

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Month: Jan.

Week #: 19

Day: e. Fri. Time: 30 - 40 min.

'I Have a Dream' Speech

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Objectives/Aims

The students will: understand the meaning behind Dr. King's famous 'I Have a Dream' speech.

Materials

movie of 'I Have a Dream' speech (check internet) or manuscript of speech (see 'Computer Generated' for copy)

Picture

This is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. waving to crowd at the 1963 Washington D.C. Civil Rights March. This is where he gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. I wonder what his dream was and if it is still valid today?



Background

As far as black Americans were concerned, the nation's response to Brown was agonizingly slow, and neither state legislatures nor the Congress seemed willing to help their cause along. Finally, President John F. Kennedy recognized that only a strong civil rights bill would put teeth into the drive to secure equal protection of the laws for

African Americans.

On June 11, 1963, he proposed such a bill to Congress, asking for legislation that would provide "the kind of equality of treatment which we would want for ourselves." Southern representatives in Congress managed to block the bill in committee, and civil rights leaders sought some way to build political momentum behind the measure.

A. Philip Randolph, a labor leader and longtime civil rights activist, called for a massive march on Washington to dramatize the issue. He welcomed the participation of white groups as well as black in order to demonstrate the multiracial backing for civil rights. The various elements of the civil rights movement, many of which had been wary of one another, agreed to participate. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Urban League all managed to bury their differences and work together. The leaders even agreed to tone down the rhetoric of some of the more militant activists for the sake of unity, and they worked closely with the Kennedy administration, which hoped the march would, in fact, lead to passage of the civil rights bill.

On August 28, 1963, under a nearly cloudless sky, more than 250,000 people, a fifth of them white, gathered near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington to rally for "jobs and freedom." The roster of speakers included speakers from nearly every segment of society -- labor leaders like Walter Reuther, clergy, film stars such as Sidney Poitier and Marlon Brando and folksingers such as Joan Baez. Each of the speakers was allotted fifteen minutes, but the day belonged to the young and charismatic leader of the Southern Christian Leadership

Background (continued)

Conference.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had originally prepared a short and somewhat formal recitation of the sufferings of African Americans attempting to realize their freedom in a society chained by discrimination. He was about to sit down when gospel singer Mahalia Jackson called out, "Tell them about your dream, Martin! Tell them about the dream!" Encouraged by shouts from the audience, King drew upon some of his past talks, and the result became the landmark statement of civil rights in America -- a dream of all people, of all races and colors and backgrounds, sharing in an America marked by freedom and democracy.

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Group Activity

1. To 'set the stage,' read the above the above 'Background' information aloud, or paraphrase and summarize for the students. At the end of the reading, invite them to imagine that they are one of 250,000 people that marched on Washington in support of the civil rights bill.
2. Say, "It's hot. You're standing shoulder to shoulder with a huge crowd of people, both black and white. In front of you is the speaker's podium and behind it is the Lincoln Memorial. You can just barely make out the shadowy outline of the statue of the seated Lincoln. To think it's been 100 years since Lincoln delivered the Emancipation Proclamation proclaiming the freedom of Negro slaves... You're excited. You've never been part of something so big and important. The next speaker approaches the podium. You crane your neck to get a good look at the young black preacher that you've heard so much about... It's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr."
3. Show the video.

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was the purpose of the march on Washington?
A: To rally for "jobs and freedom."
2. What motivated Dr. King?
A: He felt that blacks were treated unfairly. He said, "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 an exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition."
3. Did Dr. King believe in using violence to bring about racial equality?
A: No. He said, "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."
4. Did Dr. King hate the whites that enslaved Negroes or treated them badly or unfairly?
A: No. He said, "Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred," and "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."

Group Discussion Questions (continued)

5. What did Dr. King mean by the statement, “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?”

A: He meant that people should be judged by their actions, and inner character instead of being judged by some physical attribute.

Variations/Extensions

1. Read the speech in a dramatic and forceful way. (If possible, have an African American read it. Some possible sources would include local pastors and speakers from Toast Masters.)

Conclusion

Say, “Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. used his ‘soul power’ in a nonviolent way to help alter the fabric of American culture so that it could better reflect (although not perfectly), our country’s founding principle 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.” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Jan. 19 e. Fri.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: 'I Have a Dream' Speech



This is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. waving to crowd at the 1963 Washington D.C. Civil Rights March. This is where he gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. I wonder what his dream was, and if it is still valid today?

"I HAVE A DREAM" (1963)

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.

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 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 an 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. 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 that 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 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 hoped 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.

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. 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.

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 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 - 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 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.

I have a dream today.

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.

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, 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 father's died, land of the Pilgrim's 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 snow-capped 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!"

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