of important events arranged in the order in which they happened. Timelines are often used in history textbooks and biographies — they explain what happened during a certain period of time or to a particular person, starting with the earliest event and moving forward through time." You may wish to read from or display [this](#) lengthier timeline and mention that students will be making a shorter version of this.

Guided Practice

Step Six: Divide students into four or five working groups. Issue each group a copy of the Fannie Lou Hamer Facts Assignment, the [Fannie Lou Hamer Image Gallery photographs](#), chart paper, markers, ruler, scissors, and index cards.

Step Seven: Each member of the group will independently review the Fannie Lou Hamer Facts sheet—encourage students to highlight facts they find to be particularly significant as they are reading.

Step Eight: As a group, the students will then determine which five facts they would like to place on their timeline.

Step Nine: Encourage students to pair relevant images from the gallery to the timeline of events they have created.

Step Ten: Using the materials provided (photographs, chart paper, markers, ruler, index cards, and scissors) the student groups will create a timeline using the information and materials given.

Closure

Step Eleven: Select groups to share their timelines to the class. Display their timelines in the classroom or the school hallway, if possible.

Step Twelve: Ask students to reflect on why they chose the particular events and photographs that they featured on their timelines. Was there disagreement among group members about what to include? How did you resolve those differences? You can mention here that when historians, biographers, and documentarians communicate the past to contemporary audiences they also have to make choices about what to include in their work.

Day Three

Overview

*Prior to this lesson, draw a large silhouette of Fannie Lou Hamer on each large sheet of paper/poster board. This should be a recognizable outline of her form that will be filled in with student-supplied adjectives and core aspects of her life story.

Step One: Identify the day's objective. Based on the passage we read about Mrs. Hamer, students will create an opinion writing piece describing Mrs. Hamer. What's more, the class will create two pieces of art to hang in the classroom or school hallway.

Step Two: Explain what adjectives are: "Adjectives are words or phrases that name an attribute, added to or grammatically related to a noun to modify or describe it."

Step Three: Have students list one word or phrase that would describe themselves and state a reason why they chose that adjective.

Step Four: Select students to share their responses.

Guided Practice

Step Five: Distribute copies of the [Fannie Lou Hamer Entry from SNCC Digital Gateway](#) with highlighters. Encourage students to read the sketch, highlighting passages that they find significant.

Step Six: Once students read the article, ask them to think of adjectives that best describe Mrs. Hamer.

Step Seven: Encourage each student to share at least one adjective and record these on a large piece of paper or poster board. Fill in the first large silhouette with the adjectives provided by the students. It might be fun to let students choose from a few colors or to let them each write in their own adjective.

Independent Practice

Step Eight: Instruct students to re-read the Fannie Lou Hamer passage, especially those passages highlighted from their previous engagement with the text.

Step Nine: Direct students to respond to the following writing prompt.

Fannie Lou Hamer played an important role in United States History. After reading the passage about Mrs. Hamer, in your opinion, how would you describe Mrs. Hamer? Refer to the passage for evidence to support your description of Mrs. Hamer.

Closure

Step Ten: Select students to share their responses with the class. As they share, encourage the other students to listen carefully and take notes about the common themes that recur across student responses.

Step Eleven: Conclude this lesson by encouraging students to identify the core aspects of Mrs. Hamer's life story. Then, fill in the second silhouette with these core aspects. If you are able to display the silhouettes in the school hallway, you can lead in to this assignment by noting that your class will be teaching the school about an under-represented, yet highly significant figure, from American history.

Find Your Voice Highlights

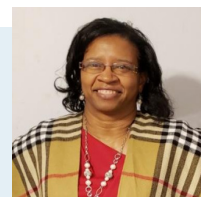
Students are encouraged to find their voice throughout this unit. In particular, students will benefit from reporting to the class about partner and group projects, identifying adjectives to describe themselves and to describe Fannie Lou Hamer, as well as being empowered to form their own opinions about the most significant aspects of Hamer's biography.

Assessment of Student Learning: Students will improve their reading comprehension by engaging with short articles about Fannie Lou Hamer and responding to reading questions. Teachers can also assess student comprehension through their group work participation and class discussions woven throughout this unit. In all, students will produce an opinion essay, two collaborative art projects, a timeline, a color-coded map, and worksheet responses to reading questions.

Lesson Plan Author: Brenda Kirkham

Lesson Plan Author: Brenda Kirkham is a fourth-grade teacher at Carver Elementary School in Indianola, Mississippi. She has been an educator for the past twenty-three years. She received her Bachelor's degree from Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi in 1996. In 2003, she received her Master's degree from Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena, Mississippi.

Being an educator from the Mississippi Delta, she felt that she should know more about people from Mississippi and the role that they played in the history of Mississippi, like Mrs. Hamer. She became interested in this project because Mrs. Hamer was from Mississippi and she wanted to know about her life and her struggles.





Getting to Know ALL About Her

Name: _____

Date: _____

Biography.com Article and Comprehension Questions

Fannie Lou Hamer (October 6, 1917–March 14, 1977) was a civil rights activist. She fought to expand voting rights for African Americans.

Fannie Lou Hamer was born in Montgomery County, Mississippi, during a time of segregation. African Americans in the South couldn't eat at the same restaurants as white people. They couldn't go to the same schools either.

Hamer's parents worked long hours on a cotton farm. She began picking cotton when she was only 6 years old. By age 12, Hamer had dropped out of school. She began working full-time in the fields.

But Hamer's life changed in 1962. That's when she attended a civil rights meeting. She was 44 years old. "They talked about how it was our rights as human beings to register and vote," she told the *New York Times*. "I never knew we could vote before. Nobody ever told us."

At the time, African Americans had the legal right to vote. But many Southern states made it extremely difficult for them to register to vote. For example, African Americans often had to pass literacy tests before they could register. The tests required them to read and understand complicated government documents. In addition, many African Americans who attempted to register faced violence.

Braving Threats

Despite these challenges, Hamer decided to brave the voter-registration process. In 1962, she took a bus to the Sunflower County Courthouse, in Mississippi. There, she was allowed to complete the paperwork. But she was not allowed to register. Why? She was told she had failed the literacy test.

Hamer's right to vote was also challenged by her boss. He gave her a choice. She could either withdraw her voter-registration application or lose her job.



© ASSOCIATED PRESS Fannie Lou Hamer speaks on behalf of the Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention, in Atlantic City, New Jersey.



© ASSOCIATED PRESS Fannie Lou Hamer (center) meets with Annie Devine and Victoria Gray outside the Capitol on January 4, 1965. The civil rights advocates traveled from Mississippi to Washington, D.C., to increase public understanding about barriers preventing African Americans from voting.

Hamer walked off the plantation. She dedicated herself to the civil rights movement.

Call to Action

Within a few months, Hamer began working as an organizer with a major civil rights group. She traveled around the South to educate black people about voting rights. Her life was threatened many times.



Getting to Know ALL About Her

In 1963, Hamer was arrested in Winona, Mississippi on false charges. In jail, she was badly beaten. The attack left her with kidney damage and a limp. But the beating didn't stop Hamer from continuing her fight for justice.

In 1964, Hamer organized Freedom Summer. It was a major effort in Mississippi to help African Americans register to vote.

That same year, she gained national attention when she spoke at the Democratic National Convention. It was held in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

During her speech, Hamer described the terrible effect of segregation. She also explained why the convention's Mississippi delegation should be integrated. "Is this America, the land of the free and the home of

the brave," she said, "where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hooks because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings—in America?"

Hamer's speech was televised around the country. It became a key moment of the civil rights movement. Four years later, Hamer achieved her goal. She joined an integrated delegation from Mississippi at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

For the rest of her life, Hamer would continue to champion black voting rights. Andrew Young Jr. spoke at her funeral. He was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. According to the New York Times, Young said that the civil rights movement was indebted to the "sweat and blood" of activists like Hamer.

1. Who was Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer?

2. Where and when was Mrs. Hamer born?

3. Describe her early childhood.

4. What happened to Mrs. Hamer in 1963, in Winona, Mississippi?

5. Why did Mrs. Hamer become an activist?



Getting to Know ALL About Her

6. Read paragraph one. Determine the meaning of the word “segregation” using context clues. Then, write a sentence using the word segregation.

Paragraph One:

Fannie Lou Hamer was born in Montgomery County, Mississippi, during a time of segregation. African Americans in the South couldn't eat at the same restaurants as white people. They couldn't go to the same schools either.

Segregation Sentence

7. Map Bonus! Mississippi is a state in the Southeastern United States. It is bordered by the states: Tennessee, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama. There are 82 counties in the state of Mississippi. Sunflower County is located in the Northwest corner of the state in what is known as the Mississippi Delta. On the map below, color-code the county where Mrs. Hamer was born.





Biography.com Article and Comprehension Questions

Directions:

Read the facts about Fannie Lou Hamer to yourself, highlighting facts that seem particularly important to you. Next, work with your group members to create a timeline using five interesting facts. You can use the Timeline Template below or create your own using the materials provided.

Fannie Lou Hamer Facts from Biography.com

Early Years

- Hamer started working in the fields when she was only six years old.
- Around the age of 12, Fannie Lou dropped out of school in order to work full-time and help her family.
- She continued to be a sharecropper after her 1944 marriage to Perry "Pap" Hamer.
- The couple worked on a cotton plantation near Ruleville, Mississippi.
- They were unable to have children because during a surgery to remove a tumor, the surgeon gave her a hysterectomy without her consent.

Civil Rights Activist

- In the summer of 1962, Fannie Lou made a life-changing decision to attend a protest meeting.
- She met civil rights activists who encouraged African-Americans to register to vote.
- She was one of a small group of African-Americans in her area who decided to register themselves.
- On August 31, 1962, she traveled with 17 others to the county courthouse in Indianola to accomplish this goal.
- They encountered opposition from local and state law enforcement along the way.
- Such bravery came at a high price for her. For registering to vote, she was fired from her job and driven off the plantation she'd called home for nearly two decades.
- But these actions only solidified Fannie Lou's resolve to help other African-Americans exercise their right to vote.
- She dedicated her life to the fight for civil rights, working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.
- This organization comprised mostly of African-American students who engaged in acts of civil disobedience to fight racial segregation and injustice in the South.

- These acts were often met with violence by angry white people.
- During the course of her activist career, Fannie Lou was threatened, arrested, beaten and shot at.
- She was severely injured in a Winona, Mississippi, jail in 1963. She and two other activists were taken into custody by police after attending a training workshop.
- Fannie Lou was beaten so badly that she suffered permanent kidney damage.
- In 1964, she helped found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which was established in opposition to her state's all-white delegation to that year's Democratic convention.
- She brought the civil rights struggle in Mississippi to the attention of the entire nation during a televised session at the convention.
- The following year, she ran for Congress in Mississippi, but was unsuccessful in her bid.
- Along with her political activism, Fannie Lou worked to help the poor and families in need in her Mississippi community.
- She also set up organizations to increase business opportunities for minorities and to provide childcare and other family services.
- She helped establish the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971.

Death and Legacy

- In 1976, Fannie Lou was diagnosed with breast cancer.
- She continued to fight for civil rights, despite her illness and died on March 14, 1977, in a hospital in Mound Bayou, Mississippi.
- Hundreds crowded into a Ruleville church to pay their respects to this tireless champion for racial equality.
- On her tombstone is written one of her most famous quotes: "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."



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Date: _____

Timeline Template







