

Lesson plan title: Martin Luther King Jr.: American Critic

Lesson Overview

This lesson is designed to have student students analyze Martin Luther King's speeches from the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1956) through his last speech at Memphis in 1968. The idea for the lesson is that is common to assume that King's legacy ends with I have a dream speech, but in fact, some of his most important speeches are less known. Students will likely notice that King's speeches became more critical of the United States in his later years. Students in groups will be given 12 minutes to examine and document each exhibit. Students are essentially gathering information in order to answer the essential question: How did King evolve over time? What themes are consistent in all of his speeches? What is different about each speech? How does each speech different? Each exhibit has scaffolding questions, but students are expected to also write notes to gain the central idea. Students are expected to write the name of each exhibit (speech) to be able to cite using textual evidence for an end of assignment performance task.

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

Close-read informational text for comprehension and critical analysis.

Identify, explain, and summarize main ideas, issues, and messages that are being presented in the primary and secondary source documents through proficient completion of the organizers.

Cite evidence from the texts of the primary and secondary source documents to support responses to the comprehension and critical analysis questions.

Compare and contrast Martin Luther King's viewpoint concerning the effectiveness and usage of nonviolence as a tactic to achieve racial equality.

Collaborate effectively with classmates to develop and express positions and viewpoints (both orally in small-group and whole-class discussion and in written essay responses) on the essential question based on textual evidence from the primary source documents.

Essential question: How did Martin Luther King's message evolve over time?

Number of class periods

Four or five instructional periods with each class period about 54 minutes.

Grade Levels: 8-12.

Procedure

1. Do Now. Ask to the students to analyze and document the following Martin Luther King Jr. quote: "*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.*" Allow students five minutes for response. Discuss for another five minutes.
2. Divide the class into small heterogeneous groups with three students in each group. Each group should contain pupils of varying abilities and level of achievement. During the lesson students will collaborate and work in these small groups as they read and discuss the document excerpts.

3. The teacher will display and discuss the essential question: How did Martin Luther King's message evolve over time? Students will have two days in 12 minute intervals to examine each of the artifacts (speeches). Each of the speeches have scaffolding questions that need to be answered, but students are not limited to just the questions. Students can also write down key words, summarize, and put in their own words, but time is limited. Students will use their own paper to complete the activity. Students need to write the title and year, and need to examine and document the main idea of each speech. At the end of the activity, students will complete a performance task to answer the essential question. Students will use textual evidence from each of the sources, as each tells part of the story.
4. Each night students are encouraged to look deeper at the events surrounding the speeches to help place the speech in the proper context.
5. At the beginning of class on the second and third days, students in whole groups can ask questions about speeches. Other students in the class with answer. Teacher will intervene, when necessary.
6. After step 2, students will work on activity and complete first four exhibits, rotating every 12 minutes. At the end of class, remind students to take notes and put into historical context.
7. Day two. Spend 10 minutes discussing student questions, answered hopefully by students. Complete next four exhibits, rotating every 12 minutes. At the end of class, remind students to take notes and put into historical context.
8. Day three. Spend 10 minutes discussing student questions, answered hopefully by students. Group work. Students will get to work together in groups to review materials for performance task.
9. Day four. Performance task. Give students writing options, and let them work for complete class. Make sure to give rubric. Collect the next day. Offer feedback using the rubric, no grade. Let students make revisions for grade.

Exhibit A: Excerpts from a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., as reported by Anna Holden, a teacher at Fisk University. March 22, 1956. Montgomery, Alabama.

At this Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) weekly meeting, King speaks to the crowd. Democracy gives us this right to protest and that is all we are doing. We can say honestly that we have not advocated violence, have not practiced it, and have gone courageously on with a Christian movement. Ours is a spiritual movement depending on moral and spiritual fortitude. The protest is still going on. (Great deal of applause here) Freedom doesn't come on a silver platter. With every great movement toward freedom there will inevitably be trials. Somebody will have to have the courage to sacrifice. You don't get to the Promised Land without going through the Wilderness. You don't get there without crossing over hills and mountains, but if you keep on keeping on, you can't help but reach it. We won't all see it, but it's coming and it's because God is for it. We won't back down. We are going on with our movement. Let us continue with the same spirit, with the same orderliness, with the same discipline, with the same Christian approach. I believe that God is using Montgomery as his proving ground. God be praised for you, for your loyalty, for your determination. God bless you and keep you, and may God be with us as we go on.

1. Who was King's audience? What does that imply about King's intentions in this speech?
2. What does this document suggest are key factors in the success of the boycott?
3. Find and list four references to religion in this speech. How does King use religion in this speech? What does this suggest about the role of religion in the boycott?

Exhibit B: Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through its songs. King speech in Birmingham during Project C.

<http://www.folkways.si.edu/sing-for-freedom-the-story-of-the-civil-rights-movement/african-american-music-american-history-historical-song-struggle-protest/album/smithsonian>

In the spring of 1963, activists in Birmingham, Alabama launched one of the most influential campaigns of the Civil Rights Movement: Project C, better known as The Birmingham Campaign. It would be the beginning of a series of lunch counter sit-ins, marches on City Hall and boycotts on downtown merchants to protest segregation laws in the city.

Over the next couple months, the peaceful demonstrations would be met with violent attacks using high-pressure fire hoses and police dogs on men, women and children alike -- producing some of the most iconic and troubling images of the Civil Rights Movement. President John F. Kennedy would later say, *"The events in Birmingham... have so increased the cries for equality that no city or state or legislative body can prudently choose to ignore them."* It is considered one of the major turning points in the Civil Rights Movement and the "beginning of the end" of a centuries-long struggle for freedom.

Questions

1. Where is the setting for the speech?
2. What is King's main message to the audience?
3. What is different about this type of protest?
4. Who is the "big fish" that King refers to?
5. Please write down the most moving phrase of the speech.

Exhibit C: Letter From Birmingham Jail. April 16, 1963.

From the Birmingham jail, where he was imprisoned as a participant in nonviolent demonstrations against segregation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote in longhand the letter which follows. It was his response to a public statement of concern and caution issued by eight white religious leaders of the South.

16 April 1963

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"--then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience. You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."

Questions:

1. To whom is King addressing this letter? What is his purpose in writing this them?
2. What is King's main argument? What three reasons does he provide to support his argument?
3. What does King say about just and unjust laws?
4. How does the story of "Funtown" help explain the reason for the existence of Civil Rights Movement?

Exhibit D: *I Have a Dream* speech. March on Washington. After Birmingham violence.

On August 28, 1963, more than 200,000 Americans gathered in Washington, D.C., for a political rally known as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Organized by a number of civil rights and religious groups, the event was designed to shed light on the political and social challenges African Americans continued to face across the country. The march, which became a key moment in the growing struggle for civil rights in the United States, culminated in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, a spirited call for racial justice and equality.

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkhaveadream.htm>

Students will analyze the speech, but with no visuals.

Questions

1. What phrases and ideas stand out in the speech? Explain at least three examples.
2. What United States documents did King reference within his speech?

3. What is the significance of using these documents as examples/references within the speech?
4. Identify the goal of the Civil Rights Movement as outlined by King?
5. What places and/or individuals do King mention was the worst violators of Civil Rights?
6. What ultimately is the dream King has for the United States?

Exhibit E: Martin Luther King's Acceptance Speech, on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1964

<http://www.nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=1853>

Questions

1. Why did Martin Luther King get the Nobel Peace prize?
2. Where is the acceptance speech given?
3. This is obvious an important award. How do you think the president at the time Lyndon Johnson, the media, or opponents view this speech?
4. What reasons does King give for receiving the award?

Exhibit F: Martin Luther King in Chicago, 1966.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKbpYXCibzQ>

Questions

1. Why does King come to Chicago?
2. What is different about Chicago than other Civil Rights destinations?
3. What was different about the Civil Rights opposition in Chicago?
4. What do other Civil Rights workers say about the violence in Chicago?
5. What stands out about the events in Chicago?

Exhibit G: Why Am I opposed to the War in Vietnam? 1967.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b80Bsw0UG-U#t=16>

Questions

1. Why is King opposed to the war in Vietnam?
2. How does King link the Civil Rights Movement to opposition of the war in Vietnam?
3. What does King say about the poor?
4. According to King, which country the purveter of violence in the world?

Can also use Eyes on the Prize: The Promised Land (1967-1968).

1. Against Vietnam: 1:13-4:46.

http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_beyond_vietnam/

Exhibit H: I've Been to the Mountaintop

Annotation: This speech was given April 3, 1968, at Mason Temple (Church of God in Christ Headquarters), in Memphis, Tennessee.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aL4FOvlf7G8>

Can also use Eyes on the Prize: The Promised Land (1967-1968).

Mountaintop. 33:03-41.

Excerpt:

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Questions:

1. What does King mean when he challenges to the United States when he says "be true to what you said on paper."
2. What is King's point when mentioning China and Russia?
3. Why does King use the repetition of "Somewhere I read?"
4. According to King, what is the greatness of America?
5. Why King is upset about court injunctions?
6. Does King for shadow his death?

Exhibit I: Final documents: God of History (1968) and Where Do We Go From Here? (1967)

God of History.

National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., on 31 March 1968. Congressional Record, 9 April 1968.

It seems that I can hear the God of history saying, "That was not enough! But I was hungry, and ye fed me not. I was naked, and ye clothed me not. I was devoid of a decent sanitary house to live in, and yet provided no shelter for me. And consequently, you cannot enter the kingdom of greatness. If ye do it unto the least of these, my brethren, ye do it unto me." That's the question facing America today.

Where Do We Go From Here? 1967 King speech.

Let us be dissatisfied until America will no longer have a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds. (*All right*)

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort from the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice. (Yes sir)

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until those who live on the outskirts of hope are brought into the metropolis of daily security.

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until slums are cast into the junk heaps of history (Yes), and every family will live in a decent, sanitary home.

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until the dark yesterdays of segregated schools will be transformed into bright tomorrows of quality integrated education.

Let us be dissatisfied until integration is not seen as a problem but as an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.

Let us be dissatisfied (*All right*) until men and women, however black they may be, will be judged on the basis of the content of their character, not on the basis of the color of their skin. (Yeah) Let us be dissatisfied. [*applause*]

Let us be dissatisfied (*Well*) until every state capitol (Yes) will be housed by a governor who will do justly, who will love mercy, and who will walk humbly with his God.

Let us be dissatisfied [*applause*] until from every city hall, justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. (Yes)

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes) until that day when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together (Yes), and every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and none shall be afraid.

Let us be dissatisfied (Yes), and men will recognize that out of one blood (Yes) God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. (*Speak sir*)

Let us be dissatisfied until that day when nobody will shout, "White Power!" when nobody will shout, "Black Power!" but everybody will talk about God's power and human power. [*applause*]

And I must confess, my friends (Yes sir), that the road ahead will not always be smooth. (Yes) There will still be rocky places of frustration (Yes) and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. (Yes) And there will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair. (*Well*) Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted. (Yes) We may again, with tear-drenched eyes, have to stand before the bier of some courageous civil rights worker whose life will be snuffed out by the dastardly acts of bloodthirsty mobs. (*Well*) But difficult and painful as it is (*Well*), we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future. (*Well*) And as we continue our charted course, we may gain consolation from the words so nobly left by that great black bard, who was also a great freedom fighter of yesterday, James Weldon Johnson (Yes):

Stony the road we trod (Yes),
Bitter the chastening rod
Felt in the days
When hope unborn had died. (Yes)
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place
For which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way
That with tears has been watered. (*Well*)
We have come treading our paths
Through the blood of the slaughtered.
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last (*Yes*)
Where the bright gleam
Of our bright star is cast.

Let this affirmation be our ringing cry. (*Well*) It will give us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future. It will give our tired feet new strength as we continue our forward stride toward the city of freedom. (*Yes*) When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair (*Well*), and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights (*Well*), let us remember (*Yes*) that there is a creative force in this universe working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil (*Well*), a power that is able to make a way out of no way (*Yes*) and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. (*Speak*)

Let us realize that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: "Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again." Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. (*Oh yeah*) Whatsoever a man soweth (*Yes*), that (*Yes*) shall he also reap." This is our hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing in some not too distant tomorrow, with a cosmic past tense, "We have overcome! (*Yes*) We have overcome! Deep in my heart, I *did* believe (*Yes*) we would overcome." [*applause*]

1. Which are the most powerful phrases in each speech? Choose three phrases.
2. For each phrase, describe why it is important or powerful?
3. How is King's God of History speech different in tone than earlier speeches?

Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11.12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11.12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social or economic aspects.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.6.8.1: Write arguments focused on (b) support claims with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrates an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

Materials

Need ear phones, and computers for each station.

Excerpts from a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., as reported by Anna Holden, a teacher at Fisk University. March 22, 1956. Montgomery, Alabama.

Sing For Freedom: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement through its songs. King speech in Birmingham during Project C.

Letter From Birmingham Jail. April 16, 1963.

I Have a Dream speech. March on Washington.

Martin Luther King's Acceptance Speech, on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1964

Martin Luther King in Chicago, 1966.

I've Been to the Mountaintop

God of History (1968) and Where Do We Go From Here? (1967)