

Before You Read

I've Been to the Mountaintop

Meet **Martin Luther King Jr.**
(1929–1968)

During the historic March on Washington in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. set the moral tone for the Civil Rights Movement with his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for leading nonviolent demonstrations to help African Americans gain civil rights. With great courage and insight, King inspired Americans of all backgrounds to come together to work for a more just and compassionate society.

“I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

—Martin Luther King Jr.

Launching the Civil Rights Movement Born the son of a minister in Atlanta, Georgia, King began his rise to leadership by entering Morehouse College at the age of fifteen. After receiving a PhD in theology from Boston University, King became a minister in a Montgomery, Alabama, church. Shortly after moving there, King became a leader of the first major nonviolent protest of the Civil Rights Movement. Inspired by the life and teachings of Mohandas Gandhi, whose doctrine of passive resistance was to become his own guiding principle, King began the Montgomery bus boycott. The African American citizens of Montgomery, who had been required to give up their seats for whites, stayed off the buses for more than a



year to force an end to segregation. Their peaceful protest was successful, and King’s leadership skills drew national attention.

Expanding the Struggle After the boycott, King served as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and helped spread the civil rights struggle throughout the South and the nation. In 1963, when the center of the struggle shifted to Birmingham, Alabama, King and other demonstrators were jailed, and violence exploded in the streets. However, King’s stance on nonviolent resistance remained firm. While behind bars, King wrote his famous document *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, in which he answered his critics and galvanized support for his program of civil disobedience.

In the mid to late 1960s, King expanded his agenda to include protests against the rapidly escalating war in Vietnam. In 1968, at the age of thirty-nine, King fell victim to an assassin’s bullet. At his funeral, over a thousand people, including political leaders and foreign dignitaries, crowded into King’s church, Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Outside, almost one hundred thousand more paid tribute. King’s message of respect, for democracy and for the dignity of all people, still lives.

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Literature and Reading Preview

Connect to the Speech

Would you be willing to stand up for the rights of other people even if you might be harmed in the process? Discuss this question with a partner.

Build Background

In April 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to support African American sanitation workers who were on strike against the city. Memphis Mayor Henry Loeb had refused to recognize and negotiate with the nearly all-African American union organization that had called the strike.

Set Purposes for Reading

Big Idea Keeping Freedom Alive

In this speech, King argues that freedom and equality belong to everyone. As you read, ask yourself, What arguments does King give to support his ideas?

Literary Element Allusion

An **allusion** is a reference to a character, a place, or a situation from history, music, art, or literature. In his speeches, King uses allusions to make his points clear. As you read, ask yourself, Where and why does King include well-known quotations and examples from history?

Reading Strategy Identify Problem and Solution

One purpose of persuasive speeches is to **identify a problem** and suggest a **solution** or solutions for that problem. As you read this speech, ask yourself, Which problems does King discuss and which solutions does he propose?

Tip: Ask Questions Ask yourself questions as you read, such as: What are the problems? What details about the problems does King provide? What solutions does King suggest? What support does he give for his solutions? As you read, fill in a chart like the one shown below.

Problems	Solutions

Learning Objectives

For pages 401–415

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study: Analyzing allusion.

Reading: Identifying problem and solution.

Vocabulary

grapple (grap'əl) *v.* to struggle, as though wrestling; to come to terms with; p. 404 *The city council is meeting tonight to discuss how best to grapple with town budget issues.*

relevant (rel'ə vənt) *adj.* related to the issue at hand; p. 407 *Though pollution is an important issue, it is not relevant to our discussion of the need for a new library.*

agenda (ə jen'də) *n.* an outline of tasks to be accomplished; p. 408 *The agenda lists what we need to discuss during this meeting.*

compassionate (kəm pash'ə nit) *adj.* having or showing sympathy for another's misfortune, combined with a desire to help; p. 409 *A variety of compassionate organizations work to help victims of disasters.*

I've Been to the Mountaintop

Martin Luther King Jr.



Segregation
Protest March.
Birmingham, AL.

Thank you very kindly, my friends. As I listened to Ralph Abernathy¹ in his eloquent and generous introduction and then thought about myself, I wondered who he was talking about. It's always good to have your closest friend and associate say something good about you. And Ralph is the best friend that I have in the world.

I'm delighted to see each of you here tonight in spite of a storm warning. You reveal that you are determined to go on anyhow. Something is happening in Memphis, something is happening in our world.

As you know, if I were standing at the beginning of time, with the possibility of general and panoramic view of the whole human history up to now, and the

Almighty said to me, "Martin Luther King, which age would you like to live in?"—I would take my mental flight by Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness on toward the promised land. And in spite of its magnificence, I wouldn't stop there. I would move on by Greece, and take my mind to Mount Olympus. And I would see Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Euripides and Aristophanes² assembled around the Parthenon as they



Visual Vocabulary
The *Parthenon*, a temple built in the fifth century B.C., still stands in Athens, Greece.

1. With King and other African American ministers, *Ralph Abernathy* founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization devoted to the nonviolent struggle against racism and discrimination.

2. The lives of these five Greek teachers and writers spanned a 160-year period ending with Aristotle's death in 322 B.C. Their ideas greatly influenced modern Western civilization.



Visual Vocabulary

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a German theologian whose arguments challenging certain teachings of the Roman Catholic Church led to the Protestant Reformation.

discussed the great and eternal issues of reality.

But I wouldn't stop there. I would go on, even to the great heyday of the Roman Empire. And I would see developments around there, through various emperors and leaders. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even come up to the day of the Renaissance, and get a quick picture of all that the Renaissance did for the cultural and esthetic

life of man. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even go by the way that the man for whom I'm named had his habitat. And I would watch Martin Luther as he tacked his ninety-five theses³ on the door at the church in Wittenberg.

But I wouldn't stop there. I would come on up even to 1863, and watch a vacillating president by the name of Abraham Lincoln finally come to the conclusion that he had to sign the Emancipation Proclamation. But I wouldn't stop there. I would even come up to the early thirties, and see a man grappling with the problems of the bankruptcy of his nation. And come with an eloquent cry that we have nothing to fear but fear itself.⁴

But I wouldn't stop there. Strangely enough, I would turn to the Almighty, and say, "If you allow me to live just a few years in the second half of the twentieth

century, I will be happy." Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land. Confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars. And I see God working in this period of the twentieth century in a way that men, in some strange way, are responding—something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee—the cry is always the same—"We want to be free."

And another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we're going to have to **grapple** with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them. Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence.

That is where we are today. And also in the human rights revolution, if something isn't done, and in a hurry, to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty, their long years of

3. Here, *theses* means "arguments."

4. In these two sentences, King is referring to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who led the United States during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

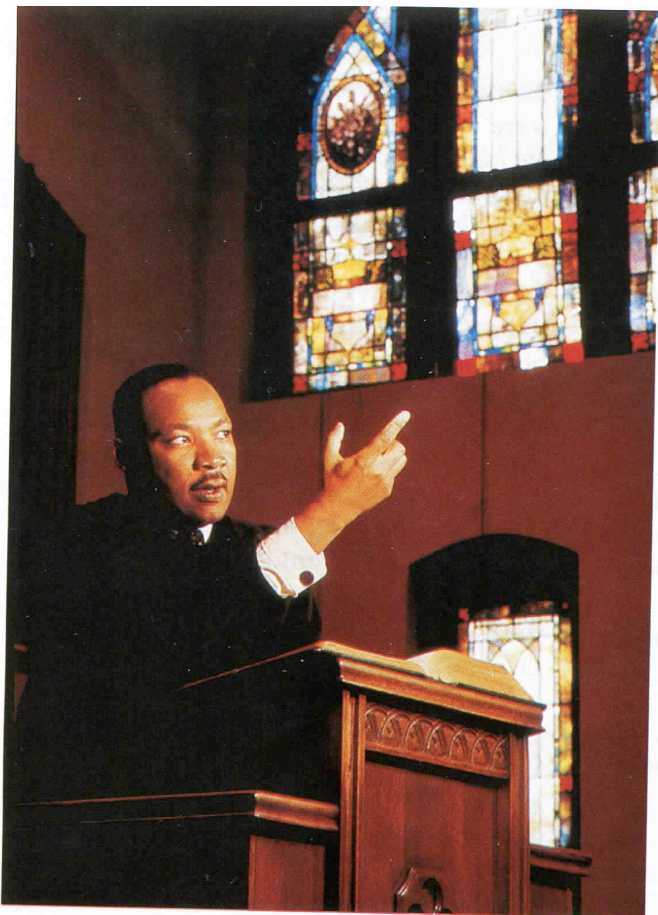
Allusion How would you characterize the kinds of people and events that King is alluding to?

Keeping Freedom Alive What issues do you think the people in these places have in common?

Identify Problem and Solution What problems has King identified?

Vocabulary

grapple (grap'əl) *v.* to struggle, as though wrestling; to come to terms with



Portrait of Martin Luther King Jr. Flip Schulke.

View the Art Schulke traveled with and documented Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders during the 1960s. What do you think King's body language here reveals about his speaking style?

hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed. Now, I'm just happy that God has allowed me to live in this period, to see what is unfolding. And I'm happy that he's allowed me to be in Memphis.

I can remember, I can remember when Negroes were just going around as Ralph has said, so often, scratching where they didn't itch, and laughing when they were not tickled. But that day is all over. We mean business now, and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world.

And that's all this whole thing is about. We aren't engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined

to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God's children. And that we don't have to live like we are forced to live.

Now, what does all of this mean in this great period of history? It means that we've got to stay together. We've got to stay together and maintain unity. You know, whenever Pharaoh⁵ wanted to prolong the period of slavery in Egypt, he had a favorite, favorite formula for doing it. What was that? He kept the slaves fighting among themselves. But whenever the slaves get together, something happens in Pharaoh's court, and he cannot hold the slaves in slavery. When the slaves get together, that's the beginning of getting out of slavery. Now let us maintain unity.

Secondly, let us keep the issues where they are. The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers. Now, we've got to keep attention on that. That's always the problem with a little violence. You

know what happened the other day, and the press dealt only with the window-breaking. I read the articles. They very seldom get around to mentioning the fact that one thousand, three hundred sanitation workers were on strike, and that Memphis is not being fair to them, and that Mayor Loeb is in dire⁶ need of a doctor. They didn't get around to that.

5. In the Bible, the *Pharaoh* (ruler) of ancient Egypt enslaved the Israelites until Moses led them out of Egypt and into Canaan, which they called the "promised land."
6. *Dire* means "dreadful" or "terrible."

Allusion What point does the allusion to Pharaoh's court help bring home to King's listeners?

Now we're going to march again, and we've got to march again, in order to put the issue where it is supposed to be. And force everybody to see that there are thirteen hundred of God's children here suffering, sometimes going hungry, going through dark and dreary nights wondering how this thing is going to come out. That's the issue. And we've got to say to the nation: we know it's coming out. For when people get caught up with that which is right and they are willing to sacrifice for it, there is no stopping point short of victory.

We aren't going to let any mace stop us. We are masters in our nonviolent movement in disarming police forces; they don't know what to do. I've seen them so often. I remember in Birmingham, Alabama, when we were in that majestic struggle there we would move out of the 16th Street Baptist Church day after day; by the hundreds we would move out. And Bull Connor⁷ would tell them to send the dogs forth and they did come; but we just went before the dogs singing, "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round." Bull Connor next would say, "Turn the fire hoses on." And as I said to you the other night, Bull Connor didn't know history. He knew a kind of physics that somehow didn't relate to the transphysics⁸ that we knew about. And that was the fact that there was a certain kind of fire that no water could put out. And we went before

the fire hoses; we had known water. If we were Baptist or some other denomination, we had been immersed. If we were Methodist, and some others, we had been sprinkled, but we knew water.⁹

That couldn't stop us. And we just went on before the dogs and we would look at them; and we'd go on before the water hoses and we would look at it, and we'd just go on singing "Over my head I see freedom in the air." And then we would be thrown in the paddy wagons, and sometimes we were stacked in there like sardines in a can. And they would throw us in, and old Bull would say, "Take them off," and they did; and we would just go in the paddy wagon singing, "We Shall Overcome." And every now and then we'd get in the jail, and we'd see the jailers looking through the windows being moved by our prayers, and being moved by our words and our songs. And there was a power there which Bull Connor couldn't adjust to; and so we ended up transforming Bull into a steer, and we won our struggle in Birmingham.

Now we've got to go on to Memphis just like that. I call upon you to be with us Monday. Now about injunctions: We have an injunction¹⁰ and we're going into court tomorrow morning to fight this illegal, unconstitutional injunction. All we say to America is, "Be true to what you said on paper." If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn't

7. *Bull Connor*, whose given name was Eugene, was Birmingham's Commissioner of Public Safety and a candidate for mayor in the 1964 election.

8. *Physics* is the study of the physical properties of light, heat, electricity, magnetism, and so on. With the invented word *transphysics*, King refers to things that transcend, or go beyond, the physical, such as morality and philosophy.

Identify Problem and Solution *What problem does King explain in this sentence? What does he encourage people to do to address this problem?*

9. King is referring to the Christian ritual of baptism, which may involve immersion in water or the sprinkling or pouring of water over a person's head.

10. An *injunction* is a court order barring a specific action, such as a march, demonstration, or strike.

Allusion *Why does King make these allusions in these two sentences?*

committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of the press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so just as I say, we aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on.

We need all of you. And you know what's beautiful to me, is to see all of these ministers of the Gospel. It's a marvelous picture. Who is it that is supposed to articulate the longings and aspirations of the people more than the preacher? Somehow the preacher must be an Amos,¹¹ and say, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Somehow, the preacher must say with Jesus, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to deal with the problems of the poor."¹²

And I want to commend the preachers, under the leadership of these noble men: James Lawson, one who has been in this struggle for many years; he's been to jail for struggling; but he's still going on, fighting for the rights of his people. Rev. Ralph Jackson, Billy Kiles; I could just go right on down the list, but time will not permit. But I want to thank them all. And I want you to thank them, because so often, preachers aren't concerned about anything but themselves. And I'm always happy to see a **relevant** ministry.

It's alright to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But

ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here. It's alright to talk about "streets flowing with milk and honey," but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's alright to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. **This is what we have to do.**

Now the other thing we'll have to do is this: Always anchor our external direct action with the power of economic withdrawal. Now, we are poor people, individually, we are poor when you compare us with white society in America. We are poor. Never stop and forget that collectively, that means all of us together, collectively we are richer than all the nations in the world, with the exception of nine. Did you ever think about that? After you leave¹³ the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain, West Germany, France, and I could name the others, the Negro collectively is richer than most nations of the world. We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year, which is more than all of the exports of the United States, and more than the national budget of Canada. Did you know that? That's power right there, if we know how to pool it.

We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles, we don't need any Molotov cocktails, we just need to go around to these stores, and to these massive industries in our country, and say, "God sent us by

11. The Hebrew prophet *Amos* lived in the eighth century B.C.

12. Here, King has freely paraphrased the words that Jesus was reading from the prophet *Isaiah*.

Keeping Freedom Alive *What arguments does King make against the court injunction?*

Vocabulary

relevant (rel'ə vənt) *adj.* related to the issue at hand

13. Here, the expression *after you leave* means "not counting" or "apart from."

Allusion *In this paragraph, King alludes to common ideas of heaven and the afterlife. What point does he make about these ideas?*

here, to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your **agenda**—fair treatment, where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you . . ."

But not only that, we've got to strengthen black institutions. I call upon you to take your money out of the banks downtown and deposit your money in Tri-State Bank—we want a "bank-in" movement in Memphis. So go by the savings and loan association. I'm not asking you something that we don't do ourselves at SCLC. Judge Hooks and others will tell you that we have an account here in the savings and loan association from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. We're just telling you to follow what we're doing. Put your money there. You have six or seven black insurance companies in Memphis. Take out your insurance there. We want to have an "insurance-in."

Identify Problem and Solution *What good outcomes could be obtained by pooling economic resources, according to King?*

Vocabulary

agenda (ə jen' də) n. an outline of tasks to be accomplished



Civil rights marchers in Washington, D.C. Marching for equality.

View the Art This photograph of a civil rights demonstration focuses on two exuberant young women in a crowd of marchers. What is King's attitude toward women in this speech?

Now these are some practical things we can do. We begin the process of building a greater economic base. And at the same time, we are putting pressure where it really hurts. I ask you to follow through here.

Now, let me say as I move to my conclusion that we've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end. Nothing would be more tragic than to stop at this point, in Memphis. We've got to see it through. And when we have our march, you need to be

there. Be concerned about your brother. You may not be on strike. But either we go up together, or we go down together.

Let us develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness. One day a man came to Jesus; and he wanted to raise some questions about some vital matters in life. At points, he wanted to trick Jesus, and show him that he knew a little more than Jesus knew, and through this, throw him off base. Now that question could have easily ended up in a philosophical and theological debate. But Jesus immediately pulled that question from mid-air, and placed it on a dangerous curve between Jerusalem and Jericho. And he talked about a certain man, who fell among thieves. You remember that a Levite and a priest passed by on the other side. They didn't stop to help him. And finally a man of another race came by. He got down from his beast, decided not to be **compassionate** by proxy.¹⁴ But with him, administered first aid, and helped the man in need. Jesus ended up saying, this was the good man, this was the great man, because he had the capacity to project the "I" into the "thou," and to be concerned about his brother. Now you know, we use our imagi-

"And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be."

nation a great deal to try to determine why the priest and the Levite didn't stop. At times we say they were busy going to church meetings—an ecclesiastical gathering—and they had to get on down to Jerusalem so they wouldn't be late for their meeting. At other times we would speculate

that there was a religious law that "One who was engaged in religious ceremonials was not to touch a human body twenty-four hours before the ceremony." And every now and then we begin to wonder whether maybe they were not going down to Jerusalem, or down to Jericho, rather to

organize a "Jericho Road Improvement Association." That's a possibility. Maybe they felt that it was better to deal with the problem from the causal root, rather than to get bogged down with an individual effort.

But I'm going to tell you what my imagination tells me. It's possible that these men were afraid. You see, the Jericho road is a dangerous road. I remember when Mrs. King and I were first in Jerusalem. We rented a car and drove from Jerusalem down to Jericho. And as soon as we got on that road, I said to my wife, "I can see why Jesus used this as a setting for his parable."¹⁵ It's a winding, meandering road. It's really conducive for ambushing. You start out in Jerusalem, which is about 1200 miles, or rather 1200 feet above sea level. And by the time you get down to Jericho, fifteen or twenty minutes later, you're about 2200 feet below sea level. That's a dangerous road. In the days of Jesus it came to be known as the "Bloody Pass."

14. In ancient Israel, men of the *Levite* tribe were temple priests or assistants. One might expect the two religious men to help, especially since the victim is also Jewish. Instead, it is *a man of another race* who decides not to leave it to someone else—a *proxy*, or substitute—to help.

Identify Problem and Solution What argument does King make for attending the march?

Vocabulary

compassionate (kəm pash'ə nit) *adj.* having or showing sympathy for another's misfortune, combined with a desire to help

15. A *parable* is a brief story intended to illustrate some truth or moral lesson.

Allusion According to King, what kinds of excuses do people make for not stopping to help one another?

And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the Levite asked was, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?"

That's the question before you tonight. Not, "If I stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to all of the hours that I usually spend in my office every day and every week as a pastor?" The question is not, "If I stop to help this man in need, what will happen to me?" "If I do not stop to help the sanitation workers, what will happen to them?" That's the question.

Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. And I want to thank God, once more, for allowing me to be here with you.

You know, several years ago, I was in New York City autographing the first book that I had written. And while sitting there autographing books, a demented¹⁶ black woman came up. The only question I heard from her was, "Are you Martin Luther King?"

And I was looking down writing, and I said yes. And the next minute I felt something beating on my chest. Before I knew it I had been stabbed by this demented

woman. I was rushed to Harlem Hospital. It was a dark Saturday afternoon. And that blade had gone through, and the X rays revealed that the tip of the blade was on the edge of my aorta, the main artery. And once that's punctured, you drown in your own blood—that's the end of you.

It came out in the *New York Times* the next morning, that if I had sneezed, I would have died. Well, about four days later, they allowed me, after the operation, after my chest had been opened, and the blade had been taken out, to move around in the wheel chair in the hospital. They allowed me to read some of the mail that came in, and from all over the states, and the world, kind letters came in. I read a few, but one of them I will never forget. I had received one from the President and the Vice-President. I've forgotten what those telegrams said. I'd received a visit and a letter from the Governor of New York, but I've forgotten what the letter said. But there was another letter that came from a little girl, a young girl who was a student at the White Plains High School. And I looked at that letter, and I'll never forget it. It said simply, "Dear Dr. King: I am a ninth-grade student at the White Plains High School." She said, "While it should not matter, I would like to mention that I am a white girl. I read in the paper of your misfortune, and of your suffering. And I read that if you had sneezed, you would have died. And I'm simply writing you to say that I'm so happy that you didn't sneeze."

And I want to say tonight, I want to say that I am happy that I didn't sneeze. Because if I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around here in 1960, when students all over the South started sitting in at lunch counters. And I knew that as they were sitting in, they were really standing up for the best in the American dream. And taking the whole nation back to those great

16. *Demented* means "insane."

Keeping Freedom Alive *What attitude or spirit does King encourage his listeners to adopt?*



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. hugs his wife, Coretta, after learning he had been awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.

walls of democracy which were dug deep by the Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been around in 1962, when Negroes in Albany, Georgia,¹⁷ decided to straighten their backs up. And whenever men and women straighten their backs up, they are going somewhere,

17. In 1962 King took part in demonstrations in *Albany, Georgia*, protesting the segregation of public facilities.

because a man can't ride your back unless it is bent. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been here in 1963, when the black people of Birmingham, Alabama, aroused the conscience of this nation, and brought into being the Civil Rights Bill. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have had a chance later that year, in August, to try to tell America about a dream that I had had. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been down in Selma, Alabama,¹⁸ to see the great movement there. If I had sneezed, I wouldn't have been in Memphis to see a community rally around those brothers and sisters who are suffering. I'm so happy that I didn't sneeze.

And they were telling me, now it doesn't matter now. It really doesn't matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, there were six of us, the pilot said over the public address system, "We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane.

And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong with the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we've had the plane protected and guarded all night."

18. In *Selma, Alabama*, in 1965, King led a march to protest restrictions on African American voting rights. Soon afterward, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed.

Keeping Freedom Alive *What does King hope to illustrate by mentioning these events?*



An African American student sits at a lunch counter reserved for white customers during a sit-in to protest segregation. Packages of napkins have been placed on nearby stools to discourage other protesters from joining the sit-in.

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

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. 🌹

Allusion In this final passage, King alludes to the "promised land" and ends by quoting the patriotic American song "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." What is the meaning of the passage?

After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

Respond and Interpret

1. Which sentence or passage made the greatest impression on you? Why?
2. (a) Summarize King's mental journey through history. In which age does he want to live? (b) What might you infer about King's character and beliefs on the basis of the age he chooses?
3. (a) What plan of action does King outline for African American people in Memphis? (b) What is the purpose of King's plan of action?
4. What feelings does King express about the dangers he faces? What reasons does he give for his feelings?

Analyze and Evaluate

5. What is your opinion of King's nonviolent approach to political and social change?
6. How did the prophetic aspects of this speech affect your reaction to it? Explain.

Connect

7. **Big Idea** **Keeping Freedom Alive** If King were alive today, what issues do you think he might be addressing? Why?
8. **Connect to the Author** How is Martin Luther King Jr.'s experience as a preacher and minister evident in his speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop"?

Visual Literacy

Image of a Leader

In this photograph, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. leads a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, to protest the lack of suffrage for African Americans. The date is March 1965. The photographer



chooses not to show those who were opposed to racial desegregation. Instead, he focuses on the pride and promise of those leading the march for freedom by showing them with arms linked, flags emblazoned behind them.

Group Activity Discuss the following questions in a small group. Refer back to the photograph and cite specific details to use as support.

1. How might a person who was against desegregation have viewed this photograph?
2. What choices did the photographer make in the framing and subject matter of the picture that show his bias?

Literary Element Allusion

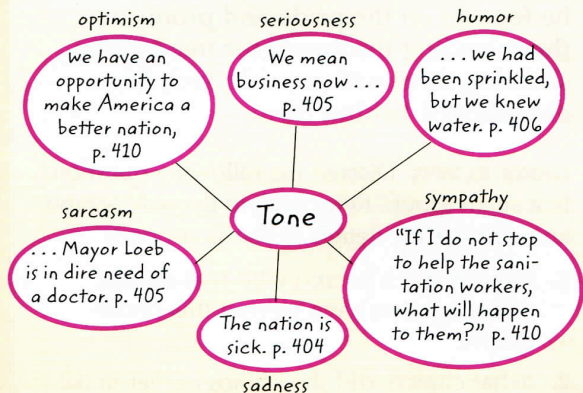
In this speech, King uses both historical and biblical **allusions**. For example, King says, "I would take my mental flight by Egypt through, or rather across the Red Sea, through the wilderness toward the promised land." He is alluding to the biblical story in which Moses leads the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Canaan.

1. Why do you think King alludes to the Israelites' flight from Egypt?
2. Locate two more examples of historical allusions in the speech, and explain why they are included.

Review: Tone

As you learned on page 185, **tone** is the writer's attitude toward his or her subject. Tone is conveyed through elements such as word choice, sentence structure, and figurative language. In this speech, King's tone conveys a variety of attitudes, such as seriousness, sadness, sarcasm, optimism, humor, and sympathy.

Partner Activity With a classmate, analyze King's shifting tone in this speech. Create a web diagram similar to the one below. Fill in the ovals with appropriate examples.



LOG ON Literature Online

Selection Resources For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL59794u2.

Reading Strategy Identify Problem and Solution

SAT Skills Practice

1. What solution to the problem of inequality does King propose in the paragraph beginning "Now we're going to march again . . ." (page 406)?
 - (A) economic boycotts
 - (B) force
 - (C) reason
 - (D) persistence
 - (E) suffering

Vocabulary Practice

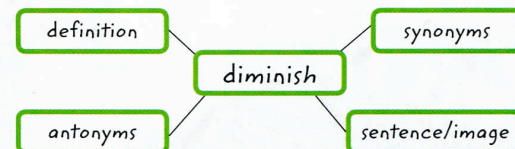
Practice with Synonyms A synonym is a word that has the same or a similar meaning as another word. Match each boldfaced vocabulary word below with its synonym. Use a thesaurus or dictionary to check your answers.

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1. compassionate | a. plan |
| 2. grapple | b. applicable |
| 3. relevant | c. accepting |
| 4. agenda | d. decline |
| | e. struggle |
| | f. kindhearted |

Academic Vocabulary

King's words are so powerful that no amount of time can **diminish** their significance.

Diminish is an academic word. The word might be used to refer to how enthusiasm can be **diminished** by bad weather or someone's negative attitude. Study this word further. Write its definition and give a synonym and an antonym.



For more on academic vocabulary, see pages 52 and 53.