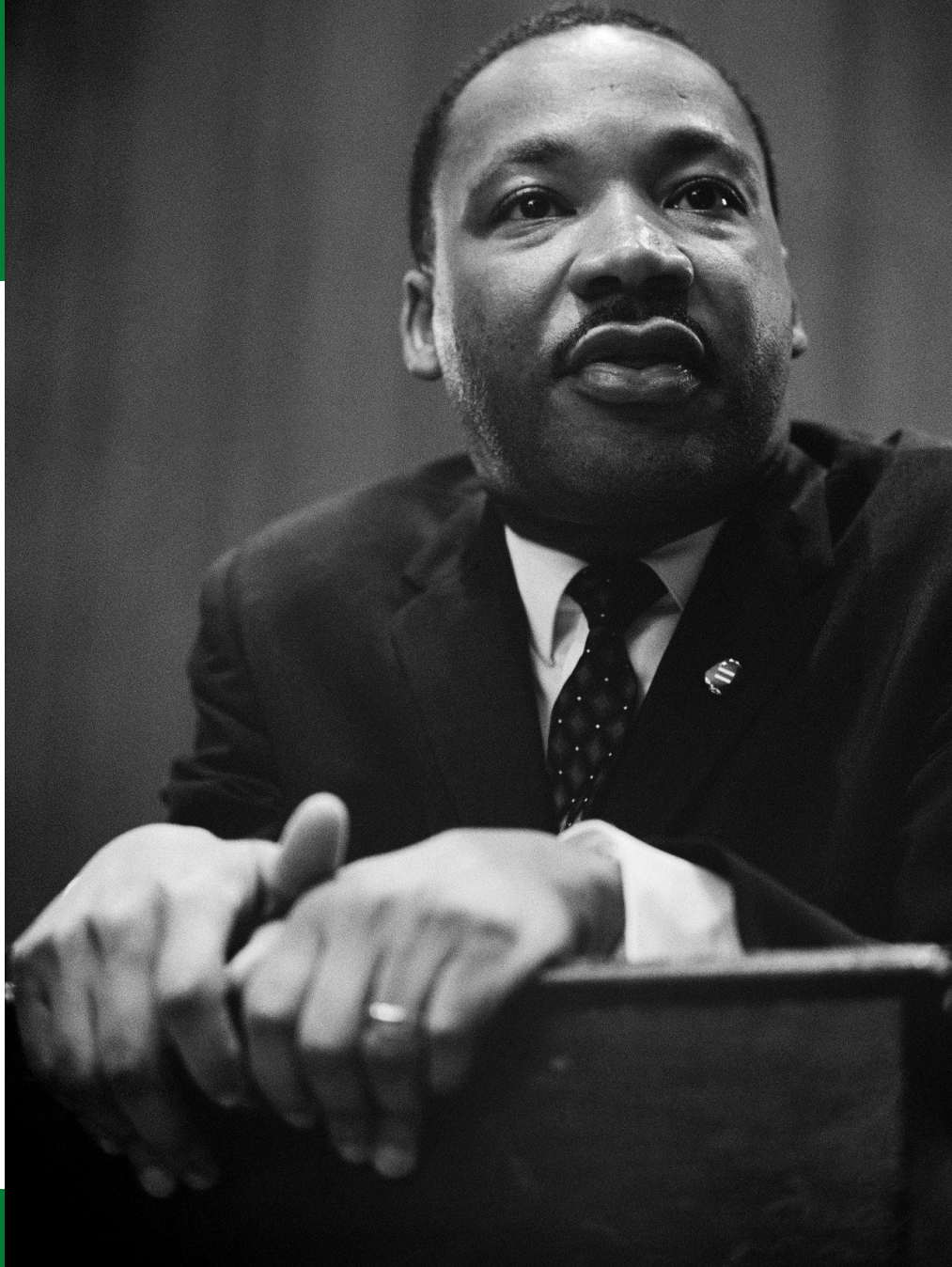


# MLK COMMUNITY ART PROJECT



POWERED BY COMMUNITIES FIRST, INC.  
[WWW.COMMUNITIESFIRSTINC.ORG](http://WWW.COMMUNITIESFIRSTINC.ORG)



COMMUNITIES **FIRST**, INC.

# About the Project

The MLK Community Art Project aims to educate community members about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s legacy and encourage critical reflection through individual creative submissions. In the spirit of collective impact, these submissions will then be used to create a one-of-a-kind art piece.

The educational material included in the following packet will also be explained in a video presentation, which can be watched for free at [www.communitiesfirstinc.org](http://www.communitiesfirstinc.org). In addition to including biographical information about King, these educational materials cover his personal philosophy and an overview of the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, the MLK Community Art Project seeks to encourage community members to see themselves as positive agents of change, and includes examples of contemporary advocacy and engagement strategies.

Once participants review the educational materials, they will be ready to work on their creative submissions! To help contributors reflect on what they've learned, artist prompts are included below. These are intended to offer a starting point for individuals' creative submission, however, artist prompts are encouraged to be interpreted broadly. As a reminder, this project is open to creative works from all ages and skill levels.

Following the artist prompts, there are instructions for submissions. When submitting your creative work to the project, please also send in a completed contact and artist release form. These will allow the project to recognize contributors' work and display them within the final collective art piece. We will not be able to display your work without this form.

Finally, we would like to thank you for your interest and participation. The project strives to honor King's legacy by recognizing the unique creativity of individuals and the diversity of our community.

# Artist Prompts

- **MLK used his own lived experiences to help others. How has your life shaped how you see the world?**
- **Connect what you've learned about the Civil Rights Movement to today. What has emerged, changed, or stayed the same?**
- **After learning about MLK's personal philosophy, what's your vision for a better future?**
- **When you think of Dr. King what comes to mind?**

## ***Submission Instructions***

Creative works can be submitted between January 13th and January 20th, 2021. There is not a limit on the number of submissions per person, and collaborations are also welcome.

Submissions are accepted through email, social media, mail, and physical drop off at specified community sites.

For questions and to submit your creative works email:  
MLK@communitiesfirstinc.org

See page 14 for additional instructions.

# How to Use Artist Prompts

The following artist prompts will help you reflect on what you've learned, and think critically about how these topics relate to social justice, equity, and activism. You are encouraged to use them as starting points for your individual creative submissions and to interpret them broadly.

You are welcome to use a variety of media (including paints, markers, textiles, etc.) and take inspiration from different modes of creative expression (including cartoons, photography, abstract art, portraits, etc.). Written submissions like poems, song lyrics, or notes from your conversations with family and friends are also accepted. We also encourage three dimensional, interactive, or performing art pieces to be captured in some way, so they can be included in the project. Community members regardless of age and perceived skill level are highly encouraged to submit their works.

If you're not sure where to begin, start with a standard 8.5" by 11" inch sheet of paper and see where your inspiration takes you! You will not be limited by the number of creative works you can submit.



# MLK's Biography

Martin King Jr. was born on January 15, 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. The second of three children, King's father, Michael King Sr., and maternal grandfather were also ministers. King grew up and attended segregated schools in Atlanta, Georgia. Public schools, along with public and private facilities across the United States were segregated legally until 1968. Segregation was both a legal and social practice that required individuals to be separated from each other because of their perceived race or ethnicity.

When he was 6 years old, King made friends with a white child who lived across the street. However, they were required to attend separate schools--one for black children and one for white children. Shortly after, his friend's parents told them they were no longer able to play together.

King continued to experience racial discrimination, but excelled in school. He attended Booker T. Washington

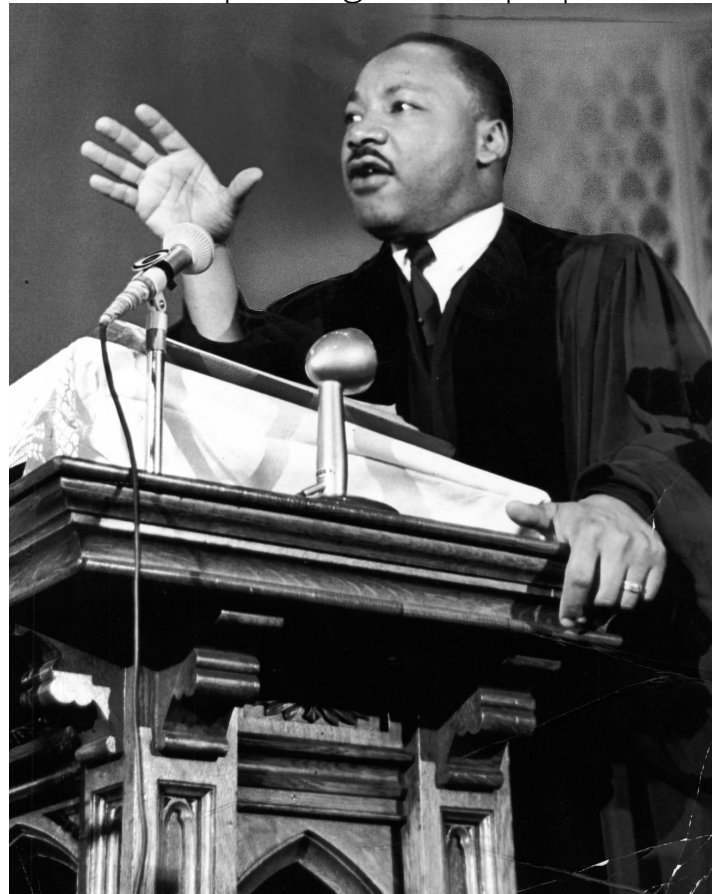
High School, the only upper level school in the city that was open to African Americans, before enrolling at Morehouse College at 15. While at the college, President Benjamin Mays became his mentor, and strengthened King's interest in ministry and religious theology. King ultimately graduated with a Bachelors of Arts in Sociology from Morehouse College, and a Bachelors in Divinity from Crozer Theological Seminary. The second which helped him practice as a minister. Finally, he received his Doctorate from Boston University in 1955, where he had met his wife, Coretta Scott King.

That year, he expanded his work as a social activist. King helped coordinate the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, and strengthened his work by collaborating with other activists. He was also the first president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a civil rights organization. In 1957, King officially changed his name to Martin Luther King Jr. and continued to strengthen his leadership in the Civil Rights Movement by advocating for racial justice and workers' rights.

Some of his most famous milestones include his efforts in the Birmingham Campaign, a collective effort focused on highlighting racial segregation and racial injustice. King was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama and from his cell he wrote "The Letter From Birmingham Jail", one his most famous calls to end the violence of racism. In the same year, 1963, King also gave his "I Have a Dream Speech" at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Now considered one of the most famous speeches in American oratory, his speech painted a vision of an American that recognizes the importance and value of all, as well as fully dismantles oppressive structures like racism.

In 1964, King won the Noble Peace Prize, one of the most notable international recognitions. Martin Luther King Jr. continued to address complex issues relating to racial and social justice including voting rights at the Selma March, the Vietnam War, and the consequences of poverty through the Poor People's Campaign. King legacy was cut short when he assassinated on April 4th, 1968 at the age of 39. Just days after his death, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act which outlawed discrimination,

MLK speaking from a pulpit.



reenforced the right to vote, and desegregated all facilities--including the public school system King had attended.

Following his death, Martin Luther King Jr. continued to influence the fight for social justice in the United States and abroad. He continued to be recognized posthumously with the creation of his monument in Washington, D.C. in 2011 and the federal recognition of MLK Day, a national day of service.

# Personal Philosophy

## *What do you think MLK believed about social justice?*

Martin Luther King Jr. combined Mahatma Gandhi's teachings about nonviolent resistance with his own understanding of compassionate Christianity. In both his ministry and his activism, King called individuals to love their neighbors while also challenging injustice.

Nonviolent resistance is a strategy that brings attention to an issue a group believes needs to change. King and other members of the Civil Rights Movement used nonviolent resistance to bring attention to racism, which is discrimination directed at someone because of their race as well as an oppressive system. They also challenged laws and social attitudes that perpetuated bias and the unfair treatment of people of color. Activists participating in nonviolent resistance refuse to be violent while protesting or demonstrating—even when they are met with violence by police officers or counterprotesters. Demonstrations, like marches or sit-ins (where a group of people

gather in a space or building and refuse to leave) are examples of nonviolent resistance.

Civil disobedience is another example of nonviolent resistance. However, civil disobedience calls individuals to specifically challenge unjust laws. King similarly drew distinctions between just and unjust laws, or what is morally right and wrong. King believed laws, like segregation, were examples of racial injustice and were fundamentally wrong because they were intended to harm



Mahatma Gandhi statue at Wilson Park in Flint, MI.

people of color. However, King's approach to civil disobedience also often required individuals who were peacefully resisting unjust laws, to still accept the punishment for violating the law. In many cases, this involved being arrested. King believed that this would show how much activists respected the law, while also bringing attention to the harm that results from unjust laws.

Segregation included a set of laws that prevented people of color from entering or being served in spaces reserved for white patrons. This could include schools, businesses like restaurants, and jobs. Certain segregation laws also prevented people from different races from spending time together. Individuals who broke these laws could be arrested, or face the threat of physical violence.

Martin Luther King Jr. and others actively protested these laws. In 1964, he and others were arrested for sitting in a restaurant and asking to be served the same by staff as they would white patrons. This is both an example of civil disobedience, by refusing to obey laws they considered unjust, and nonviolent resistance, by refusing to respond with violence as they were arrested.

## ***"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." MLK***

King believed that nonviolence would allow the movement to educate individuals (who were prejudiced themselves) about the realities of racial injustice, build a greater understanding between different people, and ultimately dismantle oppressive systems like racism. King is notable because he believed that challenging racism, and legal practices like segregation that perpetuate racial injustice, would take courage but would also require compassion. He believed this approach would help folks understand how others lived experiences and perspectives formed, while creating space for individuals to have open conversations about how beliefs—specifically one's biases and prejudices—are inherently harmful to one's fellow neighbors.

# Historical Context: The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement emerged in the mid-1950s and continued into the 1960s. Broadly, the movement sought to challenge and dismantle complex social, economic, and political issues. Through collective action, the movement highlighted racial discrimination and injustice, began to address segregation, and more.

To provide helpful context to the critical role the Civil Rights Movement played in advancing social justice, this section will briefly review key historical moments as they relate racial inequality.

## Historical Context

The year 1619 marks the first recorded ship to carry enslaved people from Africa to Virginia, but the practice of enslaving individuals in the Americas began nearly a century earlier with the enslavement of Native Peoples. Legalized slavery continued for over 200 more years and allowed dehumanization and violence towards people of color. By 1860, there were nearly 4 million people enslaved in the United States. For perspective, that is nearly half of the people living in Michigan today.

Following the end of the American Civil War in 1865, the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments were made to the Constitution. Known collectively as the Civil War Amendments, these amendments are recognized as monumental (though imperfect) steps towards racial justice. The 13th amendment abolished slavery while the 14th amendment granted citizenship to all formerly enslaved peoples. Along with citizenship, the 14th amendment is supposed to offer all people “equal protection under the law”, meaning that all individuals will be treated fairly and equally by the law. Finally the 15th Amendment gave black men the right to vote.

While people had been granted important rights, and the first black men were elected to public office from 1865-1877 (a period of time know as Reconstruction), the fight for racial justice continued. Practices like poll taxes, which required people to pay to vote, and grandfather clauses, which required individual’s grandfathers to have voted prior to the Civil War, were examples of intentional ways formerly enslaved people were prevented from voting.



Significant inequalities continued into the 1900s, and people of color were prevented from accessing the same social, economic, and political rights as white Americans. Jim Crow laws were adopted across the United States, in an active attempt to restrict the rights of people of color. Examples of Jim Crow laws include segregation, which outlawed shared use of everything from drinking from the same water fountains to sitting together on transportation, like buses.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom



King speaking to a crowd.



## The Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement was created in response to these continued injustices, and included different philosophical approaches to these issues, numerous leaders, and the collective work of many to make significant changes.

As mentioned, leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. took on a nonviolent approach to activism and engaged with large groups of activists. King and other members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference helped organize the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. After Rosa Parks had been arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama to a white passenger, this network of activists refused to take the bus, and the boycott lasted 381 days. This massive protest set the stage for future collective activism, and in 1956, the Federal Court ruled that the laws that segregated buses were unconstitutional.

The Freedom Riders also used collective action to bring attention to segregated bus stations across the South. This group of black and white activists participated in Freedom Rides, bus trips taken throughout Southern states in 1961. The groups were met with horrific violence from white counter protesters (for trying to use the “whites-only” restrooms and lunch counters at bus stations) and others were arrested. However, they continued and expanded their protest across state lines

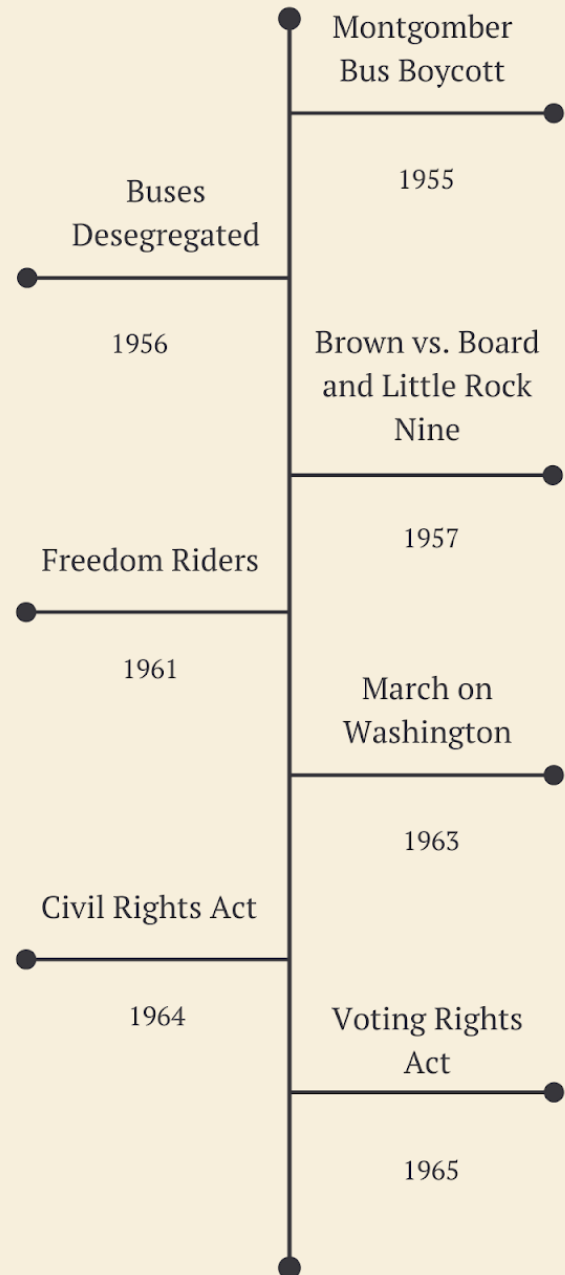
and successfully helped pressure the Interstate Commerce Commission into prohibiting segregation in interstate transit terminals.

In addition to including activists from various backgrounds, the Civil Rights Movement showed that anyone, regardless of age can make a difference. Following the desegregation of public schools in 1954, a group of nine black students enrolled at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Though school segregation had been made illegal, they were initially prevented from entering into the school. Their heroic acts enlisted President Dwight D. Eisenhower to send federal troops to escort the Little Rock Nine into the school, gaining national attention.

However, not everyone who was involved in the Civil Rights Movement believed nonviolence was the ultimate approach. Malcom X, another leader Civil Rights Movement, called on activists to defend themselves in the face of violence and aggression. Malcom X was also a support of Black Nationalism, and for a period a time, was a member of the Nation of Islam. As an American Muslim minister, his personal and spiritual philosophies evolved over time and he also helped found the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

## Timeline of Key Events

### CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT



Onion, A., Sullivan, M., & Mullen, M. (2020a). Civil Rights Movement. In History. Retrieved from <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement>

# How Can I Get Involved?

It can feel like you have to do something huge in order to make a difference. You may feel that you need to participate in a march or become the leader of a movement to become an activist. However, that is not always the case. While it is important to protest and stand up loudly against injustice, everyday activism presents itself in small steps.

In this section, we have included a recommended list of books and films that can help you open a conversation about racial injustice with others, organizations you can join or support, and other strategies for advocacy and engagement.



# Contemporary Advocacy & Engagement Strategies

## Open a Discussion: Recommended Readings and Documentaries

In order to make positive change, we need to dictate the narrative. That means talking to people, particularly when you do not want to or the topic seems uncomfortable. That is not to say that you need to open a dialogue with random strangers, but rather the people you see every day. It is easy to call out a stranger on the internet. It is much harder, and braver, to ask your friend or relative “what do you mean by that?” when they say something you believe is discriminatory or harmful about others. Consistently and proactively having open dialogues about racism or other forms of oppression in the United States is one way you continue to learn and challenge racial injustice.

### Children's Books

- *Whistle for Willie* by Ezra Jack Keats
- *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats
- *Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong'o
- *You Are Mighty: A Guide to Changing the World* by Caroline Paul

### Young Adult Books

- *Just Mercy (Adapted for Young Adults)* by Bryan Stevenson
- *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas

### Adult Fiction Books

- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison *Trigger Warning*
- *Incognegro: A Graphic Mystery* by Mat Johnson *Trigger Warning*



# Other Strategies

- Continue to learn! Choose one topic that was mentioned in the educational material, and do some additional research. Find a book at your local library, listen to a podcast, or talk with someone in your community about their lived experiences.
- Share what you've learned and what you're passionate about! Make a poster you can present to others or put in a public place, share your thoughts on social media, or make an educational flyer.
- Volunteer or donate to a local organization whose mission you care about.
- Learn about the elected officials that represent you locally, as well as on the state and federal level.
- Make sure you're registered to vote yourself (or that your family members are), and see if your elected officials represent your interests and make decisions you believe will help your greater community. Write or call them to let them know if you agree with their choices or believe there are changes they can help make.



## Support Organizations

After learning about these organizations, you can find local chapters, start a similar organization at your school, or participate in an act of service with your friends or family members. Collective action is a powerful tool for change because it brings together like-minded individuals who can work together towards a wider goal. Think about what you're passionate about, and connect with others to make a difference!

- **Communities First, Inc.**
- **Habitat For Humanity**
- **Crim Fitness Foundation**
- **GenesisHOPE**
- **CEDAM**
- **Southwest Economic Solutions**
- **Neighborhood Development Associations**
- **Telamon Corporation**
- **Local Arts Institutions**
- **Local Libraries**

# Submission Instructions

Creative submissions will be accepted from January 13th to January 20th, 2021. To ensure the safety of contributors, participants may submit their work online, through the mail, and at dedicated community drop off points.

Participants may email their submissions to [MLK@communitiesfirstinc.org](mailto:MLK@communitiesfirstinc.org) or submit their works on social media by tagging [@communitiesfirstinc](https://www.instagram.com/communitiesfirstinc) and using [#CFIMLK](https://twitter.com/CFIMLK). However, for either of these methods **please try to scan the submission or take a clear photo in bright lighting with all of the edges of the creative work in the frame**. Submissions may also be mailed directly to Communities First, Inc. at: 415 W. Court St. Flint, MI 48503

Finally, creative submission may be dropped off at the Flint Public Library at: Courtland Center 4190 E Court St, Burton, MI 48509. While the library has the same hours of operation, please be advised that the library is only offering 15-minute lobby service. To turn in your submission please ask a library attendant about the drop-off box for the MLK Community Art Project

If dropping off a creative submission at a community drop off site, please follow the appropriate COVID-19 procedures.

Finally, along with your creative submission please include a completed **contact and artist release form**. These will allow us to recognize you for your contributions, be able to put you into a raffle for fun prizes, and publicly display your work in our collective art piece.



## Thank you for your contributions!

**You can stay updated on the final presentation of the collective art piece by visiting [communitiesfirstinc.org](https://www.communitiesfirstinc.org), following Communities First, Inc. on social media, and joining our mailing list.**



## Art Release for the MLK Community Art Project

I hereby grant permission for Communities First, Inc. and certain agencies or entities contracted by Communities First, Inc., to use my and/or my child's creative submission in connection with the MLK Community Art Project.

Communities First, Inc. is authorized to exhibit or distribute such art submissions in whole or in part without restrictions or limitations for any educational or promotional purpose that Communities First, Inc. deems appropriate. Such purposes may include art display and are delivered via newspaper, magazines, journals, television, the web, or other communications media.

The undersigned agrees to release Communities First, Inc. and other entities contracted by Communities First, Inc. from any liability in connection with the use of the art submission.

Note: The following information will be used to recognize the contributions made to the MLK Community Art Project. However, Communities First, Inc. retains the ability to not include a given work. Email addresses will be used to update you of the completion of the final collective art piece.

**Date**

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**Name**

---

*Please print*

**Signature**

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*In case of child's creative work, guardian signature*

**Address**

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**Number**

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**Email**

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## MLK Community Art Project: COVID-19 Safety Guidelines

When out in public and in close contact with others, always wear a mask or face covering. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends people wear face masks in public settings, especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain. Wearing a face mask may limit exposure to respiratory droplets and large particles and may help prevent people who have COVID-19 from spreading the virus to others.

Maintain at least 6 feet of separation as much as possible when in close proximity to other people. For the MLK Community Art Project, this is particularly important when picking up artist kits, turning in creative submissions at community drop sites, in parking lots, and routes of entry and exit.

Additionally, don't shake hands, give high fives, elbow bumps, or touch others, because close contact increases the risk of acquiring COVID-19. Take extra precautions with shared equipment, such as pens and pencils. Ensure any shared creative supplies or equipment is clean and disinfected. Wipe down any used equipment with disinfecting wipes and use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.



## Why Practice Social Distancing?

COVID-19 spreads mainly among people who are in close contact (within about 6 feet) for a prolonged period. Spread happens when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and droplets from their mouth or nose are launched into the air and land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. The droplets can also be inhaled into the lungs. Recent studies indicate that people who are infected but do not have symptoms likely also play a role in the spread of COVID-19. Since people can spread the virus before they know they are sick, it is important to stay at least 6 feet away from others when possible, even if you—or they—do not have any symptoms. Social distancing is especially important for people who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.