

# Malcolm X

By Jane Runyon

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Martin Luther King became a civil rights leader during the 1960's. It was his goal to bring changes to the lives of black Americans in a peaceful manner. He taught that a nonviolent approach to making these changes would be accepted easier than by using violence. Not everyone agreed with Martin Luther King's ideas. One such African American who gained much notoriety was Malcolm X.

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, in May of 1925. He came from a large family. He was in the middle of eight children. His father was a minister. His family moved to East Lansing, Michigan, when Malcolm was very young. He was barely six when his father was murdered. It was strongly believed that Reverend Little died at the hands of a racist group quite similar to the Ku Klux Klan. Malcolm's mother never recovered from this tragic loss. She spent most of the rest of her life in mental hospitals. Her children were made wards of the state. Malcolm was only sixteen when he made his way to Boston to live with relatives. What he found there was a life of crime that led him to prison.



While Malcolm was in prison, his life took a new path. He became interested in bettering himself. He set a goal to improve his mind and to educate himself by copying every page of a dictionary. He decided to improve his spiritual being by starting a correspondence with a man named Elijah Muhammad. Muhammad was the leader of the Nation of Islam. This was a group of African Americans who followed the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, the leader of the Islam religion.

After Malcolm Little was released from prison, he changed his name to Malcolm X. He wanted the X to represent the African ancestors he would never know. He became a minister in the Nation of Islam. Malcolm X had the personality and intelligence to move a crowd with his speeches. He soon became a very popular minister of the movement. He was able to connect with the urban black community. Things started going badly for Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam about 1963. There was jealousy in the Nation over Malcolm X's popularity with the people. Malcolm became disenchanted with the leaders of the group when he saw that they were not keeping the high moral values that they were teaching others to follow.

Over the next couple of years, Malcolm X associated himself with other groups in an attempt to find people who believed in the same ideals that he did. He became a strong advocate for the overthrow of oppressive laws and rules by "any means necessary." He became a threat to both the white leaders he felt were keeping blacks oppressed and to the Islam Nation he had lost respect for. He and his family lived under constant threat by both whites and blacks. He teamed with author Alex Haley to write his autobiography. He made several trips to Africa in order to better understand the ordeal his ancestors endured and to bridge the gap that had been caused by slavery in America.

On February 14, 1965, Malcolm's home was firebombed. He and his family were able to escape with their lives. A week later, on the 21st, he was giving a speech at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City. A disturbance broke out among some of the people standing in front of Malcolm. His body guards rushed to break up the fight. As they did, a lone gunman approached Malcolm and shot him in the chest with a sawed-off shotgun. He died on the spot. Three members of the Nation of Islam were arrested for the crime.

Malcolm X will long be remembered for his ability to get people fired-up to back his cause. His militant beliefs were not accepted by all civil rights backers, but his passion for the betterment of black America was greatly respected.

Name \_\_\_\_\_



Date \_\_\_\_\_

Malcolm X

## Questions

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\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Malcolm X was born in New York City.

- A. False
- B. True

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. What happened to change Malcolm's life when he was six?

- A. They moved to Michigan.
- B. His father was murdered.
- C. He moved to Boston.
- D. He was sent to live with his sister.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Where did Malcolm receive much of his education?

- A. In Boston
- B. In prison
- C. In New York City
- D. In Michigan

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. What did Malcolm do to improve his mind?

- A. He wrote letters.
- B. He did puzzles.
- C. He read books.
- D. He copied the dictionary.

5. Why do you think Malcolm decided to become associated with the Nation of Islam?

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\_\_\_\_\_ 6. What caused Malcolm X to break off with the Nation of Islam?

- A. He became tired of their rules.
- B. He became popular on his own.
- C. He no longer respected the leaders of the Nation.
- D. He could earn more money elsewhere.

7. Why do you think the Nation of Islam wanted to get rid of Malcolm X?

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\_\_\_\_\_ 8. How was Malcolm X different from Martin Luther King?

- A. Malcolm X was white.
- B. King was for nonviolence, Malcolm X was for violence.
- C. Malcolm X was for nonviolence, King was for violence.
- D. King was a minister.

