

Teaching Racial Awareness through Song and Speech

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After four months of daily classes with the same group of adult business students, I found that most of them has a very limited understanding of racism. I put together the following lesson (about two class hours) and I felt it was a success, not only in giving them a more personal understanding of the issues surrounding racism, but also in developing multiple language skills, such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Materials

To prepare for this lesson, you'll need the music and sentence strips made from the song *Sister Rosa* by the Neville Brothers and copies of Martin Luther King's speech, "I Have a Dream."

Procedure

1. I introduced this lesson by eliciting a list of events and major personalities from the 1960's. One student mentioned Martin Luther King, so after talking about the 60's in general, I said I wanted to concentrate on racism.
2. After asking what Martin Luther King symbolized, the students made a list of words associated with him and they talked about their understanding of the issues surrounding racism. Then I told them the story of Rosa Parks, who was the woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who refused to give up her bus seat to a white person.
3. Next, I gave them the sentences strips I had made from the lyrics of the song, *Sister Rosa*, by the Neville Brothers. They worked in pairs, putting the story in order. This took about 20 minutes. Then I played the song several times at which time they completed the task. At that time, we talked about how it must have felt to have to give up your seat to a white person. Since the students had not had much contact with other races,

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they had a lot of questions regarding Black/White issues, and especially regarding the history of racism.

4. After talking about Rosa Parks and the people of Montgomery, Alabama, marching to Washington, D.C., I asked them what they know about Martin Luther King's speech, "I Have a Dream." I then divided them into small groups and gave each group a section of the speech. Each group had to write a paraphrase of their section. After that, each group taught the other groups the meaning of their parts of the speech. Finally, I gave them a copy of the complete speech which was read aloud by several students.

References

King, Martin Luther. 1963. "I Have a Dream". in *The ESL Miscellany*. Pro Lingua Associates. Battleboro, Vermont.

Neville Brothers. 1989. "Sister Rosa." in *Yellow Moon*. A & M Records.