Standing on My Sisters’ Shoulders

Time
Three or four class sessions.

Materials
- Viewer’s Guides (one per student)
- Large sheets of paper
- Markers

Purpose:
- To gain an overview of the narrative of the Civil Rights Movement
- To learn about the central role of women in the Civil Rights Movement

Preparation
- Preview the film – select vocabulary words that you think students will need to know to understand the film. Make sure that oppression and resistance are included. (In a variation of this activity --Vocabulary Bingo—you need to identify 24 vocabulary words and create three different bingo cards; see the attached sheet for an example.)
- Prepare a large sheet of paper with two columns (Name, Accomplishment) to place in view of all students – one for each class period.
- Prepare a large sheet of paper with the word Vocabulary at the top – one for each class period.

Directions
For the next several days of viewing, students will work in teams of three. Group them as they enter the room.

As students enter the room, ask them to write on the large sheet the names of women who were active in the Civil Rights Movement. If a name is already on the list, the student should place a check next to her name. [Save the sheets because they represent a pre-assessment] Hand students a Viewer’s Guide and ask them to complete the section called Prior to Viewing. The list will likely be very short (Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Fannie Lou Hamer at most).

Put up the large sheet with the three or four vocabulary words (including oppression and resistance) that you have selected and ask students to guess at the definitions of the words. Ask students to write down their definitions on the Viewer’s Guide. Ask for a few volunteers to share their definitions, and as they do so, write the definitions on the large sheet of paper.

Discuss with the students the meaning of the words oppression and resistance. The following may be helpful:

Oppression— the systematic, institutionalized mistreatment of one group of people by another for whatever reason.

‘The root of the word ‘oppression’ is the element ‘press.’ The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button. Presses are used to mold
things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk…Something pressed is caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce….One of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the double bind—situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure, or deprivation.”—from Marilyn Frye, “Oppression.” In Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, eds., *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*, 5e (Belmont, CA: Thompson-Wadsworth, 2004), p. 49.

**Resistance**— refusal to accept or comply with something; opposition to somebody or something.

Where there is resistance there is friction. When you resist something, you refuse or avoid accepting a basis of conflict. There are many ways to resist. **Active resistance** involves plainly challenging, confronting, or fighting back. **Passive resistance** involves eluding or avoiding the source of friction, or simply refusing to participate in something objectionable (boycotts, work slowdowns). Certain styles of humor, storytelling (Brer Rabbit, John Henry tales), song (spirituals), and folk traditions (playing the dozens) may be considered forms of passive resistance because they slyly challenge and comment upon oppressors. **Nonviolent resistance** is a form of passive resistance in which protestors use their bodies to take a visible stand against something they consider unjust (sit-ins, marches, rallies, mass meetings, walk-outs).

Let students know that they will be watching a film called *Standing on My Sisters’ Shoulders* that focuses on women during this period of history, and say that they will be using the Viewer’s Guide. One person on the team will take note of information their group found new or surprising. Another will take note of forms of oppression and forms of resistance. The third team member will record the vocabulary definitions that they are able to figure out from the viewing.

Show the film excerpts as follows:

**Day One:** Show from the beginning and STOP at 20:01, “The Eyes of the Klan are Upon You!!!”

**Day Two:** START at 20:01 and STOP at 39:06, after Constance Slaughter.

**Day Three:** START at 39:06 and STOP at end.

At the end of each 20-minute segment, have students talk in their groups of three to talk about their reactions to what they have just seen. Was it new? Did it contradict or confirm what they already knew? Ask students to respond to the questions on the Viewer’s Guide. Share the lists with the large group and record on the flip chart. You may get through this more quickly on the third class day. If so, move on to the Post-Viewing activity. If not, save it for a fourth class day. [If you decide to use Vocabulary Bingo, you will not have any winners until Day Three.]

**Examples of Oppression and Resistance in the Film** (there may be others that you and the students discover):

**Oppression:** voting barriers, literacy tests, beatings, lynchings (especially of Till), arrests, systemic oppression (police, politicians, media (notice the *Clarion-Ledger* newspaper), banks, White Citizens Council, Sovereignty Commission, etc), KKK, overseers, spitballs/exclusion at school.

**Resistance:** freedom schools, marches, songs, mass meetings, voting, legislation, boycotts, freedom rides, NAACP, CORE, SCLC, SNCC, COFO, non-violent confrontation/direct action, sit-ins, prayer, school desegregation, silent protests.
Themes in the first 20 minutes:

Overview of women’s central role
Women
White allies
Male employment
Black church
Music
Mamie and Emmett Till
Unita Blackwell
Dorie Ladner
STOP: at 20:01, “The Eyes of the Klan are Upon You!!”

Themes in the second segment (starting at 20:01)

Voter registration barriers
“This vote really must be about something”
Activist training via SNCC
June Elizabeth Johnson
“Find a way to love them enough to get them out of these offices and send them home”~ Hamer
Jackson Library sit-in
Jackson Woolworth’s sit-in (white allies)
STOP: at 39:06, after Constance Slaughter.

Themes in the third segment (starting at 39:06)

Freedom Summer
Murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner
Freedom schools and literacy
“I question America, is this America, the land of the free and the home of the brave?”
~ Hamer
“America you need to think about your soul”~ Devine
Challenge to the seating of the Mississippi Congressional delegation
Voting Rights Act
“They don’t accept African Americans because they love us; they accept us because we vote; when we stop voting that’s when they’ll stop loving and accepting us”~ Slaughter-Harvey

[Let students know that Victoria Gray Adams died in 2006 in Baltimore, MD.]
On Day Three or Four, conduct a large-group, discussion activity (and post-assessment) based on the questions below OR use the questions as an individual post-assessment (writing their answers on a separate sheet of paper). Be sure to address all three questions:

1. Who were the women active in the Civil Rights Movement and what were their accomplishments? (In small groups, students compete to create the longest list.)

2. How was the leadership of women in the Civil Rights Movement the same or different from that of the men? (Set up a mini-debate with students working in small groups to gather evidence for their positions.)

3. Agree or disagree with the following statement:
   If it were not for women, there would not have been a Civil Rights Movement.
   Students line up along a wall to create a spectrum of opinion (from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) and then discuss their opinions.
Viewer’s Guide to
Standing on My Sisters’ Shoulders
By Joan Sadoff and Laura Lipson

Brief Description of Film: This film describes the women who were the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement and their actions to end legal segregation and racial inequality in the U.S. It focuses on women in the state of Mississippi.

Prior to Viewing

Write down the names of women from the Civil Rights Movement. What did these women do?

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__________________________________________________________________________
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Write down two of the vocabulary words on the large sheet that are unfamiliar and write down what you think the words mean.

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__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________
During Viewing

1. New and Surprising Information

2. Examples of Oppression and Resistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oppression</th>
<th>Resistance</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>
3. Vocabulary meanings (copy the two words from the first page. When you hear them in the film, try to guess the meaning from the way it is used by the speaker. Write your guess below)


After Viewing
1. List the names of women and their accomplishments.

2. How was the leadership of women in the Civil Rights Movement the same or different from that of the men?

3. If it were not for women, there would not have been a Civil Rights Movement: Agree or disagree? Why?
**Standing on My Sisters’ Shoulders**  
**Vocabulary Bingo**

**Instructions:** When you hear someone in the film use a vocabulary word, put an X over the word. When you have five in a row in any direction, stop. AFTER the film ends, call Bingo and your team wins!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FREEDOM SCHOOLS</th>
<th>GLORIA CARTER DICKINSON</th>
<th>SNCC</th>
<th>BETTY PEARSON</th>
<th>ANDREW GOODMAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MASSIVE RESISTANCE</td>
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<td>VICTORIA GRAY ADAMS</td>
<td>CONSTANCE SLAUGHTER</td>
<td>CORE</td>
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<td>MARGARET BLOCK</td>
<td>DELEGATION</td>
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<td>JOAN TRUMPAUER</td>
<td>DORIE LADNER</td>
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<td>HUDSON SISTERS</td>
<td>MICHAEL SCHWERNER</td>
<td>SIT-IN</td>
<td>FREEDOM SUMMER</td>
<td>MFDP</td>
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<td>ANNE MOODY</td>
<td>FREEDOM OF CHOICE</td>
<td>FANNIE LOU HAMER</td>
<td>VOTING RIGHTS ACT</td>
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<tr>
<th>EMMETT TILL</th>
<th>ANNIE DEVINE</th>
<th>BETTY PEARSON</th>
<th>MFDP</th>
<th>OLE MISS</th>
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<td>FANNIE LOU HAMER</td>
<td>FREEDOM OF CHOICE</td>
<td>WINIFRED GREEN</td>
<td>VOTING RIGHTS ACT</td>
<td>MICHAEL SCHWERNER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIT-IN</td>
<td>DELEGATION</td>
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<td>L.C. DORSEY-YOUNG</td>
<td>MAE BERTHA CARTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNCC</td>
<td>JUNE ELIZABETH JOHNSON</td>
<td>DESEGREGATION</td>
<td>AUGUSTA HICKS</td>
<td>MARGARET BLOCK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE ALLIES</td>
<td>JAMES CHANEY</td>
<td>CONSTANCE SLAUGHTER</td>
<td>LITERACY</td>
<td>FREEDOM SONGS</td>
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<td>COFO</td>
<td>LITERACY TESTS</td>
<td>FREEDOM SCHOOL</td>
<td>SOVEREIGNTY COMMISSION</td>
<td>VOTING RIGHTS ACT</td>
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<td>CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE</td>
<td>DELEGATION</td>
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<td>MASSIVE RESISTANCE</td>
<td>SIT-IN</td>
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<td>UNITA BLACKWELL</td>
<td>FREEDOM SONGS</td>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>MAE BERTHA CARTER</td>
<td>JOAN TRUMPAUER</td>
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<tr>
<td>WINIFRED GREEN*</td>
<td>CONSTANCE SLAUGHTER</td>
<td>FLONZIE GOODLOE BROWN-WRIGHT*</td>
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