**Martin Luther King’s- I Have a Dream**

Background Information:

On January 15, 1929, [Martin Luther King Jr.](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr) is born in Atlanta, [Georgia](https://www.history.com/topics/us-states/georgia), the son of a Baptist minister. King received a doctorate degree in theology and in 1955 helped organized the first major protest of the African-American civil rights movement: the successful [Montgomery Bus Boycott](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/montgomery-bus-boycott). Influenced by [Mohandas Gandhi](https://www.history.com/topics/mahatma-gandhi), he advocated civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance to segregation in the South. The peaceful protests he led throughout the American South were often met with violence, but King and his followers persisted, and the movement gained momentum.

A powerful orator, King appealed to Christian and American ideals and won growing support from the federal government and Northern whites. In 1963, Bayard Rustin and [A. Philip Randolph](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/a-philip-randolph) led the massive [March on Washington](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/march-on-washington) for Jobs and Freedom; the event’s grand finale was King’s famous “I Have a Dream” address. Two hundred and fifty thousand people gathered outside the Lincoln Memorial to hear the stirring speech. In 1964, the civil rights movement achieved two of its greatest successes: the ratification of the 24th Amendment, which abolished the poll tax, and the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-act), which prohibited racial discrimination in employment and education and outlawed racial segregation in public facilities. Later that year, King became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize. In the late 1960s, King openly criticized U.S. involvement in Vietnam and turned his efforts to winning economic rights for poor Americans. He was assassinated in Memphis, [Tennessee](https://www.history.com/topics/us-states/tennessee), on April 4, 1968.

Questions:

1. Find at least one example of each literary device listed above from the *I Have a Dream* speech.

* [Alliteration](http://blog.flocabulary.com/alliteration)
* [Allusion](http://blog.flocabulary.com/allusion)
* [Assonance](http://blog.flocabulary.com/assonance/)
* Metaphor
* [Hyperbole](http://blog.flocabulary.com/hyperbole)
* [Personification](http://blog.flocabulary.com/teach-personification-with-mickey-mouse-and-hip-hop/)
* [Simile](http://blog.flocabulary.com/simile)

1. While listening to Martin’s speech underline literary devices that you see.
2. In your writing notebooks create your own speech about an injustice happening within our society.

**Examples of Literary Terms in the “I Have a Dream Speech”**

**Alliteration**  
*The repetition of sounds makes the speech more catchy and memorable.*

In a sense we have **c**ome to our nation’s **c**apital to **c**ash a **c**heck.

We ca**nn**ot be satisfied as long as a **N**egro in Mississippi ca**nn**ot vote and a **N**egro i**n** **N**ew York believes he has **n**othing for which to vote. **N**o, **n**o…

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the **c**olor of their skin but by the **c**ontent of their **ch**aracter.

**Allusion**  
*By using a classic American President’s speech and a famous African-American spiritual as bookends to the speech, he is demonstrating the equivalent worth of both cultures.*

The speech begins with “Five score years ago…”, a reference to the Gettysburg Address and ends with the “words of the old Negro spiritual, ‘Free at last! free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'”

**Assonance**  
*Like alliteration, assonance adds an element of musical poetry to the speech.*

We m**u**st forever cond**u**ct our str**u**ggle on the high plane of d**i**gn**i**ty and d**i**scipl**i**ne.

**Metaphor**  
*King equates light with freedom through the speech. Here are two examples:*

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.

Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.

*In the 3rd and 4th paragraph, King plays with the extended metaphor of extending a check.*

In a sense we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check… (This check metaphor continues)

*A musical metaphor:*

With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

*There are many more metaphor examples.* **Could you find them all?**

**Hyperbole**  
*We could call this example hyperbole, because King is using lots of “alls” and “every”s. But this hyperbole belies a seriousness; he believes that true justice will only come when every person believes in freedom for all.*

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to 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.

**Personification**  
*King is casting American society as a person who has done African-Americans wrong. He believes that people who are fighting for civil rights aren’t fighting a person, but rather a system.*

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.”

**Simile**  
*This simile demonstrates the power of justice and righteousness, as well as the belief that equality is a natural thing. It’s also one of the most famous lines of the speech.*

No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.