I Have a Dream Teacher Lesson Plan

**Standards for English Language Arts** (sponsored by NCTE and [IRA](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/mlk/))

* Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves and of the cultures of the United States
* Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
* Students [apply](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/mlk/) knowledge of language structure, language conventions (eg. spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique and discuss print and non-print texts.
* Students use a variety of technological and information resources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
* Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (ie., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information.)

1. Distribute the complete text of "I Have a Dream.”

2. Review propaganda techniques with the students.  
 3. Have the students carefully read the entire speech, either in small groups or individually -- preferably aloud. They should focus on five key lessons in speechwriting that we can extract from Martin Luther King’s most famous speech.

Emphasize phrases by repeating at the beginning of sentences

Repeat key “theme” words throughout your speech

Utilize appropriate quotations or allusions

Use specific examples to “ground” your arguments

Use metaphors to highlight contrasting concepts

Lesson #1: Emphasize Phrases by Repeating at the Beginning of Sentences

[Anaphora](http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/anaphora/) (repeating words at the beginning of neighbouring clauses) is a commonly used rhetorical device. Repeating the words twice sets the pattern, and further repetitions emphasize the pattern and increase the rhetorical effect.

“*I have a dream*” is repeated in eight successive sentences, and is one of the most often cited examples of anaphora in modern rhetoric. But this is just one of eight occurrences of anaphora in this speech. By order of introduction, here are the key phrases:

* *“One hundred years later…”* [paragraph 3]
* *“Now is the time…”* [paragraph 6]
* *“We must…”* [paragraph 8]
* *“We can never (cannot) be satisfied…”* [paragraph 13]
* *“Go back to…”* [paragraph 14]
* *“I Have a Dream…”* [paragraphs 16 through 24]
* *“With this faith, …”* [paragraph 26]
* *“Let freedom ring (from) …”* [paragraphs 27 through 41]

**Read those repeated phrases in sequence.** Even in the absence of the remainder of the speech, these key phrases tell much of *King’s story*. Emphasis through repetition makes these phrases more memorable, and, by extension, make*King’s story* more memorable.

Lesson #2: Repeat Key “Theme” Words Throughout Your Speech

Repetition in forms like anaphora is quite *obvious*, but there are more *subtle* ways to use repetition as well. One way is to repeat key “theme” words throughout the body of your speech.

If you count the frequency of words used in King’s “I Have a Dream”, very interesting patterns emerge. The most commonly used noun is *freedom*, which is used **twenty times** in the speech. This makes sense, since freedom is one of the **primary themes** of the speech.

Other key themes? Consider these commonly repeated words:

* freedom (20 times)
* we (30 times), our (17 times), you (8 times)
* nation (10 times), america (5 times), american (4 times)
* justice (8 times) and injustice (3 times)
* dream (11 times)

“I Have a Dream” can be summarized in the view below, which associates the size of the word with its frequency.



Lesson #3: Utilize Appropriate Quotations or Allusions

Evoking historic and literary references is a powerful speechwriting technique which can be executed explicitly ([a direct quotation](http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/speech-analysis-dream-martin-luther-king/)) or implicitly (allusion).

You can improve the credibility of your arguments by referring to the (appropriate) words of credible speakers/writers in your speech. Consider the allusions used by Martin Luther King Jr.:

* *“Five score years ago…”* [paragraph 2] refers to Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg Address speech which began “*Four score and seven years ago…*” This allusion is particularly poignant given that King was speaking in front of the Lincoln Memorial.
* “*Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*” [and the rest of paragraph 4] is a reference to the United States Declaration of Independence.
* Numerous Biblical allusions provide the moral basis for King’s arguments:
  + “*It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.*” [paragraph 2] alludes to Psalms 30:5 “*For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*“
  + “*Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.*” [paragraph 8] evokes Jeremiah 2:13 “*for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.*“
  + More biblical allusions from King’s “I Have a Dream” speech [can be found here](http://www.hypotyposeis.org/weblog/2008/01/biblical-allusions-in-kings-i-have.html).

Lesson #4: Use specific examples to “ground” your arguments

Your speech is greatly improved when you provide specific examples which illustrate your logical (and perhaps theoretical) arguments.

One way that Martin Luther King Jr. accomplishes this is to make numerous geographic references throughout the speech:

* Mississippi, New York [paragraph 13]
* Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana [14]
* Georgia [18]
* Mississippi [19]
* Alabama [22]
* New Hampshire [32], New York [33], Pennsylvania [34], Colorado [35], California [36], Georgia [37], Tennessee [38], Mississippi [39]

Note that Mississippi is mentioned on four separate occasions. This is not accidental; mentioning Mississippi would evoke some of the strongest emotions and images for his audience.

Additionally, King uses relatively generic geographic references to make his message more inclusive:

* *“slums and ghettos of our northern cities”* [paragraph 14]
* *“the South”* [25]
* *“From every mountainside”* [40]
* *“from every village and every hamlet”* [41]

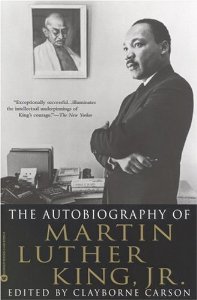
Lesson #5: Use Metaphors to Highlight Contrasting Concepts

Metaphors allow you to associate your speech concepts with concrete images and emotions.

To highlight the contrast between two abstract concepts, consider associating them with contrasting concrete metaphors. For example, to contrast segregation with racial justice, King evokes the contrasting metaphors of dark and desolate valley (of segregation) and sunlit path (of racial justice.)

* *“joyous****daybreak****to end the****long night****of their captivity”* [paragraph 2]
* *“the Negro lives on a****lonely island****of poverty in the midst of a****vast ocean****of material prosperity”* [3]
* *“rise from the****dark and desolate valley****of segregation to the****sunlit path****of racial justice”*[6]
* *“This****sweltering summer****of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an****invigorating autumn****of freedom and equality.”*[7]
* *“sweltering with the****heat****of oppression, will be transformed into an****oasis****of freedom and justice.”* [19]

How can you employ contrasting metaphors in your next speech?

[](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0446676500?ie=UTF8&tag=sixminupublsp-20&link_code=as3&camp=211189&creative=373489&creativeASIN=0446676500)

Speech Transcript: I Have a Dream – Martin Luther King Jr.

*Note: The formatting has been added by me, not by MLK, to highlight words or phrases which are analyzed above.*

[1] I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

[2] **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.

[3] But **one hundred years later**, the Negro still is 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. And so we’ve come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

[4] In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent 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 “unalienable 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.”

[5] 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. And so, we’ve come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

[6] 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.

[7] 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.** And 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. And there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

[8] But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, **we must** not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. **We must**forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. **We must**not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, **we must** rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

[9] The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

[10] We cannot walk alone.

[11] And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead.

[12] We cannot turn back.

[13] There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, “When will you be satisfied?” **We can never be satisfied** as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. **We can never be satisfied** as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. **We cannot be satisfied** as long as the negro’s basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. **We can never be satisfied** as long as our children are stripped of their self-hood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating: “For Whites Only.” **We cannot be satisfied** as long as a Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, **we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied**until “justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”

[14] I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest — quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. **Go back to** Mississippi, **go back to** Alabama, **go back to** South Carolina, **go back to** Georgia, **go back to** Louisiana, **go back to** the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

[15] Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

[16] And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, **I still have a dream**. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

[17]**I have a dream** that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

[18] **I have a dream** that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

[19] **I have a dream** that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

[20] **I have a dream** that 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.

[21] **I have a dream** today!

[22] **I have a dream** that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of “interposition” and “nullification” — one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

[23] **I have a dream** today!

[24] **I have a dream** that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; “and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

[25] This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

[26] **With this faith**, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. **With this faith**, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. **With this faith**, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

[27] And this will be the day — this will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning:

[28] My country ’tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.

[29] Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim’s pride,

[30] From every mountainside, **let freedom ring**!

[31] And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

[32] And so **let freedom ring** from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

[33] **Let freedom ring** from the mighty mountains of New York.

[34] **Let freedom ring** from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.

[35] **Let freedom ring** from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.

[36] **Let freedom ring** from the curvaceous slopes of California.

[37] But not only that. **Let freedom ring** from Stone Mountain of Georgia.

[38] **Let freedom ring** from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.

[39] **Let freedom ring** from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.

[40] From every mountainside, **let freedom ring**.

[41] And when this happens, when we allow **freedom ring, when we let it ring**from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

[42] Free at last! Free at last!

[43] Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

4. After they have read the text, ask them to address the following activity questions:

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| * **What examples of figurative language can be found in the text?**(For example, "seared in the flames of withering injustice"; "manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination"; "whirlwinds of revolt"; "oasis of freedom and justice"; "symphony of brotherhood." |
| * **How does the figurative language increase the overall impact of the speech?** |
| * **What propaganda techniques does King use to add life and energy to his speech?** (For example, use of **refrains** such as "I have a dream," "let freedom ring" and "we can never be satisfied"; multiple shifts in sentence lengths; dramatic shifts in tone, such as from enraged to cautionary to hopeful; use of questions as well as exclamations, such as "when will you be satisfied?" and "I have a dream today!") |
| * **In what specific ways does King use his preaching skills to add persuasive power to the speech?** (For example, he uses several images that call to mind both the plight of black Americans as well as the Old Testament Hebrews under the oppression of slavery -"the manacles of segregation" and the "chains of discrimination"; the final line of the speech invokes "the old Negro spiritual" and is steeped in Biblical influence -"Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last! |

5. Discuss the responses as a class.

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| **Introductory Activity -- Setting the Stage:**  Class number one:   1. Ask if anyone knows what the game "Dictionary" is. 2. Directions: The teacher will present a term and everyone has to guess the definition. The closest definition wins the points. 3. [Play](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/mlk/b.html) "Dictionary" with the terms. Students can work in groups of two or three.    * Analogy    * symbolism    * use of chronology    * personification    * metaphor    * figurative language    * effective use of repetition 4. See which ones the class can get. As you go on, explain each one and give examples. Students should be taking notes.   **Learning Activities:** | |
|  | 1. Give each student a copy of the text of the "[I Have a Dream](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/mlk/orga.html)" speech. 2. Show a tape of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Students should read along as they watch the video. 3. Hand out the "[Finding Literary Devices in Dr. King's 'I Have A Dream' Speech.](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/mlk/orgb.html)" 4. The students will work together in groups again to locate all of the literary devices in the speech. 5. What they don't finish in class, they will have to finish for homework. |
|  | g. Go over the chart and examples that the students came up with.     |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  **Finding Literary Devices in Dr. King's "I Have A Dream" Speech**  **Directions:**   1. Give the definition of the literary device. 2. Locate an example of the literary device in Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Literary Device | Definition | Example (cite paragraph number) | | Analogy |  |  | | Symbolism |  |  | | Use of chronology |  | Give the dates. | | Personification |  |  | | Metaphor |  | Find 3 examples | | Figurative language |  |  | | Repetition |  | Explain why it's effective. | | http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/images/spacer.gif | http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/images/spacer.gif | | http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/images/spacer.gif | | | |
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