

## Talking with Your Kids about Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Our country has a lot of good things about it, but one thing we have had a lot of trouble with is race and racism. Race is a word that describes the color of your skin, and racism is when people of one skin color hurt people of another skin color. In the United States, we had a problem of racism of people with light or white skin hurting people with brown and black skin from the very beginning of our country, when slavery was legal. Slavery is when a person is owned by another person. A slave does not have choices about their life, and has to work and do whatever their owner says. In the United States, having slaves was legal until 1865. Slaves were people with black and brown skin, of African ancestry, while slave owners had white or pale skin, of European ancestry.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a minister who worked hard to make the world a better place. Dr. King was an American with dark skin, who lived in a time when people of different skin colors were separated from one another by the law. People with light skin got better schools, neighborhoods, seats in the movie theater and on the bus, better jobs, even better public bathrooms than people with darker brown and black skin. There were restaurants and places where only people with light skin could go, and if someone with dark skin went there, they could be arrested or hurt. The ability to be in public places and vote without being harmed is called "civil rights," and Dr. King was part of the Civil Rights Movement. *What is one of your favorite places to go out to eat? What is one of your favorite places to go and play after school? What would it feel like if you weren't allowed to go there because of the color of your skin?*



Segregated Water Fountains, North Carolina 1950



The March on Washington, 27 August 1963

jobs, and live in any neighborhoods. He said that he had a dream, **"That my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream... that little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers."** People marched in the streets all over the country to show that they wanted these changes to happen. But some people did not like this idea. Many people with light and

white skin thought that if they had to share their resources and spaces, they would no longer have enough. *Have you ever had difficulty sharing? Does sharing ever make you scared? Does sharing make you feel good?*

Many of these unhappy people wanted to stop this movement. They didn't want to change, so they said they would hurt Dr. King and the other people who were leading and working on change. Dr. King was arrested many times for peacefully breaking the unfair laws. One day he was in Memphis, Tennessee, not too far from Nashville, preparing to lead a march. He was staying at a hotel during his visit, and one evening a man who disagreed with his work shot him and killed him while Dr. King stood on the balcony of his hotel room. He was killed for doing good, hard work in the world. On Monday, we will march with people from all over Nashville to remember Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and celebrate the work he and other civil rights activists accomplished. We also march to remind ourselves that we still have a lot of work today. People are still unable to access certain resources and freedom because of the color of their skin, and we have to keep going with Dr. King's work, making our community safe and good for everyone.



*March from Selma to Montgomery, 25 March 1965.*

### **Books for Continuing the Conversation**

*A Sweet Smell of Roses* by Angela Johnson, illustrated by Eric Velazquez (Ages 4-8)

*Martin's Big Words* by Doreen Rappaport, illustrated by Bryan Collier (Age 5-9)

*Who Was Martin Luther King, Jr.?* by Bonnie Bader, illustrated by Nancy Harrison (Age 8-12)

### **Quotes to Memorize**

- "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: Only love can do that." — Book: *Strength to Love* (1963)
- "Every man of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions, but we must all protest." — Essay: "Beyond Vietnam" (1967)
- "The problems of racial injustice and economic injustice cannot be solved without a radical redistribution of political and economic power." — Speech: "The Three Evils of Society" (1967)