

Lower School Honors MLK

Frances Hamilton shares impactful, personal story

Every year, students in all divisions take part in activities near the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday to expand their knowledge of equality, justice, and cultural competency. On January 8, students in grades 1–4 and their teachers had the privilege to hear a memorable, first-hand account of the Civil Rights Movement from assistant director of Admissions Frances Hamilton.

Earlier in the day, the children learned about five influential civil rights activists and peace leaders when they visited the “MLK Museum,” organized by Lower School faculty and administrators. Students

visited stations at the “museum” to learn about five well-known peacemakers:



Frances grew up in segregated Orangeburg, South Carolina, and participated in rallies and marches as a high school student during the Civil Rights Movement. She shared her experiences living as a “second class citizen” and why she got involved in making change happen. Here are just a few excerpts from her spellbinding presentation:

“As I finished elementary school, the issue of equal rights for all people was becoming a very big concern especially in the South. As Dr. King began to emerge as a leader of the movement in the fight for equal rights, he gained considerable support and the civil rights movement went

into full swing in my town.

“Freedom rallies and silent marches

minutes, prayed quietly, and then started back to the church. On the way back, a police officer accused one of the black boys of looking at him... In a matter of minutes, the police officer hit the young man on the head and knocked him down to the ground. When that happened, other marchers tried to help the boy up [but] the police officers used very ugly language and insisted that we just move on. When our leaders tried a second time, respectfully and calmly, the officers warned that if we did not ‘shut up and move on,’ our leaders would be arrested for disturbing the peace. No one moved and our leaders were arrested. As the leaders were being hand cuffed, all of the marchers, including me, began to sit down in support of this injustice. No one began to fight, no one said a word. We just sat quietly and calmly on the sidewalk.

“The series of events that occurred next were played out many times. We were physically removed and taken to a large fenced area next to the city jail. When we did not move as fast as they wanted us to, we were hosed down with water. And, sometimes, when that did not work, they would turn the dogs loose on us.

“I personally went to jail seven times. The longest time I spent in jail was an entire week. It was scary, hard, and uncomfortable. I did not go to jail for breaking the law—I went for the hope that maybe this small discomfort might bring about change so that my children and grandchildren would not have to be treated as I was.

“I believe those experiences have helped to make me a stronger and better person today. I made a contribution to a cause and a dream I believed in. I still hold on to that today.”

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Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Cesar Chavez, and Malala Yousafzai. What they learned later from Frances is that anyone can influence change through bravery and conviction.

Bringing history to life

The daughter of middle class parents who worked in education and government,

were some ways we showed our support for the cause. One of my most vivid memories was when I was in high school. As we marched, we were met by police officers who stood on the sides of the street gazing at us as if we were doing something wrong. We had obtained all the permits needed to walk in a march. When we reached the center of town, we stood for a few