

## **THE 1963 CHICAGO SCHOOL BOYCOTT: A SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN ACTION**

### **WHEN TO USE THIS LESSON:**

U.S. History.....unit on the Civil Rights Movement  
Chicago or Illinois History.....unit on the 1960s  
Civics .....unit on social movements and political participation

**LESSON DURATION:** 4 days

**SUITABLE FOR:** Grades 6-12

### **C3 STANDARDS:**

#### HISTORY

#### CIVICS

- D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.
- D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives.
- D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.
- D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.
- D2.Civ.5.9-12. Evaluate citizens’ and institutions’ effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.
- D2.Civ.6.9-12. Critique relationships among governments, civil societies, and economic markets.

### **LESSON SEQUENCE:**

Day 1: What’s a social movement?  
Day 2: Chicago and the Civil Rights Movement

Day 3: Strategy, Tactics, and Contingency  
Day 4: Assessing Success, Judging Legacy

### **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

#### CONCEPTUAL QUESTIONS:

- What is a social movement?
- How do leaders and participants within social movements exercise political judgment—about the strategy that drives the movement, the tactics that advance the goal, and the legacies or lessons that they carry forward?

#### HISTORICAL QUESTIONS:

- What were the unique challenges that faced civil rights movement leaders in the urban North?
- Why were schools important to the civil rights movement?
- What were the unique contexts that allowed a social movement against school segregation to form in Chicago in the early 1960s?
- What did the movement accomplish?

### **LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW AND LEARNING GOALS:**

In this 4-day lesson, students will explore primary documents and secondary sources that introduce them to the dynamics of a social movement, and immerse them in the specific events and contexts of Chicago’s 1963 protest against segregated and unequal schools. Students will expand their knowledge of the political history of Chicago and the civil rights movement, develop skills of primary source analysis, and apply principles of historical perspective-taking and basic political analysis to assess how, why, and when a social movement was successful at achieving its aims. By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define the concept of a social movement—a culturally linked and materially networked coalition of individuals or groups that, having developed a shared frame of analysis around a social problem, act collectively to pursue a sustained campaign in pursuit of political change.
- Identify key organizers and political players that defined the civil rights struggle in Chicago: [Benjamin Willis, Richard J. Daley, the CCCO, The Urban League, SNCC, CORE, Rosie Simpson, Larry Landry, Don Rose]
- Define key vocabulary associated with Chicago’s civil rights conflict: [de facto segregation, attendance boundaries, integration, boycott, Willis Wagons, solidarity, coalitions, Freedom Schools]

**DAY 1: WHAT’S A SOCIAL MOVEMENT**

**Materials needed:** LCD projector, blackboard, large post-its, markers.

**Objectives:** Students will access prior knowledge about what a social movement is and build their vocabulary to clarify the concept. Clarifications include: that civic participation extends beyond voting; that people organize around a frustration with social problems; that groups can develop shared analysis of those problems; and that they can develop strategies for sustained, organized, collective action to effect political change.

**ENGAGE:**

In **whole-group discussion**, announce to students that this week you’ll be exploring the concept of a *social movement*. Tell students that during the past decade and a half there have been a number of things calling themselves social movements in the United States, and these are a few of their slogans (project the visual aid)

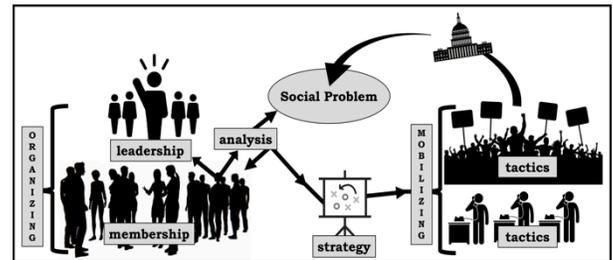


**Group students** into sets of four or five and give them a large post-it. Ask students to draw three separate scenes of what they think people who are in these sorts of social movements *do*. They do *not* have to choose one of these specific movements, but should imagine, *in general*, what people in a social movement do with their time.

**EXPLORE:**

Hang the large post-its on the front board and invite students to a brief **gallery walk** to look at each others’ images. Reconvene students in a **whole-group discussion** to identify common imagery. Students may have drawn a number of activities: *demonstrations, rallies, marches, speeches, petitions, letter-writing, social media hashtags* and so on.

In a **mini-lecture**, introduce a term: *mobilizing*. Explain to the students that most of the activities that they’ve identified are mobilizations—meaning mass turnouts of people for a big action that draws media attention. But a social movement is not just the moment of mobilization. It’s a broader and deeper process that relies on *organizing*—meaning the building of *membership* and *leadership* around a shared *analysis* of a *social problem* and a shared *strategy* for reforming or transforming the problem. *Mobilizing* people for a protest is one *tactic* that a social movement might take on to pursue its goals. (Project or draw a diagram to illustrate these dynamics)



**EXPLAIN & ELABORATE:**

In a **quick think-pair-share**, ask students to define the two words in the term “social movement”: *social* (meaning relating to society or groups of people) and *movement* (meaning something in motion or in a state of change).

In a **whole-group discussion**, ask students to share their definitions, synthesizing toward the key elements: social change via sustained social action. Then share a full **definition** for students to keep in their notes and check for comprehension of component terms: **Social Movement:** *a culturally linked and materially networked coalition of individuals or groups that, having developed a shared frame of analysis around a social problem, act collectively to pursue a sustained campaign in pursuit of political change.*

Finally, stress to students the idea that a social movement is literally *in motion*—and therefore unpredictable. People organize for a lot of different reasons, start to mobilize, and find that things may be changing around them. This makes it important to study social movements *over time* to see what triggered a movement to start, how people made change, and how people were changed in the process.

**EVALUATE:**

In **whole-group** discussion students if they know any examples from history of successful social movements. It shouldn’t take long for students to volunteer the example of the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, which succeeded in ending Jim Crow segregation in the Southern United States and secured voting rights for African Americans. Tell students that this week, they’ll get up close with an important episode of the Civil Rights Movement, but it happened here in Chicago, and it focused on schools. Announce their **homework** which is to visit and watch [chapter 1 and video clip 1](#) of the Explore Chicago Collections exhibit on the 1963 Chicago Public Schools Boycott.

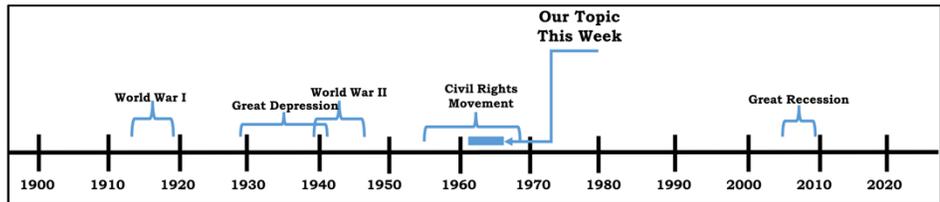
**DAY 2: CHICAGO AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

**Materials needed:** LCD projector, blackboard, laptops or computer lab.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to name the material causes and cultural effects of "de facto segregation" as it existed in Chicago in the early 1960s. Students will practice taking the perspective of historical actors who were drawn into a movement to confront and transform those conditions.

**ENGAGE:**

In **whole-group discussion**, ask students to surface the who, what, where, and when of what they're studying this week based on what they learned from chapter 1 of the exhibit. **Who:** activists, children, black Americans; **What:** a social movement against segregation and inequality; **Where:** in Chicago; **When:** the early 1960s. Show students a quick timeline to orient them to where you are in the history of the United States.



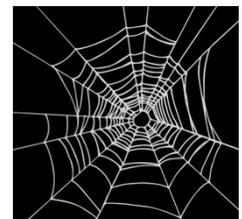
**EXPLAIN & ELABORATE:**

In **whole-group discussion**, ask students to define *racial segregation*. Help students surface the idea that segregation is some system which categorizes and separates people by color, and that it assigns people to unequal treatment, amenities, or services on that basis. Explain that the system of Jim Crow in the American South, which activists were fighting against during the 19650s and 1960s was a struggle against what was called *de jure* segregation—a system enacted by law. In northern cities like Chicago, segregation was a more complex system—a web of practices that had been built up since World War I that activists called *de facto* segregation.

**Group students** into teams of four or five and give them access to a computer. Guide them to [chapter 2](#), [chapter 3](#), and [chapter 4](#) of the Explore Chicago Collections exhibit. Explain to students that they'll be viewing this material to find out *how de facto segregation worked* in Chicago. To fill out the chart below, they'll need to read the text for each exhibit, view the entire video for chapter 2, the video of chapter 3 starting at minute 1:28, and the video of chapter 4, up to minute 1:30.

Source of Segregation	How did it work?	Who was responsible?
Redlining		
Violence		
"White Flight"		
Neighborhood School Policy		

In **whole-group discussion**, check comprehension on each aspect. To stress the interconnection of these elements, ask students to imagine de facto segregation as a **web** that kept black Chicagoans stuck in place, but where each strand was interconnected with another, and it was therefore hard to judge where a struggle against it might best begin.



**EXPLORE**

Now, instruct students that they'll return to their **groups** and revisit the video from chapters 2, 3, and 4 (up to minute 1:53) of the exhibit, but that this time their job is to move beyond the question of what de facto segregation was or how it worked, and to get at what it *felt like* and *what it meant* to black Chicagoans at the time. Have students find *direct quotations* and fill out a chart together:

Topic	How did people feel? Include the person's name and a DIRECT QUOTE
Race Prejudice	
The Southern Civil Rights Struggle	
School Facilities and School Supplies	
Neighborhood School Policy	

**EVALUATE**

In **whole-group discussion** track and process the quotations from the documentary on the board in the form of a **word cloud**. Identify common themes identified by the activists on film: feelings that their futures were being sold short; feelings of disrespect; feelings that schools were not nurturing; feelings that the system and its political leaders were serving others and not them; feelings of connection with the Southern movement. As an **exit question**, ask students to consider how those feelings of frustration might have developed as people started to attend organizing meetings.

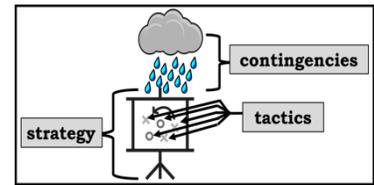
**DAY 3: STRATEGY, TACTICS, AND CONTINGENCY**

**Materials needed:** LCD projector, blackboard, laptops or computer lab.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to differentiate between strategy and tactics as they apply to a social movement. Students will identify how the deliberate planning on the part of activists can interact with a sequence of contingent events to determine a social movement’s path. Students will be able to identify and interpret these dynamics within the conduct of a specific historical example: the movement for public school integration in Chicago.

**ENGAGE:**

In **whole-group** discussion, ask students to consider a scenario in which one of them arrived ten minutes late to school one morning. Ask students what kind of things someone might bring up as reasons why this happened. Students may suggest things like a student sleeping late, a missed bus that ran early, a flat tire, keys that got left behind and had to be retrieved, an argument that the student had with a younger brother on the way out the door. Point out that some of these things (sleeping in, forgetting keys, arguing with a sibling) are things that the student has some control in planning and choosing while others (the bus running ahead of schedule, a tire getting a flat) are events outside of the control of the student. But both types of events could interact to produce the ultimate outcome of arriving late to school. Explain that a social movement is no different in this way: there is long-range *strategy* that movement organizers plan, the *tactics* that they deploy to carry it out, and there are the unexpected *contingencies* that activists attempt to react to. Explain that today, students will be finding this dynamic in early 1960s Chicago. (Draw or project the diagram to illustrate the concept).



**EXPLORE:**

**Group students** into teams of four or five. Have students re-read the text that goes along with chapter 3, and view the video for chapter 4 (beginning at minute 1:53), the video for [chapter 5](#), especially the video and text for [chapter 6](#), and the . Instruct students to plot the events related along the timeline in terms of strategies (larger goals), tactics (specific moves and actions taken), and contingencies (unexpected external events).

	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966
Strategies					
Tactics					
Contingencies					

**EVALUATE:**

In **their groups**, have students look over their chart as a team and consider the path of events that led from initial organizing in 1962 to the eventual resignation of Superintendent Benjamin Willis in 1966. Each group must come up with an answer to two questions: *What was the overall strategy of the movement? Were the tactics that movement activists adopted successful?* Give students time to work through and develop these answers. Explain that tomorrow, students will have to present their interpretations—and supportive evidence—to another group, whose job it will be to critically assess their interpretation. In the last five minutes of class, give students a chance to assign roles to each other for tomorrow’s presentation, and to assign any loose ends to each other for **homework**.

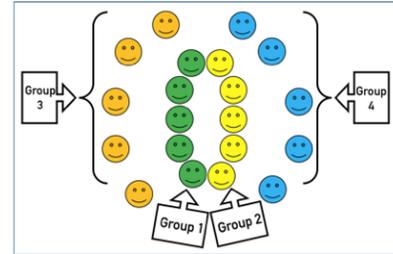
## DAY 4: ASSESSING SUCCESS, JUDGING LEGACY

**Materials needed:** LCD projector, blackboard.

**Objectives:** Students will weigh and consider evidence in support of a historical interpretation. Students will interrogate and evaluate the efforts of their peers engaged in the same task. Students will consider multiple metrics of “success” with regard to the conduct and outcomes of a social movement.

### ENGAGE:

Announce that today’s presentations will be conducted as a two-part fishbowl. In a fishbowl, subgroups of students conduct their own discussion (the fish in the bowl), while you and another subgroup of students observe from the periphery and track the content and quality of the discussion. Groups 1 & 2 will present to one another while groups 3 & 4 watch and track the details on a note-taker. Then, the roles will reverse. (Show students the visual to remind them of the discussion structure). Emphasize that although the teacher will grade you on the strength of your participation in each role, this is not a debate with winner and a loser, but a discussion aimed at tightening the link between our interpretations and our



evidence. Also remind students that the question at issue—whether the movement was successful—is meant to explore the movement *on its own terms*. The task is *not* to argue if the goal was worthy or not, or even if the tactics chosen were wise; it is simply to discover the historical relationship between what activists sought to achieve and what they did achieve.

### EXPLORE & EVALUATE:

**Fishbowl Discussion:** Explain that as the fishbowl proceeds, students will take roles as either presenters, reviewers, or observers. The exchange should follow this format:

- The presenters will set out their description of what the Chicago school integration movement’s strategy was, and their assessment of whether their tactics deployed were successful. They must cite evidence from the exhibit.
- Meanwhile, the reviewers (and the observers on the perimeter) should track and assess the argument in their notebooks.
- After the presenters cover their position, the reviewers will get a chance to raise questions and doubts that they may have about the claim or the evidence used to support it.
- Presenters can then respond to the reviewers, elaborating on their interpretation to reaffirm it, or, if they choose, adjusting their interpretation based on the new questions posed.
- After the initial back-and-forth between teams 1 and 2 is complete, they transfer to the perimeter of the fishbowl to become observers, while teams 3 and 4 move to the interior to take roles as presenters and reviewers.

### RE-ENGAGE:

Convene students back into a **whole-group discussion** and thank the groups for their presentations. Explain that the question that students debated today was only one way of assessing the success of a movement. Another crucial aspect of social movements is that fact that they are *participatory*, which means that participants are *themselves* changed as they struggle for social change. Ask students to reconsider the numerous tactics that were covered in chapter 5 and chapter 6—the sit-ins, the songs and chants, the flyering, the long marches, the experience of being arrested. Ask students to share their thoughts on what those experiences would be like as young people, and how they might shape a person’s perspective growing up.

### EXPLORE, EVALUATE, & CONCLUDE:

Show students the video from [chapter 8](#) of the exhibit. Ask students to track the numerous other ways that the movement participants look back on their participation as a “success.” What, according to the film and the exhibit, is the legacy of the 1963 boycott today? In an open **whole-group discussion** ask students to respond to the prompt: can a movement be successful on terms other than the ones that it set out for itself?