

Name:

Date:

“I Have A Dream” Speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963)

Instructions: Read the primary source, define the terms in bold using context clues or a dictionary, and answer the questions found throughout the text in your own words. Then complete the Quotes That Make History activity.



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On August 28, 1963, an estimated 250,000 people attended the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in Washington, D.C. to protest racial discrimination and to show support for major civil rights legislation that was pending in Congress.

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.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
decree	

1. Who was Martin Luther King, Jr. referring to and why?

But 100 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 in **exile** in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
manacles	
languished	
exile	

2. Why does King repeat the phrase "one hundred years later"?

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.

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.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
unalienable	

3. How does King use the metaphor of a check to explain the injustices faced by Black Americans throughout history?

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 quick sands 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. 1963 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. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
urgency	
gradualism	

4. Why does King emphasize timing and the importance of taking immediate action?

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. 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. We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
degenerate	
inextricably	

5. What does King say about how to fight for justice?

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 **selfhood** 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.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
ghetto	
selfhood	
dignity	

6. What civil rights injustices does King describe?

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. Some of you have come from areas where your 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.

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

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
tribulations	
persecution	
redemptive	
slums	

7. What challenges faced by Black Americans does King mention, and what message does he give people about how to respond to them?

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. 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.

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.

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.

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. I have a dream today.

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 down 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. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be **exalted**, 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.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
oppression	
interposition	
nullification	
exalted	

8. What does King envision for the future of the United States?

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. 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.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning: My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and 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: Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last.

Reflect and Respond

Term	Definition
discords	

9. What was King's goal with the conclusion of his speech?

Name:

Date:

Quotes That Make History

Instructions: Write the quote and its source below. Then circle three or four key words or phrases that stand out to you.



Quote:

Source:

1. What does this quote mean, in your own words (one or two sentences)?

2. Think about the historical context of the quote and answer the following questions:

When was the quote written?

What was happening at the time?

Why did the author say this?

3. In your opinion, does this quote connect to today's world? Explain your thinking.

“I Have A Dream” Speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. Answer Key

Term	Definition
decree	<i>an official order given by a person with power or by a government</i>
manacles	<i>a set of two metal rings designed to lock around a person's wrists or ankles</i>
languished	<i>left to continue for a long time without activity or progress in an unpleasant or unwanted situation</i>
exile	<i>an act or instance of being forced to leave one's country or home</i>
unalienable	<i>impossible to take away or give up</i>
urgency	<i>very important and needing immediate attention</i>
gradualism	<i>a principle or policy of slow change instead of rapid change or revolution</i>
degenerate	<i>to change to a worse state or condition</i>
inextricably	<i>in a way that makes it impossible to separate</i>
ghetto	<i>a part of a city in which members of a particular group or race live, usually in poor conditions</i>
selfhood	<i>individuality</i>
dignity	<i>the quality of being worthy of honor or respect</i>
tribulations	<i>experiences that cause someone to suffer</i>
persecution	<i>cruel or unfair treatment (of someone), especially when motivated by race or religious or political beliefs</i>
redemptive	<i>describing the act of making something better or more acceptable</i>
slums	<i>heavily populated sections, especially of a city, marked by crowding, run-down housing, and generally poor living conditions</i>
oppression	<i>cruel or unjust use of authority or power</i>
interposition	<i>the principle that a state has the right to refuse federal government actions such as a law or executive order</i>
nullification	<i>the action of a state blocking or attempting to prevent the enforcement within its territory of a federal law of the United States</i>
exalted	<i>to raise (someone or something) to a higher level</i>
discords	<i>1. lack of agreement between people, ideas, etc. 2. an unpleasant combination of musical notes</i>

1. Who is Martin Luther King, Jr. referring to and why?
Martin Luther King, Jr. is referring to Abraham Lincoln. He is referring to Lincoln because when he was president during the Civil War, he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed enslaved people in the South.
2. Why does King repeat the phrase “one hundred years later”?
King repeats the phrase “one hundred years later” to emphasize that despite the time that has passed since the Emancipation Proclamation and the abolition of slavery in the South, Black Americans are still denied true freedom and equality.
3. How does King use the metaphor of a check to explain the injustices faced by Black Americans throughout history?
King uses the metaphor of a check to show that the United States made a promise of equality in its founding documents but has failed to honor that promise for Black Americans, denying them the rights they are owed. He says Black Americans have come to “cash” this check, insisting that the United States must finally deliver the freedom and justice it promised.
4. Why does King emphasize timing and the importance of taking immediate action?
King emphasizes timing and the importance of taking immediate action because he believes justice has already been delayed for too long and cannot wait any longer. He warns that ignoring this urgency will only lead to continued unrest until true equality is achieved.
5. What does King say about how to fight for justice?
King says that the fight for justice must be carried out with dignity, discipline, and nonviolence, rejecting hatred and physical force. He says that progress requires unity among all races and a commitment to keep moving forward together.
6. What civil rights injustices does King describe?
King describes injustices such as police brutality, segregation in public spaces, housing discrimination, and the denial of voting rights. He explains that these conditions strip Black Americans of dignity and limit their freedom.
7. What challenges faced by Black Americans does King mention, and what message does he give people about how to respond to them?
King mentions challenges faced by Black Americans such as incarceration, persecution, police brutality, and living in impoverished communities. He says that their suffering is unearned and not of their doing. He urges people to keep their faith in the hope that change is possible and encourages them to continue believing in a better future.
8. What does King envision for the future of the United States?
King envisions a future in which the United States will live up to the principles of equality found in the Declaration of Independence, that Black and white people will live in harmony, and that the South will no longer be a place of racism. He dreams that people will be judged by their character and not by their race.

9. What was King's goal with the conclusion of his speech?

I think King's goal was to inspire hope and show that faith and unity could lead the nation out of division and toward true equality. He does this by describing a vision of people of all backgrounds across the United States joining together in freedom to remind the nation of what it could become.