

## The Civil Rights Movement Sit-in Scenario

### STUDENT ACTIVITY

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#### DIRECTIONS

In this activity, you are going to read some scenarios and respond to them. As you read the scenarios, imagine that you are part of the scene and think about what you would say or do in response to what has happened. For each scenario, you will be asked to write how you would respond. There are no right or wrong answers here; just try to answer as honestly as you can.

1. Read “Mealtime Malaise Part 1.”

#### **Mealtime Malaise Part 1**

It was a long, tiring morning. You had been up since 3:00 a.m. preparing for an exam in American History. Your test went all right, but you were tired and hungry as you entered the drug store for some lunch. The morning newspaper didn't seem to have anything interesting on this winter day in February 1960. You had never done this before, but you decided to sit down at the lunch counter for a sandwich. The next thing you noticed were four black students who sat down next to you in the “white only” lunch counter. When they ordered coffee and donuts, the waiter said, “We don't serve coloreds at this counter.” The waiter then turned to you and said, “We only serve whites at this counter.” Everyone remained seated as the store closed the lunch counter.

2. As you read this, what did you think your role was? (i.e. bystander, protestor, white aggressor, police officer, counter wait staff, pharmacy owner.) Explain your thoughts or feelings after witnessing this event. What was your opinion regarding the store closing the lunch counter? How did you feel?

3. Read “Mealtime Malaise Part 2.”

**Mealtime Malaise Part 2**

You stood up and stepped back from the counter. People all around the store were in shock to see four black students just sitting there peacefully reading their books. After a tense period of time, several angry white students entered the store and began yelling obscenities at the black students at the lunch counter. This did not deter the students, who continued to read as if nothing was happening. More whites entered the store. The yelling grew louder as some of the white students began pushing the black students, blowing cigarette smoke in their faces and emptying sugar containers over their heads. Others threw raw eggs at them, punched them, and poured hot coffee down their backs. Some white students even put out cigarettes on the backs of the black students while they remained fixed at the counter. All this time, the black students did not retaliate.

4. From your close vantage point, what are you feeling right now? Write down your response in the space below.

5. Read “Mealtime Malaise Part 3.”

**Mealtime Malaise Part 3**

You watched as the police entered the store and instructed the black students to leave the premises. The black students remained seated and did not move. The police then warned the black students that if they didn’t move they would be arrested. Again, they just sat there. The police then handcuffed the black students and physically removed them from the store, but as soon as they were pulled from their seats, other black students took their place. This pattern continued until the store closed. All of the black students who were arrested complied and went peacefully with the officers. At the precinct office, all students arrested were charged with disorderly conduct.

6. Write your thoughts, feelings, and actions as you witnessed this scene.

7. Read “Mealtime Malaise Conclusion.”

**Mealtime Malaise Conclusion**

The headline in the Sunday morning paper read, “Students Stage Sit-down Demand.” “Black students held sit-ins, requesting service at ‘whites-only’ lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina, Birmingham, Alabama, and Memphis, Tennessee. The sit-ins had spread to a dozen other southern cities.” Now you were certain that you had witnessed a piece of history, and you decide to share your experience at the lunch counter with a local reporter who lives next door.

8. Write the story as the reporter who would publish it as a secondary source in a longstanding southern newspaper. As you write, consider what motives, personal interests, and bias might impact your story.

9. Respond to the following questions:

a) Why do you think the black students conducted the sit-ins?

b) Why do you think the black students passively took the physical and verbal abuse?

c) Why did the store refuse to serve the blacks?

d) What rationale could the white students have for reacting so violently to the students participating in the sit-ins?

e) What is the difference between the primary (student's story) and secondary sources (reporter's story) of information about the lunch counter sit-in, and how they were relayed?

f) What questions do you still have about the lunch counter sit-ins?