Royal Fireworks Language Arts by Michael Clay Thompson

Free at Last

The Language of Dr. King's Dream

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Instructor Manual

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Anaphora

Anaphora is the repetition of a word or words
at the beginning of two or more successive clauses.
In his "I Have a Dream" speech, Dr. King used
anaphora to emphasize ideas, to create
a texture of importance around certain thoughts.

One hundred years later...

We refuse to believe...

We have come...

Now is the time...

We must...

We can never be satisfied...

We cannot be satisfied...

Some of you have come...

Go back to...

I have a dream...

With this faith....

Let freedom ring...

Free at last!

Anaphora is pronounced an-AFF-ora.

Anaphora

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued
on September 22, 1862, and was to
go into effect on January 1, 1863.

The March on Washington was on
August 28, 1963.

One hundred years later...
We refuse to believe...
We have come...
Now is the time...

Martin Luther King, Jr., began by emphasizing that opponents of civil rights had delayed justice for an entire century, since Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation. "Five score years ago," he began, summoning the voice of Lincoln, who had said, "Four score and seven years ago...." A score being twenty years, five score is one hundred years—a century had passed since the Proclamation. Dr. King then amplified his point, beginning four sentences with "One hundred years later...."

Having framed his remarks with the unjust delay of justice, Dr. King turned the audience's attention to the moment, to the "fierce urgency of now." Over and over again he referred to "today," saying that "Now is the time" finally for justice to come.

Dr. King enhanced his demand for justice now with additional strong language. "We refuse to believe," he repeated, that the United States is unable to honor its sacred obligation to afford all citizens equal rights under the law. In the strength of the verb *refuse*, King asserted the strength and determination of the Civil Rights Movement.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But **one hundred years later**, the Negro is still not free.

One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. **One hundred years later**, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. **One hundred years later**, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

So **we have come** here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense **we have come** to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men, yes, Black men as well as White men, would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But **we refuse to believe** that the bank of justice is bankrupt. **We refuse to believe** that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.

So **we have come** to cash this check—a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. **We have also come** to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. **Now is the time** to make real the promises of democracy. **Now is the time** to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. **Now is the time** to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. **Now is the time** to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights.

Metaphor

Metaphor is a poetic figure of speech
in which a revealing comparison is made
between two things. "Life," said Shakespeare,
in one of literature's most original metaphors,
"is a walking shadow." We know that life is
not really a walking shadow, but by using a metaphor
to say that life and a walking shadow are similar,
Shakespeare was able to make his point powerfully.
Martin Luther King, Jr., filled his "I Have a Dream" speech
with powerful metaphors:

the manacles of segregation

the tranquilizing drug of gradualism

the quicksands of racial injustice

the solid rock of brotherhood

the whirlwinds of revolt

the bright day of justice

the cup of bitterness

the high plane of dignity

Metaphors lift ideas out of the ordinary; they wake up our minds.

Ask students to write about freedom using as many metaphors as they can.

Metaphor

the flames of withering injustice
the long night of captivity
the manacles of segregation
the chains of discrimination
a lonely island of poverty in a vast ocean of material prosperity
the tranquilizing drug of gradualism
the desolate valley of segregation
the quicksands of racial injustice
the summer of discontent
the autumn of freedom

Dr. King filled his speech with metaphor, connecting with millions of people through their faculties of poetic inspiration. With metaphor, he could communicate the intensity of the "flames of withering injustice." Even though we know that injustice is not made of flames and does not cause people to wither, by describing justice in these terms, Dr. King could, in a way, be more accurate than he could with ordinary prose because the metaphor helps communicate the suffering that injustice inflicts on its victims.

King brought additional clarity to his subject with metaphor, describing racial segregation as a "desolate valley" and racial injustice as "quicksands." If we pause to think about segregation as a desolate valley, we become aware of the enormous waste of human potential and opportunity that segregation inflicted—on all Americans. In the desolate valley of American segregation, no American, White or Black, lived in a truly free country. No American could say that rights were equal, or that everyone could vote, or that their political process was democratic. It was indeed a desolate valley.

Among the primary themes of Dr. King's speech was the theme of economic discrimination, the mandatory poverty imposed upon Black Americans in ways both obvious and subtle. The speech is filled with references to this "lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of prosperity," to the "check" that must be cashed, to the fact that the bank of justice cannot be bankrupt. Dr. King said that the nation cannot return to "business as usual," and he deplored the "slums and ghettos of our northern cities," emphasizing not only the dire economic slavery of Black Americans but also that discrimination was a curse, not only in the South but in the North as well.

Q: What do you think Dr. King meant by "the tranquilizing drug of gradualism"?

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as **a great beacon light of hope** to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in **the flames of withering injustice**. It came as **a joyous daybreak** to end **the long night of their captivity**. But one hundred years later, the Negro is still not free.

One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by **the manacles of segregation** and **the chains of discrimination**. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on **a lonely island of poverty** in the midst of **a vast ocean of material prosperity**. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in **the corners of American society** and finds himself **an exile in his own land**.

So we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash **a check**. When the architects of our republic wrote the words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing **a promissory note** to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men, yes, Black men as well as White men, would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that **America has defaulted** on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people **a bad check**, a check which has come back marked **"insufficient funds."** But we refuse to believe that **the bank of justice is bankrupt**. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in **the great vaults of opportunity** of this nation.

So we have come to cash this check—a check that will give us upon demand **the riches of freedom** and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take **the tranquilizing drug of gradualism**. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from **the dark and desolate valley of segregation** to **the sunlit path of racial justice**. Now is the time to lift our nation from **the quicksands of racial injustice** to **the solid rock of brotherhood**. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. **This sweltering summer** of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is **an invigorating autumn of freedom** and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have **a rude awakening** if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights.

Poetics

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of anaphora, repetition, and metaphor is relatively easy to notice. More subtle are the exceptional poetic touches of his oratory. The speech is filled with alliteration, assonance, and consonance and is controlled in its metrical rhythms. Although there is only a limited number of sounds in English, making some accidental repetition of sound inevitable, we can see from a close inspection of the sounds of Dr. King's address that he arranged his words for their music, creating harmonies between adjectives and their nouns and among other words in sentences.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds in words, whether the initial sounds are vowels or consonants. In his speech at the March on Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., used alliteration abundantly. In his first sentence he referred to Abraham Lincoln, "in whose symbolic shadow we stand today" and who "signed the Emancipation Proclamation." Sometimes King was subtle in his alliteration, using sounds that, though not spelled the same, sound the same to the ear: "In the process," he wrote, "of gaining our **r**ightful place, we must not be guilty of **wr**ongful deeds." He also used alliteration to say that "We refuse to **b**elieve that the **b**ank of justice is **b**ankrupt," that "We have **c**ome to our nation's **c**apital to **c**ash a check," and that civil rights advocates must meet "**ph**ysical **f**orce with soul **f**orce." He filled the speech with alliterated pairs: "**s**laves who had been **s**eared," "**d**ignity and **d**iscipline," "**s**eek to **s**atisfy," "**l**ives on a **l**onely is**l**and," "**m**arvelous new **m**ilitancy," "**s**weltering **s**ummer," "**d**ark and **d**esolate," "**t**rials and **t**ribulations," "insofar as citizens of **c**olor are **c**oncerned," "**s**tripped of their **s**elfhood," "a **s**ign **s**tating," "the **c**ontent of their **c**haracter," "**m**ighty **m**ountains," "**m**olehill of **M**ississippi," "rough **p**laces will be made **p**lain," the "**c**urvaceous slopes of **C**alifornia," and the "**h**illtops of New **H**ampshire."

Song is a cultural universal. Every culture ever found has had music.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds
in words. Words can begin with
the same vowels or the same consonants.

Instead of honoring this sacred o**b**ligation,
America has given the Negro people
a **b**ad check that has come **b**ack
marked “insufficient funds.”
But we refuse to **b**elieve
that the **b**ank of justice is **b**ankrupt.

The **m**arvelous new **m**ilitancy...

fresh **fr**om narrow jail cells

the high plane of **d**ignity and **d**iscipline

I have a dream
that my four children
will one day live in a nation
where they will not be judged
by the **c**olor of their s**k**in
but by the **c**ontent
of their **c**hara**c**ter.

every **m**olehill of **M**ississippi!
Fro**m** every **m**ountainside...

Let freedo**m** ring fro**m** the
mighty **m**ountains of New York!

	In	**the**	**process**	**of**	**gaining**	**our**	**rightful**	**place,**
Parts of Speech:	prep.	adj.	n.	prep.	n.	adj.	adj.	n.
Parts of Sentence:								
Phrases:	------prep. phrase-------			gerund as obj. of prep. ----------prepositional phrase----------				
Clauses:	The complete sentence is a simple declarative sentence.							

Here Martin Luther King, Jr., revealed his meaning with a symmetrical contrast by balancing two prepositional phrases and using alliteration to match the two adjectives that modify the objects of the prepositions. The sentence begins with two prepositional phrases, *In the process of gaining our rightful place*, followed by a clause ending with a prepositional phrase, *of wrongful deeds*. The alliteration of the opposites *rightful* and *wrongful* is emphasized by their positions, each adjective coming next to the end of a long group of words; *rightful* begins the ninth syllable of its group, and *wrongful* begins the eighth of its group. The groups each end in a one-syllable word, *place* and *deeds*, and they are connected and balanced through the alliteration of ***g****aining* and ***g****uilty.*

The two groups of words are also matched in rhythm. If we allow the pause after the comma to serve as an unstressed syllable, the rhythm of the two groups is identical:

In the **pro** / cess of **gain** / ing our **right** / ful **place**
-- we **must** / not be **guil** / ty of **wrong** / ful **deeds**

	we	**must**	**not**	**be**	**guilty**	**of**	**wrongful**	**deeds.**
Parts of Speech:	pron.	v.	adv.	v.	adj.	prep.	adj.	n.
Parts of Sentence:	subj.	pred.----------		----------pred.	S.C.			
Phrases:						-----prepositional phrase-----		
Clauses:	The complete sentence is a simple declarative sentence.							

Dr. King used this extended balance of grammar, stress patterns, and sounds to reveal the sharp contrast between right and wrong. The key to the success of the Civil Rights Movement's attack on segregation was to show everyone, even the segregationists, that racism and segregation were immoral and were violations of the deepest American values. In *Why We Can't Wait*, Dr. King quoted President Kennedy, who a few months before his assassination had discussed the moral evil of segregation:

> We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures, and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities.... Those who do nothing are inviting shame as well as violence. Those who act boldly are recognizing right as well as reality.

Notice Dr. King's use of the auxiliary verb *must* with the subjunctive form of the verb *to be*, leading to a subject complement, predicate adjective *guilty*.

Instructor Section

Things Students Can Do

1. Read *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*. Frederick Douglass's account of his life as a slave is one of the great American documents, written by a brilliant individual who had to trick White children into teaching him to read and write. His story of slavery and escape is a classic nonfiction text.

2. Read Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *Why We Can't Wait*. After the March on Washington, Dr. King wrote that book explaining why "Now is the time." Segregationists had used every means possible to delay court-ordered integration, but many people still did not understand why things could not move slowly and in a compromised form. In *Why We Can't Wait*, Dr. King explained why these delays and compromises needed to end immediately.

3. Study the vocabulary that Dr. King used in his speech, and then write your own document using as many of these words as possible.

4. Write a letter to Dr. King expressing your feelings about the speech. Write as though you were at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and that Dr. King is still alive.

5. Listen to the speech. There are many sources of the speech, from the internet to recordings that can be purchased. Discuss the difference it makes to hear the speech, rather than merely to read it.

6. Dr. King's philosophy of nonviolence was not the only philosophy of its day. Malcolm X, for example, did not adhere to the nonviolent path but said that Blacks should defend themselves by "any means necessary." Discuss the challenges that Malcolm X and others presented for Dr. King. How did Dr. King address this in his speech?

7. Discuss: Has history proven that Dr. King was right in the basic assumptions he made in his "I Have a Dream" speech?