The true story of the Greensboro sit-in

On February 1, 1960, in the town of Greensboro, North Carolina, four African-American college students sat down on high stools at the lunch counter of the local Woolworth’s department store. They weren’t sitting down for a cup of coffee or a slice of pie. They were sitting down to change the world, or, at least, a part of it.

Throughout the South, prejudice against African Americans was common. The Woolworth’s lunch counter—like many restaurants, hotels, and hospitals—refused to serve African Americans. This humiliating treatment had many African Americans fed up and saying, “No more!” So, Ezell A. Blair, Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph O’Neil, and David Richmond—the four college students—decided to fight back...without violence.

The four men walked into the Woolworth’s with a clear plan of action. They knew the waitress would refuse to serve them. They knew other customers would treat them rudely. Some may even try to hurt them. But no matter what, the men vowed, they would remain peaceful and polite, even to those who behaved hatefully toward them.

They’d been inspired by civil-rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968). Dr. King urged African Americans to challenge prejudice and demand equal treatment. But he did not believe in using violence to get results. King said that love can lead to understanding, but hate only leads to more hate. African Americans, he said, must do something extremely difficult: fight violence and hate with peace and love.

The four men in Greensboro believed passionately in the teachings of Dr. King. But as they took their seats at the counter, they had to wonder: Would these ideas work?

Indeed they did. By the end of the week, the four were joined by hundreds of other protesters. News of their “sit-in” spread around the country, and soon other groups were protesting at Woolworth’s around the country and other segregated restaurants in the South. By July, the lunch counter at Woolworth’s was officially open to African Americans. Other restaurants soon followed. Through their simple act of sitting down, the four men took a bold stand for equality, justice, and peace.
Directions: Read “Stand Up by Sitting Down.” Then fill in the circle next to the best answer for each question.

1. This article is mostly about
   ○ A. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
   ○ B. Woolworth’s lunch counters.
   ○ C. a protest in Greensboro, North Carolina.
   ○ D. violence in the South.

2. From this article, you can tell that the four protesters
   ○ E. were very hungry.
   ○ F. were committed to nonviolence.
   ○ G. were wealthy men.
   ○ H. had met Dr. King.

3. How did the four men know the waitress would not serve them?
   ○ I. Somebody told them.
   ○ J. The waitress was rude.
   ○ K. Woolworth’s did not serve African Americans at the lunch counter.
   ○ L. Dr. King told them.

4. Which of the following is an opinion?
   ○ M. The protests took place in 1960.
   ○ N. Woolworth’s was an evil place.
   ○ O. Dr. King was a civil rights leader.
   ○ P. Eventually, the Woolworth’s counter was opened to African Americans.

5. In paragraph 5, what does the word *passionately* mean?
   ○ Q. angrily
   ○ R. thoughtfully
   ○ S. with great emotion
   ○ T. with great effort

6. What was the author’s main purpose in writing this story?
   ○ U. to encourage you to protest
   ○ V. to inform you about an important event in history
   ○ W. to share a fun story
   ○ X. to persuade you not to eat at Woolworth’s lunch counters

Write It Out!

Why do you think the Greensboro lunch counter sit-in was so successful? Why do you think the protest convinced Woolworth’s to change its rules? Use a separate sheet of paper to write your answer in a complete paragraph.
ANSWERS

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Write It Out! Answers will vary.