

EDSITEment!

THE BEST OF THE HUMANITIES ON THE WEB

vMLK 9-12 History Lesson Plan

Subject/Topics: History & Social Studies; A More Perfect Union; American Heroes

Curriculum: History

Grade level: 9-12

Lesson Plan Authors: Dr. Victoria Gallagher, Dr. Elizabeth Nelson, Cynthia Rosenfeld, and Malaka Friedman

Brief Overview: The Virtual Martin Luther King Project offers a unique and interactive way to engage students with the Civil Rights era of U.S. history. Through the use of advanced sound technology, the vMLK Project offers students a chance to hear a recreation of a pivotal speech that was never recorded and gives students a sense of what attending that speech might have felt like. Here, you will find links to audio, video, and transcripts related to the project, as well as visual aids to help you set up the experience. In this lesson plan, we offer two activities with varying levels of digital/technological engagement.

Guiding Questions:

How does Dr. King's "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]" speech and the vMLK recreation help us understand the history of Civil Rights in the United States?

How does Dr. King's "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]" speech and the vMLK recreation help us contemplate contemporary issues?

Learning Objectives:

Explain the key events that led Dr. King to deliver "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]" in Durham, North Carolina.

Describe your sense of what it might have felt like to attend Dr. King's speech at White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina in 1960.

Summarize the significance of the idea of "a creative protest."

Relate Dr. King's message in "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]" to contemporary issues.

Lesson Plan Details

Background : In this historical moment scholars and activists are revisiting the less remembered works of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in order to better understand the nature of nonviolent resistance. One such speech is Dr. King's "A Creative Protest", better known as the "Fill Up The Jails" speech, delivered on February 16, 1960 in Durham, North Carolina. The content of "A Creative Protest" represents some key aspects of his thinking, organizing, community engagement, and vision for the Civil Rights Movement's work to expand democracy *for all* through direct, nonviolent action. In addition, the timing and location of the speech demonstrates how the Civil Rights Movement was not a series of spontaneous events, but rather a coordinated set of actions that emerged from Black traditions of resistance and community responsibility. The Virtual Martin Luther King (vMLK) project combines historical information about the speech with a recreation of the speech in order to make the history and ideas more accessible to a contemporary audience. Because this speech specifically addresses the organizing and activism of young people, students can better understand how the Civil Rights Movement was made up of ordinary people taking courageous action in the communities in which they lived.

In order to understand this speech and its role in the Civil Rights Movement, students need to understand the background events that led Dr. King to be in Durham that February evening. As with many significant events in history, these events are as important as the speech itself. Learning this additional history helps students understand how this particular speech came to be delivered by this particular person on this particular day in this particular church and city. On June 23, 1957, nearly three years before the now famous sit-in at the Woolworths' store in Greensboro, North Carolina, Reverend Douglas Moore, the pastor of Asbury Temple United Methodist Church in Durham, organized a protest at the Royal Ice Cream Company. Rev. Moore had been a classmate of Dr. King's in Boston and had tried to convince Dr. King to join Moore and another classmate, George Thomas, in non-violent direct action while they were in Boston. King felt strongly, at that time, that a conversion approach based on traditional oratorical agitation -- speeches, rallies, and petitions for redress -- was the best path to follow to change people's hearts and minds about racial segregation.

In 1957 Rev. Moore and other members of a group that would become known as the "Royal Seven" organized the Royal Ice Cream Parlor Sit-in. In a short documentary film by the Southern Foodways Alliance, "The Royal Ice Cream Sit-in," students hear the recollections and perspectives of Rev. Moore, member of the Royal Seven Ms. Virginia Williams, and other leaders from Durham, North Carolina. The Royal Seven were strategic in their selection of the ice cream parlor. Ms. Williams indicated this as follows: "We could have picked from any establishment...They were all segregated. The reason we chose this one was it was located in the heart of the black community" (Rickard, 2007, see also West, 2007, Khanna, 2007). The parlor was also well regarded by the residents of Durham and often referred to as having the

best ice cream in town. Moore had previously challenged racial discrimination in Durham by petitioning the Durham City Council to end segregation at a public library and a city-owned theater. After those petitions failed, he moved toward non-violent direct action, attempting to enter a whites-only swimming pool in Durham (Rossi, 2008). These previous failures helped convince him of the need for coordinated non-violent direct action focused on strategic targets -- targets which would serve to help make the problems of segregation visible to blacks as well as whites. While the black community did not come out in strong support of the Royal Seven in 1957, Reverend Moore's continued efforts to challenge segregation in the community provided a state of readiness that led him to confidently invite Dr. King to Durham for what would be a pivotal moment in the history of the civil rights movement.

Students are likely to be aware of the historic Woolworth's lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina. What they may not know is that the action was led by students not much older than themselves. Mr. Ezell Blair Jr., Mr. David Richmond, Mr. Franklin McCain and Mr. Joseph McNeill, all students at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, were inspired to take action to desegregate their community through non-violent direct action. This action, like other Civil Rights actions, was planned in advance, and grew with the support of participants who joined in. The original young men who began the sit-ins became known as the Greensboro Four. They began their sit-in on February 1, 1960. At that time, Rev. Moore, and his colleague Floyd McKissick, drove to Greensboro to hold training sessions and to develop strategies to help the sit-ins spread. As part of an effort to support this action, Moore reached out to Dr. King. By February 16, with the sit-ins dramatically raising visibility and showing potential to have national impact, King accepted Moore's invitation to speak in Durham where, Moore promised, "we're ready" to hear the message that citizens must be ready to fill up the jails of the South if that was what was needed to attain civil rights and human dignity for all.

This was the context in which Dr. King delivered the "A Creative Protest" speech. The speech was influential because it marked the first time Dr. King--promising the full support of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference--openly encouraged activists to disrupt and break the law through non-violent confrontation even if it meant 'filling up the jails,' and the speech served to catalyze the movement. Dr. King referred to this speech, particularly the "fill up the jails" line several times, stating in an interview in 1963 that the sit-ins and nonviolent direct action were finally helping the movement to achieve the "fill up the jails" goal, which was putting pressure on communities across the south to end practices of segregation in public spaces and businesses.

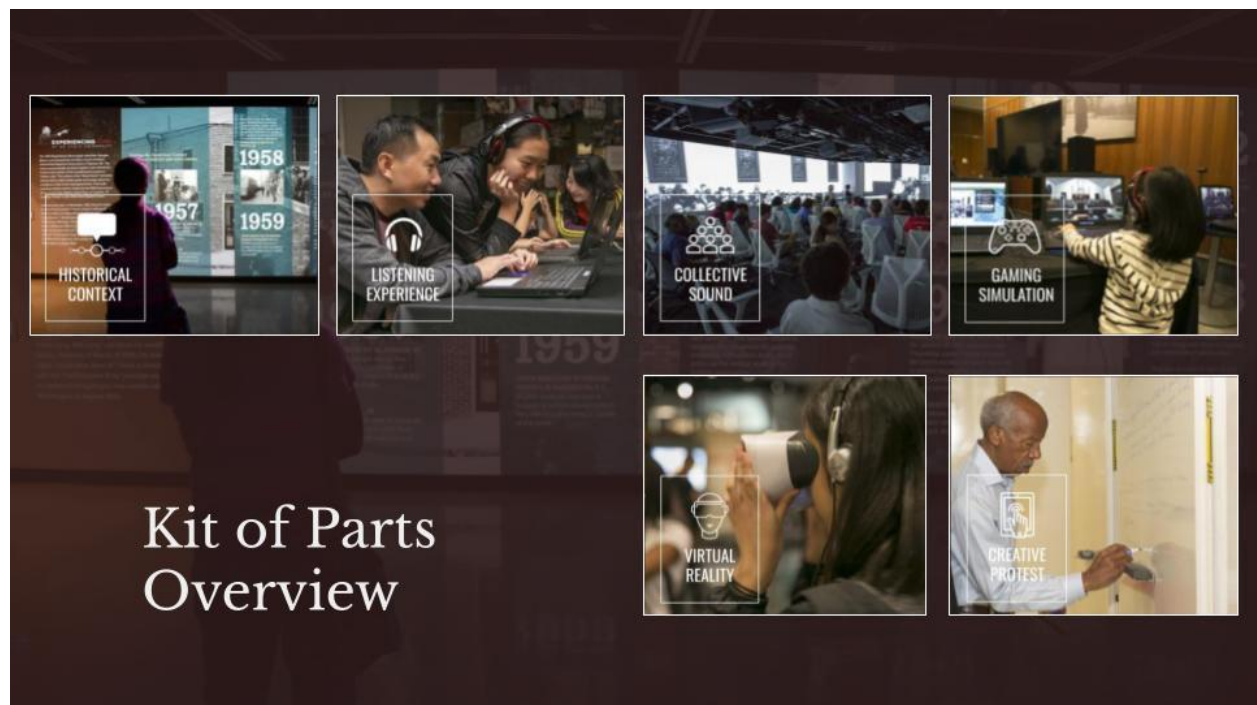
Despite the historical and rhetorical significance of this speech, no audio recordings have been found and the original location of the speech, White Rock Baptist Church, was torn down just 7 years later in 1967 to make way for the Durham Freeway. The vMLK project captured the spirit of the speech through the use of re-enactment of the speech in the new sanctuary of the White Rock Baptist Church. Attendees of the recreation event engaged in spontaneous call and response, meaning that the audience reactions students hear on the speech is unscripted. The vMLK project offers students and teachers alike the opportunity to get a sense of what it would have been like to hear Dr. King that night in Durham.

Content Standards:

- NCSS.D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
- NCSS.D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.
- NCSS.D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.
- NCSS.D2.His.15.9-12. Distinguish between long-term causes and triggering events in developing a historical argument.

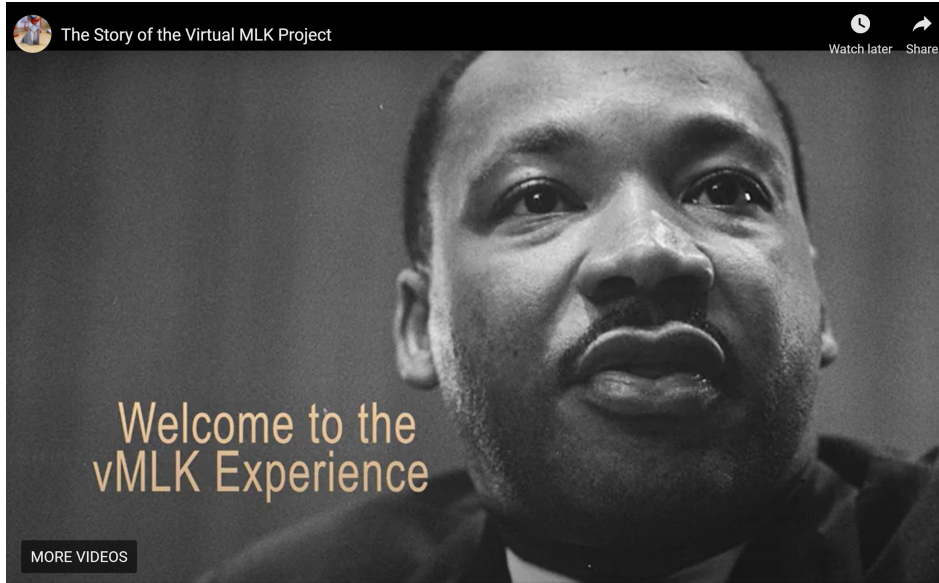
Preparation

In preparation for this assignment, students will need to have a shared, in-class experience of the vMLK website.



The website has six sections, seen above in the “Kit of Parts Overview.” Four of these sections are essential for a complete lesson. These include

- [The vMLK Documentary](#) (ten minutes)



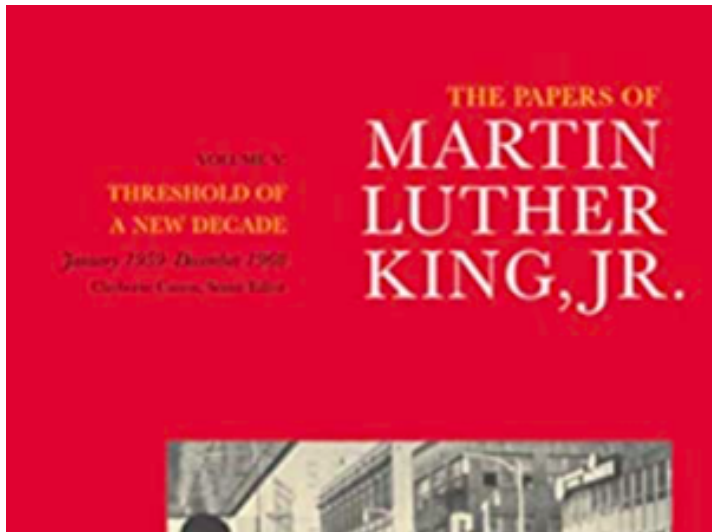
- [The Royal Ice Cream Sit-in Documentary](#) (eight minutes)

Royal Ice Cream Sit-In Documentary

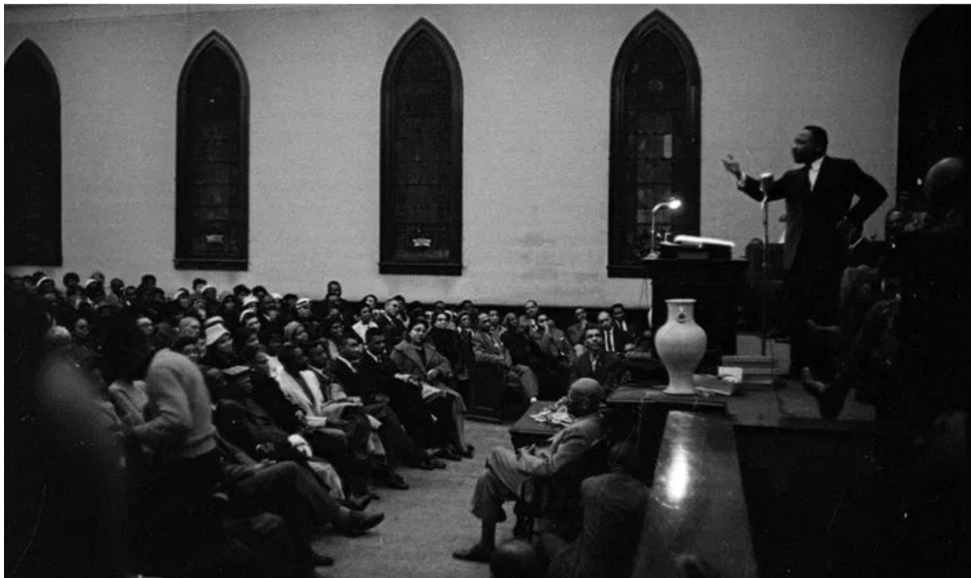
The [Southern Foodways Alliance](#) produced a film about the Royal Ice Cream Sit-in in Durham, North Carolina.



- [Transcript of Dr. King's Speech](#)



- [vMLK Multimedia Archive](#)



The lesson can take place over one or two days. The recommendation is that first the class watches the “The Story of the vMLK Project”, followed by the Royal Ice Cream Sit-In documentary, and then completes the lesson by listening to the vMLK listening experience using the recordings made in different parts of the sanctuary. Students should have access to the electronic copy of the full written speech or be provided a printed copy for their use. It may be helpful to have students listen to the speech more than once in order to fully participate in the

activities, and students should be encouraged to listen to the speech from different audience perspectives (e.g., front row, balcony).

Lesson Activity 1: Collective Reflection

This activity offers a version of the Reflection Room that the vMLK experience utilizes when the experience is held in-person. The prompts and discussion that take place in the Reflection Room have been found to contribute to students' sense of participatory readiness (Gallagher et al., 2020), which is to say the activities help students feel and process a sense of civic agency. "By inviting visitors into an embodied experience of public address, the vMLK project structures a comparative rhetorical stance from which students reflect on the symbolic aspects and impact of words, text, and discourse as well as the embodied experience and consequence of sound, sight, and movement, all of which they experience as interwoven into a unified whole" (Gallagher et al., 2020, p. 296). Based on student feedback and survey results from Fall 2020, these effects are also manifested through the online-only experience of the project. Below, the general premise of the Collective Reflection is described and then multiple options for facilitating this activity are explored.

Basic Premise. At the end of the entire listening experience, students are encouraged to write reflections on their experience. There are two different iterations of the reflection prompts. The first iteration had the three prompts as: "A creative protest is...", "An idea whose time has come...", and "The origin of my dream..." The second iteration maintained the first two of those prompts but substituted "General reflections" for the last prompt. Students do not sign their responses; rather, they are contributing to a communal reflection and sharing the variety of experiences, thoughts, feelings, and motivations the project inspires. After giving students an opportunity to quietly think and write their responses, students are engaged in an instructor-led conversation about the experience and processing the responses to the prompts. What themes emerge within a given prompt? What stands out among the responses? Another approach to discussion would be to have students process their responses in small groups of three to four and then ask a spokesperson from each group to report their discussion.

Prompts could be added or modified to accommodate pedagogical goals. The three standard prompts are:

- A creative protest is...
- An idea whose time has come...
- General Reflections

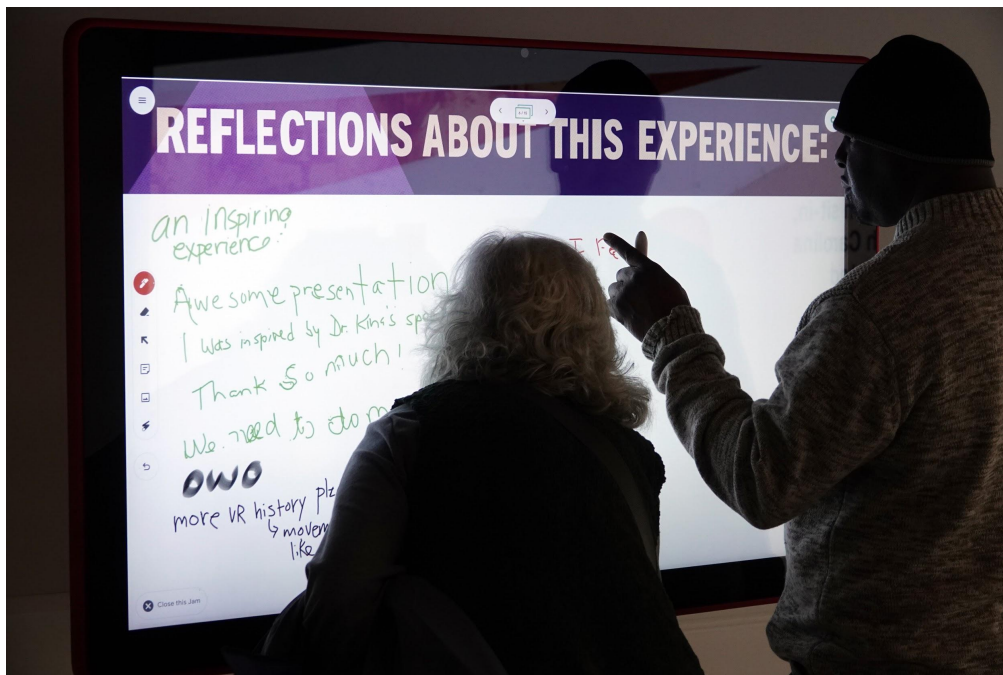
Implementation

There are a variety of higher and lower technological options for implementing the discussion prompts.

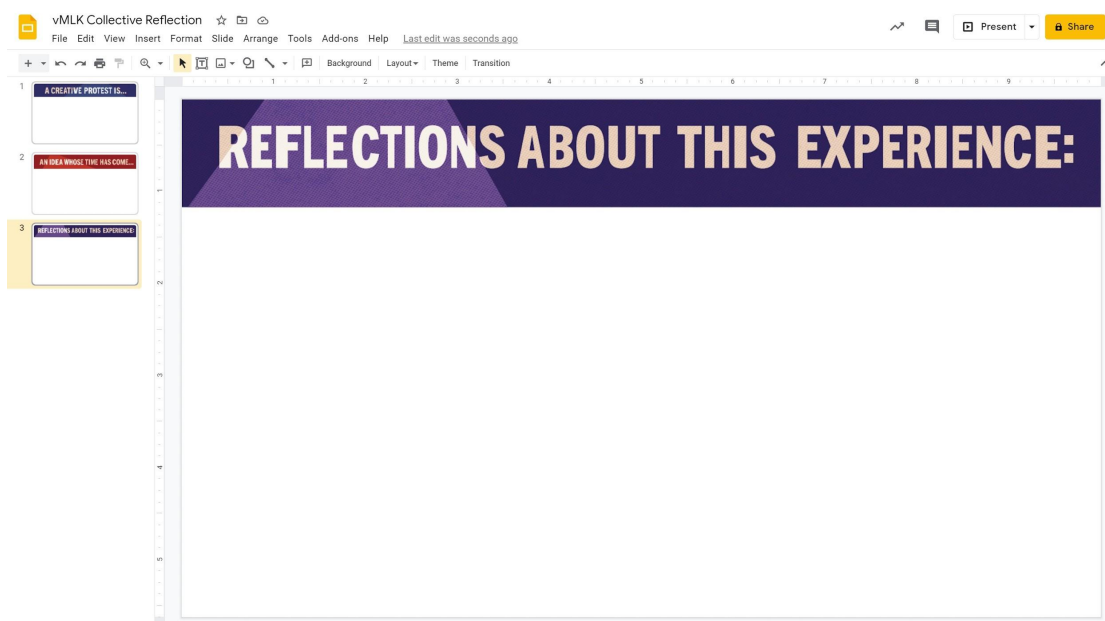
- *Dry erase boards* or *poster boards* can be used. It can be helpful to spread the boards out around the room to allow students to physically move to different locations for different reflection prompts. The poster boards have the benefit of being preservable for future reflections or integration into other activities, and taking pictures of the dry erase boards can be just as useful.



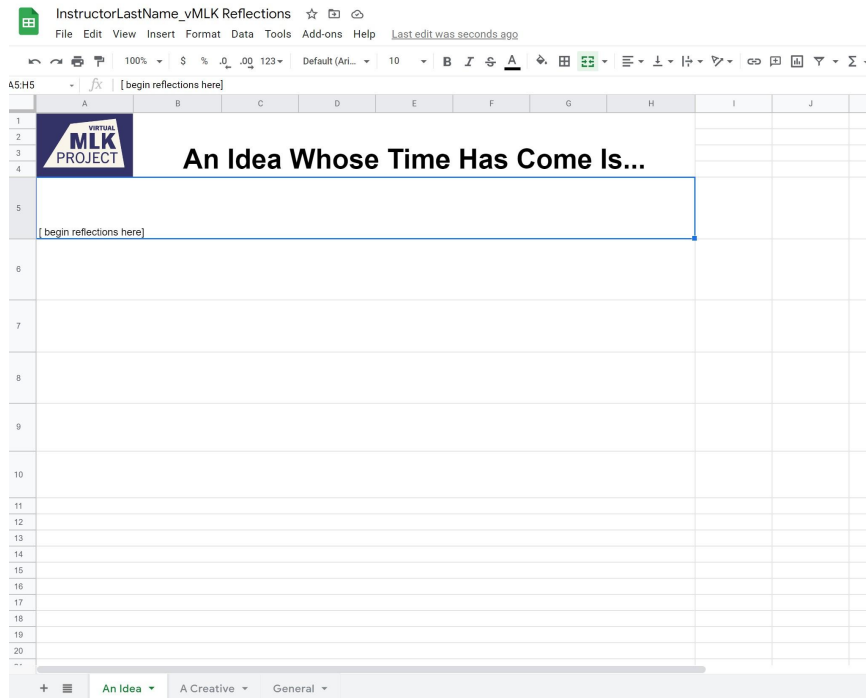
- *Jamboard*. Jamboards offer the tactile benefit of writing on a whiteboard but also offer the option for synchronous capture with Google.



- **Google Slides.** Google Slides can be used to create a digital classroom reflection space. Create a title slide for each prompt and then provide a blank slide for each student in the class. Students do not need to have slides assigned to them by name; there just needs to be enough blank sides to equal the number of students in the class.



- **Google Sheets.** Google Sheets can also be used to create a digital classroom reflection space. Each prompt can receive a separate tab within the same Sheet, and students can synchronously respond to the prompt. One issue with Google Sheets is that it is fairly easy to unintentionally type over another's response because of the slight lag time when multiple people are editing the same document.



- **Padlet.** Padlet works like a digital synchronous or asynchronous bulletin board. It offers a more visually interesting way to see the responses than a generic Sheets form, but students would likely need more instruction on how to respond using Padlet.



Lesson Activity 2: Comparative History

This activity is based on the post-experience survey that students and community members complete after engaging with the vMLK Project. The main discussion prompt and sub-prompts (seen below) are crafted to help students process the experience in a way that helps them feel ready to apply to their historical knowledge. Through written or oral engagement with the sub-prompts, students are able to engage in comparative thinking about the historical moment depicted in the vMLK experience and what engagement with that historical moment may mean or contribute to their lives. “[T]he vMLK Project experience, particularly through its sonic elements, provides an authentic learning environment that places students into a context, where they embody the role of audience member, interact with a community and its history, which leads to cultural awareness, perspective taking, and a sense of engagement with others around civic issues” (Gallagher et al., 2020, p. 296).

As a result of the vMLK Project, I feel more knowledgeable about

- The 1957 Royal Ice Cream Sit-in in Durham, North Carolina
- King’s 1960 speech, “A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]”
- The location of King’s “A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]” speech
- The reason King delivered the speech in Durham rather than Greensboro, North Carolina
- The 1960 Sit-in at the W. C. Woolworth Lunch Counter in Greensboro
- The 1967 destruction of the White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina
- How it might have felt to hear Dr. King speak
- How it might have felt to sit or stand in the White Rock sanctuary

Implementation

The main and sub-prompts given above are well-suited to oral or written reflection, depending on the goals of the class.

Discussion. An interactive element, such as a polling element, can be incorporated to help guide discussion. Using a platform like [Poll Maker](#) (see example below) or [Google Forms](#), students can indicate what aspects of the experience most resonated with them. After students have had the chance to respond on their own via the poll, students can then share their takeaways aloud with the class during a guided discussion. One way the poll can help instructors facilitate discussion is to provide an indication of where the students may need more support in making connections and understanding historical context.

As a result of the vMLK experience, I feel more knowledgeable about...

- ☐ The 1957 Royal Ice Cream Sit-in in Durham, North Carolina
- ☐ King's 1960 speech, "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]"
- ☐ The location of King's "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]" speech
- ☐ The reason King delivered the speech in Durham rather than Greensboro, North Carolina
- ☐ The 1960 Sit-in at the W. C. Woolworth Lunch Counter in Greensboro
- ☐ The 1967 destruction of the White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina
- ☐ How it might have felt to hear Dr. King speak
- ☐ How it might have felt to sit or stand in the White Rock sanctuary

Vote

Results

Assessment

The sub-prompts could also be used for short writing reflections or as part of a holistic essay response. One possible essay prompt:

"How did the vMLK experience contribute to your knowledge and understanding of the Civil Rights Movement? Things to consider in your response:

- What was the 1957 Royal Ice Cream Sit-in in Durham, North Carolina?

- What was the central message of King's 1960 speech, "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]"?
- What is the significance of the location of King's "A Creative Protest [Fill Up the Jails]" speech?
- Why did King deliver the speech in Durham rather than Greensboro, North Carolina?
- What was the significance of the 1960 Sit-in at the W. C. Woolworth Lunch Counter in Greensboro, North Carolina?
- Why was the White Rock Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina destroyed?
- How it might have felt to hear Dr. King speak?
- How it might have felt to sit or stand in the White Rock sanctuary?"

Lesson Extensions

For additional background information from Edsitement, refer to the page on [Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, and the Power of Nonviolence](#) and [Places and People of the Civil Rights Movement](#).

Reference websites

<https://vmlk.chass.ncsu.edu/>