

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Martin Luther King and Civil Rights**

Next Monday, January 17, is Martin Luther King Day, sometimes called Civil Rights Day. Civil rights are the rights and privileges that allow each person to participate freely and fully in the society of which he or she is a part. This includes the right to fair and equal treatment under the law.

### Civil Rights:

Civil rights are rights of citizenship. They depend upon, and are protected by, the government of the country in which one lives.

In the United States, the civil rights of each individual citizen are guaranteed by the *Constitution* (rules telling how our government works). This means that under the law, no one should be discriminated against (*treated differently*) just because of his/her gender, skin color, religion, nationality, or disability.

### Human Rights:

In addition to civil rights, all people—no matter where they live—are entitled to certain rights, called human rights. These rights include the right to life, freedom from torture, freedom from slavery, freedom of thought and speech, freedom of movement, the right to a fair trial, and the right to be treated with dignity as a human being.

### Civil Rights Movements:

Unfortunately, governments—including our own—have not always recognized the rights to which all citizens are entitled. At different times, one group of citizens, or another, has been treated unfairly.

Throughout history, there have been civil rights movements where people have fought for the rights of those who were being discriminated against.

For example, the women's suffrage movement fought for the right of women to vote.

### Civil Rights Leaders:

During each civil rights movement, there have been men and women who have led the fight for their own rights as well as those of others. In many cases, these leaders put their lives in danger by standing up for what they believed to be right.

Martin Luther King (MLK) was one of these leaders. He led the movement to gain social and political equality for African-Americans in the United States.

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At the time Martin Luther King lived, much of America did not allow the same rights to all its citizens - for example, a black person might not be allowed to go to the same places or do the same things as a white person. Dr. King devoted his life to finding peaceful ways to struggle against that injustice. He is particularly famous for a speech he gave - one of the most famous speeches of all time - in which he outlined his vision for a fairer, more just society for everyone. Today, we call it the '*I Have a Dream*' speech.

To be continued. . .

1. What are civil rights?
2. Civil rights are rights of citizenship—this means that they depend on the country in which you live. In the United States, our *Constitution* guarantees our right not to be *discriminated against* because of race, religion, gender, nationality, or disability. What is a *Constitution*?

What does it mean to be *discriminated against*?

3. What is the difference between *civil rights* and *human rights*?
4. Martin Luther King led the struggle to gain social and political equality for African-Americans in the United States. What rights do *you* think all Americans should have so that they can participate fully and freely in our society?