



**Darius Goes West “Know About It”  
LESSON PLAN  
Subject: SOCIAL STUDIES  
Age range: 6th - 12th grade  
Created by: Jenny Manders, Ph.D.**

---

## **The Disability Rights Movement**

### **OVERVIEW**

The Disability Rights Movement is a very important part of United States History. The rights that citizens with disabilities enjoy today have not always been guaranteed. People with disabilities led the movement that have resulted in more and more children and adults with disabilities becoming valued members of our families, schools, communities, and workplaces, with all the rights guaranteed to all citizens.

### **LESSON OBJECTIVES**

Students will:

- 1) Explore the history of people with disabilities
- 2) Understand the connection between the Civil Rights Movement and the Disability Rights Movement
- 3) Learn about leaders of the Disability Rights Movement
- 4) Become aware of important legislation related to disability rights
- 5) Understand the importance of respectful language

### **MATERIALS/PREPARATION**

No materials are needed other than the student handout included in this lesson plan.

### **INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN**

- 1) Make a copy of the student handout in this lesson plan for each student.
- 2) Instruct them to read this material either in class or as a homework assignment.
- 3) Review and briefly discuss what students have read and learned. Solicit their comments and encourage questions.

### **LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS**

Choose one or more of the following activities or discussion topics, which are divided into categories related to what students have read and learned.

#### **1) A Sad History**

Research more about the history of people with disabilities and how they have been viewed and treated. How does this history compare with the histories of other minority groups?

What do you think would have happened to Darius if he had been born 100 years ago? Or in Nazi Germany?

#### **2) The Disability Rights Movement**

What are some of the characteristics or experiences that people with disabilities share with other minority groups?

What types of activities did people with disabilities engage in to fight for their civil rights? Why is this important?

What do you think of civil disobedience? Is it an acceptable way to make change? Why or why not?

How do you decide what is important enough to make you take action? Have you ever been a part of a march or protest? Have you ever written a letter to try to make something better? What kinds of actions would you be willing to do to make life better for yourself or others?

### **3) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

IDEA requires all schools to provide children with disabilities a free and appropriate education and to be included with children without disabilities to the greatest extent possible.

Do students with disabilities attend classes with students without disabilities at your school? Do they participate in clubs and activities? Do you know or hang out with any students with disabilities? What can you (students) do to include students with disabilities at your school?

You and Darius want to attend a nature camp run by the school system. You are told that you can go, but Darius has to attend a camp just for students with disabilities. Is this a violation of IDEA? What should you do? **Answer: YES!! This violates the IDEA. Darius has the same right to participate in nature camp as do students without disabilities. The school system is required to make the accommodations needed so that he can participate. You and Darius should talk with the camp's director and even the School Board to insist on his right to attend the camp of his choice.**

### **4) The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

Why is the ADA called the "civil rights act for people with disabilities?"

What role did people with disabilities have in getting the ADA passed?

Interview someone with a disability who is old enough to remember what life was like for them before the ADA was passed. Has the ADA made any changes in his or her life? What do they think about the act? What do they think still needs to happen to make sure people with disabilities have all the opportunities that others do?

Research some of the other disability rights acts. What do they say? How do they help people with disabilities?

Conduct a study in your school/community to see if it is accessible to people who have mobility disabilities. Can people who use wheelchairs, walkers, or crutches go everywhere that other people can?

When Darius and the Crew stopped at the gas station and Darius couldn't get past the curb, was this a violation of the ADA? Why or why not? What information would you need to make this determination? **Answer: If the gas station was built or had major renovations after the ADA was passed in 1991, then yes, it is in violation of the ADA. If it was built before 1990, it is not legally required to be accessible.**

Darius and the Crew loved their tour of Carlsbad Caverns. What would have happened if, when they got there they were told, "Oh yes, we have a 'special' tour for people with disabilities. Darius can tour at 2:00. The Crew will take the tour at 1:00." Is this fair? Do you think Darius would have wanted to take the tour with people he didn't know, just because they all had disabilities?

Darius was pretty bummed out at the St. Louis Arch when he couldn't get to all the places the Crew could go. Was the Arch in violation of the ADA? What would you do if you had been with them? **Answer: The St. Louis Arch was completed in 1966, so it is not legally required to be accessible. Many places that are not legally required to be accessible make it a priority to be accessible anyway. This is fair to everyone and also makes good business sense. Think of how much money in ticket sales they lost when the Crew decided not to go into the Arch because Darius couldn't go, not to mention BAD publicity!**

## **(5) Language**

Change each of these sentences to use respectful, person-first language.

Angela is retarded.

*Angela has an intellectual disability.*

Darius is confined to a wheelchair.

*Darius uses a wheelchair.*

The baby was born with a birth defect.

*The baby has a congenital disability.*

All of the handicapped parking was taken.

*The accessible parking spots were taken.*

The crippled attorney used crutches to walk.

*The attorney with a mobility disability used crutches to help him walk.*

Alex suffers from cerebral palsy.

*Alex has cerebral palsy.*

The brain-damaged soldier returned from war.

*The soldier acquired a head injury in the war.*

The crazy man needed a quiet place to calm down.

*The man with mental illness needed a quiet place to calm down.*

Phil is a victim of Multiple Sclerosis.

*Phil has Multiple Sclerosis.*

Think about all the times when you were called a name or given a label that you didn't like. Write them all down. How did it feel? If you had to live with those words your whole life, how do you think it would affect you? Would the words make others want to be your friend?

Think about a time you used words or names to hurt someone else. Why do you think you did this? What would you do now if you heard someone using those words about Darius?

A disability is just one characteristic of a person. Think of a person you know with a disability. Write down all the words you can use to describe that person that have nothing to do with his or her disability. Review the list. Why do you think people notice disability first? Do you think you know this person better now that you have identified more characteristics?

## **6) Famous People with Disabilities**

Many famous people have had disabilities. Research some of these. What is their disability? How do you think having a disability may have helped them achieve success?

Julius Caesar  
Vincent Van Gogh  
Winston Churchill  
Albert Einstein  
Tom Cruise  
Marlee Matlin  
Cher

Harriett Tubman  
Beethoven  
Walt Disney  
Stephen Hawking  
Danny Glover  
Chris Burke  
Whoopi Goldberg

# STUDENT HANDOUT

## The Disability Rights Movement

### IMPORTANT HISTORY TO KNOW

**A sad chapter.** There are 54 million children and adults with disabilities in the United States (US Census), making this one of our countries largest minority groups. Disability is a very common and natural part of being human. Just like everyone else, people with disabilities have things they can do very well and things they need help to do. Just like everyone else, people with disabilities have interests, talents, goals and dreams.

We haven't always understood this. Throughout much of our history, people with disabilities have not been treated well. In



ancient times, disabilities were thought to be caused by the devil or by God as punishment for sin. Even Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher and scientist, did not think people with some types of disabilities should be allowed to live.

Hitler believed this, too. He ordered the killing of over one hundred thousand people with disabilities in Germany. The gas chambers that were built to kill people with disabilities were later used to kill Jews during the Holocaust.



The US President that helped defeat Hitler was Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). FDR was so popular that he was elected to four terms as President (1933-1945) and led the country through the Great Depression and World War II. He is recognized as one of our greatest leaders. He contracted what was thought to be polio in 1921 and could no longer walk. As President, he was very concerned that his disability would cause him to be seen as weak and refused to be seen in public using his wheelchair. He rarely allowed photographs of himself using the wheelchair to be taken.



In the last hundred years, it was thought that children and adults with disabilities should be allowed to live, but in isolated, segregated places, away from their families and communities. Special schools and institutions were built to house hundreds, even thousand of people, far away from the homes, schools, and communities where everyone else lived.

Today, we know that people with disabilities are more like people without disabilities than different. Everyone wants to live with their families and people who love them, have friends, learn, work, worship, and have fun. Disability is just one characteristic of a person – it does not tell us everything about who that person is or what that person can do. We are more alike than different, and we all belong together.

### THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

People with disabilities have had to fight for the rights that other citizens have always had, like the right to live with their

own families instead of in institutions, the right to go to school with students with and without disabilities, have jobs, and, when they are adults, the right to live on their own and make their own decisions.



During the 1960s, the United States was going through some of the biggest changes in our country's history. African-Americans, women, and other minority groups were fighting for their rights, and they were successful. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it against the law to discriminate against people because of their race, religion, and, later, gender. Disability was not mentioned in the Civil Rights Act, so people with disabilities began their own civil rights movement.

People with disabilities began to organize in the early 1970s. Many had watched or been a part of the earlier civil rights movement and had learned some very successful strategies to get their voices heard. They talked to their elected representatives, wrote letters and articles, and tried to meet with policy makers. There were many times when others were not interested in meeting with people with disabilities and listening to their needs or demands. In these cases, disability rights activists used more extreme actions to have their concerns heard.

**Civil disobedience** is the refusal to obey rules or laws that are thought to be unfair. It is called nonviolent resistance



because violence is never used by those engaging in civil disobedience, although violence has frequently been used *against* those participating in civil disobedience. Civil disobedience has been used in human rights movements all around the world, including India, South Africa, and the United States. Great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King

organized peaceful marches, protests, and "sit-ins" to fight for human rights.

One very famous example of civil disobedience was in 1955 when Rosa Park's refused to sit in the seats in the back of the bus assigned to "colored." Her quiet refusal to move to the back of the bus began the Montgomery Bus Boycott and helped Martin Luther King begin the Civil Rights movement for African Americans. It is often said that while African Americans were fighting for the right to sit in the *front* of the bus, people with disabilities were fighting for the right to get *on* the bus. At the time, public transportation was denied to people with physical disabilities



because they were not wheelchair accessible. This means that people who used wheelchairs could not get on the buses. Just like with African Americans, transportation became a main issue for disability rights activists.

As the right to ride a bus became a symbol of equality for African Americans, it also became a symbol for people with disabilities. In 1983, a group of activists in Colorado formed the American Disabled for Public Transportation (ADAPT). ADAPT began by protesting and boycotting inaccessible public transportation in Colorado, but quickly spread to states all around the country. ADAPT now organizes disability activists to fight for the rights of people with all types of disabilities, such as the right to live in their own homes instead of nursing homes or institutions and the right to decide what support they need and who will provide it.



The early disability rights movement did not include people with intellectual disabilities, so people with these kinds of disabilities began their own local organization. In 1974, a small group of people with intellectual disabilities who were living in a large group home in Oregon started to meet to talk about their experiences. Everyone agreed that they were very tired of being seen only as "people with disabilities." Someone in the group shouted, "We are people *first*." The group decided that People First would be the name of their organization. Today, there are People First chapters in every state and many countries around the world. The national organization in the United States is called Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE). SABE helps the People First chapters in each state stay active and organized.

Today, disability activists with all kinds of disabilities are members of ADAPT, People First, or other disability rights groups. More and more, they are working with members from other organizations to make sure that the rights of all people with disabilities are protected, regardless of what kind of disability a person has.

### **LEADERS IN THE DISABILITY RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

Just like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Nelson Mandela, the Disability Rights Movement also has leaders who have helped inspire and organize citizens to protect their human rights. There are many leaders in the Disability Rights Movement. Ed Roberts and Roland Johnson were two of these leaders.

**Ed Roberts.** In 1962, two young men were making history by integrating two different universities. James Meredith became the first African American to enter the University of Mississippi. There were many protesters and photographers, and the police had to escort James to class for his own protection. At the same time, on the other side of the country, Ed Roberts entered the University of California at Berkeley. There were no protesters, photographers, or police present, but Ed Roberts was making history, too.

Ed had contracted polio when he was fourteen. Soon he was unable to move or breathe on his own. He used a wheelchair and spent almost 18 hours a day in a large machine that helped him breathe, called an "iron lung." There were many times Ed felt like giving up, but he never did. He had always loved school, but soon learned that most schools and universities were not accessible to people with physical disabilities. There was no funding to help students with disabilities go to college, and no place where students who used wheelchairs could live. Ed and 11 of his friends began to organize and fight for their rights to go to college and get the help they needed.



They were very successful and soon started getting calls from many people who were not in college, but still wanted to live on their own. Ed started the first Center for Independent Living that was run by people with disabilities to help other people with disabilities. This idea spread quickly, and now there are Independent Living Centers in every state. When people come to an Independent Living Center, they see people with disabilities who are very successful in school or at work, and who are living great lives in their own homes or apartments. These counselors serve as role models and help other people with disabilities achieve their own goals and dreams.

**Roland Johnson (1945-1994).** Roland Johnson had an intellectual disability and lived with his family when he was a young child. When he was twelve, his family did not understand how to help Roland and did not have the money or other resources to support him. They put him in Pennhurst Center, a large institution in Pennsylvania that kept over 3,000 people with disabilities locked away from their families and communities. It was like a prison, but no one who lived there had committed a crime. It was a loud, crowded place that was always dirty and had a horrible smell. Many people who lived there were abused. For Roland and the thousands of people who were forced to live there, it was the worst place imaginable.



Roland survived at Pennhurst from 1958-1971, thirteen long years filled with fear and abuse. When he was finally freed, Roland devoted his life to speaking for the people that were still imprisoned in Pennhurst and other institutions. He encouraged other people with intellectual disabilities to fight for their own rights and the rights of others. He fought to have Pennhurst and all other institutions closed.

People with intellectual disabilities are often called "retarded" and made fun of. Some people think they are not capable of learning and do not understand the simplest of things. Other people often treat them like children and tell them what to do, even when they are adults. Roland showed everyone that people with intellectual disabilities are strong, smart, and

should be able to make decisions about their own lives. He was a very active member in his local self advocacy group, Speaking for Ourselves. He also became a leader in the United States and around the world, showing others what people with intellectual disabilities can achieve.

### **IMPORTANT LAWS**

The hard work of the Disability Rights leaders and activists resulted in very important laws that protected the rights of children and adults with disabilities. Two of these laws are the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).

#### **The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).**

Before 1954, African American children and other minority children were segregated from white children in separate schools. Children of different races were not allowed to learn or play together. In 1951, thirteen African American parents filed a lawsuit against the Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas. They said it should be against the law to separate children in school based on their race. The US Supreme Court agreed and made racial segregation in schools illegal. This court case is known as *Brown v. Board of Education* and is one of the most famous court cases in US history. It changed the way education is provided.

The parents of children with disabilities also had to fight for the rights of their children to go to school. Before 1975, schools were not required to provide education to children with disabilities. Many children were forced to live in institutions in order to be taught. Others just stayed at home and did not have opportunities to learn or be with other children. The IDEA changed all that. IDEA is an act that guarantees the rights of all children with disabilities to go to the same schools and be part of the same classrooms as children without disabilities. Just like the decision that it is wrong to separate children based on the color of their skin, IDEA says that it is not right to separate children because they have a disability.

Just like *Brown v. Board of Education*, IDEA has changed the way education is provided. If students need help to learn in school, the help should be provided in classrooms where students with and without disabilities are learning together. Today, young children and teenagers with disabilities can go to class, join school clubs, and hang out with their friends without disabilities.

**The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990).** The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made it against the law to discriminate against people based on the color of their skin or gender, but it did not mention disability. Many people with disabilities were still not able to use public transportation, work, enjoy recreation, or visit places in their communities. Thousands of Americans were still being forced to live in isolated, segregated places like institutions and group homes.

Disability activists had been working very hard in their own states and local communities to change discriminatory policies and legislation, but very few people had heard about the Disability Rights Movement at the national level. This changed when thousands of people with disabilities and their advocates

joined together from every state in the nation to support the passage of the ADA. There were rallies and marches in Washington DC and cities all over the country. Over 40,000 letters were sent to senators and congressmen urging them to support the act.

The voices of people with disabilities were heard. President George Bush signed the act into law on June 26, 1990, stating, "Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down."



**Who does the ADA protect?** The ADA protects the civil rights of all citizens with disabilities. A civil right is a right you have because you are a citizen of the United States. It makes sure that people with disabilities are treated fairly and given the same opportunities as everyone else.

Under the ADA, a person is considered to have a disability if they have a condition that substantially limits their ability to do major life activities. Major life activities are the things that most people do everyday, such as communicating with each other, dressing, eating, moving around, working, living on our own. The ADA protects people with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, sensory disabilities (blindness/visual impairments, deafness/hearing impairments), and mental health disabilities (such as depression or schizophrenia). It also protects people who are thought to have a disability, but really don't. For example, a woman with scars from severe burns may not have any limits to what she can do, but others may treat her differently because of her appearance. It also protects people associated with people with disabilities, like friends or parents.

#### **The ADA has four important parts, called Titles:**

**Title I:** Makes sure we are not discriminated against when we are working or applying for a job. It does not guarantee that we will get the job, but makes sure we have a fair chance. If we are qualified for the job, we have the right to be interviewed. If we are hired, we have the right to be paid the same salary as everyone else. Employers must also make some accommodations, or changes to the job that will help us be successful.

**Title II:** All of the programs, services, and activities that are run by state and local governments must be accessible to people with disabilities. This includes courts, schools, parks and recreational areas, and transportation.

**Title III:** Public places must be accessible if they were built or renovated after the ADA was passed in 1990. This includes any place members of the general public go, such as restaurants, movie theaters, malls, and grocery stores.

**Title IV:** People with disabilities must be able to communicate. For example, people with hearing impairments or those who are deaf may not be able to use the regular phone lines. Communication devices that allow people to type in their words instead of listening or speaking must be available. Sign language interpreters should be provided when needed.

IDEA says that all children with disabilities have a right to learn in schools with other kids, with and without disabilities. The ADA says that all people have a right to live, work, communicate, and have fun in their own homes and communities. According to the ADA, it is against the law to force people to live or work in segregated places just because they have a disability. Thanks to these acts and others like them, children and adults with disabilities are now guaranteed the same rights that all other citizens have.

Other important national disability acts include:

- Rehabilitation Act (1973)
- Voting Accessibility Act (1984)
- Fair Housing Act (1988)
- Workforce Investment Act (1998)

**SOME WORDS ABOUT LANGUAGE**

Do you know the saying, “Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never harm me”? Did you know this is **WRONG WRONG WRONG**? Words have power. They can be used to help people or hurt. Words have a great deal of influence over how we think about people. There are many words that have been used to describe people with disabilities that have done a lot of damage. Some words are intentionally used to demean people, such as “retard”. Others are used to evoke sadness or pity, such as “victim of...,” “suffers from...,” or “confined to...”

<b>Words that should NEVER be used:</b>	<b>Words to use instead:</b>
Retarded or retard	Intellectual/cognitive disability,
Crippled	Mobility impairment
Handicap	Disability
Handicapped parking	Accessible parking
Handicapped entrance	Accessible entrance
Mongoloid	Down Syndrome
Moron, Idiot, Imbecile, Crazy	Mental Health issue, mental illness
Victim, Suffers from, Afflicted with...	Has...
Birth defect	Congenital disability
Brain Damage	Brain injury
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	Uses a wheelchair

**Person First Language.** People with disabilities support the use of Person First Language. Person First Language means that people with disabilities are people first. They are not defined by their disability. Their disability is just one characteristic of that person. When we talk about people with

disabilities, we should put the person first, then the disability. For example:

<b>INSTEAD OF SAYING:</b>	<b>SAY:</b>
Disabled people	People with disabilities
The disabled lawyer	The lawyer with a disability
Darius is disabled.	Darius has a disability.
That autistic child	The child with autism.

**THE FUTURE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

We have come a very long way in the past 30 years. There are many good laws and policies that protect the rights of people with disabilities and guarantee they have the same opportunities as all other citizens. Fewer people are being subjected to discrimination and isolation. More and more children and adults with disabilities are claiming their rightful places as family members, friends, students, neighbors, co-workers, and all other roles in which we engage. The many gifts and talents of people with disabilities are being recognized and celebrated.

Laws and policies, however, can only do so much. Currently, the main barriers to equality for people with disabilities are attitudinal. As we each examine our own histories and attitudes, we can become aware of old ways of thinking that may prevent us from fully including people with disabilities in our lives and communities. Think how great our lives could be if we could each hang out with Darius!



## RESOURCES

### Disability Rights Movement

Civil Disobedience <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/172/over9.html>  
Disability Rights Timeline <http://www.sfsu.edu/~hrdpu/chron.htm>  
Youth Disability Awareness <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu/cedir/kidsweb/disabilch.html>  
ADAPT <http://www.adapt.org>

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act <http://idea.ed.gov>  
<http://www.nichcy.org/idea.htm>

Americans with Disabilities Act <http://www.bazelon.org/issues/disabilityrights>  
<http://www.dbtac.vcu.edu/>

Person First Language <http://disabilityisnatural.com>  
[http://www.asha.org/about/publications/journal-abstracts/submissions/  
person\\_first.htm](http://www.asha.org/about/publications/journal-abstracts/submissions/person_first.htm)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jenny Manders, Ph.D.** is Disability Studies Coordinator with the Institute on Human Development and Disability: A Center for Excellence in Disability Research, Education, and Service, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Georgia. She was a People First of Georgia State Advisor for 10 years.