

Social studies

Grade 7

Martin Luther King worksheet for middle school: analyzing 'I Have a Dream'



Examine how Dr. King used repetition, metaphor and allusion to build a powerful argument.



I can analyze how a speaker uses rhetorical devices to support a purpose.

1



A speech that moved a nation



On August 28, 1963, about 250,000 people gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The last major speaker was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His goal was to push the nation to end segregation and guarantee equal rights.

King opened with 'Five score years ago,' an allusion to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, which begins 'Four score and seven years ago.' Standing in Lincoln's shadow, he reminded listeners that the Emancipation Proclamation had promised freedom a century earlier.

Next, King used an extended metaphor. He described the nation's founding documents as a promise, or 'promissory note,' to every American, and said America had given Black citizens a 'bad check' marked 'insufficient funds.' This comparison made injustice easy to picture.

Near the end, King repeated the phrase 'I have a dream' at the start of several sentences. This repetition, called anaphora, built rhythm and emotion. He closed by repeating 'Let freedom ring,' naming places across the country to show that the dream belonged to the whole nation.

2



Name the device

Draw a line from each rhetorical device to its example.

☐

allusion

☐

metaphor

☐

anaphora

☐

purpose



A. Starting several sentences with 'I have a dream.'



B. To persuade the nation to guarantee equal rights.



C. 'Five score years ago' echoing the Gettysburg Address.



D. Calling unfair treatment a 'bad check.'

3

**Analyze the choices**

Circle the best answer.

1. Why was the allusion to Lincoln especially powerful at this event?

A

King was standing at the Lincoln Memorial, 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

B

Lincoln wrote the speech.

C

The crowd did not know who Lincoln was.

2. What does the 'bad check' metaphor suggest?

A

The nation had not kept its promise of equal rights.

B

Banks were closed that day.

C

Marchers needed money for travel.

3. What is the main effect of repeating 'Let freedom ring' with many place names?

A

It shows the dream is for the whole country.

B

It lists King's favorite vacations.

C

It makes the speech shorter.

4

**Fact check**

Circle the right answer.

1. The March on Washington took place in 1963.

True

False

2. Anaphora means repeating words at the beginning of sentences.

True

False

3. King's speech opened the march as the first speaker.

True

False

4. An allusion is a reference to a well-known text or event.

True

False

5

**Words in context**

Use the word bank to finish each sentence.

WORD BANK

segregation

allusion

anaphora

purpose

guarantee

1. Laws and rules that separated people by race are called _____.
2. A speaker's _____ is the reason he or she is speaking.
3. To _____ rights means to promise and protect them.
4. A reference to a well-known text or event is an _____.
5. Repeating words at the start of several sentences is _____.

6

**Sort the devices**

These sentences are new examples, not from the speech. Write each one in the right column.

Our class is a garden where every idea can grow.

Like the Wright brothers, we will not give up after one failed try.

We will work. We will vote. We will win.

Her voice was thunder in the hall.

This was our David-and-Goliath moment.

Every child deserves books. Every child deserves safety.

Allusion**Metaphor****Anaphora**

7

**Numbers in the text**

Circle the right answer. A score is 20.

1. How many years passed between the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) and the speech (1963)?

A 50

B 100

C 150

2. How many years is "five score"?

A 25

B 50

C 100

3. How many years is "four score and seven"?

A 47

B 87

C 107

4. About 250,000 people came to the march. How is that written in words?

A twenty-five thousand

B two hundred fifty thousand

C two million five hundred thousand

8

**Structure of the speech**

Write 1 to 4 to show the order King used, according to the text.

☐

He repeats "I have a dream."

☐

He opens with an allusion to the Gettysburg Address.

☐

He closes with "Let freedom ring."

☐

He uses the "bad check" metaphor.

9



Your analysis

Which device do you think made the speech most persuasive: allusion, metaphor or repetition?
Write a paragraph with a claim, two pieces of evidence from the text and your reasoning.

How did it go?



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Answer key

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Next, King used an extended metaphor. He described the nation's founding documents as a promise, or 'promissory note,' to every American, and said America had given Black citizens a 'bad check' marked 'insufficient funds.' This comparison made injustice easy to picture.

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Name the device

Draw a line from each rhetorical device to its example.

C allusion ●

D metaphor ●

A anaphora ●

B purpose ●

● **A.** Starting several sentences with 'I have a dream.'

● **B.** To persuade the nation to guarantee equal rights.

● **C.** 'Five score years ago' echoing the Gettysburg Address.

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Allusion

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Metaphor

Our class is a garden where every idea can grow., Her voice was thunder in the hall.

Anaphora

We will work. We will vote. We will win., Every child deserves books. Every child deserves safety.

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Your analysis

Which device do you think made the speech most persuasive: allusion, metaphor or repetition?

~~Answers vary. Strong answers state a claim, cite the text (e.g. the 'bad check' metaphor made injustice easy to picture; 'I have a dream' built rhythm and emotion) and explain how the device helped persuade listeners to support equal rights.~~

How did it go?



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