THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Enrichment: Debate

Active vs. Passive Resistance

Active resistance is the use of violence to fight against perceived injustices. The Boston Tea Party was an early example of active resistance. During the civil rights movement, some of the activities of organizations such as the Black Panthers, as well as riots in Watts and other inner-city neighborhoods in the 1960s, were forms of active resistance.

Passive resistance is a way of protesting in which an authority, such as the government, is challenged nonviolently. Examples of passive resistance include peaceful marches or demonstrations, boycotts of products or companies, fasting, and refusing to comply with laws or orders issued by the government.

Over the years, the form of resistance that works better—active resistance or passive resistance—has been the subject of much debate. Many people believe that the only way to achieve justice is by using force and violence. Others believe that passive, nonviolent resistance is a more effective way to achieve justice. What do you think?

Your assignment: Research both active and passive resistance. Use the information you gather to plan and present a debate on the following topic: Which is more effective in achieving the overall goals of an oppressed group—active resistance or passive resistance?

Suggested materials: Dry-erase board and markers (to detail key points in the debate) or poster board; note cards (to remember key points while debating).

Suggested procedures:

1. As a group, decide who will take each side of the issue and who will judge the debate. Will the decision rest with the teacher, with a panel of judges, or with the audience?

2. Determine the rules for the debate—speaking order, time limits, and so on.

3. Research both active and passive resistance, learning about the effectiveness of each form in achieving the desired goals. Read the questions on the following page for research ideas.

4. Support your arguments. Begin by identifying evidence that will support your side of the issue. Then look for evidence that you can use to disprove arguments that the opposing side is likely to raise.

5. Organize your thoughts in an outline. Arrange the arguments and the evidence you will need to prove your point or disprove your opponent's.

6. Anticipate your opponent's arguments, and prepare rebuttals for them.

7. Prepare for your presentation by putting your arguments, evidence, and rebuttals on note cards. Read your note cards over several times to become familiar with them.

8. After your debate, use the chart on the next page to recall the debate's important points before making your final decision on which form of resistance is more effective.
Active vs. Passive Resistance

**Directions:** Consider the following questions as you research your side of the debate.

- What is the philosophy behind active resistance? What is the philosophy behind passive resistance?
- In what ways has active resistance been carried out? Give specific examples.
- In what ways has passive resistance been carried out? Give specific examples.
- Who were some people who practiced active resistance? What were the results of their actions?
- Who were some people who practiced passive resistance? What were the results of their actions?

Make sure that your answers to these questions are based on factual information.

**Directions:** Use the following chart to record important points made during the debate. When the debate is over, use the information you recorded to make your final decision.