This lesson plan is designed to help students explore *SAH Archipedia Classic Buildings*, a publicly accessible website that will feature more than 100 of Mississippi’s most significant buildings. Students will learn about the architecture of the Medgar Evers House and how it relates to the civil rights goals Medgar Evers worked towards before his murder.

**Centers of the Storm:**
The Evers House, Jackson, Mississippi
By Charles M. Yarborough, 2011 Mississippi Historical Society Outstanding History Teacher

This lesson will help students understand that our buildings and other places can help us appreciate the rich, and often challenging, history of our nation. As students study the Medgar Evers House in Jackson, Mississippi, they will understand the architecture of the space as well as the historic civil rights lessons that the building relates. Students will ultimately be empowered to see their home communities through new eyes—eyes with a greater ability to understand the stories behind our local built environments.

**CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

Common Core English Language Arts Standards for Grades 6–8

**GRADE 6**
Reading:
- Informational Text
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.1
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.2
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.3
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.4
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.7

Writing Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.6.7

Speaking and Listening Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.4

Language Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.6.3

**GRADE 7**
Reading:
- Informational Text
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.2
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.3
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.4
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.7

Writing Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.4

Speaking and Listening Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.5

Language Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.3

**GRADE 8**
Reading:
- Informational Text
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.1
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.2
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.3
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.4
  - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.7

Writing Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.6
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.10

Speaking and Listening Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.5
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.8.10

Language Standards
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.8.3

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By Charles M. Yarborough, 2011 Mississippi Historical Society Outstanding History Teacher

Communities across our country have many homes, public buildings, and other historic places that can help us understand the cultural, social, economic, and political history of our states, regions, and nation. In essence, places can tell us the stories of our people if we work to understand the “language” in which those lessons are conveyed.

These vital repositories of history or prehistory come in many shapes: American Indian mounds that suggest the story of indigenous North American peoples; colonial structures that relate the early struggles of European settlement and then independence; classical mansions of the antebellum period that suggest the wealth and politics of “King Cotton” as well as the tragic institution of slavery; wooden dogtrot houses or barns that convey a sense of the yeoman farmer; sharecropper cabins that help relate the continuing influence of agriculture as well as the development of unique cultural contributions like the blues; cotton gins, grain elevators, schools, railroad depots, covered bridges, factory buildings, warehouses, military facilities, and numerous other structures suggest developments in transportation, education, industry, and government that have greatly impacted Americans—the possibilities are nearly limitless.

This lesson will help students understand that our buildings and other places can help us appreciate the rich, and often challenging, history of our nation. As students study the Medgar Evers House in Jackson, Mississippi, they will understand the architecture of the space as well as the historic civil rights lessons that the building relates. Students will ultimately be empowered to see their home communities through new eyes—eyes with a greater ability to understand the stories behind our local built environments.

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Background

In 1954 the United States Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that racial segregation in educational facilities violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Much earlier, in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896, the Supreme Court had determined that the equal protection clause was not violated as long as equal conditions were provided to both blacks and whites. The Brown decision overturned that “separate but equal” standard. Although it applied specifically to public schools, the Brown decision also implied that other segregated facilities were also unconstitutional and dealt a heavy blow to white supremacist policies in the segregated South.

Across the South, many white Southerners turned to “massive resistance”—resorting to violent means—to negate the Supreme Court’s ruling. The Ku Klux Klan, which was founded not long after the Civil War, experienced a resurgence. White supremacist groups such as the White Citizens Council were formed. Often referred to as the “country club Klan” by its critics, the White Citizens Council included judges, legislators, governors, and other high-ranking elected officials who officially denounced violence while promoting stringent economic and social retaliation against civil rights supporters. State governments created “state sovereignty commissions” which were funded by state tax dollars and worked to prevent civil rights activism and legislation. And local individuals took the stance that they would fight to preserve the segregated “Southern way of life” by any means necessary.

The violence that followed “massive resistance” is evident in nationally prominent events that occurred in the state of Mississippi. One of these is the 1963 murder of civil rights leader Medgar Evers, the first National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) field secretary for Mississippi, who was shot in the driveway of his home in Jackson, Mississippi.

Background information on Medgar Evers


Medgar Evers, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Mississippi, was a dynamic leader whose life was cut short by assassination in 1963. His loss at age 37 was a tragic reversal for the civil rights movement, but it galvanized further protest and drew the sympathetic concern of the federal government to his cause.

Born in rural Mississippi in 1925, Evers served with U.S. armed forces in Europe in World War II, then returned home to attend Alcorn College (a historically black institution located near Lorman, Mississippi), where he was an accomplished student and athlete. There he met his future wife, Myrlie; the couple was married in 1951.

Evers became a protégé of T.R.M. Howard, a black physician and businessman who founded both an insurance agency and a medical clinic in the Mississippi delta. Howard also established the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, a civil rights organization that employed a “top-down” approach, encouraging leading African American professionals and clergy to promote self help, business ownership, and, ultimately, the demand for civil rights among the broader black population.

Evers determined to see the freedoms he had fought for overseas established at home. He soon emerged as one of the Mississippi Regional Council’s most effective activists. Like his mentor, he mixed business with civil rights campaigning, working as a salesman for Howard’s Magnolia Mutual Life Insurance Company while organizing local chapters of the NAACP and leading boycotts of gas stations that refused blacks access to restrooms. (“Don’t Buy Gas Where You Can’t Use the Restroom,” read one bumper sticker.)

In 1954, Evers challenged the segregationist order by applying for enrollment at the law school of the all-white University of Mississippi, known as Ole Miss. Evers was turned away, but his effort won him the admiration of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund, and he was subsequently named the organization’s first field secretary in Mississippi, a dangerous and lonely assignment.
“It may sound funny, but I love the South,” Evers once said. “I don’t choose to live anywhere else. There’s land here where a man can raise cattle, and I’m going to do it someday. There are lakes where a man can sink a hook and fight a bass. There is room here for my children to play and grow and become good citizens—if the white man will let them.”

At the time, however, whites’ cooperation appeared very much in doubt. Two of the United States’s most infamous modern Lynchings occurred in Mississippi in those years: the 1955 killing of 14-year-old Emmett Till, and the 1959 lynching of Mack Charles Parker in Poplarville. Evers helped investigate the Till murder, a case that received extensive national attention. Despite strong evidence of the defendants’ guilt, an all-white, male jury took only 67 minutes to acquit them. One juror later asserted that the panel took a “soda break” to stretch deliberations beyond one hour, “to make it look good.” (In May 2004, the Justice Department, calling the 1955 prosecution a “grotesque miscarriage of justice,” reopened the murder investigation. But with many potential witnesses long dead and evidence scattered, a grand jury declined to indict the last remaining living suspect.)

Mississippi reacted harshly to the Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown v. Board of Education ruling and its order to desegregate the nation’s public schools. Local white groups known as Citizens Councils vowed to resist integration at any cost. Evers, who had earlier been denied admission to Ole Miss, assisted other blacks’ efforts to enroll there. In 1962, Air Force veteran James Meredith was admitted to the school by a direct order from U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black. State officials resisted the order, and Meredith managed to begin classes only after a night of rioting in which two people were killed and hundreds injured.

As his efforts on Meredith’s behalf intensified the segregationist hatred of Evers, he launched a series of boycotts, sit-ins, and protests in Jackson, Mississippi’s largest city. Even the NAACP was occasionally concerned with the extent of Evers’s efforts. When Martin Luther King Jr. led a high-profile civil rights campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, in the spring of 1963, Evers stepped up his Jackson Movement—demanding the hiring of black police, the creation of a biracial committee, the desegregation of downtown lunch counters, and the use of courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs., Miss) by whites who dealt with black shoppers in downtown stores.

The city’s reaction was ominous. Workmen erected on the nearby Mississippi State Fairgrounds a series of fenced stockades capable of holding thousands of protestors—a blunt message to those who considered protesting. Undeterred, Evers and his supporters fought on. Local blacks, including many children, took part in the subsequent rallies and store boycotts, marching and joining picket lines. These demonstrations represented a culmination of Evers’s long years of civil rights work. A high point came when Evers appeared on local television to explain the movement’s objectives. Whites were not accustomed to seeing black people on TV, especially presenting their cases in their own words, and many were outraged.

Soon, attempts were made on Evers’s life: a bomb was thrown into his carport, and a vehicle nearly ran him over. As Evers returned home on the night of June 12, 1963, he was ambushed and shot as he got out of his car. He died at his own front door.

The murder of so popular a leader enrag ed the black community. Over several days there were numerous confrontations with police in downtown Jackson. Even the whites who ran the city were shocked by Evers’s death, for although he was an agitator, he was at least a familiar presence. The city fathers made the unusual concession of allowing a silent march to honor him, as civil rights leaders from across the nation arrived to pay tribute. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C., with full military honors. Medgar’s brother Charles assumed some of his duties with the Jackson campaign, and his widow, Myrlie, became a well-known activist and would serve as chairperson of the NAACP from 1995 to 1998.

It was Medgar Evers’s fate to have his name linked with one of the most frustrating legal cases of the civil rights era. His killer, a white supremacist named Byron De La Beckwith, scion of an old Mississippi family, was put on trial twice in the 1960s, but in each instance was acquitted by white juries. Not until 1994, a full three decades after Evers had led his fellow Mississippians in a crusade against bigotry and intolerance, was Beckwith convicted and sentenced to life in prison, where he died in 2001.
Ultimately, Evers triumphed, even in death. The year he was murdered, only 28,000 black Mississippians had successfully registered to vote. By 1971, that number had risen to over a quarter-million and, by 1982, to a half-million. By 2006, Mississippi had the highest number of black elected officials in the country, including a quarter of its delegation in the U.S. House of Representatives and some 27 percent of its state legislature.

Additional background information can be found on the websites listed in the Internet Resources section below and in the online article “Medgar Evers and the Origin of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi” by Denoral Davis on the website Mississippi History Now: An Online Publication of the Mississippi Historical Society:

Opening the Lesson

The label “historic” is applied to many things, from Greek temples to baseball cards. When it comes to buildings it can be safely said that most are built with a fairly specific use in mind. These buildings may be beautiful, or they may be ugly, but as long as they serve their specific function some people don’t give much thought to the building itself. However, because buildings are designed with an end use in mind, they can relate a great deal about the culture, economics, and politics of the period when the building was used. 

Buildings can be great teachers of history.

It is important that students recognize the buildings, including houses, that contribute to the distinctive features of neighborhoods in cities and towns across our country.

On the board, or via projection, write the question: “What is a neighborhood?” Ask students working individually or in small groups to seriously reflect on this question and list as many answers as they can. Have students share their ideas with the rest of the class and generate a class list answering the question.

Discuss the various definitions of neighborhood below, emphasizing to students that there are two aspects to the meaning of neighborhood: one refers to a physical area and the other suggests connections between people in a community.

Neighborhood—(1) neighborly relationship; (2) the quality or state of being neighbors: proximity; (3) a place or region near: vicinity; (4a) the people living near one another; (4b) a section lived in by neighbors and usually having distinguishing characteristics (Definition from Merriam-Webster available online at:
http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/neighborhood)

Have students list the characteristics of their neighborhood or the neighborhood around their school. Are there distinctive buildings, parks, or other places? What about people, traditions, activities, etc.? Ask students how the buildings and spaces are connected to the people in their neighborhood or the school’s neighborhood.

Emphasize that spaces often determine the ways that people interact and connect with one another.

Explain to students that they are beginning a study of a site in Mississippi that has been nominated for the National Register of Historic Places.
Developing the Lesson

A. Critical Thinking and Interpreting Information

Without identifying the building for students, project an image (or several images) of the Medgar Evers House in Jackson, Mississippi (or share with each student in a digital classroom).
Ask students to share their impressions of the house in the photo. After some brief discussion, ask them to describe characteristics of a family that would likely live in the house.

Once some student speculation has taken place, explain that the home is a typical ranch style home of the 1950s. These homes were popular after World War II as developers attempted to make affordable homes available to a growing number of middle-class families.

After some discussion, project the cover of Life magazine showing Medgar Evers’s widow and son at his funeral (available online on the National Endowment for the Humanities website: http://www.neh.gov/files/divisions/public/images/life_magazine_6.28.1963_medgar_evers_funeral.jpg). Explain that this image is connected to the house and ask students to identify some of the details they see in the photograph. Then ask what additional information they can draw from the magazine cover. Ask students to continue speculating on how the house could be connected to the magazine cover image.

Student speculation is likely to start with “the people lived in that house” and move to “somebody was killed in that house.” (Students may know some details of the Evers murder and trial, given the attention paid to the 50th anniversary of the event or its depiction in the feature film Ghosts of Mississippi.) This transition in students’ critical thinking offers a great opportunity to reemphasize the various criteria for National Register status highlighted in the lesson Centers of the Storm: The Lyceum and the Circle at the University of Mississippi, and to reemphasize the point that buildings harbor our history.

After students have shared their ideas, explain that the images are of the Medgar Evers’s house in Jackson, Mississippi. The house is where the Evers family lived from 1954 to 1964, and it was the site of the 1963 assassination of Mississippi’s first NAACP field Secretary as a result of his leadership fighting for the civil rights of African Americans. The site and Evers’s contributions have seen renewed interest during 2013, the 50th anniversary year of the assassination. The Evers house is also the first house museum in Mississippi dedicated to the civil rights era.

Developing the Lesson

B. Listening, Speaking, and Writing Activities

Discuss with students that one of Medgar Evers’ goals as the first NAACP field secretary in the South was to win protection for African American citizens’ right to vote—a civil right because it’s the right of every United States citizen. Ask students if they know what other rights are included among our rights of citizenship and make a class list (or have students submit suggestions electronically in a digital classroom). Once students have generated a list, or as they offer suggestions, discuss why protecting civil rights is important to Americans. The teacher can explain that the American Revolution was ultimately about civil rights—in the case of the American Revolution, the rights of British citizens in the North American colonies who felt their government had become oppressive. Ask students if they know which rights were being violated and discuss some of the colonists’ complaints (teachers could use the Declaration of Independence to explore this point or inject a lesson on the Declaration at this point).

Architectural Style Notes

The Medgar Evers House is a ranch style home. One story ranch style homes became popular after World War II when real estate developers attempted to offer affordable, modern homes to a growing middle-class population.

The Evers House was built as part of the first middle-class subdivision developed for African Americans in Jackson. The modern ranch style house symbolized the access to a middle-class lifestyle and the type of participation in society that Evers sought for African Americans.

One feature of the ranch style home is an attached garage or carport. The Evers house has an attached, open carport which left Evers exposed to attack as he exited his car the night of his assassination.
Using the United States Government Printing Office’s Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids website (available at: http://bensguide.gpo.gov/), follow the link to activities for grades six–eight and have students explore the page “Citizenship,” then follow the link for “Rights of Citizens” (as well as links from that page).

- Have students, individually or in small groups, complete the Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens worksheet.
- Discuss student answers related to the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Assess student work.

- Have students read either: (a) the online article “Medgar Evers: Martyr of the Mississippi Movement” (available at: http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2009/01/20090106143316jmnamdeirf0.7848017.html#axzz2fgD9OZoz or (b) the online article at Mississippi History Now titled “Medgar Evers and the Origin of the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi” (available at: http://mshistorynow.mdah.state.ms.us/articles/53/medgareversand-the-origin-of-the-civil-rights-movement-in-mississippi).

- Next, complete one or both of the following:
  - Using the website A Tribute to Medgar Evers have students take a virtual tour of the Medgar Evers House (available online at: http://www.evertribute.org/house_tour.php).
    a. As students take the virtual tour have them keep a log of what they see in the various rooms. Compare and contrast the Evers house to student homes. How are they similar? Different? What can the Evers house help us understand about Medgar Evers’s life and fight to protect civil rights for all Americans? Assess student work.
  - Using the website A Tribute to Medgar Evers have students view the photo gallery related to Medgar Evers’s life and assassination (available online at: http://www.evertribute.org/gallery/index.php).
    a. As students view images have them identify six images and write descriptions explaining what is most significant about each of them for understanding Medgar Evers’s life and contributions to the protection of all Americans’ civil rights. (Student descriptions should be based on information from the Mississippi History Now article plus other resources.) Assess student work.

### Infusing Technology in the Lesson

- The teacher might utilize a class blog or use free online software such as TodaysMeet.com to solicit student responses for the Opening the Lesson section. (For http://TodaysMeet.com/: (1) create a “room” at the site and have students join it; (2) post the question, “What makes a building or a place historic?”; and (3) allow students time to respond to your query in the program—responses are shared instantly with all members of your “room” and can be projected or shared in front of the class in real time.)

- The teacher might utilize a classroom blog with software from Edublogs.com to address “What is a neighborhood?” and solicit student responses. (For http://www.Edublogs.com: (1) follow the “get your free blog now” link to register and create your free classroom blog and (2) follow directions for sharing the blog with your students.)

- The teacher might utilize the Historic Preservation Curriculum of the Mississippi Heritage Trust lesson “Neighborhoods, Towns, and Cities” to further explore this topic as part of an expanded introduction to this lesson. The curriculum is available online at: http://www.mississippiheritage.com/curriculum/MHT%20Curriculum%20-%2005%20P1%20L5.pdf

- The teacher might utilize Google Docs as a digital means for students to complete the worksheet by: (1) saving the Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens worksheet as a Google Doc, allowing students to complete and edit the worksheet in pairs or small groups as they view explore the website, or (2) saving the worksheet as a Google Form, then asking students to complete the form individually as they explore the website. (For more information on using Google Apps in the classroom, see: http://www.google.com/drive/apps.html)

- Technology-based presentation possibilities might include student-created or edited video presentations, PowerPoint presentations, online Prezi presentations (more information available at: www.prezi.com), or digital poster projects such as Glogster presentations (more information available at: http://edu.glogster.com/).
Extending the Lesson

The possible extensions are limited only by the desire, time, creativity, and imagination of students and teachers. Some possibilities include:

• Students could take a field trip to a local neighborhood, research important events that may have taken place there, and compare those events to those in the Evers’ neighborhood in Jackson, Mississippi.

• Students could take a field trip to a museum featuring exhibits related to the civil rights era and explore how the events in Jackson, Mississippi, fit into the larger historic context of the 1960s.

• Students could research and create photographic collages of their own neighborhoods, exploring places of significance to themselves and their neighbors.

• Students could research and create photographic collages of events related to the civil rights era in the United States.

• Students could research and collect oral histories from area participants in civil rights activities, or relatives of these people.

• Teachers and students could invite a member of the NAACP to speak with the class.

• Students could prepare a program for other students relaying historical events from the civil rights era.

• Teachers and students could invite members of the community who experienced the civil rights era to speak with the class. If technology is available, teachers and students could video record the interviews for future use.

• Students could research ranch style architecture in their area or in their state, then explore the significance of the style, and identify which buildings reflect ranch style details.

• Teachers and students could invite a local architect or architectural historian to speak with the class about significant architectural styles found in their community and what symbolism might be attached to those buildings.

• Students could research civil rights–era court cases in their community.

Internet Resources


Civil Rights Documentation Project, University of Southern Mississippi, last modified August 1, 2005, http://www.usm.edu/crdp/


“Medgar Evers,” The Mississippi Writers Page, University of Mississippi English Department, last modified September 2002, http://www.olemiss.edu/mwp/dir/evers_medgar/#Internet


Rights and Responsibilities

On a separate sheet of paper, define the following terms using resources on the Ben’s Guide to U.S. Government for Kids website:
A. Citizen  D. Naturalization
B. Allegiance  E. Alien
C. Immigrant  F. Bill of Rights

Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Explain what rights are granted to U.S. citizens, and where one finds those rights enumerated.
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Explain how African Americans would have experienced their rights of citizenship when Medgar Evers was alive. Do African Americans have different experiences of their rights today? Are there ways their experiences would still be similar?
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. Which civil right do you feel is most important? Why? Explain your answer.
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

4. If one or more of your rights were violated, how could you work to restore or protect those rights?
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

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