

Black Lives Matter: From Hashtag to Movement

Compelling Question: How did Black Lives Matter transform itself from a hashtag into a political activist movement and why?

Grade Level		Time	Common Core Standards
K-2	3-5	45 Minutes	Reading: R1, R6 Writing: W4 Speaking & Listening: SL1, SL2
MS	HS		



Web Related Connections

Lessons

- [George Floyd, Racism and Law Enforcement](#)
- [When Perception and Reality Collide: Implicit Bias and Race](#)
- [Exploring Solutions to Address Racial Disparity Concerns](#)

Children’s Literature

- [The Hate U Give](#)

Other Resources

- [10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism](#)
- [Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism](#)
- [Teaching about Racism, Violence, Inequity and the Criminal Justice System](#)

Key Words

(See ADL’s [Education Glossary Terms.](#))

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| activist | movement |
| campaign | nascent |
| color blind | organize |
| condemned | privilege |
| controversy | racial |
| demands | disparities |
| hashtag | systemic |
| implicit | tactics |
| incarceration | targeted |
| inclusive | trauma |

LESSON OVERVIEW

Black Lives Matter is an activist movement which began as a hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) after George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teenager killed in Florida in July 2013. The movement became more widely known and popularized after two high-profile deaths in 2014 of unarmed African-American men (Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY and Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO). Neither of the police officers involved in their deaths were indicted (i.e., formally charged with a crime). Ongoing local and national protests and other actions—often sparked by the deaths of other unarmed African Americans—have brought the movement to the public consciousness and conversation. Black Lives activists released “Campaign Zero,” which includes ten policy solutions developed in conjunction with activists, protestors and researchers across the country, integrating community demands, input from research organizations and the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

There is a larger context and history of African American men and boys who were killed at the hands of the police, many of whom, like George Floyd (2020), were unarmed. Since 2014, other high-profile deaths include Tamir Rice (2014), Laquan McDonald (2014), John Crawford (2014) Freddie Gray (2015), Walter Scott (2015), Alton Sterling (2016), Philando Castile (2016), Terence Crutcher (2016), Antwon Rose (2018) and others. Black women and girls are also targets of police violence, a reality that sparked the “Say Her Name” movement to highlight how this violence often goes unnoticed. Women who have died as a result of police interactions include Sandra Bland (2015), Deborah Danner (2016), Atatiana Jefferson (2019) and Breonna Taylor (2020).

This high school lesson provides an opportunity for students to learn more about Black Lives Matter and the activists involved, explore the controversy about using the term “All lives matter,” and posit their point of view in writing to a person of their choice.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will learn about the history of the Black Lives Matter movement and how it evolved.
- Students will analyze the controversy around politicians and other people using the term “All lives matter” instead of or in addition to “Black lives matter.”

- Students will reflect on their perspective of Black Lives Matter and write a letter to a person of their choice which reflects their new knowledge and point of view.

MATERIALS & PREPARATION

- [Campaign Zero Policy Solutions](#) (to project on board/smart board)
- #BlackTwitter After #Ferguson video (August 10, 2015, 6 mins., *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000003841604/blacktwitter-after-ferguson.html)
- “How Black Lives Matter moved from a hashtag to a real political force” (*The Washington Post*, August 19, 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/08/19/how-black-lives-matter-moved-from-a-hashtag-to-a-real-political-force/), one for each student
- Quotes about “All Lives Matter” (cut into individual quotes/strips; one quote per student)
- My Notes on “All Lives Matter” Quotes (one for each student)

PROCEDURES



Information Sharing: What is Black Lives Matter?

1. On the board/smart board, write: “Black Lives Matter.” Ask students: *Have you ever seen this expression? What does it mean? What do you know about it? How do you feel about it?* Have students do a quick brainstorm about Black Lives Matter and record their responses on the board/smart board.
2. Share the following basic information about the Black Lives Matter movement:
 - Black Lives Matter is an activist movement which began as a hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) when George Zimmerman was acquitted in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teenager killed in Florida in July 2013.
 - The Black Lives Matter movement became more widely acknowledged and popularized after two high-profile deaths of unarmed African-American men (Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY and Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO) in 2014 and in which police officers involved in their deaths were not indicted. Due to the deaths of other unarmed African Americans, ongoing local and national protests and other actions have brought awareness of the issues and the movement to the general public.
 - While Black Lives Matter began as a hashtag on Twitter and other social media, it has since evolved into a “movement.” As of August 2015, more than 1000 Black Lives Matter demonstrations have been held worldwide. Four Black Lives activists released “Campaign Zero,” which includes ten policy solutions developed in conjunction with activists, protestors and researchers across the country, integrating community demands, input from research organizations and the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

NOTE: If time permits, project the [Campaign Zero Policy Solutions](#) and after reading each category title, ask students what they think that policy solution is about and then briefly describe each solution by sharing information from the website: [Campaign Zero: Solutions Overview](#).



Video Viewing

1. Ask students: *What more do you want to know about Black Lives Matter?* Explain that they will learn more by watching a video about three of the activists and reading an article.
2. Show the six-minute video [#BlackTwitter After #Ferguson](#), which highlights three activists—DeRay McKesson, Johnetta Elzie and Zellie Imani—involved in the Black Lives Matter movement and addresses the ways in which social media helped facilitate their activism.

NOTE: It is advisable for you to preview the video in advance to make sure it is appropriate for your students’ viewing. There are images of teargas, adversarial interactions between police and protestors, people being shot (e.g., William Scott) and dead bodies (e.g., Michael Brown). Most of these images have

been shown on television. If students need to process their thoughts and feelings in more depth after watching the video, allow time for that.

3. Engage students in a discussion about the video by asking the following questions:
 - How did you feel while watching the video?
 - How did technology (video) and social media (Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook) help to enable the Black Lives Matter movement?
 - How did the three people highlighted become activists?
 - What does Zellie Imani mean when he says, “We don’t rely on the mass media. We rely on ourselves.”
 - What did you learn from the video?



Reading Activity

1. Distribute a copy of the article, “[How Black Lives Matter moved from a hashtag to a real political force](#),” to each student. Give students 10 minutes to read the article silently to themselves.
2. Engage students in a class discussion by asking:
 - What did you learn about the Black Lives Matter movement that you didn’t know?
 - How has the Black Lives Matter movement changed and evolved since its beginning?
 - What are some of the challenges and disagreements within the Black Lives Matter movement?
 - In what ways was the movement injected into the 2016 presidential campaign?
 - What are some of the accomplishments of the Black Lives Matter movement?



All Lives Matter vs. Black Lives Matter

1. On the board/smart board, write the words “All Lives Matter.” Explain to students that in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, people including politicians such as Bernie Sanders, Mark O’Malley and Jeb Bush, have responded by stating “All Lives Matter” and in some cases, were booed at public events and later apologized.
2. Ask students: *What are your thoughts about using the term “All lives matter” in place of or in reaction to “Black lives matter?” Why do you think people use this term?* How do you think people might respond to hearing this term? Have students share their initial thoughts out loud.
3. Use the [Quotes About “All Lives Matter”](#) handout (cut up individual quotes in advance) that reflect the reaction to people and politicians using the term “All Lives Matter” in place of or in response to “Black Lives Matter.” Distribute one quote to each student so that all students have a quote.
4. Have students read their quote to themselves and reflect on the following questions by writing notes or using the [My Notes on “All Lives Matter” Quotes](#) handout:
 - What does the quote mean to you?
 - What is the perspective of the person who said it?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the quote and why?
 - If you don’t agree, how would you change the quote to reflect your point of view?
5. Have students turn and talk with someone sitting near them. They should share their quotes and their reflections on the quote. Ask for a few volunteers to share their quotes and thoughts with the rest of the class. Then engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
 - Why do you think some people have said “All lives matter” in response to “Black lives matter?”
 - How does this impact the Black Lives Matter movement?

- Has your point of view changed as a result of doing this activity? How so?



Writing Activity

1. Have students consider everything they learned during the lesson and then reflect on their own thinking about the Black Lives Matter movement. You can ask the following questions to facilitate their thinking:
 - What have you learned that you didn't know before?
 - What are your thoughts about the Black Lives Matter movement?
 - What do you agree with? Disagree with?
 - What do you think the Black Lives Matter movement should do next?
 - Does their work inspire you to think about getting involved in activism on issues that are important to you? How so?
 - What do you want others to know about the movement?
2. As an assignment to begin in class and complete for homework, have students identify a person with whom they want to share their new knowledge and perspective about the Black Lives Matter movement. The person could be a friend, parent, family member, one of the leaders in the movement, an elected official or the President of the United States. In letter format, instruct them to include what they know about the Black Lives Matter movement, what they think about it and the extent to which it inspires them about their own activism and interest in certain social justice issues.

Closing

Have students share their letters with the rest of the class by reading them aloud.

ADDITIONAL READING AND RESOURCES

- [“16 Quotes To Remind America That Black Lives Matter”](#) (*The Huffington Post*, December 12, 2014)
- [“A Year After Ferguson, ‘Black Lives Matter’ Still Wields Influence”](#) (*The Wall Street Journal*, August 9, 2015)
- [Campaign Zero](#)
- [“Ferguson and beyond: how a new civil rights movement began – and won't end”](#) (*The Guardian*, August 9, 2015)
- [How to Burn What Can't Catch Fire](#) (The Root)
- [“Our Demand Is Simple: Stop Killing Us”](#) (*The New York Times*, May 4, 2015)
- [“The Truth of ‘Black Lives Matter’”](#) (*The New York Times*, September 3, 2015)
- [“‘Things will never be the same’: the oral history of a new civil rights movement”](#) (*The Guardian*, August 9, 2015)
- [“Why ‘All lives matter’ misses the point”](#) (CNN, July 22, 2015)
- [“Corporate Voices Get Behind ‘Black Lives Matter’ Cause”](#) (*The New York Times*, May 31, 2020)
- [#SayHerName](#) (The African American Policy Forum)

Common Core Standards

CONTENT AREA/STANDARD
Reading
R1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
Writing
W4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Speaking and Listening
SL1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Campaign Zero Policy Solutions

CAMPAIGN ZERO

WE CAN LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE THE POLICE DON'T KILL PEOPLE
BY LIMITING POLICE INTERVENTIONS, IMPROVING COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS
AND ENSURING ACCOUNTABILITY.



WE CAN LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES DO GOOD, NOT HARM.

JOINCAMPAIGNZERO.ORG

Quotes about “All Lives Matter”

“Of course all lives matter. But there is no serious question about the value of the life of a young white girl or boy. Sadly, there is a serious question—between gang violence and this police violence—about the value of the life of a young black girl or boy. So those who are experiencing the pain and trauma of the black experience in this country don’t want their rallying cry to be watered down with a generic feel-good catchphrase.”

—Donna Brazile, CNN Political Commentator and former interim National Chair of the Democratic National Committee

“That is why when people respond to ‘Black Lives Matter’ with ‘All Lives Matter,’ it grates. All Lives Matter may be one’s personal position, but until this country values all lives equally, it is both reasonable and indeed necessary to specify the lives it seems to value less.”

—Charles Blow, *The New York Times* columnist and best-selling author

“Black Lives Matter activists say replacing ‘Black’ with ‘All’ minimizes a movement that is meant to bring attention to the deaths of black men, women and children who have died as a result of alleged police brutality. They say it’s also supposed to bring attention to the scourge of systemic racism. For activists, the term “Black Lives Matter” is not a call for special treatment. It’s a means for black people to reclaim their humanity and personhood in the midst of seemingly unending attacks on their right to simply be humans with dignity.”

—Bryan Logan, Business Insider

“When I say ‘Black lives matter,’ it is because this nation has a tendency to say otherwise. Racial discrimination does affect all minorities but police brutality, at such excessive rates, does not. A black person is killed extrajudicially every 28 hrs, and Black men between ages 19 and 25 are the group most at risk to be gunned down by police. Based on data from the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, young Blacks are 4.5 times more likely to be killed by police than any other age or racial group.”

—Julie Craven, *The Huffington Post*

“To say that Black lives matter is not to say that other lives do not; indeed, it is quite the reverse—it is to recognize that all lives do matter, and to acknowledge that African Americans are often targeted unfairly (witness the number of African Americans accosted daily for no reason other than walking through a White neighborhood—including some, like young Trayvon Martin, who lost their lives) and that our society is not yet so advanced as to have become truly color blind. This means that many people of goodwill face the hard task of recognizing that these societal ills continue to exist, and that White privilege continues to exist, even though we wish it didn’t and would not have asked for it. I certainly agree that no loving God would judge anyone by skin color.”

—Reverend Dan Schatz, Unitarian Universalist

“Demonstrators who chant the phrase are making the same declaration that voting rights and civil rights activists made a half-century ago. They are not asserting that black lives are more precious than white lives. They are underlining an indisputable fact — that the lives of black citizens in this country historically have not mattered, and have been discounted and devalued.”

—*The New York Times* Editorial Board

