

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was African-American and was born in the USA on January 15th 1929. As a child he enjoyed playing sports, playing the piano and going to school. Sadly, life was often difficult. Some people treated him differently based on the colour of his skin.

At the time, there were separate areas for African-Americans and white people on public transport, parks, restaurants and even in public toilets. Furthermore, up until the 1960s, African-Americans in some states of the US could not vote in elections.



African-American children were not permitted to go to school with white children. They had to go to separate schools that didn't have many resources to help with their learning.



Martin Luther King Jr. was determined to make sure that all Americans had the same rights regardless of their race so he became a civil rights activist. This means that he campaigned for improved rights for people.



The 1955 Bus Boycott

In 1955, Rosa Parks, an African-American woman, was arrested after refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. Martin Luther King Jr. called on African-Americans to protest by not travelling on buses in that area. This protest lasted for 385 days and ended with a United States Court ruling that ended separate areas for African-American and white people on all Montgomery public buses.

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Martin Luther King Jr. went on to organise other non-violent demonstrations against the unfair treatment of African-Americans. In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. led a huge march in Washington DC, the US capital. Here, in front of a crowd of 250,000 people, King made his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. Here are some short extracts:



"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

"I have a dream that one day... little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers."

Did You Know?

On October 14th 1964, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for combating racial inequality through nonviolence.

As a result of Martin Luther King Jr.'s actions and words, and others like him, the US Government brought in laws to ensure equal rights for all US citizens and to give everybody the chance to vote.

Martin Luther King Jr. was only 39 years old when he died. The funeral was attended by around 300,000 people. Every January, there is an American national holiday to celebrate his birthday.

Questions

1. How do you think Martin Luther King Jr. felt about the way African-Americans were being treated?

2. Give two examples of places where African-American and white people could not mix.

3. What is a civil rights activist?

4. Where did King make his famous 1963 speech? Tick one.

New York City

Chicago

Washington DC

5. Match up the sentences.

Rosa Parks

called on African-Americans to not travel on buses in that area.

Martin Luther King Jr.

lasted for 385 days.

The protest

a United States Court ruled that there would be no separate areas on Montgomery public buses.

In the end,

was arrested after refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white man.

6. Complete the sentence by filling in the missing words.

King went on to organise other _____ against the unfair treatment of African-Americans.

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Questions**

7. Why was Martin Luther King Jr. awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964?

8. As a result of King's actions and words, and others like him, what did the US Government do?

9. How old was King when he died? Tick one.

29

39

49

10. Why do you think Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral was so well attended?
