

CELEBRATING MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Background:

Martin Luther King Jr. was one of America's greatest leaders. He felt very strongly about the rights of Black Americans. He felt that everyone, Black or White, should have equal rights. The right to work and make an honest living, the right to vote, the right to a good education, and the right to use all public places. Martin believed in using love instead of hate to settle disagreements. He was a very influential leader, one who will always be remembered and honored in this country. This is possible because in 1983, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill declaring that beginning in 1986, the third Monday of every January would be celebrated as a national holiday known as Martin Luther King Day.

On January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta Georgia. Martin was always taught to treat other people with respect and to settle disagreements with love instead of hate. When Martin was very young, he noticed that some people did not treat others with respect. He saw that White and Black people were treated differently. Martin, his family, and Black friends could not drink out of the same drinking fountains or use the same public restroom as White people. Martin's best friend was a little White boy. They played together everyday. One day, the little boy's mother told Martin that her son could no longer play with him. Martin's mother explained that this was because he was Black and his friend was White. His friend's mother did not want her son playing with a Black boy. Martin was very sad and did not understand why the color of someone's skin should make any difference. Martin's mother held him on her lap and said, "You are as good as anyone." Martin never forgot what his mother told him.

Martin was a very good student and entered college when he was only 15 years old. He decided to become a minister like his father and grandfather. While in college, he began studying about Mohandas Ghandi. This was a man who had shown the people of India how to settle their disagreements peacefully. Martin liked this idea. He began to think about how the people of America could settle their disagreements with love instead of hate.

On June 18, 1953, Martin married a woman named Coretta Scott. She was studying music at the same college in Boston where Martin was studying to be a minister. They moved to Montgomery, Alabama where Martin became a minister. The people of Montgomery had been having problems between the Whites and Blacks for many years and Martin hoped to help solve these problems peacefully.

<http://teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/byrnes-celebrations/martin.html>