

# Heroes and Heroines: The Story of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

**Materials:** Basket  
Table  
Red heart  
Photo of MLK  
Green felt underlay  
Bus  
Four human figures of differing colors

## Presentation:

*Unfold the underlay smoothing out the wrinkles.*

This is the story of Martin Luther King Jr. We remember him and think about him around his birthday every year.

*Place the photo of MLK in the center of the underlay facing up and toward the children.*

Martin was born on January 15, 1929, in Atlanta, Georgia. His mother and father called him Michael, after his father, but when he was five his father changed his name and Martin's name to "Martin Luther King" to honor the great German Reformer from the sixteenth century. Martin Luther fought to make the world better, and they did too.

*Place the dinner table on the underlay, between you and the photo, to one side.*

Martin had an older sister and a younger brother. His father gathered the family for dinner every night at 6:00 p.m. and led them in lively discussions about God and the world. "Daddy King" felt it was important to discuss serious things with his children, even when they were very young. They often talked about how all people should be treated with respect. \*

Martin's mother also talked with the children about important things. When Martin was six, his best friend, who was white, told him that his parents said they couldn't play together anymore. This confused Martin. He became sad and angry. His mother took him on her lap and told him about slavery and prejudice, which is when someone doesn't like you just because they don't

like the color of your skin. She reminded him that there are places in the Bible where the people of God overcame slavery and prejudice. He could too.

When Martin grew up, he became a Baptist minister like his father and grandfather. He also began to work to change things so that African Americans would be treated with the same dignity and respect as anyone else. \*

*Place the bus on the underlay next to the table.*

No one knew how real change might begin until one day in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama. An African American woman named Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus for a white person. This changed everything.

In those days, buses were divided into white, mixed, and Black sections. She was sitting in the mixed section, but by law Black people still had to move to the back of the bus when told to. The bus driver told her to move to make room for some white people. The other Black people moved, but Rosa didn't. She wasn't tired, she said, only tired of giving in to unjust laws. She was arrested, and African Americans became angry when they heard about it.

Martin helped the Black people of Montgomery fight back peacefully. They stopped taking the bus. This way no one was hurt by fighting, and the bus company lost money. Black people walked to work for 381 days, sometimes many miles.

Do you know what happened? The city changed the law that forced Black people to sit in the back of the bus. They could sit anywhere they wanted to. This was the first of many peaceful protests Martin organized that changed America forever.

*Place **the Red Heart** (for courage, love, and peace) on the underlay, to one side, between the photo and the children.*

Working for change is never easy. It takes courage and faith. Many people were mean to Martin and his family. Someone tried to blow up their house. Some tried to scare them with their words, but also with knives and guns. Many Black people wanted to fight back, but Martin never gave in. He said, "Peaceful actions will bring peaceful solutions." Even so he was arrested and placed in jail twenty-nine times for trying to change things by protesting against unjust laws.

In 1963 a huge crowd of people came to Washington, DC, to march for jobs and freedom. That's when Martin made his most famous speech. He said, "I have dream" to call people to be thankful to God and to work to make the dream for freedom to come true for everyone.

*Place four people in a small half-circle next to the heart.*

Martin said, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not to be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." This was also the year that he won the Nobel Peace Prize at age thirty-four. The next year the Civil Rights Act made much of his dream into law.

But Martin kept on. He traveled the country working for change until one day in 1968 he was killed. He was in Memphis, Tennessee, working to organize another peaceful march. He was buried in Atlanta, where he was born.

We remember Martin because of his dream that African Americans will be treated with the same dignity and respect as anyone else \* and because he courageously traveled everywhere to make this dream come true through peaceful protest.

*Pick up the table and cradle it in both hands.*

Here is the **table** that helps us remember the important times he and his family sat around the dinner table talking about serious things.

*Put the table back down. Pick up the bus and cradle it in both hands.*

Here is the **bus** that helps us remember how Martin organized a peaceful protest about what happened to Rosa Parks and the unjust rule that Blacks had to always sit in the back of the bus.

*Put the bus back down. Pick up the heart and cradle it in both hands.*

Here is the **red heart** that reminds us of Martin's great courage and love of peace.

*Put the heart back down. Pick up the people while speaking and cradle them in both hands.*

Here are the **People of God** who remind us of Martin's dream that his children, and people everywhere, would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

**Wondering Questions:**

I wonder what part of the story you liked the best?

I wonder what part is most important?

I wonder where you are in the story?

I wonder if there is any part of the story that we can leave out and still have all the story we need?

**Note:** *Storytellers should be attentive to the prevalent language of treating everyone the same or equally. Diversity work complicates equality with equity, and invites us to wonder about diverse ways needed to treat everyone with respect and dignity.*