

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Document-Based Activity: The Murder of Emmett Till

Prologue

MISSION US: "No Turning Back"

A NOTE TO THE EDUCATOR:

In the Prologue, Verna's cousin Robert talks about the murder of Emmett Till and its effect on his family's willingness to visit their relatives in Mississippi. Mamie Till, Emmett's mother, moved to Chicago from Mississippi in the 1920s as part of the Great Migration. While visiting his Mississippi family in 1955, 14-year-old Emmett was murdered by white men who claimed that he had whistled at a white woman.

In this activity, students will analyze the front page of the Chicago Defender from September 10, 1955, less than two weeks after Emmett Till was murdered. They will also reflect on the meaning of the word justice and observe how that concept appears in the Defender's reporting.

Steps to Complete:

1) **Create a Concept Map for Justice**

Begin with a concept map exercise with the word justice. Tell students to take 2 minutes and write a list of words or phrases that come to mind when they hear the word, using the space on the handout.

Then, in pairs or groups of three, have students compare their answers and respond to the following questions:

- *Were there things you all had on your list?*
- *What differences did you notice between your lists?*
- *What was the first thing you thought of, and what was the last?*
- *What words from your list or your partners' lists surprised you?*

Come back together as a class and have each group report out on common items from their lists. Record the words on the board to create a class word cloud.

2) **Review the Story of Emmett Till**

If students have already completed the prologue, begin by asking them what they learned from it about Emmett Till. Who was he? What happened to him?

Make sure that at least the following information comes up in the discussion:

One child of the Great Migration was Emmett Till. His mother, Mamie, had been born in Mississippi in the 1920s and moved to Chicago as a toddler; Emmett was born there in 1941. When he was 14, his mother sent him to Mississippi to visit family, and while there he was murdered by white men who claimed he had whistled at and verbally harassed a white woman, Carolyn Bryant. The Emmett Till case sent shock waves throughout the country and was talked about all over the nation. The specifics of the case tied Chicago and Mississippi together, as Emmett had been visiting Mississippi from Chicago when he was killed.

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3) *Analyze Front Page of Chicago Defender*

Share the image of the front page of the Chicago Defender from September 10, 1955. Give students several minutes to examine the front page of the Chicago Defender from September 10, 1955. Then have them respond to the following analysis questions (also printed on their handouts) individually or in pairs.

- *What words in the newspaper headline stick out to you?*
- *Where is justice mentioned, directly or indirectly?*
- *What did the writers in the Chicago Defender highlight about Emmett Till and what had happened to him?*
- *Based on the headlines, which types of "action" was the Chicago Defender calling for?*

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Defining Justice

What does the word *justice* mean to you? Take a few minutes to create a simple concept map by connecting words and phrases that come to mind when you think of *justice* to the word below.

Justice

Share your concept map with one or more classmates, and answer the following questions:

- Were there things you all had on your list?
- What differences did you notice between your lists?
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- What words from your list or your partners' lists surprised you?

Feel free to add ideas from your classmates' charts to yours.

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Analyze the *Chicago Defender* Front Page

Carefully examine the image of the front page of the *Chicago Defender* from September 10, 1955. Then respond to the questions that follow the image.

Brownell Orders Probe Of Mississippi Voting NATION SHOCKED, VOW ACTION IN LYNCHING OF CHICAGO YOUTH

'Murder,' White Says; Promises Prosecution

An aroused and angry nation this week demanded quick justice for the kidnapping of 14-year-old Emmett Till of Chicago, whose bound and mutilated body was found Wednesday in the Tallahatchie river near Money, Miss.

Even Mississippi Gov. Hugh White, traditionally silent on such matters, promised a complete investigation and full prosecution of anyone responsible.

However, Gov. White disagreed with the NAACP, which last week insisted the boy's slaying was a simple lynching. Gov. White argued it was a "struggle over manhood."

White also denied the assertion of a national youth council that the slaying was a "struggle over manhood." In the NAACP's telephone broadcast with Till's mother, Mrs. Mamie Bradley, White said:

"The people of Mississippi and the government are not going to let such an act, I am going to make immediately a complete investigation of this affair."

Young Till, accused of violating the wife of Roy Bryant, a storekeeper in Neshoba, Miss., had been missing since Sunday, when he was reported to have been seen in a telephone booth in Chicago. He was slain on Monday, a few days after his kidnapping and slaying.

Till, an 18-year-old and his half brother, J. W. Miller, were held in a Mississippi prison for two days before they were released to go to the Tallahatchie river.

'Protest Mississippi Shame'

NAACP protests were held in front of the national and Mississippi state capitols last week in Chicago. They were led by Mrs. Mamie Bradley, mother of the slain boy, and other NAACP leaders.

Chicago Answers

In answer to a query from the Chicago Defender, J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said "the facts pertaining to the murder of Emmett Till have been submitted to the Civil Rights section of the department which has advised that they do not constitute a violation with respect to the provisions of the FBI."

before the grand jury early this week and Governor and Tallahatchie County law officials promised to obey the governor's order for a complete investigation and speedy prosecution of the case.

A 17-year-old fatherless boy, his body found in the Tallahatchie river, he had been bound and mutilated. He was named Emmett Till and was from Chicago.

It was an angry youth protest that erupted in Chicago and spread with its mother to a second floor apartment at 461 N. Lawrence.

The father, Louis Till, died in service in World War II. The boy's mother has been married and divorced since.

1905-1955 GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY YEAR

Chicago Defender
WORLD'S GREATEST WEEKLY
NATIONAL

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS—SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1955



EMMETT LOUIS TILL

Urge Eisenhower To See That 'Justice Is Served'

(FULL PAGE PICTURES, PAGE 5)

Richard J. Daley, mayor of Chicago, last week urged President Dwight D. Eisenhower to see that justice is served in the slaying of 14-year-old Emmett Louis Till of Chicago.

"The whole state of Mississippi was a good lot, I know he didn't want to die for the thing," Till's body was found Wednesday in the Tallahatchie river by Fred Hunter, it, while fishing.

The NAACP charged that Mississippi had failed to prosecute anyone responsible for the slaying. The NAACP also charged that the state had failed to investigate the slaying and that it was being used as a political tool.

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Thousands At Rites For Till

More than 20,000 people gathered in Chicago for a funeral for the slain boy. The funeral was held in a large hall in Chicago.

Mother's Tears Greet Son Who Died A Martyr

They watched the procedure and they wept about their boy. Mrs. Mamie Bradley wept as she wrapped her arms around her son's body as it lay in state in Chicago.

Baptists Of America Hold Meet In Chicago

Thousands of delegates to the 77th annual session of the National Baptist Convention of America arrived in Chicago this week to take part in the denomination's 100th Jubilee celebration.

Brownell Orders Voting Probe

The FBI has now launched an investigation into charges that Negroes were denied the right to vote in last month's Mississippi primary election.

Announcement of the probe by Atty. Gen. Herbert Brownell, Jr. followed an investigation of the slaying of Emmett Till, which was reported in Chicago.

Analysis Questions



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