

# CURRICULUM GUIDE

## Kennedy's Message of Peace

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*for the Indiana Historical Society Indiana Experience*

### **You Are There 1968** ***Robert F. Kennedy Speaks***



INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Cover Image: “Robert F. Kennedy Announcing Martin Luther King’s Death” (Indiana Historical Society, Digital Image Collections, Item ID: P0303\_P\_BOX79\_FOLDER17\_B\_KENNEDY\_ANNOUNCES\_MLK\_DEATH)

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## ***Indiana Experience Connections***

This lesson coordinates with the *You Are There 1968: Robert F. Kennedy Speaks* component of the *Indiana Experience* at the Eugene and Marilyn Glick Indiana History Center. In this experience, visitors are invited to step back in time to April 4, 1968, and attend a speech given by Robert F. Kennedy at a campaign rally at the corner of Broadway and Seventeenth streets in Indianapolis. Kennedy had scheduled a rally in this predominately African American inner-city neighborhood to garner support for his bid to win the Democratic Party's nomination for the 1968 presidential election. After stops earlier in the day at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend and Ball State University in Muncie, Kennedy planned to give his usual campaign "stump speech" to supporters at the rally in Indianapolis.

A tragic turn of events drastically changed the course of the evening. As Kennedy boarded a plane following his speech to Ball State students, he learned that Martin Luther King Jr., the famed civil rights leader, had been shot while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Upon landing in Indianapolis, Kennedy learned that King had died.

Against the advice of many who feared an outbreak of violence, Kennedy continued to the rally as planned and addressed the crowd with an iconic speech about compassion, forgiveness, and hope. Invoking King's call to nonviolence, Kennedy urged the crowd to go home and "say a prayer for our own country, which all of us love—a prayer for understanding and that compassion of which I spoke." Unlike other cities that experienced rioting following the news of King's assassination, Indianapolis was quiet—a testimony to King's life, the power of Kennedy's words, and the character of the people in the crowd that night.

These curriculum materials are intended to provide historical context for Kennedy's campaign, his speech, and the racial climate of the time. The lesson may be used to prepare students for a visit to *You Are There 1968: Robert F. Kennedy Speaks* or it may be used as a follow-up to the visit.

In addition, the historical context and themes of the materials will be relevant to classroom instruction even if a visit is not possible. *You Are There 1968: Robert F. Kennedy Speaks* is open through April 14, 2012.

## **Learning Objectives**

In this lesson, all students will:

- Examine and analyze the text of the speech that Robert F. Kennedy gave in Indianapolis on April 4, 1968.
- Listen to an audio recording of Kennedy's speech and consider the power of words to build a bridge or create a chasm between us.

In addition, intermediate/middle school and high school students will:

- View a documentary that includes interviews with people who were present at the speech and consider their reactions to King's death and Kennedy's speech.
- Complete an analysis of the Kennedy photograph made on April 4, 1968.
- Complete writing activities in response to the photograph and their knowledge of Kennedy, King, and Kennedy's speech.

## **Grade Level**

Elementary (grade 3, 4 and 5), Intermediate/Middle School (grade 8), and High School

## **Academic Standards for the Social Studies**

- Indiana Standards (as of January 25, 2011)
  - Grade 3, Social Studies 3.2.5—Explain the importance of being a good citizen of the state and the nation. Identify people in the state who exhibit the characteristics of good citizenship.
  - Grade 3, Social Studies 3.2.6—Explain the role citizens have in making decisions and rules within the community, state, and nation.

- Grade 3, Social Studies 3.2.7—Use a variety of information resources to gather information about local, state, and regional leaders and civic issues.
- Grade 4, Social Studies 4.1.13—Identify and describe important events and movements that changed life in Indiana from the mid-twentieth century to the present.
- Grade 4, Social Studies 4.1.17—Using primary and secondary sources and online source materials, construct a brief narrative about an event in Indiana history.
- Grade 4, Social Studies 4.2.6—Define and provide examples of civic virtues in a democracy.
- Grade 5, Social Studies 5.2.8—Describe group and individual actions that illustrate civic virtues, such as civility, cooperation, respect, and responsible participation. (Individuals, Society and Culture)
- Grade 5, Social Studies 5.2.9—Examine ways by which citizens may effectively voice opinions, monitor government, and bring about change in government including voting and participation in the election process.
- Grade 5, Social Studies 5.2.10—Use a variety of information resources to identify and evaluate contemporary issues that involve civic responsibility, individual rights, and the common good.
- Grade 8, Social Studies 8.1.28—Recognize historical perspective and evaluate alternative courses of action by describing the historical context in which events unfolded and by avoiding evaluation of the past solely in terms of present-day norms.
- High School, U.S. History, Standard 7, The United States in Troubled Times: 1960 to 1980 (USH 7.1)—Explain the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s by describing the ideas and actions of federal and state leaders, grassroots movements, and central organizations that were active in the movement. (Government; Economics; Individuals, Society, and Culture)
- High School, U.S. History, Standard 9, Historical Thinking (USH 9.2)—Locate and analyze primary sources and secondary sources related to an event or issue of the past.
- High School, U.S. History, Standard 9, Historical Thinking (USH 9.3)—Investigate and interpret multiple causation in historical actions and analyze cause-and-effect relationships.
- National Standards (National Council for the Social Studies) as of January 25, 2011: II Time, Continuity, and Change; V Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; VI Power, Authority and Governance; and X Civic Ideas and Practices

### **Social Studies/Historical Concepts**

Election processes, civic participation, civil rights, and community action/activism

### **Time Required**

Multiple class periods depending on the classroom needs and the activities selected

### **Materials Required**

- Copies of the Kennedy photograph from the Indiana Historical Society’s Digital Image Collections as shown on page 14 of this lesson:
  - “Robert F. Kennedy Announcing Martin Luther King’s Death” (Indiana Historical Society, Digital Image Collections, Item ID: P0303\_P\_BOX79\_FOLDER17\_B\_KENNEDY\_ANNOUNCES\_MLK\_DEATH)

- Copies of the text of Kennedy’s speech, downloaded from the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum Web site, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Statement-on-the-Assassination-of-Martin-Luther-King.aspx> (accessed January 24, 2011).
- Access to the Internet to:
  - Listen to Robert F. Kennedy’s speech from the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum Web site, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/HOSE-5I0kUyRrXmWyQRsIw.aspx> (accessed January 24, 2011).
  - Watch “Awful Grace” on YouTube,<sup>TM</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tX42qKk67UM> (accessed January 24, 2011).
- Copies of the Photo Analysis Worksheet, one per student, from the National Archives and Records Administration at [http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf) (accessed January 25, 2011).
- Paper and pencils or pens
- Dictionary

### Background/Historical Context for Teachers

It is recommended that students complete “The Issue of Race in 1968: A Case Study of the Broadway Neighborhood” lesson prior to participating in this lesson. The case study provides important historical context related to the racial climate of Indianapolis at the time when Kennedy gave his speech.

By the late 1960s, civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. had been working for social justice for more than a decade. King and his followers could count among their achievements the Montgomery bus boycott, the Freedom Rides, the Birmingham campaign, the March on Washington,

the Selma march, the Chicago campaign, and the Memphis boycott. Their work resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination in employment practices and in public accommodations such as restaurants and motels, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which ensured African Americans the right to vote in practice and in law.

While King’s initial focus was on fighting for the civil rights of African Americans following the passage of the civil rights and the voting rights acts, he began to focus his attention on a broader range of issues. Recognizing that poverty, unemployment, and lack of education and economic opportunity posed barriers to the achievement of civil rights and racial justice, King set to work planning a Poor People’s Campaign. King cautioned his followers that poverty was not an issue of race. In 1967 one in seven Americans lived in poverty and two years later, 21 percent of Americans were living below the poverty line, meaning that they had an annual income of \$3,743 or less for a family of four.<sup>1</sup> Though King acknowledged that poverty was not an issue of race, he also knew that solving the poverty crisis in America was a prerequisite to achieving civil rights for African Americans.

In 1967 King conceived of an event similar to the 1963 March on Washington in support of civil rights, but this event would bring masses of the poor to Washington, D.C., and demand that the government address unemployment and guarantee a living wage for all. King planned for the poor who gathered in the nation’s capital to engage in nonviolent but militant civil disobedience.

The plan was to disrupt the daily functioning of the capital—for instance, by staging sit-ins at the Department of Agriculture or the Department of the Interior—until Congress and the White House got serious about the concerns of poor people. The longer the federal

1. Indiana Historical Society, *You Are There 1968: Robert F. Kennedy Speaks*, King-Kennedy Legacy Room exhibit text.

government delayed, King promised, the more the demonstrators would escalate their protests.<sup>2</sup>

King traveled the country encouraging others to join him in the Poor People's Campaign to bring masses of the poor to the nation's capital in late April 1968.

Earlier in 1968 King had lent his voice to the cause of sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. On February 1, two black sanitation workers were crushed to death when a garbage truck where they were taking shelter during a rainstorm malfunctioned. By February 12, Memphis sanitation workers had begun a strike. King agreed to lead the sanitation workers in a march planned for March 28. Unfortunately, the demonstration turned violent when a group of students broke the windows of businesses along the march's route. While King rushed safely from the scene, sixty people were injured and one black man (a looter) was killed. King was deeply distressed at the outcome of this march, but after reassurances about the sanitation workers' commitment to nonviolence, he agreed to return to Memphis to lead another march, initially scheduled for April 5.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most polarizing issues of 1968 was the United States' continued involvement in the Vietnam War. Many Americans had come to question the wisdom and ethics of America's involvement in a war where the South Vietnamese government was attempting to maintain its freedom from North Vietnam and its communist allies. The United States first engaged

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2. Poor People's Campaign. "King's Last March," <http://www.poorpeoplescampaignppc.org/King-s-Last--March.html> (accessed January 18, 2011).

3. National Archives and Records Administration, "Teaching With Documents: Court Documents Related to Martin Luther King, Jr., and Memphis Sanitation Workers," <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/memphis-v-mlk/> (accessed January 18, 2011).

in this war during John F. Kennedy's presidency, but President Lyndon B. Johnson drastically escalated American involvement. Beginning in 1965, Johnson sent American combat troops to take over the fighting in ever-increasing numbers. By 1968 more than a half a million American soldiers were stationed in Vietnam.<sup>4</sup>

Although many Americans believed that a victory in Vietnam was crucial to preventing the spread of communism and to protecting America's interests abroad, there was growing dissent. Veterans and college students, in particular, were becoming vocal critics of America's Vietnam policy. Despite optimistic reports from American leaders, it was becoming clear that the Vietnam War could not be easily won. The Tet Offensive, a devastating attack on South Vietnamese cities by the Vietcong at the end of January 1968, was technically a military defeat for the communists, but it provided a frightening glimpse into the high cost of war. On February 27, 1968, trusted newscaster Walter Cronkite ended his broadcast by offering his own opinion that the war was not winnable and would end in a stalemate. These actions led Americans to look more critically at the United States' involvement in the conflict.<sup>5</sup>

For King, it was impossible to reconcile the war in Vietnam with his commitment to nonviolence. He asked how he could require nonviolence on the part of his followers, when their country engaged in violent means to reach its goals:

As I have walked among the desperate, rejected and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest

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4. Indiana Historical Society, *You Are There 1968: Robert F. Kennedy Speaks*, King-Kennedy Legacy Room exhibit text.

5. National Public Radio, "Final Words: Cronkite's Vietnam Commentary," July 18, 2009, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106775685> (accessed January 17, 2011).

compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through non-violent action. But, they asked, what about Vietnam? They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government.<sup>6</sup>

King felt a moral obligation to speak out. In addition, he felt that the war was diverting resources away from programs that could improve life for the poor.<sup>7</sup> He noted:

Then came the build-up in Vietnam, and I watched the [poverty] program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political play thing of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, King observed that it was African Americans who were being sent to Vietnam to fight and die in disproportionate numbers. He saw the Vietnam War as a civil rights issue. He spoke of the “cruel irony” of sending African American men eight thousand miles away from home to defend the liberties of the South Vietnamese when they were not guaranteed those same liberties in their own country.<sup>9</sup>

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6. “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” <http://www.commondreams.org/views04/0115-13.htm> (accessed January 17, 2011).

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

These three key issues—civil rights, fighting poverty, and ending the war in Vietnam—were concerns to Kennedy as well. Early in his political career, Kennedy, who served as the U.S. Attorney General in his brother John F. Kennedy's administration, was not a vocal proponent of the civil rights movement. In fact, on May 25, 1961, Robert Kennedy delivered a radio broadcast for the Voice of America defending the United States' record on civil rights. On October 10, 1963, he authorized the Federal Bureau of Investigation to begin wiretapping King's phones. Fearing that one of King's closest advisers and perhaps King himself may have been members of the Communist Party, the FBI sought to gather intelligence about these men. Over time, Kennedy's commitment to civil rights evolved and he became a champion of the cause.

The Freedom Rides helped Kennedy to recognize the need for civil rights reform. In May 1961 a group of black and white protesters boarded buses that were to travel through the South. The protesters' intent was to test the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling that prohibited segregation in interstate commerce (including transit buses traveling across state lines). On May 14 Freedom Riders were attacked at Anniston, Alabama, and their bus was burned. Upon arrival in Birmingham, the Freedom Riders were met by an angry mob who beat some of them. Kennedy was surprised by the violence and sent his assistant, John Siegenthaler, to Birmingham to deal with the situation. After limited success in convincing Alabama state officials to protect the riders, Kennedy sent U.S. marshals to protect them. Ultimately, on May 29, 1961, Kennedy petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to adopt strict regulations that prohibited segregation on interstate bus travel. According to one author:

The Freedom Rides campaign was an opportunity for the Kennedy brothers to begin building a rapport with civil rights leaders through phone conversations, meetings, and cautious collaborations.

These ties to the Civil Rights Movement would only deepen in the coming years.<sup>10</sup>

Kennedy further demonstrated his commitment to civil rights during a 1961 speech regarding integration of the University of Georgia Law School:

We will not stand by or be aloof. We will move. I happen to believe that the 1954 [Supreme Court school desegregation] decision was right. But my belief does not matter. It is the law. Some of you may believe the decision was wrong. That does not matter. It is the law.<sup>11</sup>

As attorney general, Kennedy helped ensure that laws requiring desegregation of public accommodations and educational institutions were enforced. He also supported registration of black voters.

Both King and Kennedy were committed to solving problems in poor communities across the country. Kennedy had been deeply affected by a trip he made to Mississippi with the young civil rights lawyer Marian Wright Edelman. Kennedy was stunned by what he saw and felt the need to make all Americans aware of the economic injustices that were taking place in their own backyard.

There are children in the Mississippi Delta whose bellies are swollen with hunger. . . . Many of them cannot go to school because they have no clothes or shoes. These conditions are not confined to rural Mississippi. They exist in dark tenements in Washington, D.C., within site of the Capitol, in Harlem, in South Side Chicago, in Watts. There are children

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10. Public Broadcasting Service, “Robert F. Kennedy” biography available on Freedom Riders Web site, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/people/robert-f-kennedy> (accessed January 18, 2011).

11. Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights Web site, “Robert F. Kennedy: Life and Vision,” <http://rfkmemorial.mediathree.net/lifevision/biography/> (accessed January 18, 2011).

in each of these areas who have never been to school, never seen a doctor or a dentist. There are children who have never heard conversation in their homes, never read or even seen a book.<sup>12</sup>

Kennedy knew that good jobs were needed to improve the situation of these children and their families. He planned to encourage private industry to locate in poverty-stricken areas. Recognizing that he had come from a background of great privilege, Kennedy tried to use his voice to advocate for those whose voices went unheard.

The philosophies of Kennedy and King also converged on the Vietnam War, perhaps the issue most pressing to Kennedy. As attorney general, Kennedy had helped shape the foreign policy toward Southeast Asia. Under his brother’s administration, the American involvement in Vietnam began when President John F. Kennedy sent military advisers to South Vietnam. Following his brother’s assassination, Robert Kennedy supported President Johnson’s continued involvement in Vietnam, but urged the administration to push for a negotiated settlement. Kennedy hoped that the Johnson administration could achieve economic and political reforms in South Vietnam, but soon began to have serious misgivings about American involvement in the war and Johnson’s conduct of it. As the president continued to escalate American involvement in the war, Kennedy called for a reduction in troops and to cease the bombing of North Vietnam. He publicly broke with the Johnson administration in February 1966 and called for all sides including the National Liberation Front as a representative for the Vietcong to have a place in South Vietnam’s political life.<sup>13</sup>

In March 1968 the Johnson administration’s policy on Vietnam; the outbreak of race riots in urban areas such as Watts, Detroit, and Harlem;

12. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum Web site, “Robert F. Kennedy,” <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/The-Kennedy-Family/Robert-F-Kennedy.aspx> (accessed January 18, 2011).

13. Ibid.

and concern about the plight of the poor led Kennedy to the conclusion that he should enter the 1968 presidential race. As a late entrant, he had a lot of ground to make up. The first primary where Kennedy could compete was Indiana. The Indiana primary on May 7, 1968, was a crucial win for Kennedy. “A loss for Robert F. Kennedy there, in the first primary he entered, could stop the campaign in its tracks,” noted a Kennedy biographer.<sup>14</sup> Kennedy faced an unusual challenge in Indiana, where he ran against the state’s popular governor, Roger D. Branigin, who was running as a “stand in” for Johnson, and U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota, who already had a good showing against Johnson in the New Hampshire primary.

Kennedy chose April 4, 1968, as a date to “take his case directly to the people.”<sup>15</sup> He had made appearances earlier in the day at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend and at Ball State University in Muncie. His plan was to give his usual campaign speech in Indianapolis, but as he boarded a plane in Muncie to fly to Indianapolis, he heard news that changed the course of the evening. When Marshall Hanley, one of Kennedy’s key supporters in Delaware County, Indiana, informed Kennedy that King had been shot as he stood on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Kennedy’s heart sank. King had been in Memphis to prepare for his second march in support of the city’s striking sanitation workers when a bullet, fired by assassin James Earl Ray, struck him down.

Upon arrival in Indianapolis, Kennedy learned that King had died. A reporter noted Kennedy’s reaction: “Oh God. When is this violence going to stop?”<sup>16</sup> Surely his thoughts ran to his own

brother’s assassination five years earlier. Perhaps he thought about recent race riots and considered the possibility that one could erupt in Indianapolis once news of King’s assassination got out. That possibility was certainly a concern for Indianapolis police and Mayor Richard Lugar. According to author Ray Boomhower:

Mayor Richard Lugar had called Gerard Doherty [who ran the Kennedy campaign] asking that the speech at Seventeenth and Broadway be canceled because he was concerned for the candidate’s safety and feared a riot might break out.<sup>17</sup>

The police chief also advised Kennedy against going into the Broadway neighborhood. According to William Barry, Kennedy’s personal security officer, “The chief of police warned the party not to go into the ghetto; he would not be responsible for anything that might happen.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, there were those on Kennedy’s staff who believed it would not be a good idea to proceed with his planned appearance.

In contrast, John Lewis, a member of the Kennedy campaign, the former president of the Southern Christian Leadership Congress, and rally organizer argued:

Somebody has to speak to these people. You can’t have a crowd like this come, and something like this happen, and send them home without anything at all. Kennedy has to speak, for his own sake and for the sake of these people.<sup>19</sup>

And so it was agreed that Kennedy would address the crowd, informing them of King’s death.

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14. Joseph A. Palermo, *Huffington Post* Web site, “Robert F. Kennedy’s Indiana Campaign,” [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-a-palermo/robert-f-kennedys-indiana\\_b\\_99363.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-a-palermo/robert-f-kennedys-indiana_b_99363.html) (accessed January 18, 2011).

15. Ray E. Boomhower, *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary* (Indianapolis and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 26.

16. *Ibid.*, 63.

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17. *Ibid.*, 64.

18. William Barry, in recorded interview by Roberta Greene, March 20, 1969, p. 39, RFK Oral History Program as cited in Schlesinger, 874. Indiana Historical Bureau Web site, <http://www.in.gov/history/markers/470.htm> (accessed January 19, 2011).

19. Boomhower, *Robert F. Kennedy and the Indiana Primary*, 65.

Those who arrived early that evening and were standing near the flatbed truck where Kennedy would speak were probably unaware of the news coming from Memphis. Those on the periphery of the crowd who arrived later “were listening to the latest bulletins about the shooting on transistor radios pressed to their ears.”<sup>20</sup> On the outskirts of the crowd, where the news about King’s death was known, there were hints of anger:

Some who attended the rally later reported hearing threats being made by blacks to whites on the crowd’s outskirts, including such statements as “What are you doing here, whitey?” and “Get out of here, you white son-of-a-bitch.”<sup>21</sup>

However, there were other African Americans who were greatly concerned for Kennedy’s safety. The Reverend Lewis Deer of the Christian Brotherhood Center reported an African American woman saying to him, “Dr. King is dead and a White man did it, why does he [Kennedy] have to come here!”<sup>22</sup> No one knew what to expect when Kennedy took the stage and delivered the news.

After stepping onto the flatbed truck, Kennedy turned to one of his aides and asked “Do they know about Martin Luther King?” The response, “We have left it up to you.” Kennedy began speaking to the crowd by asking people to lower their signs and then said:

I have bad news for you, for all our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world, and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and killed tonight.<sup>23</sup>

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20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum Web site, “Statement on the Assassination of Martin Luther King,” <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Statement-on-the-Assassination-of-Martin-Luther-King.aspx> (accessed January 19, 2011).

An audible gasp could be heard from the crowd. Shouts of “No! No!” pierced the air, and then, Kennedy attempted to comfort the grieving crowd.

Facing a stunned crowd, some of whom were weeping, Kennedy gave an impassioned speech that is considered one of the great addresses in the modern era.

Kennedy spoke of King’s love of peace, shared his own pain over the assassination of his brother, quoted a Greek poet who had provided comfort during his time of grief, and offered a vision for healing:

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness; but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or they be black.<sup>24</sup>

He did not preach to the crowd. Instead, he spoke in terms of a unifying goal:

Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and to make gentle the life of this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people.<sup>25</sup>

When he finished his remarks, the crowd began to depart in peace. While riots emerged in cities across the country, Indianapolis remained calm, a testament to the good sense of the people in the crowd and to Kennedy’s eloquence at that difficult time.

## Teachers Instructional Plan

### Introduction

Tell students they will be studying a famous speech given by Robert F. Kennedy in Indianapolis on April 4, 1968.

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24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

Ask students if anyone can tell you about his life. If necessary, explain that Kennedy was the younger brother of John F. Kennedy, who was president of the United States from 1960 to 1963. Robert F. Kennedy served as the U.S. Attorney General in his brother's administration. After his brother was assassinated in 1963, Kennedy went on to become a U.S. senator from New York. In 1968 Kennedy was running as a Democratic candidate for president, hoping to receive the Democratic Party's nomination.

The Indiana primary election, scheduled for May 7, 1968, gave Hoosiers a chance to select candidates for the Democratic and Republican parties in the November general election. On April 4 Kennedy was campaigning in Indiana, where he visited the campuses of the University of Notre Dame in South Bend and Ball State University in Muncie, and had a campaign rally planned for the evening in a mostly African American neighborhood in Indianapolis. Kennedy planned to speak to the Indianapolis crowd about the issues that were important to him—civil rights, ending the war in Vietnam, and improving the lives of the poor. However, when he arrived in Indianapolis, he learned that civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. had died from an assassin's bullet in Memphis, Tennessee.

### Procedure for Elementary Grades

- Create a diagram or graphic organizer to review information about King. Include words that might be associated with King such as: minister, civil rights leader, activist, nonviolent, Nobel Peace Prize winner, equality, etc.
- Listen to the speech from the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum Web site, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/HOSE-5I0kUyRrXmWyQRsIw.aspx> (accessed January 24, 2011).
- Read through the text together.
  - Download from the Internet and print a copy of the speech from the

John F. Kennedy Library and Museum Web site, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Statement-on-the-Assassination-of-Martin-Luther-King.aspx> (accessed January 24, 2011).

- Have students note vocabulary that they do not understand and discuss the meanings as a class.
- Question students about their understanding of the speech with questions such as:
  - What was the purpose of the speech given by Kennedy?
  - How did Kennedy describe King?
  - In his speech, what did Kennedy say that Americans have to make an effort to do?
  - Explain what Kennedy meant when he said:
    - What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness; but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or they be black.
  - What does he ask the audience to do after the speech?

### Procedure for Intermediate/Middle and High School Grades

- Introduce issues where Kennedy and King held similar views (both men were pro-civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and supported programs to help the poor). Refer to the Background Information/Historical Context essay of this lesson on pages 3 through 9 for details.
- Next, introduce Kennedy's April 4, 1968, speech in the Broadway neighborhood by showing students the "Awful Grace" video on YouTube™.

- This short film (7 minutes, 34 seconds) is available on YouTube,<sup>TM</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tX42qKk67UM> (accessed January 24, 2011).
- Choose the full screen option and use a LCD projector to show the film to students.
- In the film, documentarian Zachary Shields mixes clips from Kennedy’s speech with interviews of people who were present at the speech. (Warning: You may want to review the film before showing it to students. The term “honkey” is used in the documentary as one person recalls the desire of some in the crowd to retaliate upon hearing the news that King had been assassinated.)
- As students watch the film, ask them to jot down words or phrases used by those interviewed in the film to describe their emotions regarding King’s death and Kennedy’s speech.
- Next, ask students to share the words and phrases they wrote.
  - Write the words or phrases under two columns on the board. (One column of emotions related to King’s assassination and the other or emotions related to Kennedy’s speech.)
- After completing this exercise, ask students to summarize the emotional impact of Kennedy’s speech.
  - You may guide the discussion by asking students if Kennedy’s words helped his audience as they grieved King’s death. In what ways did Kennedy’s words help? How did Kennedy’s words heal?
- Now, ask students to listen quietly (perhaps even with eyes closed) to the Kennedy speech.
  - You may choose an audio version, available from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/HOSE-5I0kUyRrXmWyQRsIw.aspx> (accessed January 24, 2011).
  - Or, view a video compilation of the speech on YouTube,<sup>TM</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCrx\\_u3825g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCrx_u3825g) (accessed January 24, 2011).
- In a journal entry, students should take fifteen to twenty minutes to respond to the speech by answering this question:
  - What do Kennedy’s words mean to you?
- Give each student:
  - A copy of the photograph of Kennedy giving his April 4, 1968, speech in Indianapolis, along with the photo description on pages 14 and 15 of this lesson.
  - A copy of the “Photo Analysis Worksheet” from the National Archives and Records Administration, [http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo\\_analysis\\_worksheet.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf) (accessed January 24, 2011).
- Explain to students that they will be writing a Haiku poem about the photograph.
  - If students are not familiar with the structure of a Haiku poem, tell them that it must adhere to the following rules:
    - A Haiku is a seventeen-syllable poem with the syllable count broken down as follows:
      - First line of poem=Five syllables
      - Second line of poem=Seven syllables
      - Third line of poem=Five syllables

- Students should use the photograph's description and their knowledge of Kennedy's speech and King's assassination to complete the "Photo Analysis Worksheet."
- They will then write a Haiku based on the photograph and their knowledge of Kennedy, King, and Kennedy's speech on the night King was assassinated.
  - Allow students twenty minutes to do this. If they finish one Haiku poem, they may start on a second one about the same picture.

### Assessment

Use a teacher-developed rubric to assess students' participation in class discussions, completion of photo analysis worksheets, a Haiku poem, and other written work as assigned. The rubric should evaluate historical accuracy, clarity of thought and presentation, thoroughness, and quality of writing.

### Suggested Modifications

- As a class, brainstorm familiar situations where words might have the power to heal or harm.
  - Ask students to consider how the words they use can be forces of healing in their school or community.
- Encourage students to be involved in counter-acting bullying in school or combating racism in their community.
  - Invite representatives from community organizations concerned with bringing community members together for positive causes to your classroom so that they may encourage students to get involved.
- As a class, choose a project that allows students to use their words for healing.
  - Perform a Google™ search to find examples, such as these, that show ways in which students have used their voices to promote positive action:
    - *Indiana Daily Student*, "Students rally against bullying," <http://www.idsnews.com/news/story.aspx?id=78638> (accessed January 24, 2011).
    - Point Park University, School of Arts and Sciences, "Using Words to Work Things Out (Grades 5–6)" lessons, <http://www.pointpark.edu/Academics/Schools/SchoolofArtsandSciences/Departments/Education/ProjectChildrenLEAD/Curriculum/LessonPlans/UsingWords/Usingwords5> (accessed January 24, 2011).
    - Tuscon YWCA, "Racial Justice Programs," [http://www.ywcatucson.org/racial\\_justice.html#rjyp](http://www.ywcatucson.org/racial_justice.html#rjyp) (accessed January 24, 2011).
- Students might consider what they might have said to the crowd waiting at Seventeenth and Broadway streets had they been Kennedy.
  - How would they give a speech that honors King's legacy and helps a grieving crowd to heal?
- Compare Kennedy's speech on the night of King's assassination to speeches by other presidents in the wake of tragedy. Examples include President Ronald Reagan's remarks following the *Challenger* disaster, President George W. Bush's remarks at Ground Zero after the September 11 terrorist attacks, and President Barack Obama's speech at the University of Arizona following the Tucson shootings in January 2011.
  - Download the text or audio of the presidential speeches from the Internet:
    - *The New York Times* Web site. [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/01/13us/20110113\\_CONSOLATION\\_INTERACTIVE.html](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/01/13us/20110113_CONSOLATION_INTERACTIVE.html) (accessed January 31, 2011).

- The History Place, Great Speeches Collection, <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/previous.htm> (accessed January 31, 2011).
- American Rhetoric, Top 100 Speeches Collection, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/top100speechesall.html> (accessed January 31, 2011).
- Use Kennedy’s speech to introduce students to the Greek poets. Kennedy quotes Aeschylus in his speech. The quotation he uses comes from *Agamemnon*, a long and difficult play in the Oresteia trilogy. Students might study Aeschylus and other Greek poets and look into the characteristics of the Greek tragedy.

## Additional Resources

### Publications

Boomhower, Ray E. *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008.

A comprehensive look at Kennedy’s campaign in Indiana. The book discusses Kennedy’s speech in the Broadway neighborhood in detail.

Miller, Daniel. *A Tragic Turn: Six Leaders and the Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.* AuthorHouse, 2008.

The author looks at how six individuals acted as leaders on the night King was assassinated.

### Publications for Younger Students

Bridges, Ruby. *Through My Eyes*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1999.

Ruby Bridges recounts how she became the first black student ever at the all-white William Frantz Public School in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the age of six.

Levine, Ellen. *Freedom’s Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*. New York: Putnam Juvenile, 2000.

This is a collection of true stories of thirty African Americans who participated in the civil rights movement as youth.

Turck, Mary C. *The Civil Rights Movement for Kids: A History with 21 Activities*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2000.

A comprehensive history of the civil rights movement, including information about how children participated in the struggle. The book includes activities designed to help children understand civil rights and the importance and history of the movement.

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *Birmingham, 1963*. Honesdale, PA: Wordsong, 2007.

This book describes the feelings of a fictional character who witnessed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombings in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. The book includes archival photographs.

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-ins*. New York: Puffin Books, 2007.

Young Connie describes her feelings about having to stand while she and her mother sip a cool drink at the Woolworth’s store in Greensboro. Her siblings participate in the lunch counter sit-ins and Connie is eventually able to sit while eating at Woolworth’s.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *The Other Side*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2001.

Two girls, one white and one black, gradually get to know each other as they sit on the fence that divides their town.

## Video

“A Ripple of Hope.” Anderson, Indiana:  
Covenant Productions, 2010.

On April 4, 1968, King was shot and mortally wounded. Despite the violence raging across the country, Kennedy made a campaign appearance in an Indianapolis African American neighborhood, delivering a moving plea for peace and reconciliation. The speech would be regarded as one of the great political speeches of the twentieth century.

## Web Site

Peace Learning Center.

<http://www.peacelearningcenter.org/>  
(accessed February 15, 2011).

This Indianapolis-based community organization promotes healthy learning, workplace and community environments. The organization’s youth programs emphasize conflict resolution, personal responsibility, and character building.

Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry,  
Ball State University. “Learning from a  
Legacy of Hate.” <http://www.bsu.edu/learningfromhate/>  
(accessed February 18, 2011).

This web project from Ball State students explores intolerance in Indiana and efforts to combat it. The teaching section includes curriculum ideas and links to other resources.



“Robert F. Kennedy Announcing Martin Luther King’s Death” (Indiana Historical Society, Digital Image Collections, Item ID: P0303\_P\_BOX79\_FOLDER17\_B\_KENNEDY\_ANNOUNCES\_MLK\_DEATH)

Title	Robert F. Kennedy Announcing Martin Luther King's Death
Item ID	P0303_P_BOX79_FOLDER17_B_KENNEDY_ANNOUNCES_MLK_DEATH
Description	Ignoring advice to cancel his speech due to concerns that violence might break out, Kennedy spoke to a crowd at an outdoor campaign rally at Seventeenth and Broadway streets; many in the crowd did not know that King had been assassinated. Kennedy broke the news of King's death to the stunned crowd, spoke out on the need for "love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another," and asked them to return peacefully to their homes. Although riots had broken out in a number of major American cities as the news of King's death had spread, Indianapolis remained peaceful.
Subject	King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929–1968 Kennedy, Robert F., 1925–1968 Civil rights Civil rights leaders Assassinations Politicians
Date	1968-04-04
Geographic Location	Indiana–Indianapolis
Collection Name	<i>Indianapolis Recorder</i> Collection
Collection Number	P 0303
Owning Institution	Indiana Historical Society
Format of Original	Photographic print, b&w
Digital Format	JPG
Destination IN Journey	Robert F. Kennedy in Indiana; IHS Treasures Visuals and Manuscripts
Copyright Notice	Digital Image © 2007 Indiana Historical Society. All Rights Reserved.