

Youth Pledge of Nonviolence

Making peace must start within ourselves and in our school.

I, _____ and each member of _____ school, commit ourselves as best we can to become nonviolent and peaceable people:

To Respect Self and Others

To respect myself, to affirm others and to avoid uncaring criticism, hateful words, physical or emotional attacks, negative peer pressure, and self-destructive behavior, including abuse of alcohol and drugs.

To Communicate Better

To share my feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to express my anger and other emotions, to work at solving problems peacefully, and to encourage an open system of communication throughout the school.

To Listen

To listen carefully to others, especially those who disagree with me, and to consider others' feelings and needs as valid as my own.

To Forgive

To apologize and make amends when I have hurt another, to forgive others, and to keep from holding grudges.

To Respect Nature

To treat the environment and all living things with respect and care and to promote environmental concern in our school.

To Recreate Nonviolently

To select activities and entertainment that strengthen my commitment to nonviolence and that promote a less violent society, and to avoid social activities that make violence look exciting, funny or acceptable.

To Act Courageously

To actively challenge violence in all its forms whenever I encounter it, whether at home, at school, at work, or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated unfairly, even if it means standing alone.

"Eliminating violence, one school at a time, starting with our own."

Institute for Peace & Justice,

475 E. Lockwood Ave, St. Louis, MO 63119

(314) 918-2630 • E-mail: ppjn@aol.com; Web: www.ipj-ppj.org

Dr. King and the Pledge of Nonviolence

1. "The Pledge of Nonviolence - The Power of Love"

- Read twice this quotation from STRIDE TOWARD FREEDOM, p. 87, as a way of introducing the core of the Pledge of Nonviolence - "the power of love," with a poster reading "The Pledge of Nonviolence - The Power of Love"

"Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness
begets a greater toughness.
We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we
must meet physical force with soul force."

- The Pledge is a way of challenging hate, violence, and toughness with the power of love, a way of escalating love in the face of escalating violence.

2. "Respect Self and Others"

Suggestions from students and teachers

- Use a colorful poster with these words to introduce this component of the Pledge.
- Using the sign language gestures focuses the students and reinforces the learning.
- Ask students to name 2 to 4 specific ways that adults/teachers can show them respect. Have students stand and/or come to the front to state their idea. Repeat each idea. See if they can identify all the suggestions that were given.
- Ask teachers to name 2 to 4 specific ways that students can show them respect. Have teachers stand and/or come to the front to state their idea. Repeat each idea. See if the students can identify all the suggestions that were given.
- Ask students to name 2 to 4 specific ways that they can show each other respect. Again, have student stand and/or come to the front to state their idea. Repeat each idea. See if the students can identify all the suggestions that were given.

Dr. King on Respect

- Read the excerpt from King's "I Have a Dream" or "I Still Have a Dream" speeches, putting the bold phrases on posters for students to repeat aloud:

"I still have a dream this morning -
that one day every person of color in the world will be judged on the basis of **the
content of their character** rather than **the color of their skin**;

- Ask students to explain what Dr. King means.

- Ask students to identify the different ways in which young people judge one another - looks, clothes, possessions, popularity, physical strength or sports - and what effects these judgments have on others.
- Ask students to decide one way they can put Dr. King's emphasis on "character" into practice in their own life.

Optional concluding song -

- Play "See Me Beautiful" (from TEACHING PEACE by Red Grammer)
- Ask students to identify what it is that makes a person truly "beautiful"

3. "Communicate Better - Talk It Out"

Suggestions from students and teachers

- Use a colorful poster with these words to introduce this component of the Pledge.
- Use the sign language gestures to visually reinforce the learning.
- Ask students and teachers to identify what they can do when someone is so "in-their face" angry that talking it out isn't possible right then, something they can do so as not to escalate the situation into a fight. Have students stand and/or come to the front to state their idea. Repeat each idea.
- At the end, see if they can identify all the suggestions that were given.

Dr. King on meeting anger with calm.

- Read the excerpt from King's STRIDE TOWARD FREEDOM, p. 121, putting the bold phrases on posters for students to repeat aloud:

"“You must **not harbor anger**, “ I admonished myself.
 „You must be willing to **suffer the anger of the opponent**, and yet not return anger.
 You must **not become bitter**.
 No matter how emotional your opponents are, you must **become calm**. ““

- Ask students to explain what Dr. King means.
- Ask students to identify some ways of "becoming calm" in the midst of anger. Have students stand and/or come to the front to state their idea. Repeat each idea.
- At the end, see if they can identify all the suggestions that were given.

4. "Listen Carefully" (if time permits)

- Use a colorful poster with these words to introduce this component of the Pledge.
- Use the sign language gestures to visually reinforce the learning.
- Paraphrase the following quotation from Dr. King's THE TRUMPET OF CONSCIENCE, p. 29, putting the bold phrases on posters for students to repeat aloud.

"Here is the true meaning of compassion and nonviolence, when they help us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to **know his assessment of ourselves.**

For from his view we may indeed see the basic weakness of our condition.

And if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of those who are called the opposition."

- Give an example from your own life about how hard it was to listen to constructive criticism from someone, but how in the long run it helped you.
- Ask students to give examples of this from their own lives, perhaps starting with a teacher if students are reluctant to share examples.

5. "Forgive"

Suggestions from students

- Use a colorful poster with this word to introduce this component of the Pledge.
- Use the sign language gesture to visually reinforce the learning.
- Ask students to identify reasons why it is good, even necessary, to forgive. Have students stand and/or come to the front to state their idea. Repeat each idea.
- In a Christian setting, hold a crucifix silently before the assembly and then ask what the crucifix tells us about forgiveness.
- At the end, see if they can identify all the suggestions that were given.

Dr. King on forgiveness

- Read the excerpt from King's **STRENGTH TO LOVE**, pp. 42-43, putting the bold phrase on a poster for students to repeat aloud:

"It is impossible even to begin the act of loving one's enemies without the prior acceptance of the necessity, over and over again, of forgiving those who inflict evil and injury upon us... Forgiveness is a catalyst **creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start** and a new beginning... The evil deed is no longer a mental block impeding a new relationship..."

- Ask students to explain what Dr. King means.
- Ask students to think of a situation in their own lives where forgiveness made a fresh start possible. You might give or ask a teacher to give an example, to help students get started.
- Ask one or two students stand and/or come to the front to share their example.

Alternative or follow-up example - **THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES**

Reading or summarizing **THE STORY OF RUBY BRIDGES** by Robert Coles is an engaging way of touching students' hearts on the possibility and necessity of forgiveness, using the witness of this 6-year-old African American girl who integrated the New Orleans public

schools in 1960. Each day on her way to school she said this prayer of forgiveness for those adults who cursed and threatened her each time she walked into the school building:

"Please, God, try to forgive those people. Because even if they say those bad things, they don't know what they're doing. So, you could forgive them, just like You did those folks a long time ago when they said terrible things about You."

6. "Be Courageous"

Suggestions from students

- Use a colorful poster with this word to introduce this component of the Pledge.
- Use the sign language gesture to visually reinforce the learning.
- Ask students to identify ways that Dr. King was courageous.

Dr. King on the courage to speak out

- Read the excerpt from King's "When Silence Is Betrayal" speech (April 4, 1967), putting the bold phrase on a poster for students to repeat aloud (or just use the title of the speech).

"A time comes **when silence is betrayal**... Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but **we must speak**. For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us.

"We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls "enemy," for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers. I think of them, too, because it is clear to me that there will be no meaningful solution until some attempt is made to know them and hear their broken cries..."

- Ask students to explain what Dr. King means by "silence is betrayal."
- Ask students to name some of the issues Dr. King spoke out about, especially ones that got him in trouble (racism, materialism/poverty, and the war in Vietnam/militarism)
- Ask students to give examples of situations where they can betray others by their silence, when they didn't defend others who were being put-down or mistreated. You might give or ask a teacher to give an example, to help students get started.
- Ask students why they sometimes hesitate to speak out, what they are afraid of. Using your own example or asking a teacher to share first can often be helpful.

OPTIONAL: To reinforce Dr. King's concern about silent betrayal -

Read and discuss this sentence from Dr. King's LETTER FROM A BIRMINGHAM CITY JAIL, perhaps substituting "hateful" for "vitriolic," and make a poster of the bold phrase.

"We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but for **the appalling silence of the good people**.

Ask students what Dr. King means by "the appalling silence of the good people" and give examples of this from their own lives.

7. OPTIONAL: Dr. King's Own Eulogy as His Final Challenge to Us

- Read "Then My Living Will Not Be in Vain," (Ebenezer Baptist Church, February 1968) and put the bold phrases on posters.
- Have six students hold each of the six posters and step forward to have the assembly read those words aloud from their poster as they occur in the eulogy.

"...I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to **give his life serving others**.

I'd like for somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to **love somebody**.

I want you to say that I tried to **be right on the war question**.

I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to **clothe those who were naked**.

I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to **visit those who were in prison**.

And I want you to say that I tried to **love and serve humanity**...

And that is all I want to say. If I can help somebody as I pass along; if I can cheer somebody with a song; if I can show somebody he's traveling wrong; then my living will not be in vain..."

8. Responding to Dr. King's Dream

- Show the "We Will Help the Dream Come True" poster you have made from the sample on the next page and inform students that their teachers will be inviting them to make action decisions in the days ahead about what each of them can do to help make Dr. King's dream come true.
- Sing "We Shall Overcome" one more time standing and using the sign language gestures.

Follow-Up Activity Options

Action Decisions - "Helping the Dream Come True"

- Invite teachers to make their own "Yes We Can, Yes We Will ...Help the Dream Come True" poster as a way of encouraging their students identify specific ways each of them can help make Dr. King's dream come true and express these action decisions publicly.
- Suggest that teachers use strips of colored paper or "postems" for their students to write their action decision on and put those strips or "postems" on the poster.
- Teachers might use the 4 or 5 components of the Pledge of Nonviolence presented at the assembly, one component at a time, as the focus for these decisions.
- Encourage teachers to repeat this activity weekly for a month or more, each time focusing on one of the components of the Pledge, as a way of deepening the impact of Dr. King's witness and the Pledge of Nonviolence on the students and faculty.

Teaching Dr. King and the Pledge of Nonviolence to younger students

Another good follow-up activity is to have the older students prepare short presentations on one or more of the components of the Pledge of Nonviolence. These presentations might be done in pairs and include the following:

- An appropriate quotation (or paraphrase of a quotation) from Dr. King on the theme
- An example from each student's own life about how they are trying to live out Dr. King's message and put that component of the Pledge into practice.
- A brainstorming discussion of how the younger students can themselves live out Dr. King's message and put that component of the Pledge into practice.
- Action decisions by the younger students and writing them down on some poster like the "Yes We Can, Yes We Will ... Help the Dream Come True" on which the younger students can place their action decisions.