Lesson Objectives:
- Students will review the role of young activists in the black freedom/civil rights movement and the tactics they chose.
- Students will reflect on filmmaking techniques that illustrate nonviolent social change.
- Students will recognize the power of words, images, and sounds to influence a target audience.

Vocabulary:
Nashville student movement, Diane Nash, James Lawson, SNCC, voter registration, freedom school, Selma, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., literacy test, Black Panther Party, Fred Hampton, socialism, cinema verite

Media:

Time: 50 minutes

Materials Needed:
- Six-page Teacher Guide
- Four video clips
- Student worksheet

Lesson Procedures:
1. Present Lesson Introduction to the class.
2. Distribute the student worksheet for logging the clips.
3. Play the video clips while students log their answers.
4. Lead students through a decoding of the video clips using the Media Sample Questions and Answers. The Teacher Guide includes Possible Answers to model application of key knowledge through evidence-based analysis. For more information on leading a decoding lesson, see the Kit Introduction.
5. Discuss the power of words, images, and sounds to communicate messages using Further Questions.
Case Study: Youth Activism

1. Organize and make copies for the class activities.
2. Introduce the lesson:

Lesson Introduction

Young people played a central role in the black freedom/civil rights movement. College students initiated the first sit-ins and provided the core of activists who participated in the Mississippi freedom summer campaign and the freedom rides. The Little Rock Nine were high school students and the Birmingham “Children’s Crusade” included elementary school children. Student organizers were often mentored by adult leaders like Ella Baker who helped nurture the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Young musicians like Bernice Johnson Reagon and the Freedom Singers brought the stories and spirit of the movement to picket lines, elementary schools, and concert halls across the country.

In the 1970s, the black freedom/civil rights movement began to appear as a plot line in feature films and documentaries on television and in theaters. The award-winning 1974 TV movie *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* traced the life of a former slave and culminated in her involvement in the movement as an elder of 110 years. The series *Roots* and *Roots: The Next Generations* followed the history of author Alex Haley’s family from his ancestor’s capture in Africa and subsequent enslavement in the U.S. through Haley’s work as co-writer of Malcolm X’s autobiography and Haley’s reunion with his ancestral relatives in the Gambia, West Africa. In 1987, PBS premiered the landmark documentary series *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years 1954-1964*.

As you view these representations of the role of young people in the freedom movement, notice the differences in construction between documentaries and feature films. Ask yourself what community-building, generational tactics the young activists used. The excerpts you will see are part of longer productions by different filmmakers and are not meant to show the full story as is told in the longer works from which they are taken. They are presented in chronological order based on the historical events they portray.

3. Distribute student worksheets. Have students work individually or in pairs to log each film.
4. Read aloud the brief introductory excerpt before playing each film clip.
5. Play the film clip.
6. Have students write their answers on their worksheet after the showing of the clip.
7. Lead a discussion of the clips using the *Possible Answers* as a guide for potential student responses.
This clip is from the chapter titled “Nashville: We Were Warriors” from the 2000 PBS documentary film about the power of nonviolence. *A Force More Powerful* was made by filmmaker Steve York. The excerpt you will see was taken from a section that explores the college student movement to desegregate Nashville, Tennessee, in 1960 under the guidance of nonviolence educator and activist James Lawson, who had studied Gandhi’s nonviolence movement in India.

### Media Sample Questions & Answers

1) What tactics do the young activists choose in their efforts to effect change?

   **Possible Answer:** They ask for a meeting with the mayor, stage a silent march to City Hall, and engage in lunch counter sit-ins.

2) What techniques does the filmmaker use to show nonviolent social change?

   **Possible Answer:** The tactics of nonviolent mutual respect and “speaking truth to power” are demonstrated by the filmmaker’s choice to use archival footage that show Mayor West and Diane Nash speaking about Nash’s public questioning of the mayor. By showing the newsreel footage of them on the steps, followed by their individual interviews, the story becomes humanized beyond what would have been possible with a mere retelling.

3) What does Bernard Lafayette, one of the former students, mean when he refers to himself and the other student protesters as “warriors” in a “nonviolent academy equivalent to West Point”?

   **Possible Answer:** The students had a disciplined and rigorous training in nonviolence in preparation for a confrontation, not unlike the rigors of officer training school that prepares cadets for war. We see the students take nonviolence into action by asking the mayor for a meeting, holding a silent march, and respectfully asking his personal opinion on the steps of City Hall in front of the media. Through their study with James Lawson and subsequent action, the students learned about “how to organize a community… how to conduct a demonstration… how to negotiate… [and] how to deal with the media.”
This clip is from the made-for-TV drama *Freedom Song*, starring Danny Glover and directed by Phil Alden Robinson. The film is set in Quinlan, Mississippi, in 1961 and is based on the true story of the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee’s early involvement in desegregation efforts in the Deep South. The excerpt you will see begins with high school students participating in nonviolence training. SNCC workers arranged role-playing to rehearse the possible treatment that young Quinlan students could expect as they mounted protests in their communities.

**Media Sample Questions & Answers**

1) What tactics do the young activists choose in their efforts to effect change?  
**Possible Answer:** Tactics included practicing nonviolent responses through role play, singing freedom songs together, canvassing for voter registration, and attending freedom school.

2) What techniques does the filmmaker use to show nonviolent social change?  
**Possible Answer:** Rather than simply describing the rigors of nonviolence training, the filmmaker showed the challenges as a young man erupted into violence during role play. The script called for the narrator to be one of the high school students reflecting on his relationship with his SNCC mentors, giving a very personal reflection to the interactions portrayed by the actors.

3) What does the SNCC worker mean when he says “you’re not tough enough to be nonviolent.”  
**Possible Answer:** Nonviolence requires people to develop great self-discipline and the toughness to refrain from retaliating when confronted with violence. This restraint could help to prevent the opponent from escalating their violence to a potentially fatal end.


This clip is from the made-for-TV drama *Selma, Lord Selma*, starring Jurnee Smollett as Sheyann and directed by Charles Burnett. The film is set in Selma, Alabama, in 1965 and follows a young girl’s decision to join the movement after meeting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The excerpt you will see begins as Sheyann skips school to watch a public confrontation between the sheriff and a woman who was rejected for voter registration following an impossible “literacy test.”

**Media Sample Questions & Answers**

1) What tactics do the young activists choose in their efforts to effect change?

   **Possible Answer:** Sheyann chooses to skip school to march and to witness the voter registration effort, returns to class to tell what she’s seen, and persuades the teacher to speak about the freedom movement in class.

2) What techniques does the filmmaker use to show nonviolent social change?

   **Possible Answer:** By putting Sheyann at the center of the story, the filmmaker enables the viewer to witness the historical moment from the perspective of a young child, a perspective that many viewers will be able to relate to.

3) What is the teacher’s explanation to Sheyann’s question as to why “the white folks got to make it so hard”? 

   **Possible Answer:** She explains that some white people don’t want to give up control by allowing black people to participate in the democratic process and gain access to freedom.
This clip is from the 1971 documentary film *The Murder of Fred Hampton*, made by filmmaker Howard Alk. The film documents the work of Fred Hampton, the twenty-one-year-old chairman of the Illinois chapter of the Black Panther Party who initiated community services including free breakfast programs, a free medical clinic, and an intervention to end gang violence. The film explores the investigation into Hampton’s murder by the Chicago police while he was asleep in his apartment. The excerpt begins with Hampton speaking to a community group in Chicago.

### Media Sample Questions & Answers

1) What tactics do the young activists choose in their efforts to effect change?

   **Possible Answer:** Fred Hampton speaks to a community group on the necessity for change and the promise of socialism. Black Panther members serve children free breakfast before school.

2) What techniques does the filmmaker use to show nonviolent social change?

   **Possible Answer:** As Hampton is heard speaking about revolutionary change for socialism, the filmmaker shows children being served free breakfast in a community program, giving an physical image to words (“socialism” and “revolutionary change”) that otherwise would be theoretical.

3) The journal *Independent Film Quarterly* reported that this film used the technique of “cinema verite.” What do you think cinema verite means, and where does it appear in this excerpt?

   **Possible Answer:** Cinema verite (true film) shows people in everyday activities not scripted by the director. The section showing the children being served breakfast by the Black Panther is cinema verite because it lets us see and hear this daily activity complete with background noises, children’s voices and faces, and the unscripted words of the server.
FURTHER QUESTIONS

- You have seen clips from documentaries and from historical fiction. Does one form work better than another for sharing history? For inspiring activism?

- Did you feel any of the films presented young activists in a stereotypical way? If so, which one or ones and why?

- What role are young activists playing in social justice movements in your community today?

- Both *Freedom Song* and *Selma, Lord Selma* are said to be based on true stories. How could you research what part of the story is true to historical events and what part is fiction?

- Discuss the different ideas about how people get power as represented in these films.

- The central organizing groups in these films include the Nashville student movement, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the SCLC under the leadership of King, and the Black Panther Party. Which of these group had you heard of before and what were the sources of your information? In your view, what kinds of sources are the most and least reliable for information on these groups? Did the films confirm or challenge what you already knew?

- Compare and contrast each of the following tactics featured in the films: the student sit-ins, the Freedom Summer voter registration project, the Selma marches, and the Black Panther Free Breakfast programs. Discuss why certain organizations and tactics are better known than others.

- Which of these stories did you most relate to yourself and why?

CONNECTIONS

U1 #4, 5, 9, 12, 15, 16; U3 #8, 10, 15; U4 #2, 5-9, 12-15; U5 #15, 16; U6 #7, 15; U7 #2-4, 5-9; U8 #6-10, 16; U1 L2; U2 L2; U3 L2; U4 L2; U8 L3

(Violence & Nonviolence)

U1 #2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 16, 20; U2 #3, 10, 12, 14, 16; U3 #2, 13, 16, 17, 21; U4 #2, 6, 10, 14, 16-18; U5 #3-11; U6 #2, 4, 5, 9, 13, 16; U7 #2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11-16; U8 #13-15; U2 L3; U4 L2, U4 L3; U5 L2 U5 L3; U6 L3; U7 L2, U7 L3; U8 L3

(Identity)

U1 #10, 11, 16; U2 #14, 17; U3 #16; U4 #3, 5; U5 #8, 20, 21; U6 #9; U7 #16; U8 #13, 16; U1 L2; U2 L2; U4 L2, U4 L3; U5 L2, U5 L3; U7 L2, U7 L3

(Youth Audience)

U1 #16, 20; U2 #2, 18; U3 #2, 21; U4 #11, 12, 16, 19; U6 #9, 12, 16; U7 #15; U1 L2; U2 L2; U3 L2; U4 L2

(remembering People’s History)

U1 #7-9, 12, 14-18, 20; U2 #6-8, 14, 15, 18; U3 #10, 15, 18, 20, 21; U4 #2, 3, 5-14, 16, 17; U5 #7, 8, 16; U6 #7, 10, 15; U1 L2, U1 L3; U2 L2, U2 L3; U3, L2, U3 L3; U4 L2, U4 L3; U7 L2

(Civil Disobedience & Direct Action)
Read over the questions below before watching the short video clips. You may want to take notes as you view the clips. You will then be given time to write your answers.

Title of Film Clip: _____________________________________________________________

1) What tactics do the young activists choose in their efforts to effect change?

2) What techniques does the filmmaker use to show nonviolent social change?

3) A Force More Powerful – What does Bernard Lafayette, one of the former students, mean when he refers to himself and the other student protesters as “warriors” in a “nonviolent academy equivalent to West Point”?

Freedom Song – What does the SNCC worker mean when he says “you’re not tough enough to be nonviolent”?

Selma, Lord Selma – What is the teacher’s explanation to Sheyann’s question as to why “the white folks got to make it so hard?”

Murder of Fred Hampton – The journal Independent Film Quarterly reports that this film uses the technique of “cinema verite.” What do you think cinema verite means and where does it appear in this excerpt?