



The Lynching of Emmett Till: The Response

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-civil-rights-era.html#obj9>

Overview/Prior Knowledge

Introduction

The lynching of Emmett Till, in the summer of 1955, served as a catalyst for the modern Civil Rights Movement. Till, a fourteen-year old African American from Chicago, was spending a few weeks of his summer in the Mississippi Delta. While visiting the local store with some of his friends after a long, hot day of picking cotton, Till unwittingly violated the unspoken, but strictly—and sometimes violently—enforced racial code of the Deep South by allegedly whistling at a married white woman.

In the early morning hours of August 28, 1955, Till was kidnapped at gunpoint from his great uncle's home in Money, Mississippi. His brutalized body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River some three days later. The perpetrators of this brutal crime, Roy Bryant—the storeowner and also the husband of the affronted woman—and his half-brother, J. W. Milam were arrested and indicted for murder. After a nearly week-long trial including a jury deliberation that lasted slightly longer than an hour, the all-white 12 man jury acquitted Bryant and Milam of Till's murder.

Objectives

- Students will examine the murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old from Chicago, who was lynched while visiting the Mississippi Delta.
- Students will interpret a protest flyer, which was published in response to the brutal murder of Emmett Till and the acquittal of his murderers.



Time Required

Two 50-minute periods

Recommended Grade Range

8-9

Subject/Sub-Subject

Mississippi Studies
English I

Standards

Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards for the Social Studies (2018)

MS.8

Evaluate the role of Mississippi in the Civil Rights Movement. (Strands: Civics, Civil Rights, Geography, History, Economics)

1. Analyze the significant figures, groups, events, and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi.

English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Library of Congress - Teaching with Primary Sources Skills:

- Analyze and evaluate primary sources.
- Formulate additional questions to be researched from primary sources.

Highlighted Strategies

- *Examining the Evidence*: strategy two

Credits

Dr. Paul E. Binford, Mississippi State University

Materials

- Primary source from the Library of Congress
- Projector
- Screen
- Poster paper
- Markers or colored pencils

Procedures

Day One

Introduction (20 minutes)

The Teacher Will (TTW) briefly review the Jim Crow laws that existed in racially segregated Mississippi. The Students will (TSW) read a subsection of the Mississippi Studies textbook (*A Place Called Mississippi*, Chapter 9) entitled, “The Emmett Till Murder.” The basic elements of the crime are highlighted in this subsection, and students will be instructed to note them:

- Emmett Till, a fourteen year old from Chicago, was visiting family in Mississippi.
- Till and some friends visited a local store in Money, Mississippi on August 27, 1955.
- Allegedly, Till whistled at a married white woman while visiting the store.
- The affronted woman’s husband and storeowner (Roy Bryant) and half-brother (J. W. Milam) kidnapped Till in the early morning hours of August 28, 1955.
- Till’s brutalized and disfigured body was recovered from the Tallahatchie River three days later.
- Bryant and Milam were arrested and indicted for murder.
- An all-white jury acquitted Bryant and Milam of Till’s murder after deliberating for slightly longer than one hour.
- Bryant and Milam confessed to murdering Till in an interview following the trial, but could not be retried for murder due to the Fifth amendment’s prohibition against *double jeopardy* (i.e., being tried for the same crime, twice).

During (30 minutes)

Student pairs to include a mix of instructed to create a poster protesting the injustice of the Emmett Till lynching or the injustice of the murder trial that resulted in the acquittal of Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam. The poster must include the following elements:

- Brief description of the injustice
- The date of the injustice
- Evidence of the injustice (i.e., witness statements or testimony, etc.)
- Immediate step protestors can take to deal with this injustice
- Long term step protestors can take to promote a just society

Students may want to use the American Experience website: “The Murder of Emmett Till” in preparation of their protest posters (see link below). Specifically, the “Brave Testimony” article on this site would be particularly useful to students.

Day Two

Introduction (15 minutes)

Students will be given 15 minutes to complete their protest posters.

During (30 minutes)

Volunteer student partners will be asked to present their posters at the front of the class.

Next, a primary source flyer protesting Emmett Till's lynching and murder will be projected on the screen using the link below. TSW analyze the primary source flyer through discussion questions, as described in strategy two of *Examining the Evidence* (pp. 54-66): "2. Determine the purpose and audience of the primary source":

1. Who was the intended audience of this flyer?
2. Who did the organization that created the flyer expect would see it?
3. Why was this flyer created?
4. Where was this meeting being held?
5. How might the supporters of Roy Bryant and J. W. Milam react to this flyer?
6. What risks were individuals taking who distributed this flyer?
7. What risks were individual taking who attended this protest?

Link:

"Mass Meeting Protesting Emmett Till Lynching and Trial, Flyer." NAACP Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-civil-rights-era.html#obj9>

American Experience: "The Murder of Emmett Till":
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/till/>

Closure (5 minutes):

Students will complete a sentence synthesis, which must include the following three words/terms: Emmett Till, Lynching, and Injustice, in response to this question: "Why did the murder of Emmett Till spark the modern Civil Rights Movement?"

Assessment

Formative Assessment (Informal): Class discussion review questions about Jim Crow Mississippi.

Formative Assessment (Formal): Student protest posters will be evaluated based on the criteria noted above in the introduction.

Formative Assessment (Formal): Sentence synthesis responses.

Differentiation

Student partners in need of additional work time will be allowed to complete protest poster at home and/or given extended time. Accelerated learners will be required to included additional facts on their poster obtained from the links previously noted.



Supplementary Materials:

Austin, Hilary, et al. (2015). *Examining the evidence: seven strategies for teaching with primary sources*.

Maupin House by capstone professional.

Crowe, C. (2003) *Mississippi trial, 1955*. Penguin Young Readers Group.

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TEACHING WITH **PRIMARY SOURCES**

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Teaching with Primary Sources Resource Guide

Title: The Civil Rights Movement: The Movement of Young People

Historical Background:

The murder of Emmett Till, a fourteen year old from Chicago, who was lynched while visiting family in Chicago is often recognized as the tragic spark to the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Primary Source 1:

Title: “Mass Meeting Protesting Emmett Till Lynching and Trial”

Link: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/the-civil-rights-era.html#obj9>

Purpose: Students will interpret this primary source by attending to the purpose and audience of this protest flyer.

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