

TIME REQUIRED: 2-3 days

LEARNING ABOUT THE EMMETT TILL CASE (UPPER MIDDLE SCHOOL)

MAIN GOALS:

1. Understand how social (peer) pressure can cause well-meaning individuals to make bad decisions.
2. Illustrate how situations that seem clear-cut sometimes prove to be extremely complex and nuanced.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

1. Learn the facts of the Emmett Till murder case and how it fit into the larger fabric of the Civil Rights Movement.
2. Compare pressures brought to bear by the adult community with peer pressure experiences regularly by adolescents.

PROCEDURES:

1. **Introduction/discussion starter:** Is it better to do the “right thing,” or to preserve harmony within the greater community? In other words, is the welfare of a single individual more or less important than the welfare of a large number of people?
2. **Study/learning:**
 - a. Who was Emmett Till?
 - b. Why was he killed?
 - c. Does jury nullification make this case different from an “ordinary” lynching?
 - d. Were Milam and Bryant actually guilty beyond a reasonable doubt or could it be argued that the prosecution failed to make its case?
 1. Appoint students to argue for the defense and prosecution
 2. Separate into groups and debate the main points for each side

3. **Culmination:** Discuss how the case actually turned out and why, including:
 - a. The jury's verdict
 - b. The subsequent confession by Milam and Bryant
 - c. The community's response following the conclusion of the trial
4. **Follow-up:** What obligation (if any) does the county, state or Federal government have with respect to this case today?

RESOURCES:

1. *Getting Away With Murder and Mississippi Trial, 1955*, by Chris Crowe
2. Reference sources including encyclopedia and Internet

EVALUATION/ARTIFACTS:

1. T-chart summarizing arguments for and against conviction of Milam and Bryant
2. Presentation of individual or group findings
3. Written reflection comparing what happened during the trial with student responses to everyday peer pressure plus a short essay in response to the introductory question.